

Danann Frost Falls from Grace

**Special Preview Edition
Chapters 1 through 19,
approximately one quarter
of the novel**

Joanne Valiukas

Special Preview Edition

Copyright © Joanne Valiukas 2009, 2010

The moral right of the author has been asserted

You may freely distribute complete and unmodified copies of this Preview Edition for non-commercial purposes.

You may print this Preview Edition for personal use.

All other rights reserved.

If you're interested in acquiring other rights, please contact the author and/or the author's publishers.

All characters in this publication are fictitious and any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

For information on where to purchase
printed copies of the complete book
please visit

danannfrost.com

Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| 1. Manannan Mac Lir 798 A.D. | 7 |
| 2. The Swan of Manannan Mac Lir 1807 A.D. | 8 |
| 3. The Goddess Returns..... | 13 |
| 4. A Costly Mistake | 20 |
| 5. The Swelling Sickness..... | 24 |
| 6. You are here, Danann | 35 |
| 7. The lock of hair | 44 |
| 8. The Archangel Gabriel | 51 |
| 9. All Hell breaks loose..... | 52 |
| 10. Gabriel, Michael and Uriel pass Judgement | 57 |
| 11. We are betrayed | 60 |
| 12. The Angel has Fallen | 62 |
| 13. Treachery, Betrayal and a Big, <i>Horrible</i> Mistake | 63 |
| 14. Death of the King | 65 |
| 15. Rape and Death and filthy sinners..... | 67 |
| 16. King Seth, of the Ancient Province Kingdom of Connacht, County Galway, Ireland..... | 70 |
| 17. Being corporeal is <i>horrible</i> | 73 |
| 18. Club Vampyr | 77 |
| 19. Strange Revelations | 95 |

Not included in this edition:

20. By the Light of the Full Moon
21. At Odds
22. An offer you can't refuse
23. The cat, the bustier and the very dark night
24. Waking to a big surprise
25. The start to a very busy and unexpected week
26. How the hell can an Angel catch Flu?
27. Fallen Angel
28. Catch a Falling Star
29. What do you remember?
30. We're going to lose her and I don't know how to stop it!
31. More Angel, Less Human
32. A first, real date
33. Invitation to the Predator
34. What do they want from me?
35. Masquerade
36. She's dead!
37. When exactly did I agree to this?
38. A solemn Promise
39. I didn't think that vampires married humans?
40. Where it all began
41. Goodbye, my King
42. The Vengeance of Uriel, the Bitter and Twisted
43. This isn't how it's supposed to be

Living Vampire

One who has been bitten by a vampire to receive the catalyst and had vampire blood introduced into a wound but whose body is still living. After being made vampire, they age approximately one year for every decade that passes. A living vampire ages in sunlight around one year for every hour of exposure. Must feed on blood and food and sleep for several hours a night; two to three hours is sufficient. Can compel humans and speak to one another's minds but they cannot listen in to another's mind. They must decide when to die in order to stop the aging process. When they die, they will rise to be undead at the next full moon.

Undead Vampire

One whose mortal body has died. They are unaffected by the sun and have no need to eat in their human form but can, though they cannot process food and must expel it at some point. They can eat when they shift into their animal form at the full moon. They live on blood and once they are over a hundred years or so, feeding a half dozen times a year is sufficient. Older vampires need to feed less often, once or twice a year or so, though they all tend to feed more frequently because they like it. Can compel humans and speak to one another's minds but they cannot listen in to another's mind. The only thing that can harm them, is another vampire or vampire in animal form or an anointed blade.

Draining

If a vampire is drained of their blood they can barely move, if at all. It matters not, whether they are living or undead.

Anointed Blade

A weapon that has old vampire blood, giving it the ability to damage vampiric flesh.

Poisoned Blade

A weapon that has been anointed with old vampire blood that has been poisoned with large amounts of salt. The poisoning is what stops vampiric flesh regenerating. Wherever the wounds occur, the flesh will be unable to repair itself; though the vampire will not die.

Shape-Shifters

Undead vampires shift at the full moon to become the animal their sire was. If the body is attacked by some other animal and if the DNA of that animal is introduced into the vampire prior to rising at the full moon, they may rise to be that new animal

Angels

Sentient beings that exist as pure light and energy from another plane of existence. They visit this plane to observe humans and their behaviour. They are also known as the Seraphim and are immortal.

Archangels

The nine most powerful and supreme beings who have greater abilities than others of their kind.

1. Manannan Mac Lir 798 A.D.

“Toda, why have you done this?” the Dagda asked curiously. “This will go on for millennia if left unchecked.” He stared at the sight below, in the valley of the warring tribes. Every single body down there lay prostrate in death. Toda had killed every single man and woman and turned every child in the nearby encampments. When the full moon rose in two days they would all, each and every one, rise to be vampire.

The man next to him laughed. “Is that not why they call me Manannan Mac Lir, the mischievous one? They could not get along in life; I wanted to see how they would manage in death.”

“This is too much, Toda. We cannot leave them unchecked; they could be the ruination of us all.” The Dagda was too old to be enraged, he was well over 5000 years, but he knew that Toda had gone too far this time. “You must stay, Toda. You must stay and teach them; make them aware of all that we are and all that we do” he commanded softly...but firmly.

“My Lord...must I?” Toda asked in irritation. “I gave them a *gift*, more than they deserved. The fools could not stand even a day of peace between them; they were killing each other to extinction. Now they will learn the futility of making war, they will not be able to kill each other; they will not know *how*.”

“It matters not, Toda; they must be taught and you will be the one to teach them. For two hundred years you must stay and govern them; put them on the path.” The Dagda looked out over the lands of the clan kings of Ireland and sighed heavily. These two septs had been warring for years. Humans were strange creatures; these two kingdoms had all that they could want and no reason that he could see for them to make war but make war they did. In spite of Toda’s carelessness, it would be interesting to see what came of this. Soon enough they would find the ways to kill each other; it would be interesting to see if these peoples survived this. The Dagda promised himself that he would return some time to see how they managed. Perhaps he would wait five or six hundred years and...perhaps Toda could work miracles as well as mischief.

2. The Swan of Manannan Mac Lir 1807 A.D.

Seth stared across the barren, green landscape down to the lake. Something seemed to glow white under the moon. He made his way closer, staying low in the grass. He was stunned to find his gaze falling upon a young woman, a Goddess; the Goddess daughter of Manannan Mac Lir, himself.

Seth knew the stories of old. Aiofe, the second wife of Manannan had been jealous of the four children Manannan had fathered with his first wife. Because of it, she had transformed his children into white swans and for 900 years they would remain so, before the curse was broken.

Seth himself, was over eight hundred years old and knew the stories of his people, who had been turned by Manannan himself, back in the first days. Manannan Mac Lir had stayed with them for two hundred years until he had departed for Tir Na nOg but the tales lived on.

He watched as the young woman unfurled the most beautiful, feathery white wings. She bent to the water and washed her hands. Seth could not help himself, he had to capture her, this young Goddess of such ethereal beauty but he did not want to frighten her. He wanted to look at her and talk to her...and if he was honest, he wanted to keep her for himself.

Seth crept closer, as quietly as he knew how. He watched as the Goddess bathed in the cool waters before she tip-toed across the stones and back up the bank. She seemed to quiver in the night air and droplets of water fell from her pale body and snow white wings. She bent to pick up the gown that was lying on the grass, before folding her wings and donning the garment.

With no forethought whatsoever, Seth stood and spoke "my Goddess." She turned in shock and stumbled backwards, making ready for flight. "Don't go! Please" he begged.

She paused a moment and stared at the Dark One standing before her. She had been foolhardy to have been caught here. Contact was not generally permitted and while she could have confused a human, she had no power over a Dark One. "I must...away from here" she whispered.

"I wish to talk to you, Goddess" Seth told her, urgently.

“Why do you call me Goddess?” She was curious, this Dark One was clearly fascinated, she observed.

“Are you not the swan daughter of the God, Manannan Mac Lir?” Seth asked in confusion.

A soft smile of understanding broke out over her face. He thought she was something other than what she was. “No...I am not” she told him softly.

Seth was supremely confused. Never in his entire existence had he encountered one such as she. “Who...who *are* you?” he asked.

She stared at this Dark One who was understandably curious. She should *not* have stayed to talk to him, she knew that but she was intrigued by this Dark One; intrigued by the curiosity emanating from his soul. She stared at him hard and could see the dark stains covering it but there was goodness there too. His kind were never meant for eternity in this form; a clean soul would have been impossible. “I have no name; none on *this* plane.”

“What shall I call you?” Seth demanded. He wanted to *talk* to this woman, he wanted to *know* her.

She pondered his question, briefly. “Have you a name for me?” she asked curiously.

Seth thought for a moment. “Yes” he said, nodding. “I will call you Danann for I know that you *are* a Goddess.”

“Danann” she tried the name out and it played well on her lips. “Danann...yes, I like it. I will be Danann and you; may I have your name?”

“I am Seth, Prince of this realm.”

“You are a Prince? Well young Lord, I must away, for I am needed elsewhere” she said, as she made ready to depart the earthly plane.

“Please Goddess...don’t go, I wish to talk to you.” There was a desperation to Seth; he could not bear for her to go. If there was a way for him to capture her, he might have considered it but he did not want to frighten her. This was new to him; never before had such a thought even crossed his mind. For over eight hundred years he had fought in the war and hunted and fed and taken that which he desired, at will. He wanted her to stay but he could

not *make* her stay...he would *coax* it from her...he would gentle his mind and thoughts and catch this most elusive of birds with...something more?

"I must go, I am sorry."

Seth stepped closer and made to reach for her. She gasped in shock; she had never been close to a Dark One before but she felt drawn to him and could not understand why. She had been warned to stay away from Dark Ones but she had never even thought to *encounter* one. "If you cannot stay, will you consider returning, *please* my Goddess." His words were full of heartfelt appeal and his soul was bright.

She was confused. If his soul could be so bright, why then were Dark Ones so dangerous, so *wrong* to be around? Whether it was a mistake, she knew not but she found herself promising to return.

"*When?*" Seth demanded. "When will you return?"

"On the morrow" she promised. "I will return here at dusk, if you so wish it."

"I *do*, my Goddess" he promised quickly. "I will be here."

"If I return" she smiled, feeling a strange sense of joy, "you really must call me Danann. It *was* your gift to me, after all."

Seth agreed quickly. In that moment, he would have agreed to anything to get her to return. "Yes...Danann. I will see you on the morrow."

Danann took a step back, smiled gently and shimmered; gold sparkles cascading from her wings as a parting gift to this Dark One, whose soul brightened for her. She unfurled her wings, leapt into the air and took flight. As she did so, a shower of golden sparkles fell upon Seth, warming him as he had never before been warmed. The very nature of the vampire made for one, constant temperature but the Goddess had shimmered for him and he felt *hot* for the first time in his life. Being vampire had always meant that he had simply been comfortable in all extremes but no more; the night air had never been so sweet.

Seth walked home slowly, through the darkness of the night. He was intrigued by the Goddess, Danann; she was an amazing creature, so bright and full of such life. He wanted to know her as he had never known another. He thought of her face and body, burned onto his brain; she was *beautiful*, ethereally lovely. She had long dark hair threaded with strands of bright

gold and bright blue eyes. His fingers itched to stroke the soft, white, feathery wings. He knew she was not vampire but what then, was she? He had never even heard of such a creature in his 839 years. "Danann" he whispered her name to the night and took off at a run.

Seth knew he was in trouble when his father's steward was waiting to relay a message, at the entrance to the great hall. Banning appeared to be around twenty years of age but in fact he was over one thousand. He had blonde hair and was short, unusually short for their clan. His name actually meant short blonde one but no one ever reminded him of it, for Banning was known to be ruthless and savage if the occasion called for it and sometimes when it didn't. "Prince Seth...your father, the King awaits you in the Hall" Banning bowed his head but Seth could sense the disapproval coming off him.

He tried to hide his smirk. "Thank you, Banning" he nodded briefly and stepped into the Hall. This old castle had been home to his family for over a thousand years. A thousand years where first his grandfather and then his father had reigned as clan kings of Ireland. Seth was the only existing son of King Tynan the Dark; his two elder brothers having died at birth.

His parents were sitting on the throned dais waiting for him, ready to deliver one more lecture. Honour and familial duty had been bred into him and it was for this reason *alone* that he still dwelt in this place but he longed to escape and leave all this senseless existence behind him. Seth desired more than anything, to visit the New World; the Americas but he suspected that it would never be. He was chained to this place as easily as if they threw him in the dungeons. He thought briefly of Danann and could not help but smile; at last...at *long* last, he had something *worth* being here for.

Seth lay on the bed in his chamber and stared up at the dawning sky. Caera had just left and he was ashamed. He had supped a little on her and she had wanted his body but for the first time, he found that he did not want that. He did not want to share himself nor sully his body with others. He did not know what to make of such a thing. It was rare for him to feel strange emotions; such occurrences were usually life changing.

Once more his thoughts turned to Danann and somewhere, deep down inside himself, Seth knew that he had begun the transformation; the permanent change he had always been warned could happen, when a vampire truly fell in love. It wasn't rare but it was not common either; vampires usually became lovers for companionship more often than *actual*

love. It had never, *ever* occurred to him that this could happen and he was excited and wary and...he was *afraid*.

It was a strange feeling for Seth. He had stood on a killing field many times and walked away, unscathed. He was known to be ruthless and unforgiving but this feeling of fear in him was unknown and deadly and he knew to respect it; he was on the cusp of change and knew not where it would take him.

3. The Goddess Returns

Seth arrived hours ahead of time; it was mid afternoon when he could contain himself no longer. He left his chamber and made his way out of the castle and through the Keep. He had felt foolish in the strange care he had taken in his attire. He was wearing leather breeches, white shirt and a deer hide jerkin. He was careful to stay on the path, not wanting to sully his boots in the mud.

He passed Donovan the smithy, who was hard at work at his fiery forge. It was a strange existence they had here in this wild and remote place in Ireland. Seth and his family were relics of days gone by. His grandfather had been made vampire more than a thousand years ago by Manannan Mac Lir, when the clan kings of Ireland still ruled under the High King, from the place now known as Dublin.

While Manannan had ruled the two warring clans, peace had reigned but upon his departure to Tir Na nOg, the battle had resumed. Seth's grandfather had taken for himself and married the maid promised to their enemy. Ahern, King of the neighbouring clan had been so enraged, he had immediately declared war and they had been fighting ever since.

Seth had cut his teeth in battle or so it had seemed, though there was little point to it all. They did not kill to the point of true-death, they just continued to shed blood and though it would seem to be a game after a thousand years, it was *not*. All was still as bitter and brutal as ever.

Ahern held such bitter hatred within him, that when he had killed his enemy and his former love; Seth's family had sent emissaries to entreat with Ahern to ensure that such a thing did not happen again. Ever since then, they no longer used poisoned and anointed blades; the only weapon that could stop vampiric flesh from regenerating. The battle continued to rage as a balm to King Ahern's pride but that was all and beneath it, a general kind of peace reigned, for neither side could afford to lose any more people to true death.

Seth knew that it was all a matter of time; the first chance Ahern got, he would attack for true death and there would be no mercy for his enemy. Seth had been waiting for this to happen for hundreds of years and it was his lack of complacency that kept them vigilant and safe. It was for his skill and wisdom that his father tolerated his more...outlandish behaviour and rarely called him to heel.

Living under the yoke of his King in this way, was slowly choking the life out of Seth and for a man of some eight hundred and thirty-nine years, it was stifling. Seth longed to away from here; his obligations making him more savage and more ruthless, as time passed.

His life had not been easy the way it would have, had he been human. Seth had never *been* human; in fact he had been born vampire, something very rare, indeed.

There were two kinds of vampire, Living and Undead. A vampire was made when two elements were introduced into their blood; firstly the catalyst. It was given by vampire bite and lay dormant in the blood until it was triggered by the introduction of vampire blood. When that happened, it set off a chain reaction that turned its victim into a vampire. You could be exposed to the catalyst or the blood individually and nothing would happen...it took *both* elements together, to make a vampire.

If the victim was alive, they would become vampire but their aging would slow and they would visibly age around one year for every ten that passed. The only exception was sunlight; if a living vampire walked under the light of the sun, they would age a year for every hour of exposure. This did not preclude them from the day, cloud cover was beloved weather but there were *never* many living vampires anyway; so it was rarely an issue.

The true difficulty for the living vampire was something that Seth had had to face himself in order to halt the aging process and that was; *choosing* when to die. Seth did not suffer the slow aging that those *made* to be living vampires did because he had been *born* vampire. As near as anyone had been able to tell, he had aged normally until around his seventeenth year when his aging had begun to slow. For the next eighty or so years he had continued to age until his appearance was that of a young man around twenty-five years of age.

The whole while, his parents had been urging him to marry and have children, whilst he was able. Living vampires could have children for they were not dead but of course, the Undead could not, for truly they had died and were animated by something other than life.

Seth had flatly refused, pushing it to the back of his mind. He may have had to remain there, trapped in an obligatory existence that presented little more than the joy of battle but even that had waned over the years...eight hundred years was a *very* long time. Seth would not be forced into marriage just for the sake of having children...he was loyal and true to his family, his

King and his Kingdom but he would not go *that* far. His refusal had vexed his parents no end and they had raged at him on a daily basis.

Seth was a skilled and fearsome warrior; both Kingdoms knew it and there was not one single warrior, not even Ahern himself that could best Seth Riordan, Prince of the Galways. In a moment of agitated weakness, he had let his guard down and the striking blow to his heart and subsequent death had silenced his parents on the issue of children forever and Seth was supremely grateful for that small mercy.

He had been undead for around seven hundred and fifty years now and for the first time, something stirred him to excitement that wasn't the craze of battle.

He walked through the gates of the Keep, under the portcullis and across the drawbridge that covered a deep trench. Some forty vampires dwelt within the Keep of the castle. The world progressed around them but few were prepared to adapt to new things, many often going for decades before leaving the castle for anything more than the monthly hunt.

There had once been a village nearby but after the turning, it was decided that it was safer for the vampire peoples of Galway to dwell within the safety of the Keep. There was room for all; the Keep's acreage numbered well over two hundred and much of it that had been given over to food and livestock, was now lush garden. They still kept *some* livestock for hunting at the full moon but it was not as good as hunting in the wild.

Seth was the son of a king but would never be a king himself. His father was immortal and Seth counted his blessings. He did not want to be king but one day, he promised himself; one day he would be free of this place and all that it represented.

By the time he made it to the lake, it was still the hour before dusk. Seth sat on the grass by the bank and looked about, surveying the lands before him. He loved Ireland but living in the same place in the same way, doing the same things with the same companions for over eight hundred years was killing his spirit. It might have been different if he had had something or *someone* worth existing for but he did not and his love of this life had waned.

The raw beauty of this land that he called home was heart-wrenching in its lush, green, barren loneliness. There were just rolling green hills, devoid of anything but the occasional rock and wildlife. He could have sat here gazing upon his lands for eternity and never grown bored or dissatisfied.

As the minutes passed by, Seth grew more nervous and more eager, a new phenomenon for him. He stood up and began pacing back and forth, by the water's edge. He hoped that the Goddess really *would* come; she had promised that she would. He checked his clothing to make sure it was free of dust and dirt and he pulled his jerkin down. Seth ran his fingers through his dark hair that fell rakishly over his forehead. He had never been concerned about his appearance in quite this way before.

"Is something wrong, my Prince?" a soft voice asked.

Seth spun around and there, in the purple and orange-hued dusk, stood the most beautiful creature he had ever beheld; she was *lovely*. "Goddess" he murmured longingly.

"Not Goddess" she whispered with a sweet, beguiling smile.

"Danann" he corrected himself quickly. "You have come."

"Yes" she smiled, "I promised I would."

She was so serene but he could see humour there and a light in her eyes. "Would you...care to sit?" he asked, cursing himself silently for not bringing something for her to sit on. He tore his jerkin open and laid it on the grass. He wanted to take her hand and help her to sit but *something*...some unusual reticence stayed his hand. He had never experienced such a problem before; no woman had ever resisted him. Seth had a natural charm that women were drawn to...he had *never* been told no, nor had he ever guarded his actions so carefully. Never had he cared so *much*.

"Thank you" she whispered softly, as she sat, tucking her legs beneath her. Her white gown was layer upon layer of white gossamer that floated in the breeze. Seth could not help himself; his eyes travelled from her neck down to her bosom and as her face was lowered, he watched as she fiddled with her slippers before removing them.

He lowered himself to the grass beside her, careful to maintain a respectful distance. This was strange for Seth; women of all kinds, vampire and human alike, often offered themselves hoping for even a few minutes of his time and attention. This was the first occasion he had ever wanted to secure a little of someone's time for *himself*.

He turned to look at her profile as she gazed out across the lake; her long, wavy dark hair, cascading down her back. She raised her head, stretching

her slender neck as she delicately sniffed the air. "I like the smell of water" she murmured, before turning back to smile at Seth.

