



# Gavin's Tale

from

# The Crescent Isle Storyboard

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# Character Bio's

## ***Gavin Draegun***

CHARACTER'S AGE: about 1100

NATURE: Magically enhanced, or cursed, human

DESCRIPTION: Gavin has red hair, and blue eyes. He is 5'11", and 205 lbs, but very muscular. He wears his hair mid-length and loose, almost unkept, and can usually be found in shorts and sandals, bare-chested.

PERSONALITY: Gavin seems laid back, but plays at life by archaic rules. He seems cavalier about most things, but will take an odd course of action for reasons only know to himself.

ABILITIES: Gavin is unusually agile and stronger than he looks. He has gotten used to outliving his friends, and is used to periods of loneliness. They don't last long, women seem attracted to him and usually if trouble finds him, it comes in the female form.

HISTORY: Gavin was a knight of the round table, nephew to the king, and one of his staunches supporters. During a dare, he beheaded an enchanted knight and was forced to allow the knight to do the same to him after a year's time. He did the chivalrous thing and showed up at the appointed time, but the knight's lady took a liking to him and gifted him with a protective spell. He failed to tell the knight of this.

The knight hadn't intended to harm him, but found out about the spell. Gavin was nicked by the knight's sword, but otherwise unharmed... or so he thought. The spell had been cast, and used, and Gavin's life force regrew with each spring and faded with each passing winter. One by one his friends passed away, his former life passed into history... and then legend.

Although renewed each spring, the English winters were harder on him as each one passed. Finally he moved where winter barely touched.

And so he found himself on a small Caribbean island, captaining a small fishing boat.

## ***Virginia Matheson***

CHARACTER'S AGE: 182

NATURE: Vampress

DESCRIPTION: Virginia is a classic vampress. Pale of complexion with dark flowing hair, she is slimly beautiful and somewhat haunting. She prefers dresses, in deference to her childhood, and usually selects the dark colors which suit her general mood.

PERSONALITY: She is haughty and self assured, and is becoming defiant of her Mistress- the vampire

that created her. This is the final stage of a vampire's 'childhood', when they split from their parent. She is exploring herself, something that had been put on hold during her vampiric childhood.

**ABILITIES:** Virginia has all the skills of a well trained novice vampress.

**HISTORY:** Named for the famous girl born at the ill fated Roanoke colony, Virginia grew up in New Orleans during the south's long decline. Meeting a French woman one evening at a social event, Virginia found herself the victim of a very old vampress. Rather than kill Virginia outright, Marie changed her. Marie has been 'hardening' her daughter ever since. As Marie moved around, Virginia followed.

They have been in Crescent Cove about five years, and add their part to the local murder rate.

## ***Marie d'Aquitane***

**CHARACTER'S AGE:** 941

**NATURE:** Vampress

**DESCRIPTION:** Marie is softly beautiful, which hides a hardened persona. Pale of complexion with sandy blond hair, she is short but full figured with crystal blue eyes. Like her daughter Virginia she prefers dresses, but with brighter colors and low bust-lines to attract prey.

**PERSONALITY:** She is cold and self assured. She looks down on mortals as only an aristocratic vampire can. Over the centuries she has grown markedly cruel, but feels it is her right for having lived so long. She knows her daughter will soon leave, but she's not quite ready to let go...

**ABILITIES:** Marie has all the skills of a disciplined master vampress.

**HISTORY:** Marie was the favorite daughter of a French lord during the fighting that led to the Hundred Years war. Her father's stronghold was stormed and the men were all killed. As a prisoner, she was forced to marry the usurper to validate his rule over her father's lands.

Several years went by as she endured his cruelty. She came in contact with a vampire who haunted the local environs, pushed there by the growing hostilities. At her urging, he changed her to free her from her fate.

Although her master was a kind, gentle vampire, Marie still had a dark side. In spite of his teachings, when finally grown she turned dark, exacting her vengeance on the descendants of her father's killers with unspeakable cruelty. Unsated she continued her evil ways, becoming colder through the centuries.

Eventually she created a scion of her own, mostly out of boredom, and is teaching her the coldness that vengeance has left in her own soul. They have been in Crescent Cove about five years, and add their part to the local murder rate.

## Starting Late

Gavin looked out across the docks to the blue water beyond. A warm breeze tousled his straggly red hair through the open window. It was another perfect day in paradise. Gulls spun and wheeled through the clear sky, following the outbound fishing boats.

"Shit," he thought, "late again." He downed half a cup of lukewarm coffee and headed for his boat.

At least it wasn't cold outside. He loved the English winter, but the cold had started to seep into his bones the past few decades. His power base, the green things of the earth, faded in winter. At least it did in northern winters, which is why he was here in the Caribbean.

His sandals slapped on the pavement as he reached the dock. A few stragglers, mostly tourists, were sitting around looking for a boat. Eleven tourists, and on just a half cup of cool coffee. At twenty bucks a head it would barely cover expenses. Gavin weighed the two, and opted to go out. It was, after all, the noble way out- it wasn't their fault he had slept late. He thought of the warm brown arms that had twined around him the night before, and smiled to himself.

Gavin stepped lightly aboard the less than beautiful head boat. The Glastonbury Tor needed a fresh coat of paint, and her decks could use a fresh coat of wood as well. He fired up the ancient diesel with a puff of black smoke like a dragon's belch. As the engine idled and warmed loudly, Gavin walked amidships to greet his customers.

The line on the dock was all male, not unusual. Many of them were regular customers, with a few tourists mixed in. There was about twenty five in all, better than he had estimated earlier.

"Morning, mates," he said to the line of men on the docks, "twenty American for the morning out, and I'll stay out a little into the afternoon for startin' late." Gavin collected the money as they entered with few words, threw off the lines, and went back to the wheelhouse. When they seemed to have sorted themselves out, he pulled slowly from the dock and pointed the G.'Tor's bow at the blue Caribbean. It promised to be a fine, albeit late, day.

Much later the G.'Tor wended it's way back through her already moored companions. It had been a good run, and the head boat's customers had plenty of catch. Gavin had a reputation for finding fish even on the worst days, and today was no exception, the small keg he used as a tip bowl was generously enhanced. He wished them each a good afternoon and saw to the aging boat's needs.

It was almost dusk when the last of the gear was stowed and Gavin headed for home. The flat was dark as he entered, and he called out, "Allo, luv!" into the darkness, expecting a reply. None came.

He switched on a light and almost immediately saw the note.

"Dearest," it began, "I'm sorry to leave you this way. You have a way of pulling someone into your semi- dream existence, and when I'm around you I don't want to leave. You have a way of growing into a person, of rooting them to yourself. I will not live as long as you, (how long I wonder, my love? You've never told me.) My life is mortally short. The three years that we spent together are an eye blink to you, but are almost a tenth of my entire life. I need a family, a home that is permanent to me, and someone to grow old with. Forgive me, my love. I will never forget you, but never for me is different

than never for you.

"All my love, Naomi,"

Gavin sighed. Well, it *\*had\** been a good day. If he could have grown old with someone, it would have been with Naomi. He was growing old, but like a noble oak and not a man. Looking around the flat, he decided not to stay there this evening. Perhaps he could numb the emptiness in drink, and sleep the night in the arms of his other mistress, the G.'Tor.

Taking his tip money, Gavin headed back to the dock area, and the bar know as One Eye's.

## What Chylde is This?

Virginia stopped in the shadows at the corner where the alley met the main street. The breeze off the water was warm and moist, speaking to her of distant rains. She could hear the dark waves lapping against the quay and the creaking of the fishing boats against their moorings. From somewhere down the docks she heard distant singing and sounds of revelry in the night. If she waited here in the gloom, prey was sure to pass by sooner or later. Her thoughts drifted to Marie and the prey she was toying with tonight.

Her mistress, the master vampire that had created her, had sent her out earlier in the evening to bring back 'dinner and a show'. To Marie this meant a pretty, naive young man to torture and eventually feed from. The man would not survive his ordeal. His screams still echoed in Virginia's head, mixed with countless others.

Virginia herself was not outside of her mistress's cruelty. Although she had to feed, Virginia didn't feel the need to toy with a victim first. Marie knew this, and used it to torment the younger vampress. Her absence tonight would not go unpunished, and she fully expected to awaken tomorrow at dusk with some dismembered part of tonight's victim violating her. It had happened before. Over a century and a half she had suffered everything Marie's twisted mind could devise.

Virginia sighed softly.

It wasn't long at all before her quarry staggered toward her ambush. He was a fisherman, perhaps a crewman or even a fishing boat captain, and he was quite drunk. She knew the type, they had few family or friends to ask embarrassing questions, and the police were far too busy otherwise. This one was perfect prey. As he neared, Virginia heard him singing. It sounded like an English folk song from her memory, but she couldn't quite make out the words because of his inebriated state. He stopped a few yards from her and did a little stagger, close enough that she could sense the blood rushing through his veins and smell the taint of dark rum.

Virginia suddenly realized he didn't stagger, it was a few steps of a old reel. He wasn't as drunk as he first appeared. His singing began again, to the tune of 'Away in a Manger', but the words were all wrong, and only a few in English. Hunger gnawing at her but curiosity piqued, she silently followed him instead of simply ambushing him.

He stopped next to a decrepit fishing boat which had seen better days a long time ago. Since it was far too late, or early, to be going out fishing, Virginia waited for the sound of deep breathing. Her assumption proved right, he was sleeping on his boat tonight.

Her heart was touched with a bit of sadness, and she wondered why this one wasn't home. He didn't seem that poor, perhaps some trouble at home had brought him here. No matter, the dawn would find him gone, and whomever had driven him here would probably blame them self. She smiled at the poetic justice and slipped on board the boat.

She found him passed out on a small cot in the tiny cabin, the nearly empty bottle beside him. Hopefully the fool had drank enough to deaden her own pains. Virginia brushed aside the coarse red hair and exposed his jugular. With a quick movement from long practice, she sank her fangs deep into the warm flesh. The blood was salty and tart, laced with the potent rum. His heart slowed, and then

stopped, as she quenched the hunger that burned within her.

Finished, she looked at him lying there. The people who found him would suspect alcohol poisoning or heart attack, they always did. He had a silly grin left on his face that made her smile. Virginia backed out of the cabin and walked to the gangplank.

A pain struck her in the stomach. At first she thought she was being attacked, but no one was around. She doubled over, attempting to wrap around the pain that now wracked her abdomen. Virginia's whole body began to shake, and she wretched. She hadn't been sick in almost two hundred years, since her change. The sailor's blood was ejected forcefully as she fought to quell the spasms that overwhelmed her.

\*What had that fool been drinking!\* Finally the spasms stopped and Virginia looked at the brownish green mess on the deck. Upset, disconcerted, and still a little nauseous, she hurried into the safety of the night and her mistress's lair.

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Gavin awoke long after dawn. Hell, it was long after noon. His head was splitting and he could barely stand he was so weak. The deck swayed lightly as if to torment him. Bracing himself against the bulkhead he stood to face his most sadistic foe; sunlight. A sound left his lips halfway between a moan and a curse as he stepped into the daylight. Funny, he didn't remember being this hung over in quite a while. One look at the deck told him why.

He must have really been sick last night, it looked as if a wyvern had shit on his deck. Moaning softly in sympathy with himself, and glad he didn't remember it, he got out the mops and began swabbing the deck of the Glastonbury Tor.



# Curiosity Kills Cats

One Eyed Eddies, a bar right on the waterfront, was quiet for a weekday night. George, the owner and bartender, had a little extra time to mingle and talk with his regulars. One in particular had been more regular lately.

"You go out today?" George asked, inquiring about whether he had taken his boat out on a fishing run. George was really wondering if Gavin would settle the tab he had been running. Gavin was captain and owner of the Glastonbury Tor, a fishing boat that catered to the Crescent Isle tourist trade.

Gavin looked up from his drink. He had switched from the dark rum of the last few nights to Killian's Red, a detail that had not gone unnoticed by George. "Yea, first time in days."

"Time heals, glad to have you back with the living." He patted the shorter Celt on the shoulder, "You'll get over her."

"I always do." Gavin smiled back, remembering far more recoveries than his appearance would suggest.

"Don't we all," George replied, walking away. Gavin smiled into the dark red ale, his blue eyes twinkled under his tousled red hair, making him look impish. He finished his drink and dropped an extra couple of dollars on the table, tips from the days run. Stepping into the air of the tropical night, he whistled a little tune as he strolled towards the G.'Tor.

The wavelets of the harbor tapped lightly on the old fishing boat, the G.'Tor seemed quietly happy to have been out that day. Gavin boarded her, gathered his duffel bag from the little cabin, and stepped back onto the deck. He ran his hand along the gunwale as if stroking a lover. "Thank you for being there, lass, see you in the morning," he said to the boat. The Glastonbury Tor seemed to understand. He checked the moorings and headed up the dock towards the flat he knew would be dark and lonely.

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Virginia lurked in the shadows, as she often did. She was revisiting the boat where she had gotten sick after ambushing a fisherman, a rather disconcerting feeling that she hadn't felt in over a century. It was the second time she had returned, but the last time she hadn't been able to get as close. The movement on board the boat made her slip further into the shadows.

Coming off the boat was the fisherman she had fed from, who should by all rights be dead. She had felt his heart stop. She waited for him to pass, then followed him up the street to a small apartment building. There were only seven units, and the vampress followed her 'prey' to the sixth one and watched him enter.

She watched the closed door for a while, confused and curious. She almost knocked and demanded to know what he was, that he could survive a total drain.

Almost. Virginia was young for a vampress, but she wasn't stupid. Draining a victim was murder.

She got the man's name from the mailbox of number six, G. Draegun. There was another name under it

that had been crossed out, which explained to her why he had been sleeping on the boat when she had fed from him. Virginia wandered back to the docks, her mind fitting pieces together. This was the most fun she had experienced in several decades, a mystery.

She returned to his boat, the Glastonbury Tor, thinking it an unusual name for a fishing boat. The vampress wandered around the boat, touching little and disturbing nothing. Finding little to sate her growing curiosity, she headed up the dock to the tavern he had come from, a place called One Eyed Eddies.

The bar wasn't the kind of place for ladies, it was rather rough and looked seedy, but in spite of her appearance Virginia was no lady. She stepped through the door and looked around.

Fishing nets hung on the walls as decoration, and the tables were hatch covers. Thirty years ago it would have passed for a tourist place with a nautical theme. Now it was the real thing, a dockside dive. The few people in the place grew quiet as she entered. Virginia stepped up to the bar and looked at the hand painted price list, surprised to see bloodwine on it. The bartender came over to her. "What'll it be, my lady?" he asked with a heavy, but false, accent.

At first the words didn't come to her. Marie, her mistress, did most of the talking for her. It was a control thing with Marie. Finally she managed to say, "Bloodwine, please."

The bartender's eye raised slightly, but he filled the order and she paid her tab. "And what's a lovely vampress like yourself doing in this dive?" George asked her.

"Looking for a captain I know named Draegun, you know him?" Virginia sipped her drink. The plasma was a little old, but it was warm, sweet, and intoxicating. In her century and a half as a vampress she had rarely imbibed.

George smiled, a little disappointed. Ah well, Gavin needed a lady worse than himself. Gavin did have a way with the ladies. "Oh, aye, Gavin, good fellow. His boat is docked just down the way, you just missed him."

"Oh, damn," Virginia feigned. She filed the name Gavin away with everything else. "Is he a regular?"

"Oh, yes. More so since his girl left him, but he's recovering," George hinted, hoping that Gavin would appreciate the help.

Virginia smiled, taking care not to display her fangs, and flashed her dark brown eyes at the bartender. "Perhaps I too will become a regular."

"I'll have some fresher stock tomorrow night," George said, indicating her drink. "I imagine that's a little gamey."

"A little, but it's not too bad," she replied with a giggle. The vampress finished her wine. "Tomorrow night, then."

"Right after dusk," he offered.

"Thank you." Virginia winked, turned, and slipped into the night as only a vampire could. George just

watched her fluid motions and thought what a lucky man Gavin was.

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Marie d'Aquitaine was furious, but it didn't show. Instead her anger wrapped around her like a long, frigid cloak as it always did. Her 'daughter' had gone missing again, something the little trollip had been doing frequently, and Marie knew deep inside that it was time for mistress and scion to split. The impending split hurt, and Marie always channeled her hurt into anger.

Marie channeled anything into anger.

She was waiting as her scion of over a century and a half slipped through the door, which clicked softly shut. "And where have we been tonight?" Marie asked with ice dripping off the words.

Virginia knew that tone, her mistress was more than a little miffed. She stood stock still as Marie approached and walked around her slowly. "Hunting," she explained.

"Ah," Marie said, sniffing Virginia's breath, "an alcoholic?"

Virginia stiffened. "A beverage shared with a potential donor."

The older vampress put on a mock pout, "And I had dinner all ready." She held out a severed male member, waving it under the younger woman's nose, "I even saved you a bit." An evil smile crossed her face, "I know how much you love these, would you like it?"

"No," Virginia whispered, then added more softly, "please."

"You know when you awaken where it might be," Marie taunted, feeding from her scions disgust and fear, "or \*do\* you?"

Virginia knew that Marie could stay awake longer into the day and waken sooner at dusk than she, leaving her dormant and at the mercy of the older vampress. A dozen different possibilities raced through Virginia's mind, all of them having been done to her at one time or another and none of them desirable. "Please don't," she half whispered.

"Then you will have to sleep somewhere I can't find you, won't you?" Marie said softly. She held a key the the opposite hand as the gruesome trophy. "This is a storage bin with your things in it. Which will my kitten choose?"

There comes a time in every young vampire's life when they must split from their creator. Terror crossed Virginia's face as she realized that her mistress of a century and a half was throwing her out. She hesitated for a second before taking the key and running out the door. Marie laughed at her urgency as the door slammed. "Sleep well, my kitten," she said to the empty space where Virginia had been. Dropping the severed member, forgotten, onto an end table, she turned to her own bed chamber.

As fleeting as the rapidly disappearing shadows, Virginia ran through the streets seeking both distance from Marie and shelter from the impending sunlight. Several places seemed possible, but finally she found a small burned out cottage. Praying that it had a decent basement, she entered. It took only moments to find a way down and a suitable corner behind a pile of rubbish and the dead central air

conditioner.

Protected from the sunlight, and hopefully Marie, Virginia clutched the key tightly and curled into a fetal ball around it. With a couple of soft sobs, she slipped into the dreamless daytime dormancy of her kind- death.

## A New Dusk

A cool breeze teased the hair on the back of Virginia's neck, awakening her. The vampress remained still as only the undead could though and took stock of herself. She was still in the position she had gone to sleep in, and apparently in the same place. Her dark brown eyes snapped open.

She was still in the abandoned cottage, still behind the pile of rubbish and central air conditioner where she had hidden at dawn. Sighing with relief she uncurled and stood. Startled at the sudden movement, something scurried into the shadows. "Well," Virginia thought to herself, "I've survived so far."

The first order of business was money. Virginia had been stashing a bit in local accounts for several years, but she had quite a bit more in off-island accounts. She could afford a security deposit and rental, but would need to make arrangements for a proper lair. Being a little leery of anything near Marie, she remembered that the building G. Draegun lived in had several 'For Rent' signs. Besides, if she had designs on the man it would be convenient to be close.

Leaving the cottage, Virginia dusted the last of it from her clothes and glided down the sidewalk. Something seemed wrong to her, it was lighter than when she usually woke and there were still quite a few people about. It took a few moments for Virginia to realize that the sun had just set, it was still dusk. For the first time in almost two centuries she stopped to admire the fading colors in the sky.

\*\*\*\*\*

It had been a busy evening, Virginia thought as she sipped her bloodwine at a small table in the corner of One Eye's. This evening the drink was a little fresher, for which she was thankful.

She had secured a basement apartment, an efficiency, not far from the docks. The building that G. Draegun was in had been unacceptable, but she was happy with the apartment she had rented. The owner was also a Mambo who had warded the place for her, for an additional fee.

Her stuff, which Marie had placed in storage, would be picked up during the day by a small company and delivered to another storage unit. She didn't trust Marie, and didn't want to pick up the stuff herself for fear of a trap. Virginia certainly didn't want the stuff to come directly to her warded lair without going through it first.

Money had been transferred from her Swiss account to her Cayman Island account, neither of which Marie was aware of. Marie was also unaware of the 'back-door' that Virginia had into her computer, a back door that was difficult to access without a computer. Virginia had closed down the public library moving funds into an account in a fey managed Swiss bank. The people that Marie dealt with would be very upset, which should occupy her long enough for Virginia to 'escape'.

So now, Virginia sipped her drink and waited for the boat captain she hoped would agree to take her to Grand Cayman, G. Draegun. For some reason she felt comfortable with him, even though she had never really met him. She had fed from him and murdered him once, but had never met him.

He strolled in.

Walking up to the bar, he talked briefly with the bar tender, George. Virginia watched George indicate

herself. She had requested that George ask him to talk with her, and she stood as G. Draegun approached her table. "Good Evening, Mr. Draegun." She offered her hand to the fishing boat captain and added, "I'm Virginia Matheson."

Gavin smiled at the vampress's use of the traditional greeting, the warmth of it flashing across his ruddy face. "Good evening, lady, my name is Gavin. I was told you wished to see me?" He took the offered hand and kissed it lightly. His lips were warm against the cool dry skin of the vampress's hand.

Virginia felt the life flowing in those lips. She smiled back, surprised at the quaintness of the antiquated gesture that seemed somehow right coming from the sailor. "Can I buy you a drink?" She sat down with a grace that only the undead attain.

"I have one, thanks, but you can buy the next one," he looked into her eyes as if searching her mind, "if we're still talking." He sat down in the chair opposite hers.

"Then hopefully I'll have the chance to buy you one. I have to go to Grand Cayman, and it has to be kept quiet." Virginia looked back into Gavin's eyes, "I've recently split from my creator and I believe she bears me ill will. She is a very strong master vampress."

"Why don't you fly?" Gavin asked.

"That would be what she expects." Virginia replied.

"You would have to be on board before dawn to make it by dusk that day." Gavin leaned back, pondering the vampress before him. She would be inert, unable to protect herself during most of the journey. He sipped his Killian's, "That is a lot of trust to put in a stranger."

"Are you implying that you are less than honorable, Gavin?" A taunting smile crossed Virginia's face.

"Never, lady. I suspect that you already know that."

"I have a 'feeling' about you." She replied softly.

They discussed times and fees, and Gavin had his second Killian's, and his third.



## Docking

The day had gone well for Gavin. Today he had a charter, no sweaty tourists crowding his deck and squabbling over whose line crossed whose or which beer was theirs. The live wells were empty this evening, except for the three he had caught himself earlier that morning. The sun was slipping from the sky with streaks of orange and purple, another perfect Caribbean sunset. Try as he might, Gavin just couldn't get tired of them.

The lights of Grand Cayman were ahead, getting brighter against the growing darkness. The evening breeze coming from the island brushed his dry face and tousled his unruly red curls. With luck he would be docked by the time the light was entirely gone. Then, while his passenger went about her business in town, he would fix himself some fresh sea bass.

Virginia awoke.

At first she was disoriented, she had been moved during her daytime dormancy. She was still in the carrier she had purchased the previous day, sort of a coffin that could only be unlocked from inside. It must be dusk, she 'felt' that the sun was down. Virginia also felt the swaying of a boat and the rhythmic hum of an engine. Remembering that it was planned for her to be moved, that's why she bought the distasteful box, her fingers fumbled momentarily for the latch.

Virginia was rewarded with a soft click. She almost leapt from the confining space, not even double checking that the sun was indeed down. The cabin was cramped around the carrier and she bumped her head. Gavin, at the wheel of the 'Tor, heard the commotion and the vampress swearing.

"Is all well, lady?" he called below decks.

"Yes, just a bit disoriented. I'm not used to sleeping in a box, and I can tell if I've been moved while I was dormant. It was just.... upsetting." She sighed. Checking herself in the dingy metal mirror nailed to the bulkhead, Virginia touched up her makeup and donned her little black dress. After slipping on her pumps and grabbing the matching clutch she added, "I'll manage. Where are we?"

"Just now getting into port, you should have plenty of time. The larger banks keep a late shift for their nocturnal customers."

"Great, it shouldn't take long," Virginia said. "Then maybe you'll allow me to buy you dinner?"

Gavin thought of the three beauties swimming in the live well. 'Ah, well,' he thought, 'they'll keep.'  
"Yes," he replied, "that sounds nice, thank you."

Slipping out of the little cabin door beside him, Virginia stood up. "Then it's a date, how do I look?" she said. Looking out at the last strains of daylight she added, "It's beautiful, isn't it? If I had to choose only one little bit of the day left to me this would be it." She smiled and added, "Well, this and the dawn." Her arm idly slid around the sailor's shoulders.

"You and the sunset are both beautiful tonight," Gavin responded, "I never tire of sunsets or ladies." Thinking for a moment Gavin added, "You do realize that I can't donate, don't you?"

She stuck her lower lip out in a mock pout, "Why ever not?" she teased.

Laughing at the vampress's imitation of a spoiled child, Gavin said simply, "Allergies." He was startled for a moment by the sound of his own laughter, it had been a while since he'd heard it.

"You're allergic to giving blood?" Virginia asked, tapping one red fingernail impatiently.

"No," he explained, "vampires are allergic to me. It's an old spell put on me. Originally it was to protect me, but it turned out to be a curse."

"Protect you from vampires?" Virginia thought about Marie and decided it was a very good idea, even if inconvenient for herself.

"No, from the loss of my precious head. It's a long story." Gavin said, dismissing further questions into his old wounds.

"Perhaps when we have more time then...." The Glastonbury Tor had reached the quay so she asked, "Can I help?"

"Yes, you throw the stern line and I'll get the bow." Gavin said, welcoming the mundane chore of docking. He cut the engine and drifted into the quay perfectly, a gift of long experience.

Virginia faced Gavin, smoothed the fabric of her dress and took a deep breath. "Do I look presentable?"