Such a strange thing for her to say; he wondered at the way she saw the world and wanted her to teach him. He inhaled, closing his eyes and allowed all the smells about him to permeate his senses. He could smell the cool water and the soft earth; the green grass and over it all, the soft, delicate fragrance of flowers and spice...lavender, she was a garden. He opened his eyes and turned to her, finding her gaze upon him, questioningly. "My Goddess...Danann...have you...how have you spent your day?" he asked finally, feeling ridiculous and stupid.

Her eyes narrowed thoughtfully. "I don't know how to explain it...I was with my Arc...one who *teaches* me."

"What is an Arc and what does he...*teach* you?" Seth wanted to know but an emotion he had never experienced, hit him squarely in his chest. He was angry that she had spent time with another.

"Gabriel is...my teacher" she said, serenely. "He teaches me knowledge of good and evil; of light and dark and of wrong and right."

Seth felt as though he had been slapped...these things were not *unknown* to him but he did not think on such things; they were not a part of his life. He did what he wanted, took what he wanted...lived as he wanted, all under the watchful eyes of Banning and his family. "Why?" he could not stop himself from asking her.

She looked at him curiously, as though she found him interesting. "Are all Dark Ones like you?"

He was taken aback. She had called him a Dark One. Is that what he was? Is that how she saw him?

"Have I upset you?" she asked him sadly and before she could stop herself, Danann placed her hand on his arm. Sparkly shocks fizzled where their skin came into contact. "Oh" she groaned in surprised pleasure. "What is *that*?"

"My Goddess...*Danann*..." Seth gasped in surprise. He felt his eyes darken and his fangs descend and he lowered his face in shame.

Danann looked up to find him turned away. "My Prince, have I offended you?" she asked in earnest. "I should not have touched you, I am sorry..."

Seth managed to control himself enough to restore his visage, before turning to the creature of light next to him. "My Goddess...you have *not* offended me. You could *not*, I was...*overwhelmed*, I have never experienced such a...*pleasure*, it took me by surprise."

She nodded in relieved satisfaction. "You must forgive me, my Prince. I do not spend time around others who are not my kind and I have been warned against Dark Ones." She stared at him thoughtfully once more. "I do not know why; your soul is bright, though it bears a darkness."

"Why do you call me a Dark One?" he asked, needing confirmation. She had been warned against his kind and with good reason but the thought of her afraid of him, frightened *him*.

"You are a Dark One, are you not? A blood drinker; you prey on others for sustenance and there is a darkness within you, is there not?"

Her words were so simple but without malice. She seemed to be speaking only the truth, as she knew it to be. Seth did not want to answer her. He wanted to tell her that he was a good man; a man worthy of her but...he *could* not because...he *was* not. He wanted to take her away from here and give her everything that it was within his power to give her. "My Goddess, what manner of creature *are* you?" he asked softly, unable to answer her question.

"My Prince, I am but a simple creature. I am a creature of the Light. I am that, which your kind calls, Angel." Her smile was so relaxed and happy. She was an *Angel*, a creature of the light. They were total opposites, how could he possibly hope to be with her; he was an abomination. Danann saw curiosity disappear and be replaced by despair on his face. "My Prince" she whispered and raised her hand to his face. Tiny little sparkles burst where her flesh touched his. "What is wrong? Tell me" she demanded softly.

Seth closed his eyes and turned his face into her hand, allowing the intense pleasure of her touch, envelop his entire being. "*Danann...*" he breathed softly. He wanted to push her down onto the grass and remove her garment. He wanted to gaze upon her pale loveliness and he wanted to *take* her. He wanted her to accept him into her body and her mind; he wanted to bite her, feed from her. Every time she called him '*my Prince*' his muscles contracted in pleasure and her voice vibrated through his mind. He wanted this creature, this lovely, beautiful woman *more* than he had wanted anything, *ever*. More than wanting her, for the first time ever, he wanted her to want *him*. He wanted her to accept him, to welcome him for the beast that he was.

Seth shook his head as if to scatter the insanity of his thoughts. Such things would never come to pass; she was an *Angel*, a creature of light and he was vampire, a Dark One. She seemed to know *that* better than he did.

Seth jumped up, vampire fast and moved to stand some distance from her. Anguish spread across Danann's face as she realised his remoteness. She took a moment to strengthen and fortify herself; she was not used to rejection, it was not something she had experienced and was surprised to find how painful it was. "Forgive me" she whispered and in an instant, her wings had erupted and she had launched herself into the Heavens, before disappearing in a burst of flashing white and a rain of golden sparkles.

"Danann!" She heard the name by which he called her, screamed to the night as she vanished.

4. A Costly Mistake

Seth fell to his knees in anguish. What had happened? She...she had left him without the promise of returning. Why? Why did she leave? Had he done something? Had he offended her in some way? *She* had apologised; why? What had she been *thinking*?

Seth screamed her name to the Heavens once more but to no avail; she did not appear. Pain speared through him and he fell to the grass in gasping agony. His heart was being crushed through the weight of his emotions. He lay for some time, unable to move or do anything when finally, a kind of resolve settled through him.

She had left her slippers behind. Little white slippers that glowed in the night. She would come back for them and he would wait for her. He would beg the forgiveness of his Goddess and atone for his offence, whatever it may be. Deep down, Seth knew there was a chance that she would not return but he couldn't allow it to take root in his mind. She *would* return and she *would* forgive. Danann was a creature of the light and she was so lovely and good, she would not be able to help herself but forgive him.

For three days and nights, Seth sat there on the grass by the lake. He did not move and he did not feed; he did not speak except to call her name in impassioned anguish. Banning inevitably made an appearance at the dawning of the fourth day. "Prince Seth, you are not well?" Banning asked. It was a ridiculous question because as vampires, their health never varied but it was his polite way of introducing the subject of that, which was bothering him.

Seth looked up in surprise. He had not noticed the presence of others; something that had never happened before in over eight hundred years. In the distance he saw his two personal guards and a servant girl. Seth groaned inwardly; he just wanted to be left alone to wait for his Goddess. "Go away, Banning" he said, in what sounded like exhaustion.

In spite of his austere manner and devotion to King and Country, Banning had always watched over the Prince, often having made excuses for him and hidden some of his more...*outlandish* exploits. It pained him to see the Prince this way and he wondered if there was something that could be done to alleviate whatever it was that ailed him. 'Prince Seth, I brought a wench

so that you may feed; you appear weakened, my Lord.’ Banning bowed, as he spoke to Seth’s mind.

A savage anger filled Seth. ‘You go *too* far, Steward. *I* decide when and how and *if* I feed. Begone!’ The only thing that stopped him from savaging Banning in that moment was his respect for the man who had been so devoted to his family, for more than a thousand years.

Banning felt chilled to the bone as his Prince sat with his back to him, not moving. There was something very, *very* wrong here...so wrong that Banning was willing to face his Lord’s displeasure, as he spoke to Seth’s mind once again. ‘My Lord...what *ails* you? Tell me, I beg you and I will *fix* it.’ He fell to his knees as Seth turned to him.

‘Banning...you are a good man and a good friend. This is one time you *cannot* fix what ails me; there is only one who can do that and she is not *here*.’

‘My Lord?’ Banning asked, confused at his Prince’s words. ‘*She*, my Lord? Of whom do you speak?’

Seth gazed out over the shimmery cold waters of the lake and sighed heavily. ‘Banning...I *suffer*. It has *begun*, the transformation and I am *desolate*.’

Banning froze in horror. ‘No, my Lord. It *cannot* be, it...*who*?’ he asked finally, well and truly overstepping his normally *very* carefully-tread boundaries. He waited for a lashing that did not come.

‘Danann, my Goddess’ Seth whispered. ‘She comes no more, Banning and I am torn asunder.’

Banning sat there in shock. Of whom was his Prince speaking? This was all so strange. ‘I do not understand, my Lord’ he said, hoping for an explanation and though he waited in vain, he did not get one.

Seth sighed heavily. ‘Begone from this place, Banning and take them with you’ he waved his hand, indicating the guards and the servant girl. ‘Leave me to my despair.’

Banning took his very existence into his hands then, because he knew there was a chance that he would be punished for his temerity. If that happened, he would not raise a hand to stop it; his love and devotion to his Prince was such that he would die at Seth’s hand and never raise so much as a finger to stop it. ‘My Lord, you are not yourself. You *must* take blood, you are burning

through your last feed too quickly and we cannot hunt for another week. We must set you to rights.'

The irony of his condition amused Seth; he was so old that he only truly needed to feed once or twice a year, so long as he hunted and fed on animals in his shifted form. He had never burned through a feed before and he had his proof that it was *love, true love* that was ailing him now.

In spite of his supreme irritation, Seth allowed Banning's words settle through his distracted thoughts. Perhaps he was right and he *should* feed. If Danann returned now, he would be volatile and may not handle things in the way that he should. He needed to be calm but the thought of feeding on the girl was surprisingly distasteful to him. He glanced over his shoulder at her and could not keep his face from revealing his thoughts.

Banning saw the look on his Prince's face and was shocked. The Prince had always been a man who took his pleasures where they were offered but he appeared to find disfavour with the pretty young vampire. 'My Lord...' Banning began, 'you would prefer a *human* girl?' Banning observed his Prince's disgust and paused briefly before speaking aloud to the three waiting some distance away. "Return to the castle" he ordered harshly, before turning back to Seth. 'My Lord,' he spoke to the Prince's mind once more. 'If you cannot feed on the maid...I would be...*honoured* to assist you...' This was dangerous, Banning knew but he was surprised to find Seth turning to him thoughtfully.

Seth wondered if feeding in this way was acceptable. It would not be as offensive as with a woman, surely. Could he do this? Should he? What would Danann think, would she hate him? Despise him? Anger flashed through him and he wanted to *destroy*...destroy and crush anything he could get his hands on. He *must* feed, he knew it now. When she returned, he had to be ready for her and in this condition, he was not. "Thank you, Banning" he said quietly.

Banning did not move, for fear of alerting his Prince to what was in his mind. "Where, my Lord?" he asked.

"Wrist" Seth said, a little too harshly. He felt guilty already for doing this. This would be supremely painful for Banning and he did not deserve it but Danann was more important and Seth had to prepare himself for her return because return she *must*...there could be no other outcome.

Seth could not indulge his sense of guilt; the only way to make a feeding painless was compulsion with a human or desire with a reciprocating partner. For Banning it could be neither and before he had a chance to think about what he was doing, Seth grabbed the offered arm and bit into the wrist, feeding quickly. He did not allow himself to delve into Banning's mind, instead he steered well clear but he could not fail to notice the calm serenity, with which Banning was handling the feed. With one last gulp, Seth pulled away and dropped the arm he had been holding. Banning fell to the grass as though he had fainted. Seth turned away, giving Banning the illusion of privacy and allowed the blood to do its work and anoint his body with a flowing calm. *Danann...he would be ready for his Goddess now; if only she would return.*

Banning lay in the grass, physically spent. He was supremely embarrassed by his behaviour in front of his Prince; all he could do now was try to salvage the situation and make his escape. He got to his feet, before bowing once more. "My Lord...you are well?" he asked in as business-like a manner, as he could muster.

"Thank you, Banning" Seth said calmly. "As ever...you are a good friend."

"With your permission, my Lord...I will return to the castle." Seth nodded his agreement. "What shall I tell your father, the King?"

"Tell him...tell him that I return, when he sees me" Seth said in sad amusement. He *would* not leave this place, *not* until Danann returned.

"And...the enemy, my Lord?"

"If they slay me, Banning...I go to the Heavens with joy."

Banning stared in surprise at his warrior Prince; that such words could have passed his lips shocked him more than anything else his Prince had ever done or said and Seth Riordan had said and done *plenty*. "My Lord?"

"Away with you, Banning...I await my Goddess." He waved his hand dismissively.

Left with no choice, Banning bowed and backed away before turning and running back toward the castle; confusion and despair filling his mind. Had his Prince gone mad?

5. The Swelling Sickness

Danann hovered in the distant skies, once more spying her Prince sitting by the lonely lake, clutching her glowing, white slippers. Her heart was drawn to him; it was as though she was tethered to him and could not escape. What made it all the more strange was that she did not *want* to escape. She had managed to come here three times in the last four days and still her Prince had not moved from this place. She wondered why he was still here after she had offended him so.

The last days had been torturous and Gabriel had noticed her distraction. He had tried to coax and counsel her but she could not mention that she had spoken to a Dark One, let alone reveal that she had had the temerity to *touch* one. She wanted to go to him again but she could not; she was not meant for interaction in this way, she did not know the rules.

Danann watched as the Prince got to his feet and raised his arms to the wide opened skies of the Irish sunshine. “Danann...my Goddess...why have you *forsaken* me?” he cried in anguish.

Danann was so surprised; she almost fell out of the air. With one swish of her snowy white, feathery wings; she righted herself and before she knew what she was doing, she found herself circling ever lower, before hovering over the lake. She dropped and flew across the gently rocking waters, dipping a finger in as she skimmed along the surface of the water. She finally came to land gently in front of the surprised Prince, just beyond the water’s edge at its grassy verge. “Hello, my Prince” she found herself saying with strange reticence. This was new...Danann had never been shy, exactly. She did not normally experience human-type emotions; serenity was *usually* all encompassing.

Seth dropped to his knees at her feet with a sob. “Forgive me, Danann...my Goddess. For however I have offended you, I promise to atone...just please, I beg of you...do not forsake me again. I have been as *nothing*, without you.”

Danann stared at him in surprise. “I...I do not understand you, my Prince. It was *I* who offended *you*...was it not?” This was too confusing; Danann was ill-equipped for the strange vagaries of those who inhabited this world. Humans were confusing enough but of this Dark One, she knew not what to make of him. “Please rise, my Prince” she begged in discomfort.

When Seth did not move, Danann took his hand in hers; tiny golden sparkles erupting where their skin connected and she raised him up. He was taller than she; much taller so as he looked down, it was into her smiling face. "Danann" he groaned in relief. Seth raised his hand to touch her but pulled back at the last second, not wanting to offend her again.

Danann looked at him thoughtfully. "You wish to touch me, my Prince?" she asked, frowning in confusion. "I would touch you, too" she said, simply. She took his hand in hers once more and pressed his palm to her heart; luxuriating in the fizzing sparks. "It beats" she said, smiling like a small child at the happiness she drew from it. Danann pressed her palm to Seth's chest over his white shirt. She was confused and she frowned in consternation. Danann pushed the neckline aside until her hand was touching his bare chest. Seth gasped in pleasure but Danann looked all the more confused.

"It does *not* beat, my Goddess" Seth said sadly. For the first time in his life, it bothered him that it did not pump life-giving blood through his body. "But it is full...it is full of...*you*, my Goddess, my Danann."

"Why does it not beat, My Prince? Is it because you are a Dark One?"

Seth nodded. "Yes...Danann. I must...beg a favour of you, my Goddess. Promise me, please. Do not leave me without telling me...*ever*, please."

His words were so earnest that Danann could not deny him. "It shall be as you wish, My Prince." Danann vanished her wings and sat down on the grass. "My Prince...how did I upset you, when last I was here?"

Seth could not believe that she thought she had offended him. "Danann...you did *nothing*, it was *I*...I wanted...*more* than I should" he said cryptically.

Danann had the urge to comfort him. "What did you want?" she asked, with almost child-like simplicity.

Seth knew that she was so good that she could not conceive of anything that could sully her perfection. "I wanted...things that I want...as a man and as a...vampire."

This was exciting, Danann wondered what those things were and so she asked. Seth was taken aback; he was not used to having this sort of conversation with anyone, let alone an Angel of the light. "Please tell me, my Prince" she begged and reached for his hand, taking it to rest in both of hers, tiny golden sparkles fizzing where they touched.

“Danann...I don’t want to...*frighten* you...I want you...I want you...I just *want* you” he whispered in agony.

Danann smiled in delight. “You do? I want you too” she said, looking him over. “I have strange sensations” she told him, creasing her brow. “I want to look at you and...*touch* you” she whispered as though it were some secret. “Is this *normal*? I cannot ask Gabriel, he would not approve. Tell me, my Prince...what do I do about this?”

Seth stared at her in disbelief. Not only did she want him too but she wanted him to tell her what to do about it. “My Goddess...Danann...I don’t know what to tell you other than that I am *glad* that you feel that way. I want to tell you what you should do but I find that I *cannot*. It must be your choice and yours alone. I am immortal Danann...I would give up eternity to touch you...to be with you.”

Strange emotions were whirling within Danann. The urge to touch him, to *hold* him, was overwhelming. “My Prince” she whimpered. Seth could not help himself. He lifted her in one fell swoop and gathered her to him, sitting her on his lap. He sighed in heavy satisfaction at the feeling of rightness that touching her brought to him.

Danann burrowed into his hold and allowed the feelings whirling within her, to permeate her mind. This was *good*...better than anything she had experienced ever, including when she first got her wings. They did not speak for a long time, they just sat, Seth holding her and Danann happy in his embrace.

“How is it that you have no name?” Seth asked, finally breaking the silence.

“Only the Arc’s have names when we are here” Danann told him. “When I am here, I do not remember my name from the other realm. But I am Danann now” she said, in obvious satisfaction.

Danann climbed off Seth’s lap and stood up. Seth jumped to his feet in a panic. “You are not going, are you?” he demanded.

“Not yet, my Prince. I flew through a sandstorm this morning and I must wash my wings” she told him, as she shed her gossamer white gown. Seth looked at her in shock, as she smiled at him without guile. She was an Angel and without the frailties of human nature. She did not know shame, or embarrassment or hatred or anger. Her nakedness was not intended to tempt him, she merely wanted to wash.

He was beginning to understand her and he realised this gave him a good insight into how to proceed. "Will you swim, my Prince" she asked, as she turned away and slowly waded into the water. Seth watched as small, white, feathery buds appeared between her shoulder blades and in the space of a mere second, they grew to beautiful, glowing, snowy white wings.

Without further thought, Seth shed his clothing and boots, before leaping into the water after her. They waded for a little while, before Danann dipped low into the water, fully immersing her wings. Seth knew a moment of panic when she burst out of the water in a shower of cascading droplets that rained over him. She hovered above the lake and shimmered her wings in the sunlight until they were dry, before vanishing them once more. As she did so, she fell to the water; without her wings to hold her up. Seth caught her before he knew what he was doing and held her to the length of him.

Danann smiled, as she rubbed the water from her eyes. "Thank you, my Prince."

"Danann" Seth breathed in wonderment. "You are so...*beautiful*, my Goddess. How is it that you are here with me?"

She thought about his question for a long moment. "I am where I wish to be" she told him simply. She liked the sensation of his skin against hers, and she wriggled a little, trying to get closer.

"My Goddess...something is wrong?" Seth asked, curiously, his body contracting at the feel of her shimmying against him.

"No...not *wrong*; I am just experiencing...*strange* things. Things I have never *felt* before."

She was so child-like in her innocence that Seth was beginning to get the proper measure of her now. She was curious and wanted to know things and experience things and...Oh God, but he wanted to be the one to show them to her and experience them *with* her. "What strange things?" he encouraged, gently.

She pursed her lips thoughtfully. "My Prince...I have been around many humans and helped them for a long time but never have I wanted to touch one, or be with one or talk to one...until you."

"I am not human, Danann."

"I know but you do come *from* them. Why do I feel like this?"

"Maybe...because it is good and...*right*?" he said, hopefully.

Danann thought about that for some time. "You are right, my Prince. It *is* good and right but it also...*hurts*" she told him, wistfully.

Seth laughed. "I know *exactly* what you mean. I *ache* when you are *with* me and I *ache* when you are *gone*. Danann...the other day when I moved away from you...do you know why I did that?" he asked gently, feeling bolder and more sure of himself now.

"No, my Prince" she frowned, shaking her head.

"I wanted to be *with* you, Danann and I was afraid that if you *knew*...you would run away."

"I would not do that, my Prince" she assured him softly. "I *want* to be with you, too." She wriggled closer again and it was impossible for Seth to control his reaction to her.

"Danann" he gasped urgently. "When I am...*aroused*; when I want to touch you and be with you...I am vampire. My eyes darken and my teeth lengthen; I have fangs. I don't want to *frighten* you."

"I am not frightened" she said with child-like bravery. "Show me, my Prince. Show me so that I may prove to you that I am not afraid."

Seth bit his lip softly, somehow knowing that this was a mistake but not being able to help himself. He closed his eyes slowly, before allowing them to darken and his fangs to descend.

He flinched in surprise when he felt her hand at his mouth and her fingers stroking along his fangs. His eyes burst open of their own accord and he could see her exploring his features with fascination.

Danann flinched as she cut her finger on the sharp, upper inner edge of his fang. "I bleed" she whispered, watching a drop of blood pooling on her finger. Seth knew he was unworthy of her, when all he could think about was *tasting* her blood that smelled so good and so pure. "You are a blood drinker, my Prince" Danann said quickly and put her finger into Seth's shocked mouth. She watched curiously as his blackened eyes seemed to roll

into the back of his head in ecstasy. He tried to stop himself from sucking at the tiny wound but she made it impossible, when she began rubbing her finger over his tongue.