Gavin admired the vampress. Warm chestnut hair rolled off her shoulders, framing an almost elfish face. Her ruby lips were parted slightly, her chest rose and fell in anticipation, and her hands held her clutch in front of her tightly. She blinked, drawing his attention to the deep brown eyes, and Gavin got lost in them for a moment. "You look stunning," he affirmed.

She relaxed. "Good," she said, "Well, wish me luck."

"Luck," Gavin replied, offering her a hand as she stepped onto the dock. The smooth coolness of her touch lingered as she disappeared into the night. 'Oh,' he thought as he watched her go, 'this is going to hurt.' He held his hand to his nose, trying to place the scent that lingered on it. 'May as well enjoy it in the mean time,' he admonished himself.

## Dinner In Port

While Virginia handled her affairs, the business of a young vampress just starting out, Gavin performed his usual end-of-day rituals aboard the G'Tor. Tonight he had less to do, there wasn't the usual tackle and mess that was left on the head boat after a day of fishing.

Finishing up, he sat on the cover on the center live well and watched the goings on dockside. Bars and taverns were alight with color, beckoning passing customers and pushing back the darkness of the Caribbean night. People moved in waves up and down the dock from place to place. Somewhere a rock band played loudly, mingling unsuccessfully with the mariachi music from the other direction. Gavin took it all in, letting the sensations waft over him with the scents of jerked goat and bratwurst. He almost didn't notice the approaching figure.

"Miss me?" Virginia asked, starting him from his reverie.

"I haven't even thrown anything, how could I miss you?" Gavin grinned broadly, "Ready for dinner? I'm starving, all these smells have made me hungry."

"Me too, look at all the people. Do you know how hard it is to walk through a crowd with blood-lust ringing in your ears?" Virginia complained, "And I still have to hunt mine, you can just walk up and buy yours."

"You said \*you\* were buying it," Gavin corrected.

"So I did. They told me about this nice place at the bank, the 'Fishing Pier'. Want to try it?"

"They won't cater to your 'appetite' very well, and the hunting will be sparse there too. If you don't mind lower class I know a little jerk place with a tavern next door that has dancing," he offered tentatively, tilting his head towards her.

Virginia raised an eyebrow, "Why Gavin, you surprise me. How well do you know this island?"

"Not that well. The owner is a regular of mine and I've visited his place a few times. He'll treat us right."

"Sounds good," she smiled at the sailor. "Sure you won't change your mind about donating?"

"I'll donate, but you won't like it..." At this Virginia recalled the first time she'd 'met' him, and the violent illness that followed her feeding from him. At least she knew now that it wasn't just her.

"Point taken." Virginia offered him her hand, and the pair started off down the dock.

"Remember where we're parked." Gavin teased.

Within a short walk they turned from the major road onto a side street. On the corner was a neon clad club with techno blaring. The throbbing sound diminishes with the glare as they passed deeper into the shadows. "This is a nice place for a mugging," Virginia said as they came to a wooden sign that simply said "Julio's".

"Shhh, we're here," Gavin cautioned, "and only a fool would try to mug a vampire." Virginia giggled as he opened the door for her. Heavy air, laden with kitchen smells and warmth welcomed them into the dimly lit bistro. The dimness was interrupted by an incredibly white grin from a very dark skinned man.

"Welcome, pretty lady," the man said, then he saw Gavin. Impossibly, his grin widened, "Gavin, man, good to see you back! Is this lady with you, you old sea dog?" He patted Gavin on the shoulder.

"Julio, this is Virginia. Virginia is a client and friend."

"Ah, then available," Julio hugged the vampress, "alas, poor lady, Julio is married. Do not cry, I know it must be disappointing."

"Careful, lad, she would kill one such as you," Gavin teased. "Perhaps you have a table open?"

"...and Julio's wife would finish what was left." He laughed, "A table for two then?"

They were led to a dark booth. Julio passed Gavin a menu, but passed a smaller list to Virginia. Opening it, she realized it was a list of vampiric selections. "He doesn't miss much, does he?" she said to Gavin.

"No, he might act like Jar-Jar Binks but he's very sharp. He's a 'lobo, by the way, an Hispanic Werewolf."

"I thought he felt different, but it wasn't familiar."

"He was also born in New York, don't let the act throw you."

Virginia laughed like wind chimes at that and read the menu. She started to select a familiar bloodwine, then opted for something simply called Jerked Plasma. Gavin picked blackened roughie. "Don't you ever get tired of fish?" she asked him.

"Don't you get tired of plasma?" he retorted.

"Touche'," she said, "point taken. So how long have you been running a fishing boat?"

"Only about a century and a half," he said blankly, "surprised?"

Virginia raised an eyebrow, "A little, yes. You're not one of the night children, so what gives?"

"Part of my curse, the woman who cast the spell really was trying to help me. It's sort of like vampirism, but with plants. The last line of the spell was 'and grafte thiss laurel unto these bones'. Short of burning it out, a laurel grove will live virtually forever. The individual plants grow and die, and the grove will split and migrate, but it will survive."

Virginia's eyes were wide, "That's a little scary."

"Oh, it was great at first. Now it's just a pain in the arse."

"So, how old are you? I'm only a hundred and eighty, barely more than a child vampirically," she said quietly.

"I was born in 561," he responded equally hushed, "in an area known as Y'Fallon."

"Wow," she responded with wide eyes. "Marie was only born at the beginning of the hundred years war."

"There are plenty of older pretes, and individual trees that are well over three thousand years old. I figure the spell will wind its way down eventually, I just don't know when. I'm aging, just very very slowly."

"Yea, but being an old man for centuries on end will suck," Virginia observed.

"By then we may have space travel. Maybe I'll drop myself into a star or something," he replied.

"Do you think that will work?" She leaned forward slightly and placed her cool hand on his.

"Oh yes," he said confidently, "fire will work." Julio arrived with their order and Gavin added, "Enough of this morose talk, dinner is here!"

Virginia sipped hers tentatively, and raised an eyebrow. "How is it?" Julio asked.

"Different, it's got a bit of kick to it. It's almost like having a donor who consumed a great deal of the spices..."

Julio grinned. "Exactly, and he was well paid too." Virginia smiled, showing a bit of fang. They consumed the rest of their meal in relative silence.

When he had finished, Gavin asked, "So, enough about me. Did you get to choose your situation?"

"You mean vampirism? Yes, I was entranced by a certain vampress but she did give me a choice." Virginia played with the rim of her empty glass, "It's more than most people that cross her path get."

"Ah, the conversation's getting heavy again." Gavin said.

"I guess that means it's time to pay the check and go dancing?" Virginia offered.

"Yes, an excellent solution," he replied, pushing his chair back noisily and standing up.

Virginia dropped more than enough money to cover their bill on the table. With a short goodbye and thanks to Julio the pair stepped out into the night.

## Dancing

"I hope," Virginia said as she and Gavin exited Julio's, "that you didn't mean the techno place on the corner when you suggested dancing."

"No, there's a little vamp place around the corner from here," he replied, "Much nicer, and it will give you the opportunity to hunt a bit." He smiled at the vampress. "Although they aren't very prevalent here, the locals tolerate a small prete' community."

Within a few steps they had rounded a corner and were presented with a sign that said "Bogey's". Big band music wafted from it's dimly lit entrance. Gavin paid the small cover to the doorman and they entered through a beaded curtain.

The interior was equally subdued with indirect lighting. There was no customary cloud of cigarette smoke, this place catered to weres as well as vamps. Gavin and Virginia were led to a red vinyl booth with an antique jukebox selector. They ordered drinks. "Moonlight Serenade" began to play and Gavin offered her his hand. With a sly grin Virginia joined him on the dance floor.

"This is nice," she said as she rested her head on his shoulder. "I don't need to hunt tonight, you know."

"I know," he felt his voice vibrate in his chest against her temple, "but it's your nature. Just as it is mine to be awake with the sun." He wrapped his free arm around her shoulders.

"So, you won't dance all night with me?" She looked up into his eyes and her lips parted. The light caught the barest glimpse of a fang. Taking the invitation, he kissed her gently. Her lips were soft and inviting, although cool.

"One of us must drive, and you, my dear, will be incapacitated."

She hugged him as they danced. "Yes," she said softly, "thank you."

"For what?" he asked.

"For understanding." He rubbed her shoulders, feeling the smoothness of the fabric and the cool flesh underneath. They danced on in silence. The music ended and they returned to their table to find their drinks had arrived.

"I know that bloodwine is not enough to sustain you," Gavin began after they sat down, "and I can't help you there. You are cool to the touch," he touched her hand gently, "so I know you should feed."

"Yes," she acquiesced. Her dark eyes met his, "Friends?" she suggested.

"Special friends," he said, squeezing her hand.

Virginia looked over the jukebox selections and picked one. A medieval reel, remembered only in undead memories, began. Gavin raised an eyebrow at her. "A test?" he asked.

"I was hoping you could teach me," she giggled. Arm in arm they returned to the dance floor and Gavin



led her in the steps. To his surprise they weren't the only couple dancing. All too soon the music faded and they returned to the table laughing.

"Excuse me," a voice interrupted. They both looked up at the newcomer. He was a young man, fairly well built and handsome, although non-preternatural. He looked at Gavin, "Would the lady care to dance?" He had misread their relationship as a master vampire and scion.

Gavin answered anyway. "Yes, I believe she would," Looked into her eyes he added, "wouldn't she?"

"Yes, I would," she answered, standing. She led the young man to the dance floor. Gavin sipped his dark rum as he watched the pair swaying to the music. Virginia moved with the smoothness that only the undead could. Her dress moved with her, accentuating rather than concealing her obvious charms. He realized she was using her 'charm' on the young man, and noticed his arousal.

Gavin finished his drink and stood. Catching Virginia's eye, he blew her a kiss and mouthed the words, "We leave at dawn."

She winked back in acknowledgement, mouthed back, "Thank you," and tightened her grip on her new partner. Smiling quietly to himself, Gavin headed out the door.

The streets were quieter now, the crowds had thinned out. Gavin walked slowly to the G'Tor and climbed into the makeshift hammock next to the light tight box that took up most of the small cabin. Morpheus found him quickly, and within a few minutes he was snoring loudly.

Shortly before dawn the small hatchway opened and Virginia entered. She looked over the sleeping form, pondering whether to wake him. Looking at the morning sky, she decided on prudence and kissed his cheek softly. Her lips were noticeably warmer now, and their color tinged with fresh crimson. "You're not off the hook so easily, my friend," she said as she opened her 'coffin'.

Virginia eyed the interior with disgust, climbed in, and clicked the latches as the first rays of sunlight touched the morning sky.

## Frumious Bandersnatch

Massaging her temples, Marie d'Aquitaine pushed her chair back from the computer screen. Ever since Virginia had run away she was forced to do the menial tasks of business. She hadn't gotten the hang of it yet, and seemed to be missing an account. At least she thought she was. Her brows knit in frustration, and it was now too close to dawn to find a 'plaything' to relax her. Tonight Marie had dressed for the hunt in little more than a midnight blue micro dress. Her makeup, hair, and nails were flawless. Now it was too late to hunt though, all the prey had gone home.

She growled softly. Even tormenting Virginia would have been some relief, but Virginia was gone. The computer mouse flew across the room, joining the stapler and a paperweight in the far corner. "Enough for tonight!" she yelled to the empty room. Her computer beeped a complaint, but it didn't give her the same thrill as a living thing. The Olympians would be expecting a funds transfer tomorrow night, but Marie just couldn't handle any more 'business'.

Those Fey bastards would have to wait.

Touching the intercom button, she was rewarded with a familiar, "Yes, Ma'am," from the other end.

"William, please come down to the lair," she said. Marie turned off the computer, making a mental note to replace the mouse, and leaned back in her chair. Playing idly with a lock of hair she waited and took stock of her assistants and servants. Fortunately for poor William, she realized she couldn't spare him for a bit of fun.

There were, however, \*other\* ways to torment a man.

Marie was still pondering them when the door opened. A well built young mortal stepped in and the door clicked softly shut. She admired him. He could have been turned into a Renfield, all of her 'assistants' could have. What was the sense of surrounding herself with beings who were willing to suffer for her amusement though? Tormenting them wouldn't be any fun at all.

"Why are we wearing so much clothing?" Marie asked, standing. He really wasn't, just his customary light shirt, belt less slacks, and sandals. It was the business attire of the island population. She walked slowly over to the young man. Her arm snaked across his shoulder and chest, resting on the top button of his loud Hawaiian shirt, "Perhaps I should unwrap you?"

William's body stiffened, he knew her tone all too well. She hadn't fed yet, and he was about to become tonight's 'donor'. He only hoped it was just a pint of blood she wanted. "I can disrobe," he offered.

He watched as the top button popped off audibly, clicked on the floor, and spun for a second. "No, William," the vampress said softly, "I think I'll \*enjoy\* unwrapping you." The second and third buttons joined the first on the floor, exposing his broad chest. Her lips strayed across the lightly haired expanse and found his nipple.

A fang pierced it and William sucked in a quick breath.

She entered his mind, tickling his consciousness lightly as she licked at the blood oozing from the small wound. He responded, and the light fabric of his trousers tented slightly. Smiling at his response, she

slipped back out of his mind leaving behind an inhibition to orgasm. /After all,/ she thought, /no sense in rushing things./

The last button of his shirt popped off, and Marie skinned it from his shoulders. It fell to the floor and pooled around their feet. William trembled slightly and offered his lips to her. Kissing them softly, the vampress felt the warm flow of life just under their surface. She gasped and leaned her head on his chest, listening to the rapid heartbeats like those of a captured rabbit. Her hand slid downward.

"No underwear, William?" she asked as she reached her destination.

"No," he whispered, "I know how much you dislike them and took a moment to slip them off."

"Good boy," she smiled. The two buttons holding the waistband of his pants popped off like the ones on the shirt, and the waistband loosened. By now his generous cock was straining the zipper, and she reached inside to scratch it lightly just under the glans with long manicured fingernails. She pushed his left foot sideways until his feet were separated by slightly more than the breadth of his shoulders. His breathing became deeper, and he anticipated her next move.

The teeth of the zipper parted under the vampress's strength, and the sliding part of the zipper joined the buttons on the floor. Marie giggled as his cock sprang free, and then she tore the crotch seam of William's pants loose from the bottom of the ruined zipper to halfway up the back. The slacks held on to his hips lightly. Now totally exposed, his genitals swayed gently with the pounding of his heart within the frame of torn fabric.

Her body slid against his. His skin was warm and firm against the thin silky fabric of her dress. Marie nipped lightly at his neck and her hands slipped along the smooth muscle of his back to his firm little butt. With a deft move, Marie finished destroying the trouser's seam, and the now separated trouser legs fell to William's ankles. Cupping his buttocks, she lifted him into her, pulling his engorged cock tight against her stomach and resting her head on his chest.

Fangs sank into his pectoral, and with them the contact of Marie's mind. William moaned softly. Her command to him was more of a picture than words, and he kicked free of his sandals and ruined slacks, using her as balance. She released him and stepped back.

Now naked, he stood stock still as the vampress looked at him momentarily, pondering her next move. With the smoothness that only the undead have, Marie sank to her knees and took the head of William's cock in her teeth. Anticipating the sting of sharp fangs, his body jolted slightly. "No," he whispered softly, "please."

He was met with the smooth, cool mouth of the vampress as she slid her lips around his cock.

Her hands slid around to once again cup his butt as he gasped with relief and pleasure. As fleeting as shadows, the tip of her tongue darted around his glans, slipping it's way into the tip.

His fingers found Marie's soft blond curls and she stopped. Soundlessly she stood, and William trembled, thinking he had angered her. Stepping to the desk, she returned with a roll of duct tape. Without a word, Marie positioned William's hands against his sides just above the hip bone, and fastened them there with several wraps of tape around his midsection.

She put the tape down and once again she engulfed him in her cool mouth, stoking his member with her lips. He began to move with her. Without removing his erection from her mouth Marie reached down, pulled off a short length of duct tape, and held it in one hand. Her other hand found his balls and gripped them firmly, pulling them down, and she wrapped the tape around the base. With her new 'handle' she steadied him, controlling his movements.

This time he behaved.

William whimpered softly as he strained against her earlier inhibition against orgasm. A cold sweat broke out on his brow. Her torturing mouth stopped it's assault and she stood, placing her lips near his ear. "What's wrong, kitten?" she asked innocently.

"I have to come," he whispered.

"...and you can't?" she finished with a grin. Thoughts of his impending torment flashed through her mind.

"No," he replied, "I can't."

"You're right where I want you, you know...," Marie taunted, feeding from her victim's arousal and fear.

Terror crossed William's face. "I thought so," he replied softly, "what are you going to do to me?" A dozen different possibilities raced through his mind, all of them less than desirable. "Please don't hurt me," he added in a half whisper.

Marie grinned. Once again her hands cupped his butt and with vampiric ease she lifted him, digging into his flesh with sharp nails. He writhed in her grasp, and his cock wriggled against her belly enticingly. She carried him into the bedroom and dumped him unceremoniously onto the bed. The duct tape around his balls caused his cock to stand straight up

Unable to use his hands, he pushed away from her with his feet. She grabbed an ankle and dragged him back, leaving up and down crimson streaks from the ten punctures on his butt. Being famished, the scent of fresh blood gave Marie a momentary rush.

After a seconds pause, she found the shackles she knew were attached to her bed and fastened his ankles securely. She removed her shoes and panties, leaving her dress, stockings, and garters on. William's cock had lost some of it's erection and lay to on side against his thigh. Marie lay down between his thighs, resting his cock against her lips. Sliding along his body, she dragged the fabric of her dress across his member and almost immediately returned it to it's engorged state.

"Now," she said, laying on top of him and looking right into his eyes, "I'm going to rape you." His cock slipped easily into her, and they both gasped. The hem of her dress tickled his stomach with her movements. She sat up, feeling his bound testicles against her buttocks. A wicked thought flashed across her face, and she grabbed a pillow. Stuffing it between his thighs, she trapped his balls between it and her own butt. Slowly, letting him anticipate her next move, she slid his member from her.

She came down hard on William's erection, crushing his poor balls against the compressed pillow. He cried out, writhing in pain beneath her, and she felt his anguish roll over her. This wouldn't take her

long. Stroking him gently in and out of her, she waited for his discomfort to subside. When he once again began to respond to her movements, she once again came down on his balls.

Within a few cycles, Marie's movements quickened. William's poor balls were pounded repeatedly as she neared climax, and by the time her body tightened in orgasm he was writhing in anguish. With a scream and a short gasp, Marie fell limp against his chest.

William lay there under the vampress with his cock still buried deep inside her, unable to move. His pain slowly subsided. When she slid his member from her, it flopped against his thigh. Marie put a pillow under his head, raising it up, then turned around and positioned her pussy against his lips.

Hoping that she would lift her inhibition against his orgasm, or perhaps free his aching balls, he began to lick her. The fabric of her dress draped around him, obscuring everything but Marie's tenderest treasures. She took his cock into her mouth, feeling the flow of blood rush into it as it became erect again. He quickly reached her block to his progress. Fangs scratched lightly against his engorged member, and Marie sensed his anticipation. Her hands gripped his buttocks, pulling him up to her as his tongue pushed her to the brink. The vampress ground her pussy into William's face as she began to climax a second time. Her fangs sank deep into the blood engorged flesh of his cock as she came.

William screamed.

His body bucked and twisted, trying to free itself from its bonds or at least disengage the vampress's fangs from his cock. Marie held on, once again digging her nails into his firm butt as she fed. Warm blood coursed into her, filling her with the dual feelings of life and orgasm.

All too soon it was over for her, and every muscle in her body became water. Laying on top of William, the vampress basked in the warm glow of life. His cock, drained of blood if not semen, lay like a shriveled balloon between her cheek and his thigh. Marie got up, feeling renewed strength with the feeding, and unshackled his legs. She felt the impending dawn. "Let yourself out," she told him.

He stood weakly and with difficulty, unable to use his arms which were still taped down. "The inhibition?" he asked. "I can't come unless you release me from it."

An evil grin crossed Marie's face, "What of it? Perhaps I will release it ....later." Her hand found his cock and it began to stiffen at her touch. Within moments she had it erect again, the fresh wounds seeping blood. She batted his dangling balls cruelly, "Be happy you still have them. Now, get out before I decide to use you again."

William staggered for the door. Unable to pick up his ruined clothes, he pushed open the door to the lair and heard it click behind him. It wouldn't be the first time one of Marie's toys staggered up the stairs naked from her lair at dawn. Helpless, her discarded toys that were left with genitals intact were easy targets for the women of the daytime office staff, who often exacted their own amusement from them before releasing them. He leaned against the wall in the stairwell as the full weight of his plight occurred to him, a toy who was unable to orgasm would be a special treat for them.

"Oh, William!" one of them exclaimed as he topped the last stair. They all turned to look at him as a wicked smile crossed the woman's face, "Caloo, calay, my beemish boy, it seems your vorpal sword is ready for battle."

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Marie was finally relaxed and ready for sleep. Just before her daytime lethargy took her into its arms a thought occurred to her; she remembered several unused accounts she had in some Swiss banks. Perhaps she had inadvertently transferred the funds in the chaos that followed Virginia's departure. Smiling contentedly, she drifted off.



## Twass Brillig

The fey sat quietly at the small table in the back of One Eyes. Smells of greasy cooking, smoke, and unwashed humans permeated the dingy place. The table was sticky, and so was the floor. She occupied her time trying not to allow her disgust to show. At noon, right on time, William strolled in. He was in his customary Hawaiian shirt and light tan slacks.

He looked around, saw her, and made his way to the table. She gave the outward appearance of an attractive redhead in a light gray sun-dress with green trim. "Persephone?" he offered with a hand.

She touched it, disdaining the full contact of a handshake. "William," she replied. "You look as if you are in pain, is there a problem?"

"Rough night. Marie decided to 'play', and selected me," he offered. The thought of a mortal and an undead coupling crossed her mind and she shuddered. "Care for lunch?"

He knew the fey wouldn't eat here, but liked the look that crossed her inhumanly beautiful face. "No," she replied. "I need to discuss her ...situation with you. She missed a funds transfer, is there a problem in her organization?"

"Well," he began, "she has been under a great deal of stress. Her scion, Virginia, has left. They had a falling out. Virginia, as you may know, ran most of the day to day business. Marie has been doing it, and she isn't really suited to it."

"Do we need to step in?" Persephone asked. William realized that 'step in' meant 'remove her'. If Marie met her end now, he may never have the mental block she put on him removed. He may never again orgasm.

"Not yet, Marie is picking it up. It is just trying her patience." He blushed slightly and added, "Hence my present situation."

"You mean your rough night of sex?"

William's blush deepened. "It was more of a feeding for her." Looking down he continued, "She placed an orgasmic block on me that she has yet to lift."

"Oh," the fey smiled. "you poor dear. Would you like to apply for hazardous duty pay?" She accentuated it with a giggle like tinkling glass. She empathized with him as a human would for a trapped animal, but being fey she couldn't help but torment him a little. Her foot slipped from its shoe and reached across under the table, finding his crotch. Wriggling her toes against his member, she smiled at his discomfort.

"No, but I would like you to wait until she lifts it before ....'stepping in'." William had opted against underwear, they would have caused unnecessary constriction to an already delicate area, and so he felt his interest growing along his pants leg.

"Please stop," he asked, "the office staff has already tormented me mercilessly."

The fey woman continued to rub her foot along his upper thigh where his bulge was growing. Ignoring his request she continued to talk business. "We're sending one of our operatives, a dhampir, to speak with her. If it goes well, and it should, I see no problem."

William knew that the dhampir would be a hit man. As a child of a vampire and a mortal, they had a certain ability to hunt and destroy vampires, although they were themselves mortal. They also, generally, had a dislike for their undead parent's kind. Out of fear the vampire community had outlawed their willful creation.

All of this was overshadowed by William's burgeoning erection. He was now fully erect, and his generous manhood strained at its prison. At least, thanks to Marie, he wouldn't have to worry about a wet spot, just the longing ache. He looked into Persephone's eyes for mercy.

A warm, sexy smile crossed her perfect face, dimpling her delicate cheeks. William felt himself buffeted by her charm. "He will attempt to discern whether it is her incompetence or greed that is driving the situation," she explained. Her toenails scratched along the tip of his bulge, feeling the ridge of his glans through the thin poplin of the pants. "If it is just incompetence, as you imply, he will advise her."

A cool sweat broke out on Williams forehead, and he hit Marie's block. He thanked God for small favors, but his ache increased dramatically. A knot of pain throbbed inside his lower pelvis, his inflamed prostrate.

"If not," Persephone continued as William squirmed, "then he will take appropriate action." She felt the tension in him through her toes and added, "Leaving you like this."

She looked into his eyes. His consciousness focused on the star flecked midnight blackness of her eyes, fey eyes. He felt himself falling into them and she added, softly, "Unless I help."

Marie's block vaporized, and William's body shuddered in orgasm. His world stopped for a second as his mind wrapped around the combined sensations of relief, pleasure, and pain. He refocused, leaning his head on his arms as wave after pounding wave of orgasm washed over him with each throb of his tortured member. Slowly his climax subsided, and soon he was only washed with gentle, lapping waves as the last of his semen was squirted into his trousers. He felt it running down his leg and into his sandal.

Persephone giggled, gripping her purse. "That was fun," she said. "but I really have to go."

"Why did you do that?" William asked plaintively.

"Poor William," she said looking at him, "it's like a cat that falls into a bucket of glue. Of course you would help the poor thing, even feel bad at it's predicament, but it still looks funny if you have to shave it." Persephone stood, smiled sweetly, and left.

William sat there. His lunch came and he ate, waiting for a convenient chance to slip out unnoticed. Finally the lunch crowd cleared out. He paid his bill and slipped out as inconspicuously as possible.

## The Jubjub

Yawning, Gavin saw the Crescent Isle rise on the horizon. He was home, but less than enthusiastically. Nobody awaited his return, and dinner tonight would be eaten in his small flat alone. He sighed. At least he would have the fresh sea bass to keep him company.