As soon as she pulled her finger from his mouth, Seth could not help himself, he kissed her. He kissed her sweetly and gently and though he did not know whether or not it was a mistake, he could not have helped himself in that moment. He loved this lovely, amazing creature and he had to be with her. Seth vowed to do whatever it took to make her his. He wanted to spend his forever with her. Angels must live forever...*mustn't* they?

Finally he pulled away but it was Danann herself, who seemed reluctant to break contact. She took a second to calm herself, before asking with child-like innocence "what was *that*, my Prince?"

"That, Danann...was a kiss" he said, smiling at her bemusedly.

She touched her lips tentatively. "A kiss" she whispered. "Teach me more...I liked it. Ahhhh!" she screamed suddenly before leaping away from him, in the water.

"What is it, my Goddess?" Seth asked her urgently, reaching for her again.

"There is something in the water, my Prince" she said in a panic.

Seth pulled her protectively to him, when Danann's eyes burst open in obvious shock. "What is it, my Goddess?" he demanded.

Without a word, Danann reached down between them and grasped his body in such a way that he stiffened in absolute shock. She was exploring him with her hand in such abject curiosity, he could do naught but try *not* to explode from the sheer pleasure of it. "It is *you*, my Prince. This is *you*?" she asked, tugging at the length of him. "Is something wrong that it does this? Do you have a sickness? I have seen ill humans with swelling sickness that kills them" she told him, her concern for his health obvious.

Seth wanted to laugh but could not, as she grasped him firmly. "My Goddess...Danann...there is nothing *wrong* with me. This is how a man...*responds*...when he is with the woman that he...*loves*" he explained softly; revealing the true depth of his feelings.

She released her hold, wrapped her arms around his neck and smiled up at him. “You *love* me?” she asked curiously. “The way the light loves everyone and everything?”

“No Danann, not like that. I love you the way a man loves *his* woman. I love you the way that I love no other. I want to be *with* you and *in* you. I want to spend eternity with you and I never want to be parted *from* you.”

“Oh” she breathed softly, in wonderment. “My Prince...is your...*swelling* a mark of your regard for me? Do you...parade about, showing it to others, so all may know your feelings for me?” she asked, shaking her head in confusion; trying to understand the strange ways of the creatures that inhabited this plane of existence.

Seth bit his lip to keep from laughing so hard, that he pierced his lip. It healed almost instantly and thank goodness his Goddess had not noticed. “No Danann...I would not show this to anyone but...you...” he let his words trail off in the hope that she might begin to understand.

“Oh” she was obviously disconcerted. “So...you wish to show it to *me*...do I...*celebrate* its...*swelling*...do I...*congratulate* you...what do I do, my Prince?” she finally wailed, thumping ineffectually against his chest in clear, frustrated confusion.

“Danann...you do not have to do *anything* that you do not wish to do” Seth said firmly.

Danann looked at him, knowing somehow that there was something he was not telling her. “Tell me” she demanded with such sudden petulance, he was surprised to find himself proud of her.

“Danann, my...*swelling* is for...pleasure. The pleasure that it can give a man and his woman, the woman that he loves.” Seth fervently hoped that this would satisfy her but somehow...he knew that it wouldn’t.

“Like kissing?” she asked in delight. “That gave me *much* pleasure, although...” she said, wriggling once more, “it made me feel...strange...*here*” she said and grabbed his hand, bringing it down to press against the apex between her legs.

Seth gasped. “Danann...”

"Is something wrong, my Prince?" she asked warily, releasing his hands quickly.

"Danann...it is important for you to understand that...you *cannot* just have anyone touch you that way and you cannot touch *others* that way, not unless you understand what it *means*."

Danann could hear the wariness and warning in his voice but she did not know what it meant. "Please, my Prince" she begged. "Make me to understand."

Seth knew that he was in trouble as he looked at his Goddess, who was completely without guile. "Perhaps this discussion would best be held out of the water" he suggested softly.

Danann smiled at him. "Very well, my Prince." He felt her arms encircling his waist and suddenly, with an explosive aquatic eruption, they were airborne. Seth saw Danann flap her wings twice before fluttering, to slowly lower them to the grassy verge that bordered the lake.

"Danann!" he exclaimed in surprised.

"Yes, my Prince?" she smiled at him as she stepped back and began shimmering her glowing wings beneath the warm sunlight, to dry them, before she vanished them once more. Danann lay back on the grass, amongst the tiny wildflowers and raised her face to the light.

Seth could not move. She was the most magnificent creature, he had ever beheld. He saw her raise her head and look at him. "My Prince...your swelling does not hurt?" she asked, running her eyes over his body. Seth knew that he was attractive to women; he was tall, solid and muscular. He had broad shoulders and a narrow waist and hips. That he was well endowed, he knew also; he had never been vain but he knew what he knew and for the first time ever...he found himself wanting to preen. He *wanted* to be beautiful to her. He stood as straight as he could, bearing the scrutiny of her eyes that were roaming curiously.

"No, Danann...it does not...*hurt*; at least not in the way that you mean." He walked slowly toward her and lay down beside her, in the grass.

Danann turned on her side and rested her head in her hand. "How then, *does* it hurt?" This was strange. The swelling was going down and was now half the size it had been.

“My...*swelling*” God it felt strange to think of it that way, Seth thought. “It...*desires*...release.”

“Give it release, then” Danann suggested with a practicality bordering on insanity.

There was only one way to stop her incessant questions; Seth knew that he would have to explain it all to her, he just didn’t know *how*. This was not a conversation he ever thought to have. “Danann, the only way for a man to have release for his...*swelling*, is to become one with his woman” he said slowly. “Before you ask me how he does that,” he warned her, knowing that the question had been on her lips. “The man puts his...*swelling*...inside his woman and when they move together, release comes.” He prayed fervently, that this would be sufficient and thus be an end to it.

Danann lay eyeing him thoughtfully. “Why?” she asked finally. “Why do you do this?”

This was an easier question, at least. “Because it feels...wonderful...and *right*” Seth told her.

“You have done this before” she said astutely and he cringed. “Many times?” Now he did not know what to say. He bit his lip so hard, that he bled but this time, he was aware that she knew it. He saw Danann’s eyes narrowing as she looked at his bloody lip. His tongue inadvertently licked a little, trying to remove the blood. He did not want her remembering that she knew him to be a Dark One. He watched frozen, as Danann leaned forward, darted her tongue out and licked across his lip. She sat back obviously assessing the taste of his blood with curiosity. “Interesting” she said simply. “How many have you done this with?” she asked again.

He sighed with resignation. “Some” he said quietly, but hurried to explain. “Danann...there are different ways of being with someone this way...*intimately*. There is sex for physical release and then there is sex for love. I have known release but not love...*ever*. It’s important that you understand that.”

“Why?” she asked curiously.

“Because I have never loved a woman before but I...I love *you*. I want *to* love you...I have *never* wanted to love another, *ever*.”

"You...you want to become one with *me*" she stumbled over his remembered instructions. "You want to put your...*swelling* in my body and move...for *release*?" she asked.

Seth cringed when she said it that way and though he had done his best to explain it to her, it sounded awful when it fell from her lips.

"No, Danann" he whispered, taking her hand in his, gasping at the sheer pleasure from the touch of her skin and the way the tiny sparkles that emanated, warmed him. "I want to make *love* to you."

"Oh" she sighed lazily in pleasure and lay back again, gazing up at him. "My Prince, will you kiss me again?" she asked with such a beguiling look on her face that he leaned over her and kissed her gently and *thoroughly*. As much as he wanted more, he did not want to rush her; he did not want to risk this for anything.

Danann lay in Seth's arms for an age, before she heard bells ringing in her ears. "I must away" she said, scrambling up in alarm.

Seth jumped to his feet in despair. "Danann...don't *go*, my Goddess. *Stay* with me" he begged in a panic.

"I cannot, my Prince. Gabriel calls me and I do not want him coming to *find* me." She picked up her gown and donned it swiftly.

"Will you come back?" Seth was afraid to ask but had to; hating this Gabriel with everything that was in him.

Danann thrust her feet into her slippers, before turning back to Seth. "If you wish, I will return on the morrow, but not until the evening. Is this your wish, My Prince?"

Seth breathed a sigh of relief and nodded in agreement. "Yes" he hissed. "Danann...you *will* return, won't you?"

Danann smiled, seeing the strange vulnerability beneath the surface of this brave warrior's visage. "Of course, my Prince...on the morrow. Will you make love to me?" she asked with a sweet, curious smile.

Seth gasped. "If...if that is your wish, my Goddess. I *will* make love to you." He lowered his head and kissed her again.

Bells rang in her ears incessantly as Danann broke away, unfurled her wings with all speed, leapt into the air and took flight. As soon as she was far enough off the ground, she vanished in a burst of white light and a shower of gold sparks.

Seth wanted to scream his disappointment to the Heavens for taking Danann from him. He had until tomorrow; he would return home, bathe and change...he wanted to be ready for his Goddess. With one last glance at the place they had spent the afternoon, Seth turned and ran home, eager for the passing of time.

A pair of thoughtful eyes had spied the departure of the strange creature Seth had been talking to. What could this mean? What was he up to with the lady of the light? Plans had to be made...that was for certain.

6. You are here, Danann

Seth was in a strange mood as he entered the castle Keep. Killian and Roarke his guards, were waiting for him, disapproval showing all over their faces. Seth grinned at them and had to laugh. He was renewed; life as he had known it was over and everything was new. He aimed to make Danann his and with his parents blessing, they would leave this place and visit the New World. He longed for travel and adventure and wanted to do it all with his Goddess.

He paused on the stone staircase and turned to Killian and Roarke. "Do women like travel and adventure?" he demanded.

"Nay" Killian informed him firmly, in his gravelly Irish brogue. "The women like home and hearth...kith and kin" he told Seth firmly. Seth pondered this thought as he climbed the stairs again. Killian *would* know; he had been married for a *very* long time; something Seth hoped to have for himself soon enough.

He paused once more. Roarke was engaged to a *living* vampire, Moira. "What of Moira, Roarke. What is her preference?"

Roarke looked at his Prince as though he had lost his mind and not quite understanding what it was that his liege wished to know. "My Lord...Moira is a *modest* girl."

Seth nodded thoughtfully before taking the last few steps and turning down the hallway that led to his rooms. He dismissed his guards and closed the door behind him. Danann would love travel, he was certain and they would not be hard up for money, his family was rich. They owned the lands hereabouts and humans farmed for them. Seth pictured himself taking Danann to Dublin. He would buy her gowns and jewels and then they would take a ship to the new world. He had money to buy her every luxury; her comfort would be paramount and his only concern. Once they got to the America's he would look around for appropriate investments and he and Danann would experience all that the world had to offer. He was excited by tales of new inventions and progress...there would be nothing that was not available to them.

Each and every minute was an entire lifetime to Seth. He was desperate for the time when he and Danann could be together again. He wondered how soon he could ask her to be his Princess. He would marry her this minute, if

he could have but he knew that he had to bide his time. She deserved wooing and he still had to convince her to be his. He had no idea what it meant to be an Angel but she was clearly bound by this Gabriel. Seth felt his fangs run out and he almost snarled at the thought of the man. She had called him an Archangel...Seth knew what that meant from the bible but he had not ever truly believed that there was such a thing as an Angel. He would have to question Danann and find out about these things; he needed to know her better.

She was a very free spirit, Danann; she was not a woman who would ever be called to heel and she would always do what she thought best. He knew this about her already and he wanted to know more, he wanted it *all*. She was not an easy woman, he knew...she was opinionated and led by her own thoughts...truly a woman worth winning the regard of. Anyone could have some fawning harlot, clamouring for his notice but who wanted that? No...easy had *never* been what he wanted. Seth desired to win the favour of this most amazing and impossible Angel...she was well worth it, that he knew.

He thought about the innocent way she had asked him about his '*swelling*' and he laughed aloud. He had never met anyone like her, truly she was unique. He closed his eyes and pictured her lovely, pale, white body and her soft, feathery wings. She had asked him to make love to her tomorrow but he wasn't certain that she had understood what she was asking. In as much as he wanted it, he wanted things to be *right*, all the more.

He heard his door open and he sat up and saw Caera entering, bringing with her a pot of boiling water. Seth got up and took the pot from her, tipping its contents into the nearly-full copper bath by the fire. He had no need of the warmth the fire gave but he always liked the cheeriness. He undressed quickly, got into the bath and lay back to think of Danann. He remembered her curious hands on his body and he could not control his physical response at the memory.

"Prince Seth" Caera almost purred. "You are ready for me?" she asked, putting her hands into the water to grasp him.

"Get *out*!" he hissed, pushing her hands away angrily. The thought of anyone but Danann touching him made him angry and disgusted. He was contrite instantly, when he saw Caera's face; she had always been a pleasant and generous girl but their times had only ever been simple, physical encounters. He apologised and dismissed her, promising himself that he

would arrange a suitable alliance for her; something she would like, he knew.

Seth gazed at the fire and the soft, animal skin rug before it. He pictured himself laying Danann on it and her wriggling in delight at the feel of the soft fur on her skin. He could see himself smiling indulgently at her pleasure. His hands itched to explore her body. He wanted to touch her in ways that he had never known before. He wanted her to *want* him, to *need* him the way that he was held captive by need of her.

There was a lingering concern at the back of his mind that he kept pushing aside but he allowed himself to think on it, here by the fire. He was an Undead vampire, who appeared to be of around twenty five years of age. He had lived for well over eight hundred years and he was unchanging. He would always think and feel like a twenty-five year old and now that he loved Danann, he would love her forever in this same, intense way. He wondered if she was capable of the same thing. He knew that humans were not and for the first time, true fear filled him. He could not imagine eternity without Danann...there was just no way...

Seth was summoned to join his parents in the great hall to hear roaming minstrels. He sat beside his father, the King and under normal circumstances he would have been quite diverted by these rather talented musicians and their bard but now, now he could think of nothing but his Goddess.

The hall was full of revellers, both human and vampire alike. Secrecy was maintained; Manannan had taught them all that and if a human ever discovered the secret, they were made to forget it. Seth could use his mind to make humans follow his will, just like all vampires.

He knew that as Prince, it was expected of him to dance with all the unattached women present but he did not care what anyone else thought, he would *not* do it. He knew that his parents were annoyed, that was evident in their disapproving frowns. Seth promised himself that he would speak to his father and inform him of his intention to leave. He got up and walked out of the hall, with Banning following in his wake.

“Prince Seth...”

"Banning stop!" Seth said quickly. He did not want to argue with this man who had only ever shown him caring and loyalty. Seth made his way to the roof and spent the night among the battlements, gazing out for miles across the Irish country side. The landscape was majestic in her beauty; undulating plains of soft Irish grass, scattered with rocks, dotting the landscape. He would miss these wild Irish lands but there was no help for it, he would *never* find freedom here nor even respect for his age and experience. Seth's father was only two hundred years older than he was, not that much to someone who was eight hundred and thirty-nine but to his father, Seth would always be a child.

The dawn came and went and finally Seth changed his clothes again and left early, making his way to the lake some ten miles distant. He was nervous and jittery and he was wearing very fine clothes today. He still wore leather breeches but with it, he wore a finely embroidered waist coat and tails; he had chosen blue, in honour of Danann's eyes. He sat down to wait, though he was hours early. Seth was nervous; he had never felt this way before, it was all so strange and new and not entirely pleasant but he would not have it any other way.

Seth had a plan. He needed to know all about Danann and if she was capable of loving him forever. He would take what she could give but if it was not for eternity, then he needed to know that and the sooner the better. Dusk fell and Seth gazed out over the purple and pink bands of light across the sky. He lay back on the rug he had remembered to bring and gazed up at the stars, as one by one they revealed themselves in the darkening skies. He could see through the light if he chose to but sometimes it was nice to allow things to reveal themselves in due course.

"My Prince" he heard her soft voice and jumped to his feet. There she was, his Goddess standing in the moonlight and glowing, everything pale white; her long dark hair with golden threads cascading softly about her shoulders. He strode to her and clasped her hands in his.

"You are *here*, Danann...my Goddess" he breathed in relief, enjoying the sparkles that were warming his hands. He felt as though he had been holding his breath, though he had no need to breathe at all and enveloped her in his arms, careful of her wings and held her to him. "I have *missed* you" he told her desperately.

"And I, you" she whispered softly, clinging to him. "My Prince...I am *despairing*..."

"Why, my Angel?" as the words fell from his lips in question, they felt so right to him.

"Gabriel was *vexed* with me. I was unable to...perform properly, I was distracted" she confessed and though she sounded guilty, she did not seem to be sorry.

"Danann...we must talk, you and I. There are things I need to know and there are things that I want but...I don't know whether or not there is any chance that I can *have* them."

"What is it you want, my Prince?" she asked him; her curiosity evident.

Seth took her hand and helped her to sit, then sat gazing at her as he stroked the soft skin of the back of her hand. "*You, my Goddess, just you.*"

A thrill ran through Danann at his words and she responded without forethought as she clutched the bodice of her gown in distress. "My Prince...I *hurt*. My heart is full to *bursting* and my body *screams* at me. My mind is overflowing and my *soul...it burns* so brightly and it is *all for you*. You are inside me, filling me up every way and...I *hurt*. Relieve my suffering, my Prince. Tell me what I must do" she begged and moved closer until she could rest her head on Seth's chest.

"My Goddess...it is the same for me" Seth rasped in somewhat relief. She *loved* him, she *must*. "Danann...are you...can you...how...?"

"Yes, my Prince?" she asked softly; calmer now that she was closer to him. "What is it that you wish to know?"

"Danann...I am *immortal* and where I love it is *forever*. I love *you*, do understand what that means?"

"I think so but...what do you want to know of *me*?" she asked, somewhat fearfully.

"Danann...*can* you love in the same way? How long do you live for? Can we...can we be *together* and if so.....is that what you *want*?" Seth had not meant to reveal so much so soon but he could not seem to help himself. He had wanted to take a softly, softly approach but when Danann had confessed to all those feelings for him, he had not been able to stop himself.

“My Prince...I do not...*live*. But I *am* forever and though I am not supposed to be able to love in this way...I find that I *do*. I have already broken every rule and strangely...I have every intention of breaking more. Not something good in an Angel, I fear” she whispered sadly.

“Danann...I *love* you. *Marry* me, my Goddess. Let us away from here and we will go to the New World and be together, forever.”

“I want to, my Prince but...I *cannot*. I am bound and to do as you ask...I would become an abomination. Please my Prince, Can you understand? *Can* you?” she asked in earnest, desperately hoping that his answer would be yes.

Seth looked at her thoughtfully. He had asked for too much, too soon. She loved him and that was all that mattered, everything else would come in time. Seth placed his hand under hers and gazed down into her beautiful blue eyes that were patterned with starbursts on her irises. He lowered his head and captured her lips with his and as she sighed into his mouth, he felt his eyes darken but he managed to keep his fangs at bay. Thankfully he had over eight hundred years of experience.

Danann could not help herself, her hand slid under his coat and shirt, trying to get at his skin. ‘*Why was he wearing so many clothes?*’ she wondered desperately. She jumped to her feet and divested herself of her gown, before falling to her knees in front of him once more. “Hold me, my Prince” she begged. “I *need* to feel you.”

Seth threw his waist coat and tails off, as Danann pawed at his shirt. Before long, he was as naked as she and together, they were lying with the tall grasses all around, holding one another. He wanted to beg her to be with him but knew that he *must* bide his time.

“My Prince...you promised to make love to me” she reminded him. “I want you to show me what it is. I want to be one with you. I want you to love me the way that I love you.”

Her words took his breath away. Seth worried that this was too much too soon but once again...with Danann he could not help himself. He twisted to hover over her gently and decided to let things play out as they would. He would touch her, explore her and if she wanted more, he would give it to her. He kissed her softly, tenderly and stroked her hip. She was unbelievably responsive and he knew that she had never been touched before, not intimately. Every little noise that she made filled him with satisfaction. Everywhere his skin touched hers, tingly golden, fizzing sparkles erupted

and when Danann squirmed against him; he had to smile indulgently at her impatience. He had hated that he had been with others but now he was grateful for that experience; it meant that he had the patience to be there for her, to give her all consideration and not be some rough and unstable boy; ready to explode at the first touch of her hand.

Danann felt like she had died and gone to Heaven already. Seth, her Prince was touching her in ways she could never have imagined. The more he caressed her, the more she wanted. She wanted to touch him but did not know what to do. He was obviously knowledgeable and she did not want to disappoint him. "My Prince" she gasped. "Show me how to touch you, I beg of you."

Seth stilled his movements and smiled down at her lazily. He wanted to make this easy on her, especially for this first time. He knelt on the ground and lifted her to straddle his lap. In this way, she could wrap her arms around him and he could hold her and caress her and love her.