He docked in his usual slip without much notice shortly before dusk. His passenger couldn't disembark yet, so he busied himself around the G'Tor. Of course, there was little to do so sunset found him napping with a walk-man clamped over his ears. He was awakened by a gentle pull on one earphone.

"Arise, sleeping beauty," a sultry voice whispered in his ear.

He opened one eye and saw Virginia, now awake. "You must have me confused with some other princess," he teased. "I turn into a hairy old sailor at dusk." She laughed.

"I'll have the box picked up tomorrow morning, if that's alright," she offered.

"Tomorrow afternoon would be better, with any luck I'll be out in the morning. Got to make a living you know," he replied.

She hugged him, "Thank you for a wonderful trip."

Smiling, he said, "Don't be a stranger, it was nice having someone to talk to."

"Yes," she affirmed, "it was. I'll be around, and when I get my life in order we'll get together. You're not off the hook yet, Gavin."

"Later," he offered, and he watched her sway smoothly down the docks. Gathering his dinner from the live well, he gave the G'Tor one last check and headed home himself.

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A dark creature slipped through the gathering shadows of Crescent Isle's streets, doing it's master's bidding. Tonight the dhampir had been dispatched to assess a growing situation, a stray vampress that might need some inspiration. He smiled coldly, as he enjoyed 'inspiring' his undead kin.

Reaching the lair of his assignment, he announced himself using the coded name that would indicate he came on Olympian business. He was shown in almost immediately.

Marie stood up from her desk and looked at the tall figure in black. He reminded her of John Travolta in "Get Shorty", but knew he was exponentially more dangerous. "To what do I owe this visit?" she asked, offering her hand.

He did not take the offer. "It has come to the attention of my superiors that a large transaction has not occurred yet. They are concerned."

"It is not late. I've had some administrative difficulties and,"

"We are aware of your difficulties," he interrupted, "that is why you were not dragged into the daylight this afternoon. I have some information from an investigation of our own."

"Yes?" she said, her ears perking.

"The funds are in this account," he passed her a piece of paper with a number on it. "They were transferred two days ago by yourself. We're assuming it was an oversight."

Marie took the paper, gazing at it and wondering how the hell they had gotten their information. Going to her computer, she looked up the account and the transfers. Sure enough, her personal password was used. It was used from her computer, too.

With several keystrokes she transferred the funds back where they should be, and then to the account she used for her 'partners'. "Done," she explained. "I don't understand how I could have screwed it up that bad. Thank your organization for me."

"Would you like to know where the session it was done from originated?" the dhampir asked.

"Yes," Marie answered, raising an eyebrow.

"The local public library," he said. Allowing it to sink in he added, "You were hacked."

A light should have appeared over Marie's head. "That little bitch," she said softly. She turned to the dhampir and asked, "Can you assist me with a little damage control?"

"I am detailed to this situation for the evening," he said, "what do you need?"

"I need a vampress abducted and brought here. Can you help two of my staff?"

"Of course, lady," he bowed, "I rarely pass up an opportunity to cause discomfort to the undead."

Two large mortals were summoned, and Marie dispatched them with their preternatural assistant to the apartment she knew Virginia had rented. When they had left, she muttered under her breath, "Asshole dhampir."

\*\*\*

Gavin stretched. His sea bass had been all it promised, and what he hadn't eaten now rested in the freezer. It was dark in his apartment, he hadn't turned any lights on yet, and probably wouldn't. The cool evening breeze wafted over him through the open window, bringing with it the sounds of evening revelry and the smells of other peoples dinners. His eyes closed as he relaxed on his sofa in the small living room. Within several minutes he was snoring loudly.

He was awakened by the phone, which he answered with a groggy, "Hello?"

"Gavin, it's Victoria. I think there's someone inside my apartment," came the whispered reply.

"What time is it? Are you inside?" he asked.

"It's three and I just got home, I'm not inside yet. Do you think Marie would send anyone? I can feel two heartbeats inside."

"What about your wards?"

"They were put in hastily by a local wise woman and would be easily defeated by anyone with skill. I'm looking in now, it looks like....Ugh!" The sounds of a struggle followed, Gavin was out the door before the line went dead.

Gavin reached Virginia's apartment and found it had been ransacked. There was only one place he could think to look for her- the lair beneath Marie's club that had only been described to him. It would, to him, be the logical place to start looking. If, by some chance, it hadn't been Marie perhaps he could entreat the elder vampress to assist him in finding her scion. After all, she had liked the girl enough to spend almost two centuries with her.

Rather than run the whole way, Gavin called a cab and shortly stood in front of a large, trendy, neon splashed nightclub, "Darkside". He was turned away by the doorman.

Slipping into the small side-street beside it, he tried every door that entered the building. They were all locked tight. He was about to reattempt the doorman when he heard approaching voices. He picked a convenient dumpster to hide behind, hoping that the smell would mask his own if any of them were lycanthropes.

Two large men, carrying a bundle, were being led by a third. The leader moved with almost vampiric grace, but the other two struggled with their burden, which was struggling back. They entered an unmarked door, and Gavin grabbed it just before it clicked shut. He stepped in unnoticed and almost fell down the dark stairwell.

It took a few seconds for his eyes to adjust to the nearly light-less interior. The music from the club vibrated the walls, masking any sounds of his prey's passage. A doorway three landings down opened, and then closed with an ominous click.

Gavin mostly felt his way down the stairs, at one point stopping dead because he thought someone was passing him. He must have been mistaken, he arrived at the bottom without incident. Feeling the smooth cool metal of the doorknob, he turned it ever so slowly, praying it was unlocked and wouldn't make a sound.

To his astonishment it opened.

The small foyer was unoccupied. It was furnished with a small chrome and glass table and several dark red chairs. The walls were covered with expensive, and very old, tapestries. Hearing voices in the next room, Gavin slipped behind one. Nobody entered though, and he listened for several minutes as a woman, probably Marie, dismissed the men he had followed. They must have left through another exit, because pretty soon there were no voices at all. At eerie quiet dropped over the place.

Gavin moved to the next room, a combination office and living room. It was furnished with stylish metal and glass, no wood. He hadn't seen a stick of wood in the whole place, suggesting this was the inner sanctum of a very paranoid vampire. The room was empty, and several doors led out. He listened at one, and heard sounds from the club indicating it was the other exit. Another was ajar and led to a

posh bedroom. The third was narrow, suggesting a closet, and a fourth was reinforced and closed, but unlocked. He slipped it open very quietly, hoping no one was facing it, and heard Marie's voice clearly now.

"How did you get into my accounts?" she demanded. He heard another female voice sob. It was Virginia's. The air was tainted with the smell of garlic. "Don't think vampirism absolves you from feeling pain, kitten," Marie explained. A whip cracked.

Virginia screamed.

Gavin moved. The room was a torture chamber of sorts, implements of pain and restraint lined the walls. A naked Virginia was hanging loosely from shackles attached to the ceiling, marks crisscrossed her smooth back. Marie, in a bright yellow workout leotard, was behind her with a cat-o-nine tails. The irony of her outfit, more suited for a yuppie gym, was lost in the situation. She was dipping the tips into a bowl of liquid when she noticed him. "Filthy bloodsack, how did you get in here?" she demanded.

Realizing it wasn't going to go well, Gavin looked for a weapon. There were plenty of toys, but actual weapons were scarce. Seeing a rack of swords, Gavin picked a medium weight one and advanced, wishing there was a stick of wood anywhere in the place. Marie smiled wickedly.

"Ooooo, is this lover boy? Looks like he wants to play too!" The whip cracked next to Gavin's head and he ducked and rolled. His ear stung and he realized she had notched his ear, and also that the whip was wet with garlic water. That's why Virginia had screamed so. He felt his ear bleeding.

In a flash Marie picked up a blade of her own and took a stance. Gavin copied her move and they began feeling each other out with the blades. "I have been fencing since I was mortal," Marie began, "and that was during the hundred years war."

Gavin grinned cockily, "I'll not hold it against you, lady. I'm sure you'll give it a good try."

Her first attack was inhumanly fast and powerful. Though beaten back by the powerful strokes, Gavin parried them all and came back putting Marie on the defensive. The swords rang like sleigh-bells.

It tried her speed to parry his lighter blows, and Gavin nicked the back of her hand. They backed away and Marie reassessed her opponent. "Nice, for a mortal. Very well played, sir, but I can brute force my way in." She grinned like a cat with a fresh mouse, "Or I can wear you down. One, two! One, two! And through and through, My vorpal blade goes snicker-snack!" Marie misquoted.

"Or m'lady could simply bore me to death with meaningless prattle..." Gavin attacked, fast and sure. Marie parried, not so much looking for an opening as trying to keep Gavin's flashing blade from reaching home.

Gavin stumbled.

Marie, seeing her opening, raised her guard for the killing blow. It was a feigned stumble, and Gavin thrust under her blade. He buried the sword into her chest to the hilt, driving the point into the wall behind her with all his might. She swung furiously, missed, and wailed at him. The sword she held clattered to the floor. Her fangs bared and she tore at the hilt sticking between her breasts. The wound had weakened her, she could not wrench Gavin's sword from the wall.

Gavin grabbed the keys and freed Virginia. Marie still struggled and growled at them as he helped her through the door, locking the soundproof portal from the outside. With Gavin's support, Virginia climbed the stairs to the alley door, and made her way to the safest place he could think of where she would be protected during the day, the Glastonbury Tor.

Dawn found them several miles out to sea, and Gavin wrapt in uffish thought.

# The Mome Rath

Unlocking the door to his small flat, William stepped in tiredly. He dropped his keys on the end table with a jingle and flopped into the sofa. It had been another shitty night at work, he was beginning to hate vampires. Raising his tired feet, he slipped off his sandals and put them gingerly on the big cedar chest that doubled as a coffee table. His head fell back and he recounted his night.

It actually hadn't been bad until he got the angry call from Marie's dungeon. Virginia's boyfriend had broken in, pinned Marie to the wall with one of her swords, and freed Virginia. She would have chased them down, but he had locked the dungeon from outside and she was trapped inside with the only key. It was almost dawn by the time they had gotten a welder to cut through the door.

William laughed at the thought of Marie pinned to the wall like a bug, he sure wished he had seen it. That mental image made him smile as he drifted off to sleep.

It was well after noon when the pounding on his door woke William. He stood up groggily and opened the door. Standing before him was the dhampire from the night before.

"William," he said.

"Yes?" William replied. He hoped it wasn't more trouble, he didn't need more trouble.

"I understand there were difficulties last night." The young man laughed in response.

"You might say that," William began, and he recounted the whole scene of finding Marie.

"I have an assignment," the dhampir began when he was done, "I need you to leave one of my 'calling cards' with a little note." He passed William an oak stake, almost two feet long. It had a wicked point and an envelope tied to it.

"Why me?" he asked, "why not you."

"Because I will be reporting the situation back to my people. I want the present delivered before she wakes, where she is sure to find it."

"I'll leave it on her desk. We leave all her mail there during the day."

"That will be fine," the dhampire agreed. Without another word he turned and left. The door shut with a bang.

"Asshole," William observed, "I'm beginning to hate dhampirs too." He dropped Marie's 'present' on the chest and returned to his nap.

\*\*\*

Marie awoke.

The wound in her chest was gone, closed during the days rejuvenation. The feeling of helpless



humiliation was still fresh though. She picked up the jumpsuit from the night before, the bright yellow fabric was pierced front and back with matching holes. With a little sadness because she had liked that outfit, she dropped the ruined thing in the trash can and went into her living room.

The first thing she noticed was the missing door. The hinges had been cut off the dungeon door to free her, and the door itself sat against one wall. If she could have cried she would have, so much had gone awry last night. She wished Virginia were still here, she could always cheer her up, but it was too late to hope for reconciliation. Shoulders drooping, she turned to the mail.

Marie saw the stake.

Picking it up slowly, she turned it over in her hand. She opened the attached card and read it. "For you, my dear, if you do not focus more on your business. I would \*so\* hate to need this."

"Asshole dhampir," she muttered. She threw the stake across the room. It bounced off the detached door and she heard it skitter across the dungeon floor. She would have to find it later, maybe she would get an opportunity to stick it up his ass.

She went through the rest of her mail, mostly routine stuff, and found a tidbit. Her network discovered that Virginia's 'friend', the one who had humiliated her, was a fisherman that hung out at a bar called 'One Eyed Eddies'.

Emotions rolled playfully across her psyche and revenge twisted with admiration for any mortal that could best her at swordplay. Marie's curiosity was piqued. Perhaps he could be talked to. Maybe he could help her reconcile with Virginia, or at least return to speaking terms.

After all, it's not like he did any permanent damage.

All these thoughts danced through Marie's head as she dressed for the evening. It was no surprise that she was haunting the docks a half hour later looking for a certain bar.

## Tulgey Wood

Gavin ordered another Captain Morgan. He didn't drink rum unless he wanted to get drunk, and tonight he felt like getting toasted. He had been in many fights, in the last bad one he had left several fingers and part of his shoulder at Omaha beach. Good thing he regenerated like a plant. Nothing, however, was quite like attacking a vampire in it's own lair armed with only one's wits.

They had returned at dusk so Virginia could find a new place. Good thing she hadn't unpacked. She also needed to hunt, the previous evening have left her weak.