"Are you...are you going to..."

"Sshhh" he whispered softly into her ear. "Just relax, my Goddess" he told her softly, confidently. "I have you. I will take care of you, just *hold* me...*love* me, my Danann." Very gently, he slowly and smoothly filled her body. He knew that she was not yet accommodating him properly, so he continued to kiss her and caress her and moments later he felt the change in her, as her body began to relax. He began moving slowly and captured her whimper with his mouth. His Goddess was lost to all sensation as she buried her face in his neck. Seth put his hand between them, where their bodies joined and fluttered his fingers against her.

"My Prince" she gasped in his ear. "What are you *doing* to me?"

"Do you like it, my Goddess?" he whispered, enjoying her obvious pleasure as he moved harder and faster within her. "I love you, Danann" his voice was soft, as he began to be carried away himself. When he felt her clench and freeze, shuddering and holding her breath, he allowed himself to finish, quivering in an emotionally intense way that he had never felt before. He held her tightly to him, as she whimpered in exhaustion. He buried his head behind her ear in her hair and inhaled her scent, taking it within him deeply. He could not have let her go for anything and if he had experienced true-death right then, he would have died happy.

Danann opened her eyes and smiled up at him in amazement. “My Prince...how you have touched me...”

“I know that you have never...been touched *like that* before, Danann. Was it...?” he could not finish because she interrupted him.

“I have *never* been touched” she told him firmly.

“I know you haven’t. That’s why I wanted to be gentle; I did not want to scare you.”

“My Prince, you *mistake* me. I do not mean that I have never been touched in *this* way; I am telling you that I have not been touched, *ever*. You are the only creature to ever lay a hand on me. I have not been touched by either the Seraphim; the Angels or humans and you are the only Dark One that I have ever met.”

Seth stared at Danann in shock. She had never been *touched*...how was that even possible? How could a sentient creature *exist* and not be touched? He cuddled her closer protectively; she deserved better than she had had, it was *horrible*. “My Goddess, how *are* you?” he had to know that she was alright.

“I am *fine*, my Prince.” She quivered against him, as she clung to him for dear life. “I find that I *cannot* let you go” Danann admitted with a rueful smile. “I *covet* you” she whispered, as though wanting him was a sin.

“I am *yours*, my Angel; only *yours*.” He kissed the top of her head gently. “Are you cold, Danann?” Seth asked, the night had turned icy and though he did not feel the cold, he *was* aware of it.

“No, I am not cold” she told him softly.

“Would you...care to come to my home?” he asked quietly.

Danann sat back and looked at him. “I cannot allow others to see me” she warned. “It is *unforgivable* that I have done so with you.”

Seth nodded quickly. “I know my Goddess. Perhaps...we could sneak in” he suggested.

“How?” Danann asked curiously.

"You could fly us, perhaps?" Seth asked, hoping that she would say yes. He imagined himself held within her embrace; her feathered wings flapping as they soared through the air.

"If there are others about, they would see us" Danann told him, "but perhaps there is a way. Have you a knife?" she asked him.

Seth stared at her in horrified disbelief. He had no idea what she wanted the knife for but surely it could not be anything good. "Why?" he asked warily.

"I need to cut a lock of my hair" she explained patiently.

With a sigh of relief, Seth handed her the small knife concealed in his earlier-shucked boot. Danann cut a small lock from her head and passed Seth both the knife and the hair. "Danann, what...?"

"My Prince, is there somewhere private, we can be?" she asked Seth and he nodded. "Go to that place, ensuring that no one is there and make sure that you have my lock of hair with you. Place it on the floor in the middle of empty space; call to me and I will come to you" she explained.

"But Danann...how will this work?"

"Trust me; do as I ask and I will be with you." Danann jumped up, donned her gown and pushed her feet into her slippers.

Seth dressed quickly, in spite of his shock but he wanted to be with Danann in his room so badly, he did not question her as he wanted to. There would be time for that later.

"Go home and I will join you" Danann whispered before kissing him tentatively. He was pleased to see that she was getting bolder.

"I will see you soon?" he had to make sure.

"Of course, my Prince. Trust me, as soon as that lock is on the floor, I will be with you. Just call me, and I will come. Now go, move swiftly."

Seth smiled happily and took off at a run, disappearing so quickly that Danann could no longer even see him.

7. The lock of hair

Seth raced home as quickly as he could. It had taken him mere minutes to get there and he had had to force himself to slow down through the Keep, lest he be seen by any of the humans that might be about. He raced through the Keep and into the castle proper. He ran past a very surprised Banning, and made his way up the stairs of South Tower and into his room. Seth checked to make sure it was empty, before placing the lock of hair in the middle of the floor, just beyond the foot of the bed. “Danann” he called, softly.

Danann stood up, from where she had been sitting on the grass by the lake. She smiled at the sound of the tinkling bells and vanished with a burst of golden sparkles and a flash of white light.

Seth stood impatiently, staring down at the lock of hair. When Danann appeared out of thin air in a glittering shower of gold, he sighed his relief and took her straight in his arms. “I missed you” he confessed urgently.

“As did I, my Prince” he could hear the smile in her voice.

Seth pulled Danann down to the rug in front of the fire. He had fantasized about this only yesterday and like a dream come true...here she was.

They lay together talking quietly for hours. She was not here most of the time, she told him; she was usually on, what she called...*another* plane. Seth told her about his desires to leave his home and make a new life for himself. He told her about his father, the King; his mother, the Queen and his sister, the Princess, Mab.

He told her about the war with King Ahern, the only other ancient king of Ireland; relics well past their time, created by Manannan Mac Lir a thousand years earlier. He told her how his father had been made a living vampire as a child when everyone had been made undead. It had taken his father over a hundred and fifty years to become an adult before he had married another living vampire, Eiluned. They had gone on to have four children, three boys and a girl. Their first two sons had died in child birth and would have risen to become undead babies at the full moon but instead, they had burned the bodies and scattered the ashes before that could happen. Undead and unaging babies were not suffered to live, it was too cruel. At the time, Manannan had been living with Ahern’s people and by the time he returned,

he was able to instruct Queen Eiluned not to push during the delivery and so firstly, Seth...the third son had been born and then Princess Mab. There would be no more children for them after that as during a raid, Ahern had killed and burned Seth's Grandfather, King Ferris and his Grandmother Nuala; the woman to whom Ahern had once been promised. Seth's own mother had been killed and she had eventually risen at the full moon to become undead and so there had been no more children for them.

Seth, being born vampire and not made, had aged faster than his own father had, who had aged one vampire year for each human decade that passed. Tynan had been made living vampire at the age of four and it had taken him over two hundred and sixty years to attain the age of around thirty, when he had died. His own son had aged more rapidly and though he had not quite surpassed him; he had not been far behind. Seth had attained the age of around twenty-five in approximately eighty years. Seth had often wondered if his father resented the way things had turned out and if that was why he had always been treated like a child, no matter what he did. His father had never truly given him the respect due a man.

Danann was more vague about her past. There were a lot of things that she couldn't tell him because as a mere Angel, she could not *remember* when she existed on this plane; such as her name. She knew that she had one, she just could not remember what it was. This had bothered Seth very much and he demanded to know if there was a chance that she could forget him, when she was gone from here. Danann had laughingly assured him that when she was in, what she called the '*other*' place, she remembered everything from here. She knew some things here but not others. Danann told him about the rules that governed her here, on this plane. She was not to have contact with anyone other than her Arc and she was to simply carry out his charges.

When Seth had asked Danann what an Angel truly was, she told him what she could. "We are beings of light and pure energy, my Prince. What you see before you is not exactly a body but a *corporeal manifestation* of my soul and it is animated by my Light. The Light within me, that makes me Angelic. I know that humans think we are servants of their God but that is not true. We *are* the Seraphim; creatures of Light existing in another realm and on another plane beyond this one. We can travel between, because we are beings of pure light and energy."

"Danann...why can you not...be *with* me? *Stay* with me, *marry* me?" Seth had to ask, against his better judgement.

Danann looked at her prince in despair. "I am not allowed to *talk* to you, nor be *with* you. If Gabriel finds out what I have done...he will punish me" she whispered hoarsely. "My Prince...I am thousands upon thousands of years old and very young for my kind. In all that time, I have only ever known one of the Seraphim to surrender his Light and Fall from Grace and he was an Arc. His name was Lucifer and he came to know Original Sin, do you know what this is my Prince?"

Seth cringed in horror...how could he tell her? How could he tell Danann that she had already committed original sin? He wanted her to stay with him more than anything save one; he could not do this to her. He could *not* tell her what this meant. "I do not know, my Goddess" he lied swiftly. "What happened to him? What happened to Lucifer?" He wondered if it was the same one who was mentioned in the bible that the humans seemed to live by.

Danann sighed heavily, as she gazed at the flickering flames of the fire. "Gabriel told me that he was suffered to live unto this world, a little like a human I suppose though how exactly, I know not. He would not tell me...Gabriel...he is *impatient* with my questions. I do know however that to surrender your Light...to Fall from Grace...we lose who we are and become that which is an *abomination*; suffered to exist in ways that would most *destroy* the soul." Danann shivered in fear.

Seth could see how frightened she was by the thought of this and he despaired. Were they only ever to have brief moments stolen from time together? He cuddled her to him and stroked her hair gently. "Fear not, my Danann. You shall *never* experience such horrors. You are too *good*, my Angel and will *never* lose *your* light."

In the weeks that followed, Seth and Danann met as often as they could; sometimes by the lake and sometimes, if possible, in his room. Seth longed to woo her and take her to meet his family. He wanted to declare his love for her but he could not; she was not allowed to see anyone. His frustration grew but he was careful to hide it from her. He was having to feed more often and to his disgust, he was having to feed at least once a week. He could normally feed once or twice a year but he had always fed much more frequently than that because he *liked* it. The anxiety he now felt, with Danann's frequent absences, was making him burn through his feeds quickly. It was a side effect to the transformation; the change that had occurred within his unchanging nature because he *had* changed...he had

fallen in love. He had had to resort to feeding on Banning who was always ready to assist, though Seth hated doing it. One evening, Danann had broached the subject of his feeding, herself. "My Prince, would you not be desirous of feeding on *my* blood?"

"My Goddess...why do you ask?" Seth was wary. He always *hated* it when she talked about the ways of the Dark Ones; he was scared that she would realise that he was not worthy of her and though he believed it, he was selfish enough to not care and still want her to be with him anyway.

"Do you feed only for sustenance?"

"No...we also feed for pleasure" he said warily, wondering where her inquisitive mind would take all this.

"You have fed from the women you have made love to?" Danann asked him in her usual curious, child-like innocence.

"No, Danann" Seth said, *very* firmly. "I only make love to *you*. I have *bedded* other women but I did *not* make love to them. It was *different*."

"Very well, my Prince but still, you fed from these women?"

Seth sighed in annoyance. How was it she always touched his raw nerves when he wasn't supposed to *have* any. "Yes" was all he could manage; shame filling him.

Danann sat thoughtfully for long moments, thinking things over. "You feed from these women and you took pleasure from them but you will not do this with me. Why?" she demanded.

How was it possible that one *clearly* intelligent Angel could get it all so wrong? "Danann...I *do* want to feed from you...for pleasure but I do not want to...."

Danann looked at Seth and realised for the first time, how her questions were making him feel; he was *uncomfortable*. "Why do my questions bother you, my Prince?" she asked, raising her hand to cup his cheek comfortingly.

"I *love* you, Danann" he whispered. "If I bite you, part of what makes me vampire will be *within* you and...I do not want to *frighten* you."

"I am a creature of the Light and this is not a real body, only a corporeal manifestation of one. Nothing you do, can permanently damage this body."

"It *feels* like a real body" he whispered, bothered by what she was telling him.

"Then bite me, my Prince. I want to experience all of your desires." Danann leaned forward and kissed him gently, before bringing his mouth to her neck. Seth's bite was exquisite...it was the agony and the ecstasy. Danann clung to her Prince and shivered at her body's response to his bite.

With the next full moon, Seth shifted to become an Irish wolf, only his colouration was no longer grey but *white*; pure white and he *glowed* under the moonlight; he was *luminescent*.

"My Prince, I am *despairing!*" Danann had exclaimed in the early hours, one morning. She was angry and nothing Seth could do; would calm her.

"What is it, my Goddess?" he asked, as she began pacing. The night was cold and ice had settled on the ground.

"I...I cannot *endure* this anymore" she continued pacing in agitation. "What is this infernal *crunching?*" she demanded in annoyance.

Seth's concern warred with his amusement, as he explained placatingly "it is frost, my Danann."

"*Frost?* What is *frost?*" she demanded in glorious arrogance. She was truly like a warrior Goddess; the way she stood there glowing imperiously in her white, gossamer gown.

Seth held his hand out, hoping to encourage her to sit. After a brief moment, Danann knelt by Seth and took his hand in hers. "Frost is frozen water, my Goddess. The moisture in the air settles on the leaves, flowers and grass and freezes to ice. We call it the frost."

"Frost" she said thoughtfully, stroking the grass by her feet. "I like it" she whispered. Danann sat thinking for so long that irritation overrode Seth's concern.

“What *ails* you, my Goddess?” he asked, putting his hand under her chin and raising her face to his. He had the strongest urge to feel her soft lashes beneath his lips and so he leaned in and kissed the corner of her eye gently. When he felt her lashes flutter against his lip, he sighed softly in exquisite satisfaction.

“My Prince...let us away from here. I *cannot* endure this anymore. I...I will not *use* my Light...they will not find me; Gabriel will not find me.”

Seth froze. Was this possible? Could they away together and be free without Danann losing her light? “Are you *sure*, my Goddess?” he demanded, in the most earnest of hope. Suspicion entered his thoughts immediately. “Has something *happened*?” he asked in a worried, harsh tone.

Danann bit her lip. “My Prince...my *warrior* Prince...Gabriel...he knows that I am different and I fear...I fear that he is planning to *banish* me to...he will return me to the plane from whence I came.” Danann raised sad eyes to Seth’s worried ones. “If he does that...I will *never* see you again and I...I *cannot* bear that, my Prince. I am an Angel of the Light and I must do that which I *know* is right and being *without* you is...*wrong*.” This was a very confusing revelation for an Angel to come to but Danann knew it with all her being. She thought of Lucifer and wondered if this was what had happened to him. Had he Fallen from Grace for love?

Her words resolved Seth to action. “Danann, we will leave this night then away together to the New World, where we can never be found.” He jumped to his feet, helping her to stand.

Bells rang in Danann’s head and she groaned in anguish. “He calls to me, my Prince. Gabriel commands my presence” she whispered and began wringing her hands in agitation.

“Ignore the summons” Seth said quickly. “We will soon be gone from this place.”

Danann calmed herself and stood thinking. “No...my Prince, if I do not answer; he *will* come for me. I must...I must *take* from him, my lock.”

“He has a lock of your hair, too?” Seth demanded.

Danann nodded. “It is *how* he summons me. Without it, it will be impossible for him to find me, if I do not use my Light.”

Seth didn't like this...he did not like it one little bit. If he could have gone in her stead to take back the lock, he would have but he was left with no choice. She would be safe...Gabriel did not know what she was doing and it would be the last time that she would leave him. After this, they would be together forever. While she was away, he would arrange for currency and treasures. "How long, my Goddess? How long will you be away?"

"My Prince. I will return on the morrow. I will be here at the setting of the sun."

Seth nodded. "And we will away together?" he needed confirmation that this was *truly* happening.

Danann nodded. "My Prince...I *cannot* be without you" she said painfully. Loving him hurt so much but it was her imperative, she could not do otherwise. Bells rang insistently in her head. "I must away my Prince or all will be for nought" she said urgently.

Seth took her in his arms and held her tightly, kissing her lingeringly; only letting her go with the greatest of reluctance. He could not speak, it was too painful to let her go, yet he was excited nonetheless. She was to be *his!*

Danann stepped back, smiled serenely and unfurled her glowing white wings. Seth watched as she raised her face joyously to the night and leapt, straight to the starry Heavens. With a flash of white light and a burst of glittery gold...she was gone.

8. The Archangel Gabriel

Danann materialised and was horrified to find herself standing before the highest ranked three, of the Celestial Hierarchy of Nine. Gabriel stood waiting; flanked by the Archangels, Michael and Uriel. She was doomed.

9. All Hell breaks loose

Seth made his way home, as quickly as he could. He raced through the Keep calling for Babbit, his manservant as he entered the castle. "Babbit!" he stood screeching for some minutes, before the wizened, older human scuttled from below stairs in his night garment.

"Prince Seth" Babbit bowed, trying to hide his irritation at being woken from his slumber. "How may I serve?" Babbit could not conceal the yawn that followed but Seth was not of a mind to notice.

"I am away on the morrow, Babbit. Pack my trunk and arrange a carriage, for I am for Dublin." Seth stalked off to the hall to speak to his parents.

Babbit stared after the Prince. This was *strange*...the Prince had travelled only the year before last; to be going again so soon was unheard of. *Especially* if what he had overheard the Queen and the Princess talking of Ahern readying himself to move against them, was true. Babbit hobbled up the stairs to his Prince's chamber, muttering his annoyance to himself.

Seth entered the Hall where his parents and sister were sitting talking to Banning. Though it was strange, he ignored his instincts in his excitement and strode forward. "Father, Mother...I would speak with you."

That they had not known he was there was obvious from the looks on their faces and it now irritated Seth that he had not been of a mind to pay attention to what they had been saying. As a vampire, he had enhanced sight and hearing but his mind had been elsewhere. "My son" his father was seemingly uncomfortable. "You have need of me?"

Seth sat at the table and began his tale. He told his family that he had found his love, the one who had caused the transformation in him. He would not give them room to protest and so he told them that he was for Dublin on the morrow. He did not bother telling them that he would make for the New World, there was no point; they would have enough trouble coping with the situation as it was.

He heard their gasps but somehow, he knew they were not of shock but...*annoyance*. King Tynan stared into his son's face and said "Thank you, Banning, you may go." Banning stood up, bowed and left the Great Hall.

That the King had dismissed Banning meant that things were going to become serious indeed. Seth turned his eyes to the blazing fire in the enormous fireplace. He spied Flynn and Flann, the castle's Irish wolf hounds, lazing before the hearth. Seth knew that what was to come would not be pleasant but he was unmoved and cold with resolve. He had given nearly eight hundred years to this senseless war; it was time he did something for himself. Besides, it was not truly like his family was in any danger; they were Undead vampires, protected by other Undead vampires.

Queen Eiluned could not contain herself any longer. "My son, if this is about that whore you have been with..."

Anger rose in Seth faster than he would have believed possible. He jumped to his feet and slammed his fist on the thick wooden table so hard, that with an enormous crack, it split in two. "**Never...speak of her...that way**" Seth's voice was deadly cold and his blackened eyes and fangs were evidence that his feelings were both serious and heartfelt. He had never spoken to his mother thusly before and her shock was obvious.

King Tynan decided to soften his broach of the subject. He was beginning to believe that a simple edict would not conform his warrior son *this* time. "Seth" the King began slowly. "Speak to me, my son."

Seth moved around to the fireplace and rested his forehead on the mantle, gazing at the licking flames. "Father...I away to Dublin on the morrow."

"For how long, my son?" the King knew that he would not like the answer but at this point, he knew not how to proceed. Perhaps his son's fascination with the flibbertigibbet needed to run its course.

"I do not know, Father. I go to make my life with my Love. It is...*dangerous* for her; others may come looking for her and I cannot allow her to be in danger."

Though he was an undead vampire, Tynan felt his blood run cold. "When do you plan to return home, my son?" The King knew the answer, before Seth even gave it.

"I *cannot* return, my King" Seth's voice was almost a whisper, "at least not for some time."

Deathly silence reigned until Princess Mab, Seth's younger sister rose to her feet and began screeching at him. "How can you do this, Seth? For nothing

more than a slut...that, that, that...*white* bitch. She is an abomination, what manner of creature are you bedding, Seth? She does not appear to be *vampire* but she must be. Does she bear the plague and not shift properly? Is she a bird? How can you be with one such as that? It is *beneath* you; you are a Prince of Ireland who owes fealty to your King and your people."

Seth let the tirade pass because Mab was only around twenty years of age but in maturity she was much younger and a very spoiled brat to boot, despite being over eight hundred years old. She had always been overly indulged and to his disgust, she was promised in marriage to a vampire who was nearly sixty years of age, visibly.

"Danann is not vampire and does not suffer the plague." Vampires were shape shifters and once a month with the full moon, they changed to whatever creature their sire was, unless the body had been attacked during the down time before rising. Amongst those who lived here and those who lived in Ahern's lands, there were Black birds, Irish wolves and Irish wolf hounds. Seth himself was an Irish wolf. They had since been hunted to extinction but not when Seth had become undead; lying on a killing field, dead and waiting to rise. Fortunately, those slain were moved quickly to be lain in protective darkness, for sunlight could age the bodies horribly, something that had happened to Mab's betrothed, sometime *after* the engagement.

"Then what *is* she?" hissed Mab in disbelief. "And how does she come to be *Danann*? She is not a *Goddess*, she is an *abomination!*"

Seth did not know whether or not to tell them the truth but he could not find any harm in it. "Mab" he said in a deadly, horrifically cold voice, "I will tolerate no further insults...not a one. You would be *wise*...to heed my warning." He kept his eyes on the dancing flames in the fireplace, as a way of keeping his temper. "Danann is...a being of light. She is an Angel."

He heard his mother gasp and his sister snort in disbelief but it was his father who spoke. "My son, surely you *cannot* mean..."

"Yes, Father" Seth answered. "She *is* an Angel and her teacher is the Archangel Gabriel...from the human's Bible."

"But...but...what does this mean?" Tynan found himself horrified and fascinated all together. His mind immediately shifted to the thoughts of harnessing any potential power that the creature might have.

“They are not as the Bible describes them, just the way we are not what folklore and legends tell. Folklore says that we are fairies and all the legends of vampires tend to be dissimilar to the creatures that we are in reality. Angels are creatures from another plane of existence beyond our own. She is here to learn about the beings of this world; that is all” he said simply. He knew that they would be so resentful that they would not even *try* to understand.

Tynan sat, trying to devise ways to keep his son here voluntarily. “Bring her *here*, my son. We can...*protect* her” he offered, however unwillingly.

Seth was bitterly disappointed. The life of a vampire could be so lonely and Seth had not known the love that had been denied him so long, for well over seven hundred and fifty years. He had hoped his family would be thrilled for him but all they were thinking about is his waging war for them; commanding the King’s army in battle and claiming victories. Seth was tired of this...tired of it all but he did not want to leave his family bitter. “Thank you for your offer my King but when the Archangel Gabriel knows that Danann is missing, he will search for her and so we must away from here, lest he trace the places that she has used her light.”

“*Used her light...what does that mean?*” the Queen demanded in anger. Seth knew that his mother was cross and resentful but he also knew that she was selfish. She put her own feelings and comforts above those of even, her family. As far as she was concerned, her son could remain alone for all eternity, so long as he was there to amuse her when she bothered with him.

Mab was no different; she liked to tell anyone who would listen how much she worshipped her warrior brother but nothing in her behaviour had ever demonstrated that she cared anything more for him, than what her boasting did for her. She liked the attention she was given when she either bragged or complained that he ignored her.

He knew that they did not deserve explanations but he was leaving and he wanted to make things as easy on them as possible. “Danann explained it to me as being; whenever she used any of her powers, such as flight or her ability to vanish.”

“Is there a danger...if they come here looking for her?” the King demanded.

“No...you are safe; their law is imperative that they not allow themselves to be seen by those of this world. So long as she is not *here*, if they search, you will never even know that they were here.”

The King felt a cold resolve settle over him; whatever else happened, he could not allow his son to go; Seth had to be here for his lands and his people. There was a war to be won and Seth would be the one to win it. "You must stay, my Son. Your people and your King need you."

Seth had known it was coming and would be this way. Clearly they had already known about Danann. "Who?" he had to ask. "Who told you about Danann?" He expected that it was probably Banning, or maybe even his guards Roarke and Killian; if so, he would be bitterly disappointed. He had trusted his personal guards.

" 'Twas I" Mab hissed. "I saw you with that...*creature* by the lake, ten miles yonder." Everything Mab said, was clearly intended to insult.

Seth turned away from the fire and moved to kiss his mother on the forehead. "I cannot stay my King and short of draining me...you *cannot* stop me." Seth knew that if they held him down and drained his blood, he would not be able to move, let alone leave but that was the only thing that would stop him from departing this place.

Tynan felt rage bubbling within him; he was the King and would not be disobeyed. "If you leave...you leave with *nothing* more than the clothes on your back" he snapped. "I will give you no money, no treasure, nothing!" King Tynan was certain that *this*, if nothing else, would bring his wayward son to heel. "To your room, Seth...we will speak on the morrow." The King dismissed his son with apparent carelessness; like the small child he had always seen his son as being.

Without a word, Seth turned on his heel and walked out of the Great Hall and made his way up the South Tower. He lay down on his bed and gazed out at the breaking dawn. His father had treated him like a petulant child one time too many. Seth had given his whole life to his King and Kingdom; its people and this *senseless* war but no more. Seth did not care for money, he could work but it was Danann that he worried about; he wanted to give her everything. He had to reign in his anger when he thought of how, for eight hundred years he had worked for his father and his people. Even the lowliest stable boy earned a wage and yet for Seth's devotion, *nothing*. Fine...if that was how it must be...he would handle it. Something died in Seth that day and he felt its passing keenly. The only thing that kept him in check was knowing that in a few hours, he would be with Danann.

10. Gabriel, Michael and Uriel pass Judgement

Danann fell to her knees, blinded by the radiance of the Archangels. She did not speak, there was no point...she knew banishment home was nigh and all she could do was think of her Prince as she wept silent, agonised and bitter tears.

“Little One” Gabriel spoke, calming his light so that she could see him. “We know you have strayed from the path and broken your vow.” He was angry and betrayed; she could hear it in his voice. Gabriel had been her teacher for thousands upon thousands of years and she had disappointed him.

“I’m sorry” she whimpered, not daring to lift her head.

“You have been consorting with a Dark One” Uriel spat. “There is a *filth* staining your soul.” Uriel was arrogant and scathing and this made Danann angry because she knew that it was a *lie*...there was *nothing* staining her soul.

She got to her feet quickly and stared at him, narrowing her eyes in the strength of his light. “You are *wrong*! Love does *not* despoil the soul. Love is hard and painful and sometimes...full of mistakes but it is *not* wrong. What you see on my soul is a wonderful mark of regard for the one that I love. You call him Dark One but he is goodness itself and he *loves* me as I love *him*.”

Uriel brightened his light at the arrogance of this naughty child, so much so that Danann had no choice but to lower her eyes.

“Calm yourself, Uriel. We are here to teach this young one the error of her ways.” Michael was a powerful and Ancient Arc. He was favoured by the Light and Uriel knew it, to his consternation and jealousy but he nevertheless diminished his light somewhat, against his will. “Young One...we are here to *help* you” Michael whispered beguilingly but Danann knew better.

“You are here to *pass judgement*, Archangel Michael...I *know* it. You will banish me home but I...I will *not* go.”

Danann heard a collective gasp of horror and Gabriel’s admonishment. “Child!”

"I am *sorry* Gabriel, you have been a wonderful teacher and have been so good to me but...I no longer believe as you do...I *cannot* go home and I will *not* surrender my Love."

Silence reigned for long moments, before finally Michael spoke once more. "You *cannot*...you cannot *wish* to Fall; child. There is no recovery from such a thing."

"There *is* the chance for recovery" Danann insisted.

"Lucifer has never *managed* it" Uriel spat, harshly.

"Perhaps not but the possibility exists... the Light permits it."

Gabriel had to intervene; he could not allow this Little One under his protection for so long, to Fall. "You cannot do this, come home with me now and all will be righted. It is not too late."

Danann shook her head sadly. "It *is* too late, Gabriel. I love him already and will *always* love him. We spend time here learning these creatures, yet we cannot understand them because we have not walked in their path. We pass judgement on them, though we do not understand them...there is a...*wrongness* in that. *We* are flawed, though we consider ourselves to be supreme beings."

"Enough!" spat Uriel, incensed by the temerity of this child. "Your *choice*...make it. Do you return home or do you wish to Fall?"

"Uriel," Michael admonished.

"No, Michael. You know as well as I...they are the only choices available."

Danann closed her eyes briefly and thought of Seth, of his dancing blue eyes and dark hair. She thought of his smile and his tender, gentleness. She could not surrender him to suffer the agonies of loneliness and she *refused* to endure that herself. She knew the torments that she would suffer but she would readily do it...for *him*.

Her decision had been made long ago in the event of this happening, though she had not known it. She smiled serenely and opened her eyes slowly. Danann stepped toward Gabriel and could see abject relief on his face; he

thought she was returning to him. In a move no Angel had ever undertaken before, Danann took his hand in hers and stroked the back of it.

Gabriel shivered in sensation and shocked wonder. He was older than time itself and had *never* been touched before. "This cannot be Original Sin, *can* it?" she asked with wistful sadness. "For all that you have done for me and all that you have been to me...I thank you, Gabriel but...I *am* ready to Fall."

Strange and warring emotions were whirling within Gabriel. It suddenly seemed wrong to him that one must Fall, for so small a thing as loving and touching another. She had *touched* him and it was...*good*. "No" he whispered.

"Yes!" roared Uriel in horrific delight and with an enormous burst of white light, he cast the Little One from paradise and...she Fell from Grace.

11. We are betrayed

Seth heard a commotion and went to investigate. Instead of going downstairs, he raced up through the south tower, across the battlements to the east tower and through the door, leading to the north facing landing. He gazed across the Irish countryside and saw the lands strewn with mayhem. Ahern had sent his brigands and they had had no warning. Seth stepped up and over the brick facing and fell eighty feet to the ground, crouching as he landed, before standing to his feet. He ran into the weapons store, chose a poisoned and anointed blade and ran out to battle. Exhilaration raced through Seth at the thought of one last engagement with the enemy, before he hung up his sword for the peace and serenity of Danann's arms.

Seth ran under the portcullis and into the fray on the battle grounds before the castle. Most often, the enemy ran from the deadly swing of Prince Seth but Ahern had a habit of making new, young vampires as fodder. A poisoned, anointed blade cut and damaged the flesh, such that it could not repair itself. More often than not, these young vampires were burned and their ashes scattered in the sea, for pity's sake. Ahern had a will of iron when it came to revenge, though he was a man of honour, in his own way. Seth relieved the suffering of all the young vampires that had gone to slaughter. He surveyed the bonfire with distaste and wondered where his men were. He listened carefully to the surrounding area and heard a moaning. He followed the noise and found a young vampire attempting to put his slashed limbs back together; not realising that he would not heal after having been severed by such a blade. A blade that had been anointed in old vampiric blood and poisoned with salt.

"M-my Lord" the young vampire said. "Save me and I will give you information" he bartered in desperation.

Seth took a strange pity on the young vampire; it was not something he had experienced before. His usual aspect on such things was more pragmatic than pitying. "Fear not, young thing" he said. "I *will* help you." Seth knew the only relief for this young, damaged vampire was death and he would do it before the young one even knew that it had been done.

"My Lord...you must tell the Prince. Tell the Prince that they come for his woman, the woman of the light. Tell him this was the plan all along and that he has been betrayed. Help me now...please" he begged. "I have told you all I know."

Seth felt ice flowing down his spine. With no thought whatsoever and one almighty slash, he cleaved the young one's head in two and tossed him on the bonfire with the others. At least the young one would have peace this day.

Seth ran faster than he ever had before and raced to the lake. Every agonising second that passed, was a lifetime of fearing for Danann, his Goddess, his beloved.

12. The Angel has Fallen

Cringing in pain, Danann experienced things she had never even known existed. She felt as though she would implode as she was crushed under the emotions of change. She had been birthed from the loss of her Light and from thence, her body grew and aged quickly. Danann went from newborn babe to young woman in the space of mere seconds. She knew all the changes that were wrought; she had become part Angel and part human and she felt her wings bursting painfully from her back, before they shredded themselves before disappearing entirely. Danann cried tears of misery as the last of her Light left her but she cleaved to her soul and though she could feel Uriel tearing at it; she would *not* surrender it and managed to keep it intact.

She heard murmurings and whisperings in her mind as certain knowledge was wiped away and enlightenment achieved. Danann knew who and what she was to be now and it was horrific and awful but *worth* it; worth it to be with Seth, her Prince.

With an explosive flash of white light, Danann appeared several feet off the ground near the lake, before falling to the hard, cold ground with a crash. She grunted in pain and gasped for air in desperation. She had a body...a *true, corporeal, human-like* body; not just a manifestation of one.

She staggered to her feet unsteadily and looked around. She was sick to her stomach and this body was difficult to control. Danann longed for her Prince and wanted nothing more than to be enveloped in his loving arms.

13. Treachery, Betrayal and a Big, *Horrible* Mistake

Seth could see Danann in the distance by the lake but to his left, he could also see an advancing troop of the enemy's men. He would make it to her first but there was no time to away with her; he would have to send her on, as he waylaid them.

Danann's face brightened as her Prince appeared by her side. As she reached for him, she saw the savage anger on his face but before she had the opportunity to question what ailed him, he was savaging her. "Get *out* of here! I don't *want* you..." Seth turned to glance over his shoulder and listened before speaking again. He shoved her gently in an easterly direction. "Go...whatever you do, *don't* come back! Go!"

Before Danann could do anything but register shock, her Prince had turned and run away. "My Prince" she whispered. He did not *want* her...she had Fallen from Grace for him and...he did not *want* her. Danann fell to her knees in despair and clutched her chest. The pain was agonising and she felt her heart breaking within her. She had a brand new, newly-birthing body and already, she was damaging it.

Danann knew not how long she sat there but it seemed like an eternity. At some point she heard voices and she looked up to see six men, staring down at her. "Is this the one?" one of them asked gruffly, poking at her with his filthy hand. "Ain't she s'posed to glow or somethin'?" The man nudged her leg with his boot. "You the Angel?" he demanded gruffly.

Without thinking of the danger, Danann murmured miserably "not anymore."

"She's the one but there's somethin' wrong with her. Queen Eiluned and Princess Mab said we was to take her way an' despoil her; *use* her before killing her and burying her in consecrated ground, that means holy land. We'll bury her in the church yard." He jiggled his pocket and Danann heard a tinkling sound. "Can't believe we're gettin' paid to rape an' murder a woman. We'll have some fun tonight, boys" their uncouth leader said, laughingly.

For the first time, Danann was beginning to register the things going on around her. Seth's *mother* and *sister* had sent these men to despoil her, rape

her...what did that mean? She knew that they meant to kill her and short of daybreak coming; which was hours and hours away, there would be no escape for her.

14. Death of the King

Seth was frightened; an emotion he could not recall ever experiencing before. He feared for Danann's safety and would not be content until he got back to her. All he could do was hope that she had heeded his warning and had run east. He would easily be able to track her, provided that he managed to waylay the others. Humans were no problem...it was only those of his kind he knew; that were a danger to her.

He had passed a bunch of drunken, human fools and gone on to meet the enemy that was advancing.

Seth had managed to dispatch the newborns by literally draining them, before tearing them to pieces. There were only five of them and though they *could* reform, they would not be able to move after being drained. The dawning light of the new day would take care of the rest and they would become as nothing. He would have preferred to burn them but he did not have time to stop, he needed to make sure that no one else was coming after Danann and he had to find out how the enemy had known about her. He would not allow her to be put in danger ever again.

He quickly made his way back to the castle and stood, horrified at the sights before him. His mother and sister were standing before a body that had been decimated. Banning stood in abject shock and their people were gathered around in silence. Seth pushed passed the mourners, for it was impossible to mistake their shock and misery.

"My son" his father's severed head gurgled, as blood bubbled from his mouth.

His father...a *king*...had been damaged by a poisoned blade. Seth fell to his knees, pain racking his mind...his *father*...King Tynan the Dark, was not long for this world. Seth closed his eyes, trying to gather his resolve. These were *his* people...he knew he had to do his duty, as he *must*.

He stood to his feet, using every ounce of strength that he had and gave orders for the king's funeral pyre to be made ready. He ignored the wailing of his mother and sister, lest he reveal his own frailties. It was a time for Seth to show his mettle and strength and guide his people. He ordered Banning to bring him an anointed blade and there, in the darkness of the Irish night, fate made Seth cleave the head of his father in two. He carried

the damaged and decimated pieces of the body to the pyre himself, before taking the lit torch from Banning. "All hail" Seth declared. "All hail Tynan, King of the Ancient Province Kingdom of Connacht, County Galway, Ireland."

"All hail!" the gathered crowd shouted.

Seth set the torch to the funeral pyre and watched as his father burned. The body pieces were moving and Seth was glad that vampires burned quickly. He turned away to hear Banning speak.

"All hail Seth, King of the Ancient Province Kingdom of Connacht, County Galway, Ireland." Banning fell to his knees, as did every vampire there, including Seth's own mother and sister.

He stood frozen, shame burning through him because all he could think was that now he would be unable to leave this place. His father was burning and all Seth could think of was Danann; he would find her and talk to her. He would find some way to hide her and protect her, maybe she could go and use her powers elsewhere, leading Gabriel off the trail, before returning here. He would find a way to make it all work, he *had* to.

15. Rape and Death and filthy sinners

“Grab ‘er” the apparent leader said.

“But Ulick” someone spoke to him. “Are you sure ‘bout this?”

“Do ya want ya share or not?” Ulick answered, jingling the coins in his pocket. “Now bring ‘er. We’ll do it near the church, that way we don’t ‘ave to carry the body far.”

Danann was beginning to feel fear, the way a human feels it and it was debilitating. As two of the brigands hoisted her by her arms, she began to drag her feet and whimper; anything to slow down what was coming to seem, as being inevitable. Rage and anger filled her as well as total despair and at some point she began wailing and calling for help but all she got was a beating for her trouble. Something was wrong she knew, as she began to welcome what they were doing to her. Every time one of them lay their hands on her, beating her to a bloody pulp...she welcomed it. The more they hit, the more she wanted them to. The only respite from that horror was when they kicked her; in those moments she despised them bitterly.

As Danann lay in the dirt being kicked in her body and her face; all she could wonder at was human nature and the creatures that were capable of this. In the space of minutes, she had given up all that she was and had chosen to Fall from Grace for the love of a man, a Dark One who did not *want* her.

His family had sent brigands to deal with her in the most brutal way possible. She would die from this Danann knew, if they buried her in consecrated ground; she *would* die; the knowledge of it was within her still...it was the only way she *could* die.

She vowed that if she somehow, miraculously managed to get away, she would wait the one hundred years required and unlike Lucifer, she *would* take back her Light. Take it back, return home and never grace the filth of this horrible world again and with that thought, Danann faded away.

“Child...child, wake you up, *quickly.*” Danann tried to open her swollen eyes. She was looking into what appeared to be a kindly, wizened old face.

"Quickly child, we must away with ya'. I have dispatched with the thugs but t'will not be long before they waken, surely."

"Who...who are...you?" Danann managed.

"I am Father Seamus, child. I heard these brutes trying to...well they was not nice to you, lass. Hit them with the back of a spade, I did. I can't lift ya' on me own, ya' have to help me."

Danann used every desperate ounce of strength she had to get herself off the ground with the help of Father Seamus. It was difficult but she managed to scramble on to the back of the small cart he had tethered with a donkey. She groaned at the comfort she derived from the warmth of the blanket he covered her with and though she felt horrible pain, it was so bad that she was almost beyond actually *feeling* it. Father Seamus climbed up into the cart and drove away from the little church, leaving the animals that had attacked her; lying bleeding and beaten in the dust.

Father Seamus drove south-east to the coast and gave Danann a letter and a little satchel of money he had taken from the brutes that had attacked her. He arranged passage for her to the Arran Islands where his widowed sister dwelt and he instructed her to give the letter to his sister with the promise that she would help Danann. He saw her installed in the cargo hold of the small vessel bound for the Isles, before blessing her and kissing her forehead. "My child...is there a reason why they did this, other than that they are beasts?"

Danann raised miserable eyes to the priest. "Queen Eiluned and Princess Mab...they told them to...despoil and kill me."

To say that Father Seamus was shocked was an understatement. "They...they *told* you this?"

"Yes" Danann whimpered.

Father Seamus prayed silently and tried to settle his soul. "I will *conceal* everything, my child. Fear not, no one will follow you."

"Thank you" Danann sighed in relief.

"Child...what is your name?" he asked curiously, realising in his urgency to help make her escape, he had forgotten this small courtesy.

“Danann” she whispered hoarsely, having difficulty breathing as she clutched at the pain in her side.

“Danann what?” Father Seamus had to ask.

Danann thought for a moment. She remembered...was it just yesterday that she had been with her Prince? She smiled sadly to herself as she recalled standing on the crunchy ice and his attempt to be patient with her. “Frost” she said softly, her insides, her heart and her mind, icy. “My name is Danann Frost.”

Danann sat in the darkness of the small boat, wrapped in her blanket and for the first time in thousands, upon thousands of years, knew what it was to cry.

She had no idea how long it would take to get to the Aran Islands but by the time she was shaken by the captain who told her it was time to go; it was still dark and she knew that she would be safe for a time. As per Father Seamus’ instructions, the Captain arranged for her to be taken by pony trap to the home of Diedre O’Shea; Seamus’ widowed sister.

Diedre was a kindly, motherly woman and exactly what Danann needed, though she did not know it at that time. She tucked Danann up into bed after feeding her a basin of bread and sweetened milk and cleaning her wounds. “Good night, little one” Diedre said, kissing Danann gently on her bruised forehead.