He banged his head on the bar. "Vacca, vacca, vacca," he repeated in Latin.

"Here," George the bartender advised, "stop that. I just had the bar fixed from the fight last week. Don't want it banged up!"

Gavin smiled at him. "Thanks, George."

"Lady trouble, Gavin? The only time you drink rum is when it's a woman."

Gavin saw Marie enter and his back stiffened. "Yea, and she just walked in."

George appraised the newcomer. She was a pleasantly rounded blond in a bright red dress. Her beautiful face was framed by bouncy curls. He said, "Oh, my, she's a cutie. You didn't kick her out of bed, did you? I'd want to get drunk if I lost one of \*those\*."

"Nope, I kind of ran a sword through her chest."

"There are other ways to a lady's heart, lad," George observed.

Gavin felt a little bad, after all he really didn't belong in the middle of a vampire power struggle. "How about sending her a glass of blood wine."

"Much better than the sword idea," George chuckled. "Another vampress? My, we do get around." He sent the drink to the vampress's table. Marie took the presented drink from the busty waitress, looked at Gavin, and raised it toward him with a smile. She took a sip.

The waitress approached Gavin. "She asks you to join her, says she's unarmed."

"Good luck, lad," George offered with a sly wink. He had misread the situation badly, as he did from time to time. Gavin stood and slowly wended his way to Marie's table.

"Are we ...okay?" he asked the petite blond vampress softly.

She smiled at him, "As long as you aren't carrying a weapon."

"Only that which God has graced me with," he smiled back with a bow. Sitting his rum on the table he took the opposite chair.

"Those can also be dangerous in the wrong hands," Marie replied.

"Among other places... To what do I owe this visit?"

Marie leaned back, appraising the man. He was average in height and build, apparently in his late thirties. He had a faint, unplaceable accent and a wild mane of reddish hair. He was kind of cute in a rough way. "I wanted to meet the mortal who could best a me in a sword fight," she explained.

"Ah, lady, it was a lucky stroke. You could have bested me easily."

A sly smile crossed her face and she raised an eyebrow. "Oh, I don't think so," she said. "I want to apologize for my anger at you, I was really mad at Virginia." She stuck her lower lip out in a pout, "I do hope you'll forgive me."

"Of course, and I apologize for pinning you to the wall." He sipped his rum.

"...and locking that damn door. If you had taken the phone I'd still be locked in there." She smiled and added, "I really was livid. I had to put my feet on the hilt and push with my back. I fell on my ass when it finally came free."

"I am sorry," he said looking down.

"No damage, except to my pride and a lovely outfit."

"I like the one you're wearing now much better," Gavin replied. "If you don't mind my asking, what caused all the trouble between you two?"

"You know how children can be. I didn't mind her moving out, but she messed with my business accounts. The people I deal with can be very ...insistent when everything doesn't run smoothly." She looked away and added, "They threatened my life."

"I'm sure she didn't mean to cause you harm."

"Just mischief, but she can be so irresponsible at times. Have you ever had kids, Mr. Draegun?"

"Yes, and I understand. It's Gavin, by the way," he smiled.

She offered her hand. "Marie," she said. He took it and kissed it lightly, the vampress's skin was cool to the touch.

"Ah, you haven't fed yet," he observed.

She smiled sweetly. "Is that an offer?" she asked, putting a soft lock of hair back into place.

"Perhaps another night. Last night's activities left me quite weakened."

"My loss," she sipped her wine. The fluid glistened on her lips and she licked them.

"If you need to hunt we could go somewhere else."

"No, I'll be fine for a while," the vampress smiled.

Gavin realized that Virginia may seek him out at One Eye's. "Then perhaps a more private location?"

She raised an eyebrow and one corner of her ruby lips slightly. "We'll need a couple bottles, unless you stock this stuff. It goes sour pretty quick."

Gavin smiled broadly, "M'lady, I have my resources. Meet me at the door?"

Marie ran a index finger along Gavin's jaw. He captured it and kissed her fingertips gently. "Of course," she replied.

Gavin went to the bar as Marie headed for the ladies room to freshen her makeup. "Georgie, I need a bottle of that wine and a fifth of the Captain."

"Ain't a package store, lad."

"George!"

George grinned broadly, "Ah, here ya go." Bottles and money exchanged hands. George slipped Gavin a pair of plastic wine goblets as well. "Glasses on the house. It's good to see you getting about again, Gavin. Let me know how it goes."

Gavin started in mock indignation. "Georgie, I'm a gentleman!"

"I didn't ask for the details. Good luck to ya, hit one out of the park," the bartender winked as Gavin turned to go. Marie was heading for the door, and he met her there bottles in hand.

"Where to, Gavin?" she asked.

"Well, the boat's out. Virginia would look for me there, and I don't know how she'd react with you there. Ditto for my place."

"Their putting the door back on at my place, welders and noise. Besides, I don't think you'd be very comfortable returning there yet."

"I know a quiet spot on the beach, between rock outcroppings....."

"Sounds romantic," she agreed. They strolled along the dock toward the wide expanse of moonlit sand, and the dark rocks beyond, stopping only for Gavin to get a blanket from the G'Tor.

## Under the Tumtum Tree

Climbing the outcropping of rock had been challenging, but not difficult, for either the fisherman or the vampress, although Marie did arrive on the other side carrying her pumps. It was worth the trouble.

It was a Caribbean- perfect night. The pair sat on Gavin's folded blanket under the nearly full moon. The expanse of glowing sand, framed and protected by dark rock, spread around them. Waves, their tips softly luminescent, lapped the beach rhythmically.

Marie was nestled against Gavin's bare chest, his arm around her. It was hard to believe that twenty four hours ago they had been trying to kill each other. "You know," she was saying, "I needed this. The stress has been unbearable lately. Stupid Fey."

"Shhh," Gavin said, putting his finger against her ruby lips, "they're not here."

"They'll be a problem though, along with the stupid dhampir," she said around the finger.

"They're not \*now\*," he replied.

She looked up into his eyes. A warm breeze tousled her soft curls. Her lips parted slightly. Gavin took the offer, meeting them with his own. The wine on Marie's lips tasted sweet, spiced with a coppery tang of fresh blood which reminded Gavin of \*what\* he was kissing. The thought was erased by her lips, which were warmer now from both the wine and the blood it was laced with.

They were both glowing with alcohol. Gavin's hand reached up and slid the strap of Marie's dress off her shoulder. Her fingers ran through the hair on his chest in response, pushing him back gently.

The sand was cool on his back, even through the blanket. Marie, laying on top of him, ground her lips into his. She was warm. Gavin lay there suspended between the warmth and the coolness for a moment, then his tongue responded. Marie's mouth tasted coppery, like her lips. His tongue ran across the sharp fangs.

It was a vampire's mouth.

Gavin's heart beat faster with the sense of danger and arousal. Marie, being what she was, felt it. His arms found their way around her, then they found the zipper of her dress. The night, quiet except for the lapping waves and the pairs breathing, was interrupted by a quiet 'ziiip'. Like a snake shedding an unneeded skin, Marie slid from the sun-dress. Her rounded breasts bobbed in the moonlight, free of the dresses sewn in brassiere.

Marie's smooth pale skin was afire in the blue glow of the moon.

"My turn," she whispered. The night was interrupted by another 'zip', a twin to the earlier one. Her breasts pressed into his chest as she moved her weight off her arms, squishing warmly. With her free hands she pushed Gavin's jeans off his hips, and to his knees. Gavin gave several kicks, and the offending jeans flew into the night, abandoned. It was immediately obvious that he never cared for underwear.

Marie gasped softly and giggled, finding far more skin than she expected while exploring his hips. His hands had found her rounded butt, still in panties. "You have me at a disadvantage, m'lady," he said through her kisses.

"One that I intend to exploit," she replied. She brought the fabric covered mound in contact with his cock. "It's much nicer than the last blade you used on me..."

"Ah, I do apologize again. I never,"

"Shhhh," her finger touched his lips which responded, suckling the digit gently. His lips moved to the soft skin of her breast, then the nipple. She pushed it up slightly, giving him better access. He moved between them, feeling a little bad because this was where the sword had passed through her. Marie's mons was still pressing on his cock, and it was responding. In spite of his morbid thinking he could feel the smooth fabric rubbing against his burgeoning erection.

Gavin moaned. Marie replaced her plump nipple with her lips, kissing his softly. She moved down, raining soft kisses across his neck, chest, and tummy. Reaching his pubic hair, she gave the tip of his cock a kiss and wriggled the tip of her tongue into it. The muscles of Gavin's buttocks tensed and she slid a hand under it, cupping one cheek.

Marie slid her lips down the shaft and Gavin gasped. He watched his length disappear under the soft curls and his hands knotted in the blanket at his sides. Raising back up, she rested the head of Gavin's erection against her lips and looked at him. "Like?" she asked huskily.

"Oh, yes," he whispered, "very much." She smiled, her fangs flashing in the moonlight, and went down again. Gavin could feel the sharp fangs brushing along his length and his whole body shuddered.

"If you keep that up, luv, I may disappoint you," Gavin cautioned. Marie's lips slid down along his length again in response. Her free hand wrapped around his balls, holding him as she slid him from her mouth. Kissing them gently, she kissed her way across his pubis and down his inner thigh. She felt the blood rushing through the strong arteries of his leg, and bit there gently.

::I can help that,:: she suggested, entering his mind.

::How so?:: Gavin asked, guarding mental parts of himself.

::I can block it, then release you at the right moment::

Gavin smiled. ::Won't that be frustrating for me, maybe even painful?::

::It *can* be,:: Marie smiled a wicked little smile, ::you just never know::

::I'm game,:: Gavin responded, and felt a little mental pull deep inside as her contact broke.

"Yes," she whispered too soft for him to hear, "you are."

Marie stood. Removing her panties, she held them loosely and allowed the warm breeze to play with them for a second.

They dropped to the sand, forgotten.

Her smooth body glided against his as she melted over him. His cock stood straight up, and she teased the tip of it against her nether lips before sliding down over it. Gavin let out a little gasp.

Marie began slowly, sliding his erection in and out with deliberate strokes. Very quickly Gavin hit her 'block'- the inhibition against his orgasming, and he moaned in frustration and arousal. Hearing his moan, her pace quickened.

Within moments Marie was riding him like a madwoman. Her body tensed.

She stopped, pushing him into her hard. Her body went rigid and she let out a sound between a gasp and a soft scream. Gavin felt her inner muscles squeezing his manhood tightly. Giving him several more manic strokes, her stiff body dropped against his chest and slowly turned to water around him.

Marie sighed softly.

Gavin felt her relax around his cock. His arms embraced her, keeping her balanced and pulling her to him. He felt the smooth coolness of her back and rubbed it softly.

He began to move his hips beneath her, stroking his captive erection into her gently as she returned to earth.

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Marie felt Gavin's movements. The fool was trying to get off, then she realized that he knew he couldn't. He was doing it for her. She smiled at him.

"Welcome back, lady. Ready for another go?" His strong hands stroked her shoulders and her soft blonde curls.

"You know you won't climax until I release you, right?" she asked.

"I know. I've had plenty of them before," he answered. With a quick twist he rolled them both, winding up on top, "but watching you orgasm was fun." Gavin began to give her long full strokes, raising her legs and resting her feet in the crooks of his elbows.

Marie started. She heard rough laughter and felt cold chain mail against her. A hard knot formed in her tummy. Wide eyed with terror, she looked into Gavin's eyes.

"What's wrong, luv?" The back of his hand touched her face gently and she flinched. He stroked her gently. His eyes returned warmth to hers, and she shuddered.

"Old memory, sorry."

"Shall I continue," he asked, "or do you need to talk?"

She answered with an impish grin and began moving her hips with his, helping him. His pace increased. Their bodies made soft slapping sounds, echoing the neighboring waves, as they came

together again and again.

Marie felt herself climbing over the edge again, and she took Gavin's hand. Bringing his wrist to her lips, she bit. They were past the words stage, all she could send was her body's response to his.

All she received was his. With an arch of her back that nearly tore his wrist from her mouth she peaked, muffling her scream against his flesh. Gavin stiffened, feeling her climax.

Marie released the block. Gavin cried out at the impact of his own orgasm, filling Marie's mind with alien sensations. She screamed again, this time loosing his wrist as she topped her own climax. Gavin gasped at the broken contact, dropped Marie's legs to the blanket, and fell against her on his elbows.

Marie felt the fading throbs of his subsiding orgasm inside her, and she rolled them both on their sides. His flagging erection slipped from her and across the thigh wetly. "That was..." he whispered.

"Yes, it was," she agreed. Gavin wrapped her in his arms, and she reached behind her. Grabbing the blanket, she pulled it around them both and snuggled against his chest. She felt safer here under the night sky with him than in any lair.

Soon, Gavin's breathing deepened and she heard his faint snores.



## Whiffling and Burbling

Gavin awoke, and panicked. He was soaked.

Looking around him, he realized that Marie was long gone and a storm had rolled in. The waves, gentle and soothing earlier, were now pounding against the rocks. He searched for his jeans and finally found them, but one of his sandals and his favorite shirt had been stolen by the sea. Bundling up in the blanket, he stumbled back over the outcropping of rock and headed for home in the oppressive darkness hoping he wouldn't meet anyone he knew.