Danann did not hear Diedre crying; she was fast asleep as her hostess lamented the evil doings of humans beings. Nor was she aware of the irony when Diedre prayed to the Angels, to bring Danann relief from her suffering.

16. King Seth, of the Ancient Province Kingdom of Connacht, County Galway, Ireland

Before the bonfire was even out, Seth set out to search for Danann. He made his way back to the lake and followed her scent but it was disconcerting; it was her but...*different*. Others had been here, drunken humans; he could smell it on the air. Fear chilled him but he pushed it aside and kept going. When he came to a place where he could smell Danann's spilt blood, he was nearly demented. Faster than he thought possible, he followed the scent; his head full of horrors. He should *not* have left her...it was all his *own* fault. He should *not* have left her!

He came to the small church yard and saw the six men, lying bleeding in the road. He could smell Danann's blood on their fists and boots and knew what they had done to her. Without even pausing to ask what had become of her, his rage was such that he tore them all to pieces without a second thought. He had torn each one, limb from limb, leaving the head and torso until last, so they knew what was being done to them. When he had calmed down enough to begin to think again, he realised his mistake. He had no idea what they had done with Danann.

Seth searched the surrounding area, using his senses but found no trace of her. He could see fresh track marks in the road and he could smell donkey on the air. He fervently hoped that someone had helped her because he could find no other trace of her; it was as if she had disappeared into thin air. With nothing else to guide him, he followed the now familiar smell of the animal. He followed it to a crossroads where he lost the smell, too much traffic through this byway. He settled down to wait for the first passing donkey, to question its owner. Seth sat seething and killing himself with thoughts of what those animals had done to Danann.

Finally by mid-afternoon, Father Seamus of all people, drove past in his little donkey-led cart. When Seth jumped up, Father Seamus started in surprise and turned suspicious eyes on him.

They had played with the priests mind in the past; he had wondered at how they were not aging and so they planted the notion in his head that they had been. He had readily accepted their royal status and did not know any different. The priest was looking at him in a very wary fashion now and Seth knew that he had knowledge of Danann. "Where *is* she?" he almost snarled

and the poor priest inadvertently cringed away. "Forgive me, Father. A girl, she was attacked by your church, where did you take her?" Seth appealed.

Father Seamus knew that this fellow's mother and sister had arranged for her attack and he didn't know if Seth was in on it. What had been done to that poor girl was horrific and Prince Seth was savagely angry. Was he upset she had escaped? Father Seamus could not take the risk and so on his honour, he swore to his God and lied. What he did, he did for the right.

"Prince Seth, the young lass was beaten horribly, she told me that there was nothing for her here and she was going to England. I arranged passage east for her, from County Mayo by coach, though if she makes it, I will be surprised. She was at death's door."

Seth's world was crashing down around him as, without another word, he left the stunned priest behind as he seemed to disappear into thin air. Seth made his way north to County Mayo and Father Seamus returned to his little church, packed up his things; trying to ignore the dead, torn bodies outside and made his way to see his Bishop in Ballintubber, County Mayo. Father Seamus requested an immediate transfer and was sent to the other end of the Green Isle and was very happy to be in County Wicklow. He was kept apprised of Danann's progress with letters from his sister and though he did not know it, Father Seamus was a very *clever* and a very *lucky* man, indeed.

Seth knew that Father Seamus had lied to him when nothing made sense. He could neither sense Danann nor had he heard news of her and she would have been hard to miss in the condition she had to have been in. Seth quickly made his way home and went straight for the little church, ten or so miles away. When he found the church empty and the little house next door, absent of all of Father Seamus' possessions, Seth knew he had been lied to. Why had he not compelled the truth from the man? Seth was so angry with himself, he tore the little house to pieces.

The King was despairing. Danann was out there somewhere, abused and damaged with no one to look after her. He knew that she would heal, she was an Angel and it would only be a day or two before she came back, surely. Suddenly, Seth had a brilliant idea. He would use her lock of hair to summon her to him. He would care for her tenderly until she healed and then they would be together. He would make it up to her, what she had suffered through. Those vile creatures must have done something to her, that she had been unable to vanish from this world the way that she did.

With some hope finally, Seth ran back to the castle and straight up to his room. He searched for the lock of Danann's hair but it was gone from the place he had concealed it. He searched right through his room, then called in the maids and like a man demented, questioned everyone in the castle.

In the end, he had to accept that it was gone but that would not stop Danann from returning. She *loved* him and would be back very soon. She would not blame him for what had happened to her, though she *should*, he knew; it *was* his fault. She was so good and lovely...he missed her so.

King Seth sat upon his throne in the Ancient Province Kingdom of Connacht, County Galway, Ireland and waited for the return of his Goddess. As each day passed, he grew more and more embittered and more and more savage.

His mother and sister had long since regretted their pact with Ahern, for not only had Ahern's treachery robbed them of a husband and father but it had also taken from them, a son and a brother. They did not accept responsibility for their actions however, for such people will do anything to divert blame from themselves and instead they blamed Danann. But for Danann, everything *would* have been as it *had* been.

Mab had even paused to regret burning the lock of Danann's hair but in the end she could not truly regret anything because nothing was her fault after all...was it?

17. Being corporeal is *horrible*

Danann had been living with Mrs Diedre O'Shea for some time and she was not used to the passing of days, the way that humans were. She was sitting in the rocking chair by the fire at Diedre's insistence.

Those brutes had damaged her so badly, it was a miracle she was alive. To Diedre's relief, the doctor had told her that Danann had not been raped but it was unlikely that she would be able to have children; she had been beaten so badly. Diedre knew the pain of that herself; nature had been unkind to her in that way too.

Danann was a strange girl, everything seemed to be new to her and her insistence of staying in a fully darkened room during the day bothered her but she was such a sweet girl that Diedre let it pass.

It took nearly three months before all the broken ribs had mended and ceased to cause pain and breathing problems, though the bones had not healed properly. The open cuts and bruises were long gone but horrible scars remained on Danann's face and body; thankfully she was no longer crying in misery every few minutes, it was all just too, too horrible.

As the days, weeks, then months ran by, Diedre and Danann came to love one another like mother and daughter. Diedre cherished and spoilt Danann with favourite foods and games. She taught Danann to knit, crochet and sew. Danann adored Diedre with the reverence of one that had been healed with gentle and loving care. She did all the heavy chores around the house and kept things clean and tidy. Diedre was not a young woman, she was in her sixty-eighth year but having companionship this late in life was a blessing.

The only contention was Danann's insistence on staying in absolute darkness during daylight. Diedre did not understand it, thinking that perhaps it had to do with the scars but in time came to accept it because it bothered Danann so very much. Diedre often sent Seamus her brother, news of her young charge and as the months turned into years, Diedre was happy; more than she thought she had any right to expect.

Diedre never noticed that Danann did not age because her eyesight was failing. Neighbours never noticed because if they visited, it was during the day and Danann would absent herself to her little room or if they came at

night, lamplight was poor and so it was easy for Danann to pass the twelve years that she did, with the very kind and gentle Diedre O'Shea.

Danann had spent those twelve years with a modicum of happiness. Diedre had been wonderful and loving to her; exactly as Danann had always imagined a mother might be. Diedre had taught Danann more about human emotions than she had ever expected to learn and she knew that when Diedre died, she would have to leave this beautiful little place in the Arran Islands.

She had only ever explored at night but it had to be one of the most beautiful places in the world; its rugged beauty was so painfully exquisite. Danann had often sat atop the cliffs, gazing out at the wild ocean. In times like that, Seth would invade her mind and she would ache for him but it was never to be. She had to keep to her plan; she would take back her light and return home, where she belonged.

Diedre had been gone a week when Father Seamus returned. Fortunately he was not overly surprised by her appearance because the only time he had ever seen her had been with a bruised, swollen and bloody face. The fact that she appeared to be so young for her age was nothing of great alarm; the scars marring her otherwise pretty features notwithstanding. He was too late for the funeral but he wanted to pay his respects to his sister, regardless.

Father Seamus had plans for Danann. He had kept in touch with Father Baird, the Priest at St Patrick's, in County Galway. He knew that Prince Seth and his family were still there and had tried to gain his whereabouts but Seamus had seen to it that no one, save his sister and his bishop knew where he was. The oddness of the Riordan family was not lost on Father Seamus, nor the fact that Father Baird seemed to be oblivious. Father Seamus did not say a thing but he wanted Danann safe, as his sister wished.

Danann had been willed all of Diedre's worldly possessions and he was here to help convert them to cash. Father Seamus was sending Danann to the New World. He had booked second class passage for her on a ship bound for New York out of Dublin, in six weeks time. Her cabin was below the waterline and thus devoid of natural light, something he knew was strangely important to the poor, frail, young girl. After seeing her scars he could understand her reticence.

Danann was shocked to find that Diedre had left her everything; it didn't feel right and she told Father Seamus so but he would have none of it. She had brought his sister happiness and it was good and it was right. He sold the

house and the surrounding lands quickly, to the local would-be Lord of the Manor. The household goods too, were sold off or given away. By the time this was all done, they had a fortnight to make their way to Dublin.

It was a relaxing, peaceful journey once Danann realised that they would only be travelling at night. She and Father Seamus had never discussed it but somehow she knew that his sister had warned him of Danann's foible. What he made of it, she knew not but he respected it and she loved her saviour all the more for it.

They went to Dublin in a very roundabout way, having headed east through County Clare, across through Tipperary, Kilkenny and east to Wexford, before making their way north through County Wicklow and up to Dublin. They arrived with two days to spare and Father Seamus was determined to see Danann onto the ship.

Father Seamus understood his sister's delight at the genteel, young woman. Danann was both kind and respectful. She was intelligent, insightful, curious and well-spoken. He almost wished that he could go with her to the Americas to ensure her well being but he could not, he was bound by the church, an institution he did not always understand, though he *was* devoted. His church told him to forgive those their cruel deeds against this child but he *could* not...he *would* not. His church taught him that should those who had committed these crimes express regret, all was forgiven...well that was *wrong* too. Some things could not be forgiven and no man of the church would convince Father Seamus otherwise. Over time he realised that he was living by the church men's laws and not God's...it wasn't what he had signed up for, particularly given how damned wrong those laws were.

Father Seamus enjoyed seeing Danann's fascination with the city and he could not help himself; he took her to the theatre. He enjoyed watching *her* enjoyment more than the play itself. He knew that she was a good girl and would make her way in the world.

He had arranged to have her met in New York, where she would be introduced to a good family that would see her well situated. He didn't understand her aversion to sunlight but he was confident that she would manage; she had for twelve years.

It was a melancholy moment when he saw her to the ship and it was time to say goodbye. Danann hugged Father Seamus closely and whispered '*thank you*' in his ear. He could hear the depth of her emotions in her tone and was glad once again; that he had been there to save her that night.

Danann was melancholy as the ship left port on the night sailing and she stood at the railing, waving to Father Seamus. She would not see Ireland for eighty-eight years if everything went according to plan. The next time she trod the lands of the Green Isle, she would fight Uriel for her Light...and go home forever.

18. Club Vampyr

“Danann, come *on*” Asher urged. “You’re going to be late for work.”

“I know, I know.” I knew that this was my fault but I had been caught up cuddling Jemima; she had been in such a good mood. I checked my face in the mirror and I looked okay.

Simon wanted to meet with all the staff tonight before the club opened; something to do with a review before the owner arrived in three months for his inspection. Apparently he visited once every three years; it was reputed that this guy owned clubs all over the world and spent his time roaming between them. Interesting life I supposed but I liked being a little settled, probably because I was always having to move on, myself.

I checked my image in the full length mirror behind the bedroom door. I was wearing pin striped, pin tucked pants and the matching vest, over a white business shirt. I could see the lace edge of my bra, so I tried tugging it lower but there was no help for it, it was going to show. Oh well, at least I had good cleavage. I grabbed my bag and went out to where Asher was waiting impatiently.

“You look good” he said with a cheeky grin. “The wait was definitely worth it.”

“Thank you” I said, rolling my eyes. He always said things like this because he knew it embarrassed me.

Asher drove his red Mercedes hard top convertible with the top down. It was a warm summer evening and I enjoyed the way the wind whipped past my face, though what it was doing to my hair, who knew. It wasn’t a long drive from our apartment in South Yarra to the nightclub where I worked in Toorak. I could have walked it but Asher liked to drive me; he liked knowing that I got there safely. He was very protective though he pretended not to be and the truth is...I *was* much safer this way.

My choice to work often vexed him because I didn’t *have* to work but I liked keeping busy and I particularly liked *this* job. Funnily enough, it was Asher who had introduced me to Simon in the first place.

Asher drove down Chapel Street and pulled up outside Club Vampyr; it was the hottest club in Melbourne. It was Goth themed but was enjoyed by anyone who was prepared to pay the rather steep, fifty dollar door charge. The place was always packed and the lines out the front always ran down and around the corner.

“Ring me when you’re ready to be picked up” Asher said, dropping a quick kiss on my lips. I nodded and jumped out of the car. I walked to the access door on the far side of the main doors and inserted my key in the lock. I knew that Asher was waiting until I went in; I didn’t have to turn around to know it and I heard his car move away, as I closed the door behind me.

I went down the hallway, turning lights on as I went. So much for panicking that I would be late; I was the first one here as usual. I froze when I thought I heard a noise.

I went through the door that came out behind the bar, in the club’s main room. The lights were out, so I tentatively stepped to the main board down the far end of the bar. I could see quite well in the dark, though nothing like the vampires who worked here could but here and now, I couldn’t see anyone or anything that might have made the noise. I was suddenly very uncomfortable and felt that I was being watched. I flicked the main switch on over the bar and as the board was illuminated, I began turning on the switches until the stage, the ground floor, the second floor mezzanine and the sunken dance floor were all lit up. I chuckled to myself softly at my foolishness, as I turned the radio on for company and poured myself a coke. Maybe the sugar and caffeine would put me in a less jittery mood.

I rarely ate or drank anything but when I did, it always affected me and could sometimes be a useful tool, I had found. I swung my hips in time with the music and jumped in surprise when I felt hands at my waist. “Grant, you scared me!” I chastised, trying to slow my heart.

“I couldn’t help myself, when I saw these hips swinging, I *had* to join in.” Grant was crazy, he was one of the bartenders and he was harmless. He liked to have fun and he *wasn’t* trying to hit on me, thank God. He really did mean that he just wanted to dance. I laughed as he swung his hips against me and I couldn’t help myself, I moved in time, just having a carefree moment.

“Oh, shit! Gotta go” Grant said, raising his eyes comically. “Boss is calling.” I watched in surprise as Grant jumped over the bar, up the stairs and turned towards Simon’s office.

I really *was* surprised; I hadn't realised that Simon was in. Was he sitting up there in his office in total darkness? Grant and Simon were both vampire's and had the ability to speak to each other's minds; he had obviously been summoned.

I fit in here because I was '*other*' though they had no idea what. I did not age...and in many ways, I *was* just like them. For my part, I liked being around vampires because I could bear to be touched by them. I had this horrible affliction which was a result of my Fall; I suffered from empathy. When living creatures touched me, I felt what they felt which could be very, *very* dangerous for me.

I had been attacked one night, many, many years ago. I had been walking through the Garden District in New Orleans one evening, enjoying the Ante-Bellum architecture, when I had been set upon. My attacker had wanted to do unspeakable things to me and in a strange way...when he was touching me, I *wanted* him to; it was the same way I had wanted those animals to beat me with their fists back in Ireland, so long ago. I had been feeling all of the gruesome sense of power and debauchery that my attacker was. Thankfully, I had been saved by Asher. He had been out trolling for a meal and decided that he would find *me* tastier than my attacker and he had quickly drained and dispatched with him; before turning to me. I had blood on my cheek from a scratch given me by my attacker and Asher had reached out and swiped up a little of my blood and tasted it. I will never forget his words to me. "What the *hell* are you?" he had asked curiously. That had been back sometime in the 1870's and one way or another, Asher and I had been together, ever since.

I went out through the door behind the bar, to the back area where my office was housed. I turned my computer on and put my bag in the bottom drawer; glancing at my watch, it was only 9:15pm. Simon usually got in around ten in Summer. I sat at my desk and checked the answering machine, taking down the message details.

I could hear my phone ringing and lamented that I hadn't taken it out of my bag earlier. Finally fishing it out, I flipped it open, "Hello."

"Babe...feel like going away for the weekend?" Asher's voice was sounding positively excited, something I hadn't heard in a while and that was saying something; for a vampire, Asher was very upbeat.

"Um...sure, I guess. Where?"

“A place near Mount Buller; in the Victorian Highlands. I’ve just had an invitation from a friend of a friend. It’s the full moon this weekend, so I thought it might be good. It’s a weekend house party type of thing.”

“Okay, if you want to, sounds good.” It really was good to hear Asher so excited. After we hung up, I slid my phone into my pocket and went back to my computer. I was both the Office Manager and the Human Resources Manager; ironic given that the only humans who worked here were the cleaners and wait staff. Everyone else, the DJ’s, the bar staff...even Simon, were all vampire; except me of course.

Asher knew what I was but no one else did. When they asked, I told them that I didn’t know and that I had just woken up one day and found myself like this. They all thought that I was a vampire gone wrong but even they didn’t quite believe that either; after all...vampires needed blood, right? Well I *didn’t*. I didn’t *need* to sleep or eat but I *could*. The only time I ate was if I went out and the occasion called for it but that wasn’t very often. I didn’t sleep either; once in a while during the day if there was nothing on television or I was bored, which *was* often.

I spent all day in the apartment and read or watched television. I couldn’t go out in the daytime for one reason and one reason only – I could not *exist* in the light. It used to be much more difficult but it was much easier these days with cable television and readily available books. Life since Asher had even been bearable.

I felt the hair on the back of my neck prickling and I turned around to find my office door open but the hallway was empty. I was certain I had closed my door...it was not like me to be so vague. I shook off my discomfort and went back to my computer; I had invoices to process and bills to pay.

This club was very successful and whoever owned it, had to be doing very well for themselves. I knew that whomever it was, owned many clubs and other businesses worldwide but this one alone, made profits in the multi-millions, annually.

The phone on my desk rang. Simon wanted me upstairs in the conference room and asked me to tell the other staff. I quickly logged off...it wouldn’t do for just anyone to be able to access the club’s books, the way that I could. I went out to the club where Per, the Scandinavian DJ was fiddling with his equipment. I called to him and Grant who was back behind the bar. No one else was about and I had to wonder where the other staff members were but I soon found out when we entered the upstairs conference room.

On the second level to the left of the stairs, was the small conference room and Simon's much larger office. To the right of the stairs, was the second story mezzanine that housed booths along two walls and a dance area for the rest. The downstairs was a little more complex. From the entry, the bar was on the right with the back areas behind there, which consisted of my office, the kitchen, the laundry room and a small meeting room. To the left, booths ran along to the left and around the wall, all the way down to the stage. In the middle of it all was a huge, sunken dance floor. They sometimes got bands in to play or special guest artists. This was a very prestigious club and it gave a certain amount of kudos to having been invited to perform here.

The other staff were already seated around the table; there were Matilda and Samson, who were the door staff, as well as Ryan and Leonora who were customer hosts. It was their job to roam about, dance and entertain. Basically make sure that everyone was having a good time. They were always dressed in some Goth outfit or other.

At Club Vampyr, customers expected it but little did they know that there were real vampires here. Vaira was the other bartender and I went to sit next to her. I liked Vaira, she was really nice and we shopped together sometimes or went to see a movie.

The club was only open four nights a week, Thursday through Sunday and that left a lot of spare time. I would have to remember to tell Simon that I was changing my hours this week. Because I worked out the back, I could work whenever I liked and I considered staying the whole night and all of tomorrow; that way I could go away for the weekend and everything would be done before I left.

"Thank you all for coming in so early" Simon said, from his seat up the end. The conference room was glass enclosed and from this room, you could see neither in nor out. From Simon's office next door, you could see out, including into this room but from the outside, you could not see in. "As you are all aware, the owner of the club was due to visit sometime in April; which is three months away. He has decided on an early visit and will be here for the next fortnight. Many of you have worked in his clubs here in Australia and all around the world. Working for...." Simon paused and I could see that someone was speaking to his mind. I glanced around the room...it wasn't anyone here, of that I was certain. I looked to the glass wall behind Simon and narrowed my eyes thoughtfully. There was someone in there...I *knew* it. I turned to Vaira and was about to ask her what she could see. As a vampire, she would surely have been able to see through the glass

but Simon stopped me. “Danann...the owner will need to meet with you frequently to go over the books but not until next week. We will be closed for the weekend, so everyone will have a long break, before we get back into it next Thursday.” Simon looked supremely uncomfortable as he shuffled some papers. He kept his head strangely lowered, this was not at all like him and I just knew that he was being spoken to again. I turned to Vaira again when Simon’s head snapped up. “Thank you, Danann. You may go back to your office, I still need to speak to the rest of the staff...transfer opportunities, things like that...” he smiled at me but something was wrong.