By the time he reached his apartment the fast moving storm had all but dissipated and dawn was near. Gavin pondered going to work, then figured that a morning on the water would be good for him. "After all," he told himself, "I've already showered."

He hung the blanket in the bathroom to drip dry, then dried off himself and redressed. Grabbing a sandwich he headed for the docks.

At the G'Tor, he checked Virginia's 'coffin' and found it locked from the inside. She was on board again, so apartment shopping had probably not gone well. Several men were standing on the dock when he came on deck.

"Hey, Gavin," one of them called, "you going out today?"

"Yea," he replied, "we'll go out. Give me a few minutes to set her up, it was a strange night."

He busied himself with the G'Tor's daily routine, losing himself in the work. Soon the head boat was aimed at the deep water. It was almost time to return when he found the note from Marie in his still damp wallet.

It was an invitation to her club.

By the time the G'Tor had docked the note was burning in Gavin's pocket. Gavin bided his time though and stowed gear. Lunch was eaten at One Eye's. It was difficult to eat with George's barrage of questions and innuendo, but Gavin had managed. He headed home in the waxing afternoon sunlight, planning a nap and shower before going to Marie's club. The note in his pocket called to him again. Finally he pulled it out and read:

"Gavin, mon ami, give this note to the doorman at my club. He will let you pass, and let me know you are here. If you felt the same thing as I did this night, join me after the sun has set.

~Marie"

Gavin smiled. What he had felt was not a vampire's charm, nor a fey glamor. He knew them both for what they were. It was also not simple lust, although that thought had crossed his mind during the long morning run. This was something more, a spark from two souls that, like flint and steel, could be fanned into something more, or fade unnoticed equally well.

It would, of course, need nurturing and tinder like a fledgling fire. He stuffed the note back in his pocket, tinder for later.

Arriving home, Gavin attempted to nap. It was a bit difficult, but he managed about an hour and a half. He showered, and shaved, hurriedly, and stood in front of his closet naked pondering his wardrobe choices.

It had been a while since he had gone to a nice upscale club. The clothes in his closet reflected it. He went to his 'old faithful', his cedar trunk.

Gavin set aside the eight yards of MacDonald tartan, the kilt was definitely out. He pulled out a simple linen shirt. It would pass for modern. Besides, he suspected there would be vampires about so an old style would be less obvious than last years. A simple pair of button flys and boots from the sixties completed his choices.

He admired himself in the mirror. It was just different enough to look all right. Gavin looked into his own eyes. "Are you sure you know what you're doing, lad?" he asked himself.

He shook his head, pondered whether to change and just get dinner at the docks, then he set his shoulders. "All else would be mundane. Fair or foul, this night will be different." He stepped into the night, locking the door behind him.

# The Jabberwock

Virginia was dancing. For the fifth night she was on her own, and she was free. Her first vow had been to never cause another donor pain, besides being fairly illegal it was much more fun to give them pleasure. She smiled at the young man she was dancing with. Especially \*this\* one.

He was cute. His heart pounded with the exertion of the dance and the blood sang in his veins, calling to her. Virginia could almost taste him. Her cell phone rang. It was new, only she, Gavin, and several banks had the number.

The banks were all closed by now.

"Hi, Gav, what's up?" she answered.

"I believe," Marie's voice said coolly, "that Gav is."

"Marie."

"Yes, kitten. I have your lover boy. He was quite nice last night, thought I'd like him again."

"He's not my lover, we're friends," Virginia explained. She stopped and did a mental 'oops'.

"Oh, dear," Marie said, "that's unfortunate. Ah, well, I haven't fed yet." The phone went dead.

Gavin, hanging shirtless and barefoot from Marie's dungeon ceiling, wondered who this Marie was. He was certain that she was a different creature than he had met last night. She approached him slowly. "I was hoping for bait. You understand bait, don't you? I'm sure you do, being a fisherman. Turns out your not bait, just chum."

She touched his shoulder lightly.

With a smooth quick motion Marie pulled off his jeans, leaving his naked form sway gently. She stopped upon seeing him naked, remembering that he didn't wear underwear. Other memories of him clouded her vision, and she closed her eyes. Her body shuddered.

Gavin watched her, silent, hoping that the Marie he knew would prevail. He could almost see her fighting inside. His heart went out to her as he wondered what horrors could have done this to her.

Gavin didn't see the 'cat o nine' before it struck, but he screamed when he felt it.

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Dropping her cell phone, Virginia nearly leapt to the door. Her partner watched her run out the door with his mouth agape. Marie's club was several blocks away, and Virginia took off her pumps and started running down the street. Her feet left the ground.

She was flying.

She dropped the shoes. Virginia had never flown. It took her a moment to get her balance, but she arrived at Marie's secret back door within moments. The door slammed open at her touch, the lock shattering. She dropped along side the spiral stairway, landing lightly.

Marie's inner door burst open with the same fury. Virginia tore down the tapestry and stormed through the frilly bed chamber and into the central room. Lifting the temporary dungeon door, which groaned with the sound of tortured metal, she ripped it off and tossed it aside.

She stepped in, facing off with her elder. Gavin looked up. He was naked and hanging, but only had minor injuries. "Release him," Virginia demanded.

"Or what?" Marie asked. Virginia tried to take a step forward, and found she couldn't move. It was a trap. A wicked smile crossed Marie's face.

"Now, kitten, you shall have to watch."

Through his pain, Gavin heard a familiar singing. He scanned the room. The vampresses were faced off, Virginia seethed but was immobile. The rack of swords caught his attention. There, amongst the blades, Gwynrheged rested. It's elvish metal glowed slightly as it sang of battles, blood, and gore. It felt it's master close by and called to him. Gavin wondered how the hell it had gotten here, it should be safe in his great-grandson Wallace's care. He didn't wonder long. Had it only been his skin, he would have endured the pain, but Marie would end up killing Virginia.

Gavin opened his hand.

Gwynrheged, feeling the call to arms, flew to it. With a metallic clang the chains holding him fell like soft clay before the Elvish mithril. He was no longer a fisherman, he was a knight again. Marie turned with the cat, threatening another blow.

Gwynrheged sang through the air almost on it's own, and Marie's head fell from her neck. Several blonde curls drifted to the floor, severed by the same blow of the razor sharp blade. Gavin saw the surprised look on the vampresses face, and something else. Marie's body fell, and began feeling around for it's lost head.

Gavin could see the lips moving, threatening them with silent curses. He cast Gwynrheged from him.

Virginia could move. The spell, broken by Marie's beheading, fell away from her. Seeing her mistress trying to get the head back, Virginia looked around for options. The vampress's cursing, though silent to Gavin, roared in Virginia's mind.

Her eyes fell on the wooden stake lying forgotten where Marie had thrown it the previous night. Taking it up, Virginia plunged it into the back of the searching torso. It fell, immobile, to the floor.

Marie's lips mouthed one last silent word, "Merde!"

Virginia grabbed Gavin, tucked him under one arm, and flew for the door and the safety of the G'Tor.

## Galumphing Back

Gavin had doctored his injuries and donned a fresh pair of jeans, if you could call anything stored in a head boat cupboard 'fresh'. Moving slowly, and sore, he joined Virginia on the gunwale, sitting next to her. She was staring out across the harbor, listening to the waves lap the sides of the G'Tor.

"We have to go back, you know," he said.

"No, I'm never going back," she said flatly.

"There is something very dangerous there."

"Yes," Virginia affirmed, "Marie's ghost."

"That I would brave, to see Gwynrheged safe again. That sword would be dangerous in the wrong hands."

"The sword?" she asked, raising an eyebrow, "You named the damned sword?"

"It has a name, and a spirit of sorts. It is an Elvish blade, forged of silver and magic instead of iron and fire." Gavin looked down into the water. "It is a dangerous power in the mortal world." He looked back up into her dark eyes, "I had to leave it with others, it's singing in my mind disturbed my dreams. It troubles a peaceful life, wanting battle."

"Why not destroy it?" Virginia asked.

"It's spirit and mine are twined, inseparable. We feel each other."

"Then we'll return." Virginia opened her arms and Gavin entered. Hugging him protectively she raised into the air smoothly.

"I didn't know you could fly," he said.

"Neither did I," she replied as they headed back to Marie's lair.

The club was closed, it was less than an hour before dawn. The pair wound their way through the back door and down the spiral stair, moving soundlessly. The lights were still on, but an eerie quiet hung in the lair. Gavin went through the bedroom and into the central chamber.

Nothing.

The only sound he heard was the soft singing of Gwynrheged, a sound unheard by Virginia. She was listening for the mental voice of her mistress. They slipped past the broken door and into the dungeon. Gwynrheged lay on the floor, next to several lost golden curls.

Marie's body was gone.

There was no pile of telltale ash or long rotted corpse, not even an empty dress and a stake. Gavin took

off his shirt, wrapped the blade, and picked it up gingerly. As an afterthought he gathered the curls of hair and put them in a pocket.

"Why did you do that?" Virginia asked.

"If I touch Gwynrheged, I bond with it. It is not so easy to unmake the bond, I would soon seek out a battle somewhere in the world."

"No," she said, "the locks of Marie's hair."

Gavin blushed and looked down, "We all need our memories. Perhaps I was hoping for something...."

Virginia replied with silence. William stepped into the dungeon and saw the pair.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded.

"What are \*you\* doing here, Wallace William?" Gavin demanded back.

"Don't call me that, it's William. I see you two found each other."

"We came her together," Virginia said. Looking at Gavin she asked, "You know William?"

"He's my great-grandson," Gavin replied.

"I meant him and the sword," William explained. "I was told that Marie had... interest in him and I left it where he might need it."

"On your own?" Gavin asked.

"Probably not, ancestor." He pointed at the bundled Gwynrheged, "That damned thing probably manipulated me." Looking around, William added, "Where is Marie?"

"Gone, Gavin beheaded her and I staked her."

"We just don't know where her body is," Gavin added. "Would you please take this back and hide it?" he asked, offering Gwynrheged to William.

"If your sure you're done with it."

"Oh, definitely," Gavin replied quickly. Softly he added, "Thank you, Wally."

"My pleasure, ancient." William turned to Virginia, "If Marie is truly gone, then the club and all her interests fall to you as her only scion. It's in her will, I helped her make it out."

Virginia sat with a thud. "I think, if she's really gone, that I'll go legit." She looked at the young man, "William, do you know enough about her ties with the Olympians to break with them?"

"It won't be easy, Ma'am, but I will try." He bowed. Carrying the bundled sword, he headed for the door to the business office.

"Staying here?" Gavin asked Virginia.

"Not just no, but HELL no," she answered. Arm in arm they headed for the G'Tor under the gathering dawn.

## Love Blooms Anew

Gwynrheghed sang softly to herself. Tonight for the first time in decades her lover had embraced her; she had waited so long for his return. They had fed together. It was only a brief feeding, just one bloodletting.

But it had been so long.

She feared it would be his last embrace, he had been so cold toward her the past few decades. He didn't listen to her singing anymore, if he even heard. Her song turned sad with that thought, following an ancient Elvish dirge like a stream changing its course. Where would she be, stranded in the mortal world without her prince.

Perhaps, like others of her kind, she would be lost. Buried with a corpse or lying forgotten at the bottom of a cold dark lake was a terrible way to face eternity. Her terror of that living death colored her song, but still she sang.

Her singing paused momentarily and then took an overtone of anticipation. Danger approached, and she felt it.

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Wally was taking a chance. He knew the section of town he passed through was Al Paca turf, but he needed to hurry his burden home. Gavin had been specific, take the sword and return it to its hiding place before anything happened to it.

Yea, in the middle of the night. He put his head down and hoped the 'Pacas didn't take notice of him. The South American were-rats had moved in a few years earlier and were challenging the Olympians in the Caribbean Islands, and the Crescent Islands were no different. Both dealt in the lucrative drug trade, and the 'Pacas were tied to Columbia.

Like any good criminal organization the 'Pacas knew the players in the area. Wally assumed they would know of his Olympian ties. He was taking a big chance. Slipping down a darkened side street, he tried to remain unnoticed and hoped his luck would hold.

He saw movement in the shadows ahead of him and realized that his luck had run out. There was no way he could hide, and if he turned and ran they would run him down like prey. His best chance was to feign ignorance and hope nobody recognized him. Walking forward as if lost, he approached the group of gang-bangers.

The five were-rats surrounded him. "Hey, hombre, you lost?"

"Yea, this ain't the tourista district, no expensive whores out here," another added.

"I was looking for the docks, could one of you direct me?" Wally asked.

The one directly in front of him smiled showing a gold tooth, "How much money you got, friend, maybe we can sell you a map?" The others laughed. "What's in the package? Rosies for the lady



friend?" Wally realized it wasn't going to go well. He was unarmed and faced five more than likely armed weres.

"Need some help, Hombre? Maybe she will like your new friends too."

Wally's thought turned to Gwynrheghed, and in an instant the rat's keen smell picked up his concern. "Oh, not rosies then. Something better?" He grabbed for the package.