I stood up. “Simon...am I being fired?” I asked. If this was the case, I wanted everything out in the open.

Vaira gasped in shock and Simon seemed to leap into damage control. “Not at all, Danann...*not at all*, I’m sorry if you got that impression. It’s quite the opposite, actually; we’re wanting to sign you to a long term contract; something that might involve a bit of travel, perhaps visiting other clubs...that kind of thing.”

This was very strange...very, *very* strange. “I’d have to talk to Asher first” I told him suspiciously. Something was going on here and I intended to find out what.

I left the conference room, closing the door carefully behind me but I did not go back downstairs, instead I went next door to Simon’s office and pulled on the handle but it was locked. This was bizarre; the club was closed and with Simon in the next room, there would be no reason for his office to be locked. I went downstairs to my office, pulled out my phone and rang Asher.

“Hey, Babe” he said after the first ring. “What’s up?”

“Something’s going on, Ash. I don’t know what it is but Simon has gone all funny on me and I think there’s another vamp here at the club telling him what to do. It might be the owner but it just doesn’t *feel* right. Simon said something about signing me to a long term contract that might involve travel...does any of this sound right to you?”

“I’m coming over...if someone is there, I’ll know it. See you soon.”

I closed my phone and sat thinking. Asher was old for a vampire, he was 314 years old; if someone was there he would be able to sense it. He said that some of the ancient ones had powers where they could stop others from sensing them or even speaking to them but he had never met any. I had

been working here for just over two years...perhaps it was time to move on. The trouble was...I *liked* it here and I liked the staff; they were nice and fun...for *vampires*, anyway.

Not long after, I heard a knock on the access door at the rear and I went to let Asher in. I don't know how I looked but he glanced at me quickly, before running upstairs. I stayed in my office to wait for him; I did *not* have a good feeling about this. In all the time I had worked here, I had never felt this way and Simon had *never* been so secretive nor to my knowledge, had I ever been *excluded* in this way.

Asher was back within minutes, with Simon following behind. "You *can't* do this Asher, I *won't* allow it." In spite of his words, I was surprised to hear Simon's tone. It was more *panicked* than actually annoyed or angry.

"*Allow* it...you can't *stop* it" he hissed at Simon. "You're up to something; someone is pulling your strings, Simon." Asher grabbed my arm and pulled me to the door. "Come on Babe, we're out of here" he said quickly.

I trusted Asher, I *had* to; he had always had my best interests at heart. I allowed him to lead me out of there, with Simon pleading the whole time. "Danann...please *don't* go" he said urgently. "We *want* you to stay..."

Asher rounded on him immediately. "Who is '*we*' Simon?" he demanded.

Simon appeared taken aback and was instantly uncomfortable. Once again, I knew that he was receiving instructions. I stepped up to him and touched his face. "Simon...*who* is talking to you?" I asked softly.

His face fell in despair; he knew I had realised what was happening. "Danann...*don't* go, please. There is no *need*" he urged.

"I'll think about it, Simon but...I want some answers. I might see you next week" I told him softly.

Asher quickly escorted me out of there; he seemed agitated. "It must be someone powerful because there was no one in the club. For someone to be speaking to him in a city this populated, and *not* be close by...I don't like this, Babe. Not one little bit."

We made it back to his car and he pulled out into the traffic. "I don't want to go home" I told him; I needed *life* around me, I felt so cold on the inside.

“Shall we go to SunRay’s” Asher asked.

“Sounds great, can we get a booth, do you think?” I asked, hoping desperately that we could. It was...*difficult* being around humans.

“Where do you think I was, when you called?” he asked, grinning. Asher turned into Commercial Road and I knew that he would take St Kilda Boulevard down to the beach. I loved Melbourne and its wide, tree-lined streets. For a relatively young city in a young country, Melbourne had beautiful architecture. It was a warm, balmy evening and I pulled my hair out of the top knot I’d twisted it up in earlier and enjoyed the breeze through the tresses.

A current pop song came on the radio and I cranked the volume up and sang along. I was up on most of the current dance hits, working in a nightclub. Asher thought my devotion to music and dancing was cute but he was always quick to indulge it. I knew that it was because he loved it even more than I did; if that was possible.

Asher was very social and always going out somewhere. He didn’t work, he had been rich even before he had been made vampire. He hated that I insisted on working and would gladly have supported me but I liked my independence. I had once trusted someone to be there for me...I would *never* trust that way again. I would never *surrender* control; I would not survive the pain again. I pushed thoughts of him to the back of my mind and as a tear threatened to spill from the corner of my eye, I wiped it away quickly. It would be good to be around others; I needed the distraction, provided I could avoid contact with the humans.

Asher had turned down Beach Road and was driving down the palm tree lined street. The Ocean was on the right and I could see the lights of SunRay’s further down, situated directly on the beach.

SunRay’s was a dance club that was open to the elements in the Summer, when they folded back the walls. It was on a huge deck that stretched out over the beach and was lit with Tiki torches, as well as lights. Booths ran along the back, facing the dance floor on one side and the ocean on the other. You could only get a booth at SunRay’s if you knew Ray or his husband Paul, or if you were a VIP.

Some days, it felt as though Asher knew everyone. He pulled into the front of the club and tossed his keys to the valet, as I got out. “We’ll have to troll

through the humans but after that you'll be fine...promise" he said, winking at me.

I braced myself, knowing what was coming but I also knew that Ash would not let anything happen to me, *ever*. He quickly greeted the Bouncers, who knew us both by name and waved us through. As soon as we were through the double wooden doors, Asher took my hand and pulled me along behind him; making our way through the club as quickly as possible. He walked around the dance floor and as soon as the first human touched me, I was lost. I vaguely registered some guy taking my hand; I could feel his intoxication and his lust hit me like a runaway train. I swooned against him, pulling his head down for a kiss.

As soon as Asher wrenched me free; instant and complete mortification hit me, as the emotions quickly dissipated and I registered what I had been about to do. He pulled me into his side, putting his arm around me. It was difficult to walk through the dancing partygoers this way but it was also less likely that a human could touch my skin.

I breathed a sigh of relief when we made it to the booth where Ray was sitting, with two vampires I didn't know. I could always tell a vampire from a human, it was one of the remnants left to me as a Fallen Angel. I was sure that Uriel had intended it as a punishment but to me it was a blessing. I would run to a vampire for help, before a human every time – rather bizarre given that vampires weren't known for their giving nature.

"You're *back*" Ray grinned, indicating that we should sit down in the circular booth. "Hey, Gorgeous" he said to me, winking. "Where's Asher been keeping you, I haven't seen you in ages."

"Hello, Ray" I smiled back. Ray was a fun guy, harmless so long as you stayed on the right side of him. There was one thing that I knew about vampires...*don't* get on the wrong side of them...*ever!*

"Dani...I'd like you to meet Mia and Julian Hamilton, Mia, Julian; this is my Danann." I had to stop myself from laughing at the way Asher often introduced me; it was his way of letting others know that I had his protection. I turned to greet them, noticing that the woman was very pretty. She had long, dark straight hair that fell to below her shoulders and her fringe accented her beautiful brown eyes that almost seemed to sparkle with obvious delight.

I was surprised when Mia, who was sitting next to me, held out her hand. I wasn't used to vampires volunteering to touch me in this way; they were not normally touchy-feely anyway but they were usually wary of me. They could tell that I was something other than human or vampire but not what and it could make them antsy. Having Asher's protection had probably saved me many times from some vamp biting my neck just to sample me. It was a good thing that at 314, he was older by far than most of the vamps I'd come across.

I shook Mia's hand lightly but I knew that I had been unable to keep the surprise from my face when she laughed. "Danann" she said, as though trying out the sound of my name on her lips. "You are a *delight*, I do not bite, you know. Well...maybe not *you*" she teased.

I couldn't tell if she was mocking me or trying to soothe me but either way, I was uncomfortable and could not stop myself from leaning away from her and into Asher. He could sense my discomfort, I knew...no one knew me the way he did and he put his arm around my shoulders, protectively.

"You must forgive my wife, Danann. She is hoping to make friends with you but...she does not know *how*" Julian teased his wife, dropping a kiss on her temple.

"Oh please, Danann...please don't be offended. Asher was telling us about you earlier and I was intrigued."

"There's nothing intriguing about me, I assure you" I told her, relaxing a little. She seemed to mean what she said and her smile appeared genuine but I did not trust my judgement.

Judgement was an interesting thing; before I had fallen, I had trusted *everything and everyone*. After I had fallen and was abandoned and attacked; my judgement was to trust *nothing and no one* and I didn't, except to some extent Asher but he would disagree. He knew that no matter how close I was to him, I still held back. I clung to my independence *just in case* he ever left me. I hated that I felt that way and I hated it even more that he knew it because he had never done anything to deserve my mistrust; quite the opposite, in fact.

A waiter appeared from somewhere and deposited a Vodka-Lime in front of me and I took a fortifying sip, wanting to relax more than anything. I had no need to eat or drink but I *could* and when I did, they affected me in the same way any human would be affected.

The conversation had gone on without me and after several more sips, I was loosening up a little. I began wriggling along in my seat to the music; I loved to dance but could rarely do it because of the humans.

“Dani” I heard Asher whisper in my ear.

“Yes?” I looked up in surprise. God but he was cute; Asher had dark brown hair that was short and gelled to spike. He had dark brown eyes and the cutest smile; I loved him *very* much and though we had tried...we had never been able to fall *in* love.

He smiled at me indulgently. “I was just telling you, that it was at the invitation of Mia and Julian; to join them this weekend.”

“Oh” I winced apologetically. I really shouldn’t drink, I wasn’t used to it and it affected me very quickly when I did. I turned to them and could not stop my blush of embarrassment. “Thank you for the invitation; I know that Ash is looking forward to roaming around fresh territory.”

“I’m looking forward to it myself” Julian said. “We’ve only been in Australia a short time and I’m longing to see the forests here; I understand they are quite different to anything we’ve seen before.”

“Where are you from?” I found myself asking.

“The States” he said simply.

I stared at him thoughtfully. They had very strong, North American accents and I wondered if they were particularly young for vampires. Many I had met tended to lose their accents after a hundred years or so and became somewhat indistinct.

“What are you thinking?” Mia demanded, her eyes narrowing.

“I’m sorry” I said quickly. “I didn’t mean to stare, I was just thinking that you had to be...*young*...for vampires.” I hoped she wasn’t insulted; vampires could take offence at little things, sometimes.

All four vampires at the table laughed and I felt like the entertainment or court jester or something. I had spent most of the last two hundred years around vampires and still I got the feeling that I would never truly

understand them. I really had to stop lumping them into one category; maybe thinking of them as total individuals might make it easier...maybe.

Mia reached out and touched my arm again, which was strange; vampires were never touchy-feely with strangers, I kept reminding myself. "Danann, your query was fair. You are thinking that with this accent, we must be young, yes?" I nodded. "I am one hundred and eighty years old and Julian is four years older" she said, smiling gleefully. "You are a clever woman, though you were wrong. It is...*unusual* for us to leave the States, you see. We do it very rarely...only when it is required, which is not that often" she lamented.

"Required?" that was surprising.

"Mia!" Julian admonished her quickly and I saw her bite her lip. Had she said something she shouldn't?

When she changed the subject, I got the feeling that there was more going on here than I knew but I didn't let it bother me. Vampires were often up to something, whether it was for their pleasure or their business; they generally kept things to themselves and as it had nothing to do with me, I did not exactly care.

"So, Gorgeous" Ray said, winking at me. "When are you going to come work for *me*?" Ray had always called me Gorgeous from the first time I had met him; he had also been trying to poach me the whole time, too. Ray looked to be the typical image of an Aussie surfer; he was tall, muscular and blonde. He wore a coral choker, singlet top and board shorts. Ray often followed the waves around the world; surfing was his passion and he had been trying to get me to run this place for him but it wouldn't have worked. I'd have come into contact with humans too much and there was no way that I could handle that.

"Now Ray," I teased. "You *know* Simon wouldn't like that." I used loyalty as my excuse but really, I *liked* working at Club Vampyr. I liked the people and the atmosphere. If I wanted to go out into the club, I could; I just stayed behind the bar and occasionally, I even served drinks. My job was flexible and generally, I could come and go as I wanted, at least...it *had* been that way until earlier today.

I felt a prickling sensation down my neck and shivered before taking another sip of my drink. I glanced out over the crowd and wished that I could have danced. I downed the last of my Vodka-Lime when a current chart-topping

dance number came up. I could tell from the look on Ray's face, what he had in mind and I was definitely up for it. Maybe not *usually* but now I knew why he had given me the alcohol.

He kicked off his sand shoes before jumping up on the wide wooden railing that backed the booths. He walked around to me and taking my hand, helped me to climb up next to him. He wrapped one arm around my waist and began moving to the beat of the music. I loved this song and couldn't stop myself from going with it.

Somewhere deep down inside me, I knew that the crowd was watching us; anything Ray did always drew attention. I knew without looking that Asher was amused and though I had no idea what their reaction was; I knew that we also had the attention of Mia and Julian Hamilton.

I didn't care about any of it; I was away with the moment and Ray was a great dancer. I didn't worry that I might fall; he would not allow it. I glanced around, taking in the crowd on the dance floor to my right and the ocean to my left. It was great to see the place jumping and for once, I got to be a little part of that. Falling had punished me in ways I could not have conceived; it was nice to have a tiny little bit of relief from that for one stolen moment.

The song was coming to an end and Ray, holding my hand turned towards the cheering crowd and bowed; he loved the accolades, I knew. I couldn't stop my smile of enjoyment, until I saw a face in the crowd near the entrance to the club. Shock reverberated through me, as I closed my eyes briefly. I sighed in horrified relief when I opened them again to find that I had imagined it; he could not be here, that was ridiculous and even if he had been, it was of no consequence at all. He had not wanted me and told me to go; he was nothing to me and...I was trying very hard to convince myself of that.

Asher helped me to sit once more and Mia was clapping in enjoyment. "Danann, that was *wonderful*" she gushed. She was a strange woman...strange for a vampire, anyway. I got the strange impression that anything I did, she would have thought was wonderful.

"What's wrong?" Asher asked.

I took his hand in mine and though I knew the others would hear what I said, I whispered. "I thought I saw...someone that I once knew" I said cryptically.

Mia put her hand on my arm once again and I had to wonder what it was with her, touching me all the time? “Danann, are you alright, you sound upset but I know that you *cannot* be” she said with a weird kind of confidence. She was acting like I was her best friend; like she actually cared or something.

Asher answered for me. “Dani’s fine, she just needs to get away. This weekend will be good for her.” He put his hand under my chin and turned my face to his, before dropping a soft, comforting kiss on my lips. I cuddled into him and relaxed once more. I was surprised to see a disapproving frown, crossing Mia’s face. What was it with this woman? I wasn’t sure that I wanted to go away this weekend after all. I could tell that she knew exactly what I had been thinking, when she noticed the look on my face and her own brightened instantly.

“Do you like to swim?” she asked me, smiling for all she was worth. “There is a pool at this place we’ll be staying.

“Are you renting the place?” I asked curiously.

“No...a *friend* of ours owns it, an investment usually but he’s in the country at the moment and thought as there’s a full moon this weekend, we might as well make a party of it.”

That at least made sense. “How many will be there?” I asked her.

“There will be five of us and I understand that Ray will be bringing someone; one or two others. Is there...anyone that *you* wanted to invite?” she asked curiously.

I would have loved to invite Vaira but that seemed a little rude, so I shook my head. “Are there planned activities...or...”

“Some” Mia said quickly. “We are having a treasure hunt. Everyone will be partnered off; it should be fun.”

I would probably miss a lot of the activities; there was a price to pay for having to stay in darkness during the day and after two hundred years, I was still not used to it. As for a treasure hunt with vampires...it was probably something that I did not want to participate in, anyway; the prize was probably some poor human, to snack on.

“Do you like to travel?” Mia asked suddenly.

“Yes and no. I like seeing new places but given the nature of our lives, I hate *having* to move but I guess I’m used to it. Generally, once I am settled in a place, I do not travel at all but I have a big trip coming up early next year.”

“Danann!” Asher was angry. He hated it when I talked about my upcoming trip to Ireland. He was still hoping to talk me out of it but he *couldn’t* and though I knew it was unfair to him, I was unmoved. I *would* go back to that lake in Ireland where I had lost my Light. Once again, I would do battle with Uriel but where last time I was not strong enough to take it from him, this time I *would* be. He had told me last time that just like Lucifer; I would *never* get it back. He said that Lucifer had given up trying but that would *not* be me; it *could* not.

I bit my lip not wanting to argue with him in front of these people but I could see both Mia and Julian glancing from me to Asher and back again.

They would not be able to say anything; Asher would be offended and offending a vampire whose strength was unknown, was *not* a good idea.

Asher stood up and held his hand out for me. “It’s time we left, I think. Danann will want to go home and pack for our trip tomorrow. We should arrive around ten o’clock tomorrow night, if that suits you?” He was sounding very bossy and imperious and normally I would not have let him get away with it but he was upset and I felt mean and selfish.

I was surprised to see Mia seriously disappointed. “You *must* come earlier, even in the morning, if you wish.”

“We can’t do that, I’m afraid. Danann likes to rest during the day” Asher said firmly. He made me sound like a kept, overly-indulged woman which was almost the opposite of what I was. I worked hard and was trapped in the darkness but his words made me cringe in embarrassment, internally. I often wondered why poor Asher put up with me; I found it hard to believe that he didn’t agree when I told him that I just cramped his style.

Ray jumped up, hugging me quickly before we made our goodbyes and left. Instead of going back through the dancing throng; Asher walked to the edge of the elevated platform, picked me up quickly and made the twenty foot drop to the sand below. When he made silly mistakes like this in front of humans, I knew that he was seriously upset. Without a word, he removed my shoes; holding them in one hand and taking my hand in his other, as we strolled down the beach.

"I'm sorry, Ash" I groaned.

"Sshhh" he said softly. I knew that we were still too close to the vampires that we'd just left and they could hear everything that was said.

When we were far enough away, we sat down on the sand and gazed out at the sea. "I *don't* want you to go, Dani...I *love* you" he whispered and I could hear his pain. All the loneliness of the long years was clear in his tone and I knew that I was his one respite from that...having even a friend to love meant so much when you were all alone in the darkness, with no one to turn to.

I did not need to be empathic to feel what he was feeling because I felt it myself. "I have to, Ash...I...I can't.....dammit!" I said angrily.

"You *won't* do it...there's time. I can change your mind, I *know* I can, Dani...you won't *leave* me."

"Ash...." I groaned despairingly.

He picked me up and ran back along the darkened beach and around to the front of the club, before helping me back into my shoes and retrieving his car from the valet.

He drove home quickly, whilst I admired the bright city lights. I never tired of this cosmopolitan feeling of life; not surprising given my very solitary existence as an Angel in my former life, though at the time I had never felt that way. I had never known any different.

Ash pulled into the garage and turned off the engine. We lived in an old, converted mansion in South Yarra. The house had four apartments and we were apartment two on the upper floor. Asher had had blackout shutters installed on the inside of the rooms of our apartment, so that I was free to walk around during the day.

He dragged me into my room, pushed me back onto the bed and began undressing. He wanted to have sex with me; I knew that it was just his insecurities of my possibly regaining my Light. We weren't exactly friends with benefits but almost. We had once tried to fall in love and have a full on relationship but it had never bloomed in that way. We loved each other *totally* and *completely* but we were not *in* love. I had tried on two other occasions to have a true relationship but they had not worked and I had very quickly realised it.

Very occasionally, like now, Ash and I had sex from the desperate need for intimate contact. The last time had been about five years ago. I usually went without totally and whatever Ash usually did...he didn't bring it home.

In a strange way, I needed him tonight, too. That scare I had earlier was a reminder to me that I was denying so much because of the memory of him...I could not even think his name; it hurt so much.

I felt a tear fall and run slowly down my cheek. Asher, naked now; moved gently to lay over me. He undressed me slowly and kissed away my tear. Our coupling was not frenzied, as I had been expecting but slow and caring. He was my friend. We might have been having sex but he wasn't touching me in that way. He was holding me and loving me...we were two lonely souls finding solace in each other.

Sometime later, Ash got up, kissed me gently and said that he was going out to feed. I got up, wrapped myself in the snowy white, minky blanket from the chair in the corner of my room and went to the window that looked out onto the street. I sat on the wide window sill and gazed up at the stars. I couldn't see that many; the light spill from the city was too bright.

I was cold on the inside, though it was a warm evening and I pulled the white rug tighter around myself. I could see the tall buildings of the city from this elevated position. Melbourne really was gorgeous; I would hate to leave it someday and I had to wonder if that would be early next year, when I made my pilgrimage to Ireland.

I closed my eyes and inhaled deeply. I could smell the lilacs that were blooming in the yard next door and I sighed sadly. My life had been so lonely since I had Fallen. Even with Asher, who had been my saving grace; I was still lonely. It amazed me that as an Angel, I had been older than time itself; though I had been young for my kind. I had not known loneliness before experiencing Original Sin. This life that humans and vampires experienced was good...but it was not for *me*. I could not do what they could do. I was bound in ways they were not and I could not *tolerate* it any longer than I had to; *not* anymore.

I sighed heavily, glanced down and froze. "No" I whispered. I was seeing him again, staring up at me with a hard...*hard* expression on his face but when I blinked, he was gone. I rubbed my eyes and stared up and down the street, as though I would see something. I had imagined him again; he had been on my mind for days which was crazy because he was *always* on my

mind. For two hundred years now, not only could I *not* forget him, all I could do was think *of* him.

Why was I doing this to myself? I always felt guilty after having sex, which was *insane*. He had told me that sex and love were not the same and he had been right. In the last two hundred years, I had only tried to have three relationships, none of which had lasted much beyond about a month because for me; it had always felt wrong. Ash and I had been able to be more, we were loving friends who lived and travelled together but it would *never* be anything more than that. Very occasionally, we would comfort each other but that was all.

I was emotionally exhausted and could not take any more trauma this evening. I thanked the fates that he had not really been out there, listening to me being so intimate with Asher. I lay down on my bed and called Jemima to me; she was my grey, short-haired cat. Jemima came running in and leapt up onto the bed next to me. I stroked her soft grey fur and she began purring, loudly. I could feel her warm satisfaction beneath my hand as her feelings flowed into me. I enjoyed this part of my punishment. My empathic abilities were torturous around humans but with Jemima, it was a reward. Even if she was angry or disgusted with me which was not often; it was funny but usually, she was simply happy and she loved me. I snuggled in next to her and for the first time in about a year, I allowed myself to fall asleep.

19. Strange Revelations

I sat up in a panic but calmed down almost immediately; this was *why* I did not usually sleep. I had fallen asleep with the blinds up; thank goodness Ash had closed the shutters sometime later. I glanced at the time; it was two o'clock in the afternoon and that gave me plenty of time to pack and get ready for the drive to the mountains.

I wandered out to the kitchen and fed Jemima before running the bath. There was a note on the fridge from Asher, chastising me for being so careless and reminding me to be ready by 8.40pm for our road trip.

I took a long, leisurely bath, before settling down with a book. Jemima sat in my lap and whined every time I turned a page. "I'm so sorry my reading is interfering with your *relaxing*" I told her sarcastically but set the book down and stroked her ears and the back of her head until she purred. I quivered in satisfaction as her feelings of comfort flowed into me.

I went to pack around five o'clock and dress for the drive. I tossed in all manner of things that I might need; I was not fast and agile like vampires, I had to do things like a human in that way. I took a bikini that Asher had given me after a trip to Maui; it had a matching sarong, so I packed that too. I tossed underwear in and casual wear. I did not wear pyjamas to bed; it was a leftover from my time as an Angel. I rarely slept so if I ever did, I wore nothing. In a strange place where there might be nothing to occupy me, I might have to resort to sleeping but no one would know, except maybe Asher so that was no problem. I tossed in shoes and several dressy outfits. I knew what vampires could be like...they talk about going away to a cabin in the mountains and the next thing you know, everyone is dressed up to party.

After I had finished packing, I dressed in a white pleated mini skirt and matching short-sleeved scoop-necked sweater. I wore white, leather sandals on my feet and made up my face in natural browns with black mascara and eyeliner. I tried to keep things simple; if Asher drove with the top down my hair would end up everywhere, so I pulled it into a high ponytail and secured it with a white hair tie. God but I looked like a teenager.

Many years ago, Asher had decided that I looked to be about nineteen years of age. I had upped that to twenty so whenever someone asked, that's what I told them. I took my bag out to the living room and waited for Asher to get home.

Forty-five minutes later, we were zipping along the Hume Highway heading north. Asher did indeed drive with the top down and for the first time in two days, I began to relax. I enjoyed the scenery; I had not done much exploring of the Australian countryside.

Before we moved to Melbourne, Asher and I had been living in Montego Bay. Ray had settled here first and Asher had decided to follow him out. Most vampires, from what I could tell, tended to group together. They *could* socialise with humans I supposed but most tended not to. They often fed from them and sometimes used them for sex as well but I had never known one to fall in love with a human; it just didn't happen.

It took just over an hour and a half to get to Mount Buller. Asher seemed to know where he was going; he had always been very good with maps and never seemed to need to consult them, not once he had already obtained his bearings.

We passed through a small town called Mansfield, which was very pretty and obviously country-cottage like, before heading across and up the mountain. I couldn't wait for dawn and then dusk tomorrow night. I was able to enjoy that tiny bit of light left over from the day, once the sun had disappeared over the horizon. It was more risky at dawn; often the sun could just burst forth and if I was not indoors and protected, I would be in serious trouble.

The road wound around and around and up until we reached a number of chalets. Asher turned down either a rough track or perhaps a driveway that went first down a ways, before heading back up and across the side of the mountain.

Nearing a flat area just down from the pinnacle, I could see a sizable lodge sitting just above us. The car made its way along the last hundred metres or so, before turning up and back, then stopped in the front of what appeared to be a rather impressive building.

I suddenly wanted to turn the car around and go home. I had to tamp down that feeling as Asher got out of the car, before going around the back to get the bags. Mia and Julian came out through the front, double glass doors with big smiles on their faces and I was totally creeped out. I *wanted* to like these people but I couldn't, I was wary. I had to wonder once again, if this was a remnant of my misplaced trust and the consequences of my choosing to Fall. I had paid such a heavy price to be with him; so much more than I had ever

expected and all it had done was leave me lonely and unable to trust or have any true kind of life.

Mia stopped a few feet from me, as her husband went to talk to Asher. I could tell that she was sensing my reaction to her; it was as though she did not know how to proceed. I had to wonder at a vampire that was over one hundred and eighty years of age, giving pause for thought to another creature that was not vampire. Did they revere Ash this much or...did they *fear* him...what? This all had to be about *him*, surely?

"Hello, Mia" I said tentatively; she *was* my hostess after all. Her face brightened immediately and she tossed her shoulder length, dark hair and came forward, taking my hand in both of hers.

"Danann" she gushed. "I'm so *glad* you're here. We're going to be very *good* friends, I just know it." She threaded her arm through mine, as though she was scared I'd run off and led me into the rather impressive lodge.

We were standing in a huge open plan living, dining and kitchen. There were so many windows and no coverings that I knew I would not be able to spend much time in here. I couldn't see anyone else and desperately hoped that we were not the only guests.

Mia led me upstairs and down a long landing, to the far right. She opened the last door and said "this is your room, isn't it lovely?" I looked around despairingly; barely taking in the room's decor...it had an enormous wall of windows and coverings that seemed positively insubstantial. When my face fell in despair, I could not stop the look from appearing on my face. "What is it, Danann?" Mia asked in obvious concern.

Asher and Julian came in behind us with the bags. "No, no, no" Asher said quickly. "There is no way Dani can stay in this room. She needs total darkness in the day or she won't be able to rest properly" Asher said firmly.

Julian's brow furrowed and Mia stood wringing her hands in agitation. "Perhaps...I should go home" I suggested to Asher. "If I left now, I would make it with plenty of time to spare and you could make your own way after you've hunted." I so desperately wanted to leave this place but I suspected that he would not allow me to do it.

"No!" three voices resounded in unison. I stared in surprise at the three of them when Asher spoke again. "If you go *home*, we go *together*," he said firmly.

"This is silly," Julian said quickly. "There's another room across the hall that will be perfect for you, Danann." He picked up my case and walked straight out of the room, across the wide hall and opened the door opposite.

I stopped in shock in the open doorway. This room was enormous...it had to be the master suite, surely. It was around five times larger than the other room and the king sized bed sat on a raised dais. It had a sectional sofa in front of a fireplace with a large screen television above it. There was a balcony leading off it and solid timber shutters that were fully opened to reveal the incredible views of the mountains and the valleys below. There were two doors either side of the bed that I knew must lead to the ensuite and walk-in closet. "I can't take this room...surely it's already occupied?" I was horrified that as a guest, they might give me this room.

"Nonsense" Julian said firmly, smiling at me. "For the duration of your stay, this is your room, Danann."

I looked to Asher for help but he was so thoroughly approving of this room for me, that he was no help at all. "If you're sure" I said uncomfortably. "Thank you."

"I'll show you to your room Asher" Julian said firmly and walked out into the hallway. I cringed once again, unusually uncomfortable to be away from him.

"I thought perhaps that Asher and I would...share" I told Mia tentatively.

The disapproving look I got from her occasionally was back again, before she smiled at me once more and said dismissively "Danann, Asher will be hunting and coming and going...it's much better for him to have his *own* room, you'll see."

I expected her to leave but instead she sat on the end of the bed and patted the spot next to her. Trying not to show my reluctance; I sat down beside her, wondering what she would say next. "I can't believe that you're here, Danann...this is so exciting."

"What do you mean, Mia? We've only just met...you sound as though you...know me or something?"

She bit her lip before speaking again. "Not at all, it's just that I don't get to travel often and when I do, it's rare that I meet a female that I am able to...get

to know. You know what vampires are like, we either tend to stick together or kill each other and there aren't that many of us out there."

I nodded, understanding just what she meant. It was difficult for me too, trying to meet people that I could safely get to know; we had that in common. "I too have the same problems, although I have managed to make a friend of a girl that I work with. We shop and go to the cinema sometimes, it's...nice" I said sincerely.

"Perhaps...we might get to be friends like that...too" she said slowly and somewhat wistfully, I thought.

"How long do you intend to be here?" I had to ask.

"As long as it takes" she said grinning.

"As long as what takes?" I asked curiously. She was always saying very cryptic things.

She bit her lip once more and frowned, staring at me with blank eyes. Someone was talking to her mind. I was not going to confront her...I was going to let this play out; so I sat there staring at her intently, waiting for her to reply.

It took several moments but she finally had the decency to look mortified. She got to her feet quickly before saying "forgive me, Danann. Our guests have returned from the forest and Julian was asking me to go and greet them. Come downstairs when you're ready and I'll introduce you." She left the room very quickly and I breathed a sigh of relief to be left alone. Thank goodness it was only her husband she'd been talking to; I couldn't stand any more craziness at the moment. I didn't bother to unpack; instead I went in search of Asher.

I realised on my way down the hall that there were only three rooms up this end of the lodge, the master and two smaller rooms opposite. There was a gallery leading across the top of the open living areas downstairs. I walked across, calling Asher's name softly, knowing that he would hear me.

I saw him entering the hall from a room down the far end; a room that was the furthest away from me possible. He looked happy, so I brightened my smile. I did not want to spoil his time here and besides, he would be off with all the vampires hunting most of the time, whilst I had plans to explore the views from atop the mountain.

We made our way downstairs and Asher led me outside; he could obviously tell where all the activity was. I saw steam coming off what was obviously a heated pool. "Vaira!" I said joyfully and quickly made my way over to where she was sitting at a table, poolside.

"Danann" she squealed in delight, grabbing my hand and pulling me down into the chair next to her. I was suddenly, supremely happy; having Vaira here would make all this bearable. "I heard you were going to be here, Simon was very put out last night. He went into panic mode; you *know* what he's like. He might be the manager but you run the place and know all the ins and outs of everything."

"What happened after I left the meeting? Why did he make me leave?"

"I don't rightly know why he made you leave but I'm pretty sure that it's not because he wants to sack you." She moved a little closer and said softly, "he's here, you know...Simon... he *brought* me. I was a bit surprised to have been asked, actually but I wasn't going to stare a gift horse in the mouth."

I glanced about and saw a fire glowing in a brazier near where Asher was talking to Julian and a woman I didn't know. She was absolutely gorgeous, with long red hair that fell straight down her back. She was wearing a summery dress in pastel pink which normally one would think would not suit someone of that colouring but in fact, it did.

Mia came out of the house carrying a tray, followed by Simon who was bearing a dish. This was a little strange...they were all vampire, they did not eat or drink. "Danann" Simon greeted me with a big smile.

"Simon" I said slowly. I was still upset with him but I was more wary than anything.

"Cheer up, Danann" he said, grinning. "What would you like to drink?"

I narrowed my eyes at his ridiculously happy mood and relaxed. He was much more like the Simon I knew. I looked at what was on offer on the tray. Avoiding alcohol would be a good idea, so I asked for San Pellegrino and lime. He was a tad scathing of my choice but made me the drink anyway.

We were soon joined at the table and introductions were made, all around. There was Mia and Julian, me and Asher, Vaira and Simon as well as the woman who was introduced as Sadie. I was given the usual curious looks and for the first time, no one asked Asher if I was a snack he'd brought along

for the weekend. In fact, I was a little disconcerted by how much deference I was shown. Mia and Sadie in particular, seemed to go out of their way to talk to me but I tried to stick to Vaira as much as I could. It wouldn't be the full moon until tomorrow night but I had to wonder, why they weren't all out and about, running in the forest.

"When is our mysterious host arriving?" Asher asked Mia.

Mia plastered an overly bright smile on her face. "Later tonight or perhaps tomorrow."

"Let's play a game" Simon suggested. "Everyone has to tell us something about themselves, something that no one else here knows. There was a general murmur of excited agreement and I had to wonder what I might say. "Whatever you tell us; has to be the absolute truth. Mia and Julian, we know that you'll know everything about one another, just tell us something that will shock the rest of us. Now, I'll go first." Simon sat thinking for a moment before he said "I was the father of fourteen children once."

I was a little shocked. Simon appeared to be in his early thirties, I supposed and I had no idea how old he actually was but to have had *fourteen* children and have to leave them behind. It made me wonder whether he had chosen this life or if he'd been attacked.

Mia took a turn next and said that she'd been married twice as a human, before meeting Julian. Julian himself told us that he had begged his maker to make him vampire...he had been dying of some unknown illness in the bayous of Louisiana. I had been to that part of the States and could imagine all manner of things breeding there, especially a hundred and eighty years ago, when medicine was different to what it is now.

Vaira went next and told us that she used to be a dress maker in London, back in the early 1800's. I laughed and tried to picture Vaira dressed in something out of a Jane Austen novel. She had very trendy, sandy blonde curly hair and usually wore leather pants and tank tops behind the bar...the difference was difficult to reconcile.

Sadie told us that she had never been in love before, not even as a human. There was lots of murmuring over *that* one.

Asher volunteered to go next and his words both worried me and were strangely disconcerting. He stared straight at me, his eyes holding mine as he spoke. "I think that...I might have fallen in love." He wasn't talking about

me, he *couldn't* be. He had to be talking about someone else and I had to wonder why he hadn't said anything before. He had had sex with me last night...what was he *thinking*? I could feel myself getting very angry and I dragged my gaze from his, looking down.

If he wanted to know what my response to his revelation would be, he would have to wait; I certainly would not discuss it in front of all of these people. I suddenly registered the fact that silence continued to reign and I knew that they were all wondering what was going on. I had just decided to speak, when Mia saved me.

"What about you, Danann...what's something about you that even Asher won't know?" she asked enthusiastically.

I had been thinking about this and I knew that I had never told Asher this part. They would think that I was being cryptic but I would be absolutely truthful. "When I was born...I went from a new born baby to the woman you see before you in about...three seconds." I waited to see what kind of response I would get. There was deathly silence around the table and all I could hear was a Kookaburra, an Australia native bird, cackling in the distance.

"That makes no sense" Mia said curiously. "How can that be?"

I stood up and smiled at her. "That's a whole *other* story...if you'll excuse me; I thought I might go for a walk." I turned and walked around the side of the house, going across the front of the lodge. I climbed up to the top of the hill that I had seen when we had driven up and sat down to admire the view. The moon cast a lot of light and my eyesight was good but nowhere near as good as it would have been in daylight or as good as a vampire's. I lay back on the slope and gazed up at the stars, glad that I could actually see so many of them here.

I thought back to the times I had lain in the grass by that lake in Ireland. I did not want to remember him but he was so much a part of me that I could not help it; he was burned into my heart and my mind.

I thought back to some of the things I had asked him and I blushed; how innocent I had been and how curious. It was humorous but also tragic; I had to allow for the fact that perhaps it was my naivety and inability to satisfy him that had turned him from me. I *had* been rather pathetic compared to what he had to have been used to. I really had no idea why he had told me to go but I also knew deep down that I didn't *want* to know.

"My Goddess" I heard the words breathed on the wind and sat up, stunned. I looked about but could not see anyone. My imagination was getting more and more *vivid* and...*worse*. I sat for long minutes, listening to every little sound but I heard nothing more. Finally comfortable with the fact that my imagination was running riot, I lay back down again.

I shouldn't have come on this weekend away; as usual, I felt out of place. I had been alone so long, that now whenever I was around others, I was often out of my depth. I thought of the horrifying irony that these vampires, these Dark Ones, could walk in the light and me, a Fallen Angel was suffered to live in the darkness.

I was glad that I could sleep because I intended doing it all day tomorrow. I *didn't* want to talk to Asher and I wanted time alone but not with my own thoughts. I craved Jemima's touch. I liked being able to stroke her fur and empathise her feelings of comfort and safety. They were not sentiments I could achieve on my own, not really.

I was a little surprised that Asher hadn't come after me but I also knew that he would be monitoring me until I was safely ensconced in my room for the day. I got up and made my way back to the house. I entered through the front door and went straight upstairs. I closed the wooden shutters and took a quick shower, before climbing into the King size bed, where I turned the television on, using the remote. The room was lovely and cool from the air conditioning and I settled back to watch a comedy on satellite.

I heard no sound or movement at all and more than once I wished for Jemima's comforting presence. I glanced at the clock and saw that it was in the early hours of the morning and the sun had to already be high in the sky. I left the television turned on for company and lay down to sleep and a painful sadness settled over me, while I fell into an unsettled slumber.

I felt my forehead stroked gently and I sighed. A hand traced above my eyebrow and my cheek. It stroked down my nose and my ear; all the places that bore my long-healed scars. I sighed again at the strangely comforting pleasure of it. I felt the sheet gently turned down and I rolled over onto my side. I felt the hand with gentle fingers, tracing my rib cage where the bones had never healed as they should. It stroked down my arm; following invisible lines of scars that had disappeared after two hundred years of healing.

I sighed heavily before the hand made to move away. Without knowing what I was doing, I grabbed it and pressed it to my stomach, holding it there.

Sleeping had never been so satisfying. I felt a cool body sliding against mine and I breathed in satisfaction. Feeling so much skin against mine was heavenly and it felt so *right*. I absently stroked the hand at my stomach, before I rolled over on the spot and turned into the body in the bed with me. I didn't care that this was a dream; it felt so *good* that I never wanted to wake up.

I snuggled in closer and when my lips came in contact with that silky cool skin, I couldn't help myself as I kissed it gently...softly. I heard a soft gasp before lips settled urgently on mine. The kiss was coaxing and intoxicating but there was also a desperation there, beneath the surface. I found my hands roaming and all I could do was enjoy the luxury of stroking such soft, smooth, silky skin over such hard, taut muscle.

I began whimpering in abject need...I needed...I needed...*more*. I had not felt this way in two hundred years and now here I was *dreaming* of it...dreaming of *him*. There was no escape for me from this torment...I needed my Light back. "Please" I whimpered. "Please...my Prince...please" I could feel the tears falling from my closed lids as the body next to me froze. "My Prince..." I sighed heavily; my mind calming as the cool body moved over mine. "Yes" I whispered. "Yes, my Prince." I felt my tears kissed away as my body was filled in one breathtakingly, pleasurable move. It was so *right*; what was missing had been returned to me. I clung tightly to the body moving over mine. I felt soft lips by my ear and hands at my breasts and in my hair.

The soft lips breathed into my ear gently and whispered "my Goddess." I froze instantly. This was *not* right...there was something very *wrong* here; I was not asleep as I had dreamt. The body on top of me had stopped moving and though my eyes were now open, I could not see a thing.

I heard a click at the same moment a lamp flicked on and I was staring into the eyes of the man lying on top of me. I was so shocked, I could barely even think as I spoke the name that had *never* before passed my lips. "Seth" I whispered in shocked anguish.

He frowned but did not otherwise move. I tried to scramble out from under him but I was trapped. I pummelled him with my fists in urgent desperation, until he finally rolled off me; when I ran to the balcony shutters, my only thought of escape.

I flung the shutters wide and slid the door open. I flicked my head around; my hair flying as I turned back to look over my shoulder at the man lying on the bed watching me. I did not care that I was naked; my only thoughts were

of escaping this waking nightmare that I was trapped in. I stared miserably into his eyes as I stepped into the light; totally consumed with feelings of betrayal. My heart, mind, body and soul were instantly ripped into billions of shards of gold. The pain was excruciating and I vaguely registered the horror on his face and my name on his lips, as in the space of a split second, I ceased to exist.

Like what you've read so far?

**That's just the start – there's
three times that left to read**

See

danannfrost.com

**for more information on the
complete paperback edition**