Before he knew what he was doing Wally drew Gwynrheghed from hiding. The Elvish sword glowed. He felt it in his mind, guiding his hand. It sliced the air with a whoosh. The Pacas stepped back momentarily, then began to move in.

The singing of the sword entered Wally's head as she took the first two opponents in one stroke. The weapon took on a life of it's own. Before the others could react Gwynrheghed took a third. The remaining two turned to run. The sword thrust and the fourth fell, wounded. The fifth 'Paca ran for his life as only a were-rat could.

Wally fought briefly for control of his sword arm, and then Gwynrheghed lashed out and took the fourth's life. Finally in control, Wally wiped the glowing blade on the fourth's clothes and sheathed the sword.

The ancient was gonna be pissed!

Sheathing his bravado with the sword, Wally took off at a run for home. It wasn't until much later that he heard the soft singing in his head.

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Gwynrheghed had been awakened from her half dream. Her old lover must be gone, for a new prince of Rheghed had wielded her. It had been so long. The attacking force was only five, another light feeding and she'd had only four of them. Still, she took them with no effort, and their blood tasted sweet. It was much sweeter than the vampress that her last lover had fed her.

She sang softly to her new lover, hoping that he wouldn't be as cold toward her as her last one had turned.

## Dissolution

Once again Persephone sat quietly at the small table in the back of One Eyes. The place still smelled of grease, smoke, and unwashed humans. The table was still sticky. At noon, promptly as ever, William strolled in. Today he moved with an air of self assurance, and went right to the table.

He offered his hand to the attractive redhead, and she touched it. "William," she acknowledged.

"William is my middle name, I've decided to start using Wallace. Friends can call me Wally," he smiled.

"Very well, Wallace." the sidhe replied coldly. "What news of Marie?"

"None, she seems to have disappeared. The report is that she and Virginia argued over a man." Wally looked her in the eyes, feeling the spatial coldness in them. "Virginia staked her."

Persephone raised an eyebrow. "How inconvenient. What is the dispensation of the organization?"

"Virginia gets it, but she has little... aptitude for the less legal aspects. I would suggest breaking it up, letting her have the club and legit stuff." Wally leaned towards her and lowered his voice conspiratorially. "We can give the smuggling and drug portions to one of our own."

"Can she be coerced into signing a portion of the operation away without a fuss." Persephone asked.

"Right now she'll sign about anything I give her. I'll have to act fast, before she comprehends the scope of our operation. Who should I sign it over to?"

"Hmmm, how about Morris Rowen, the dhampir?" Persephone grinned. "Him we can control. I'm sure he won't mind taking up residence in Crescent Isle if we insist."

"He's such an ass..." Wally observed.

"Yes," she replied, "and he does so \*hate\* the tropics." The pair laughed. "You'll stay with Virginia's organization. Make sure she doesn't start up a rival organization in Marie's absence."

"I don't think the Olympians need worry, but I will stay with the legit part of the business."

Persephone raised her eyebrow yet again, "I do not believe you will be leaving the organization the easily, Wallace, no matter what you change your name to."

"Yes, that is true. Consider, though, that an enforcer for the organization will need a legitimate occupation as a cover," he replied conspiratorially. "With Morris occupied here I assume you'll need to backfill, and I'm thinking of a career change."

"You haven't really shown an aptitude for it though....."

"Well," Wally replied quickly, "there were those Al Paca's all sliced up last night. I understand one got away saying something about a crazy guy with an elvish sword."

Persephone knew of only one way Wally would know that. "I'll.... mention that in my report. Are you sure that Virginia will be satisfied with just the club and the import/export business?" Persephone asked incredulously. "They were a very small part of Marie's domain."

"I suspect she will expand, but not into your arena."

"Very well. I will take this to my people, but I see no problem if the paperwork and transfers happen. If they don't...." She winked, suggesting that he should already know.

He did.

"Staying for lunch?" Wally asked innocently, smiling at her look of utter disgust.

"You are, of course, kidding." Persephone stood, offering her hand hesitantly. "Wallace, stay in touch." Wally touched it lightly as she did with him. He knew that 'staying in touch' was far more than a suggestion.

"Of course," he replied. He watched her leave and ordered lunch.

\*\*\*

Virginia walked into Marie's business office, just above her lair. Work stopped and a silence fell over Wallace and the three women. She scanned them, knowing them all from when she lived with her mistress. She had worked closely with all of them, but now she was the boss.

"Good evening," she said, smiling.

The tension lightened. "I have the transfer papers ready, Virginia." Wally offered.

"They have the organizational changes we discussed?" she asked him.

"Yes, I talked to Marie's business partners that are affected. I had to let go of a significant portion of the joint holdings, but it leaves us with the import/export business and the club. We are still sole exporters of Crescent Rain and several other local manufacturers, and import the same dry goods and such from the U.S."

"Good," Virginia replied, "and the club?"

"We had to let go of quite a few employees, so we are hiring bartenders, dancers, and servers. We also need a D.J. and bouncers." Wally said.

"Ouch. Are we even open?" she asked wide eyed.

"For now. If you know of anyone though..."

"I might get the Sanchez brothers to bounce, their mother helped me out and I owe them. They're both lycs."

"We'll put an ad in the papers, there are plenty of good people on Crescent Isle. We'll be short for a few days, but we'll be fine," he comforted.

"Yea," Virginia said flatly. "I'm going downstairs. I'm going to go through Marie's stuff." ("and a lot of memories," she added mentally.)

"Good luck, boss lady," Wally offered.

Virginia steeled her shoulders and stood at the top of the stairs. The stairwell was dark except for the light flowing in from behind her. It didn't matter, she could walk it blindfolded.

She glided down the steps, opening the door at the bottom. Marie's living room was empty. It still had all the furniture and tapestries. The computer still sat on the desk where it should, but the presence was gone.

Marie's presence.

The dungeon door lay to one side, bent and twisted off its hinges. A breeze ruffled edges of tapestries and Virginia realized that the back door was still open. She went through the bedroom and up the spiral stair. Closing the upper door she returned, closing doors as she went.

Virginia stood next to the bed. It was their bed, the one she had shared with Marie for so long. Realizing that she was not yet ready to do this, Virginia went back up to the office. "Wallace," she began.

"Wally," he corrected.

"Wally, have the dungeon dismantled and that steel door replaced with a wood one, one with louvers. Pack up the tapestries and hangings. I want one of those murals, an outdoor scene of, um... maybe woods in the living room. Leave the bedroom and closets for me, I'll have to go through them." She looked around the small office, "And have my desk moved up here, into that corner." Virginia indicated the corner nearest the stairs, which was partitioned off and held the copier and its supplies.

"Okay," he said, "where will you be if we need you?"

"I'm going dancing. I have my cell phone." she replied heading for the door.

"Very well," he said, watching her go. "We all have our own demons," he added under his breath.

## From the Sea

Waves lapped at the sand before Gavin gently, the sun was setting with all the colorful glory that the Caribbean sky was capable of. Warm wind tousled his coarse red hair. Gavin stood where he and Marie had made love, savoring the memory. Marie's head and body had been gone, along with the stake, when they had returned to her lair.

He hoped, oddly, that she was well. A tear touched his cheek as he thought of the soft curls falling around her head, severed with her neck by the finely honed Elvish mithrill of Gwynrheged.

Gwynrheged, his blade, wielded by his hand.

With tears streaming down his cheeks Gavin spoke. He chanted in archaic Briton, calling for a protector to watch over her should she still survive. He called to the sky, sea, Sun, and Earth, intoning the phrases taught to him by his fey friends.

Somewhere, in the gathering shadows, the call of his broken heart was answered.

The pooka heard someone calling in the old tongue, almost pulling at him to answer. It stepped from the water, taking on it's equine form. It's whithers were the sea green, but it's mane and tail gleamed white as the foam that capped the waves. "Who calls?"

Gavin stopped. At first he thought it was the waves, but then he saw the creature. He had heard of the Pooka, but this was the first time in all his years he had actually seen one. "It is I, Gawain son of Urbgen, prince of Rheged, right hand of the Cenna of Y'Fallon and blood friend of the Green One. Who has answered?"

The pooka shook it's head slowly, the moonlight gleamed on the white mane, and star shaped scar on his forehead. "You may call me Marcavalo. If you know so much, you know what and who I am. I am near the last of my kind." he studied the man before him, frowning slightly, "For what purpose do you call me from my habitual trod?"

"Ah, a noble creature for a noble task. One would wonder if it was mere chance that brought us both to this here and now." Gavin took a golden curl of hair from his pocket and pondered it. He remembered running his hand through them. "Take this lock of hair, find the head from whence it has come, and keep it safe." Gavin passed the lock to Marcavalo and looked into the waves, "When the time comes, tell her I love her."

The pooka, now in human form, raised a silver eyebrow, took the lock of hair, and pondered it. "This is most unusual. You ask that I find and save a vampiress?" he laughed, and his laugh was like a lion's roar, but also like a horse's neighing. He did not smile.

"No, simply keep her safe. I feel she will save herself, or perish." Gavin said quietly.

"I will do as you ask, if only for the sake of the child she once was."

"What she once was," Gavin repeated, turning from Marcavalo and looking into the sea. "Perhaps that is the part that most needs protecting, and the part that draws my heart tight like a bow."

Marcavalo stepped closer to Gavin, "Be warned, Gawain of Rheged, should you prove false, so shall her safety." He turned to go, "I can only hold so much power."

"Understood," he agreed to the vanishing creature.

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Marie awoke at dusk to the sounds of children playing. She pushed the massive stone, the door to her 'priest hole', free and breathed in the musty air of the ancient Spanish fort. The place was a bit of a tourist attraction, it's only purpose since pirates no longer plied the seas of the barren north shore. There was no beach here, just the rocks and the waves that had battered them for centuries. There were also no people.

The waves called to her with the voices of children. Marie listened, skipping across the worn stones of the main hall of her fathers castle and out the door. She made her way gingerly down the rocks, wondering why she had never noticed that her father's castle had a beach.

Marie stopped with her bare feet on the wet rocks. The other children could just touch her, and they sang a song about daisies and summer fields. She did not wonder why the waves sang in perfect medieval Occitan, or with the voices of children. Her voice joined theirs, singing joyfully.

They threw a stick to her, and she threw it back. Marie watched it bounce from wave to wave, until one of the other children threw it back to her.

And she laughed.

Tiring of the game and the songs, Marie bid her friends adeiu and went back to her father's castle. Her chest and neck ached, and she felt weak. She wondered where the door to the hall had gone, but surmized that the English had taken it with them. The English took everything.

She stopped, seeing flames and hearing coarse laughter. It was gone in a flash, and she saw Bernius, the minstrel, looking for dinner. "Bernius, why did you change yourself into a rat before you opened that trashcan? Silly man, now I shall have to help you."

Marie lifted the lid and pulled out several pieces of bread and part of a brownie, the remains of some tourists lunch. She fed the morsels to the apprehensive, but grateful, rat.

"You know, Bernius, it's nice of you to stay with me. It's so lonely since the English drove everyone off." She sighed, scratching the sore spot on her chest. "I miss father."

Marie scratched again, noticing for the first time the wooden spike sticking between her ample breasts, the spike that had missed her heart by the thickness of one of her blonde curls. "How did that happen? Look, Bernius, I have breasts!"

The rat stared at her, looking for another morsel. "I'm sorry, Bernius, it's all gone. I'm hungry too, I need to go to the village. Where has my steed gone?"

As if on cue, a large white stallion came forward. His mane shook out long and curled, and the white

on white star gleamed in the moonlight. The large dark eyes regarded her solemnly, and he stamped one silver hoof.

"There you are, silly horse!" Marie exclaimed. She mounted the beast clumsily, her head felt loose and the haft of the spike which protruded from her back unbalanced her. The rat chattered and Marie listened intently for a moment.

The pooka wondered why he'd been called upon to watch over one of the night's children, but he never questioned his calling, his purpose. Listening to her heart, he knew he'd have to stop soon, and find healing for her. To protect her, he had to save her.

"Yes, Bernius, I remember. A sip from each, like a butterfly, so as not to damage the flowers." Marie tapped the sides of her mount and headed for the city of Crescent Cove. She began to sing to the 'horse' in childish Occitan as she rode.

One step at a time, he mounted the air, just ever so slightly, careful not to jostle her head loose, the pooka followed her dreamy desire and carried her to a place where he could set her down, and let her feed. First she needed strength.

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Marie returned from her feeding in the town astride the pooka. She kept her promise to Bernius, a sip from each only. Dismounting, she patted her 'horse' affectionately on the rump. "Good steed, go and tell the stable-hands to brush you well."

Marie staggered across the bare stone, dragging a small object and sitting it on the floor. If anything, Marie looked worse than when she had left. Her dress was torn and dirty, and stained with blood. A wooden stake still protruded from her back with the point poking out between her breasts. Flopping slightly, her head was very loose, although it was reattaching. She sat down awkwardly, opposite the discarded doll that she had found during her hunt. "Poppy," she addressed the doll, "would you care for some tea?"

The doll stared at her through one painted eye. The rat, smelling the garbage the doll had been found in, poked his nose out. "Perhaps Bernius will sing for us?"

The rat was silent. "Where has father gone?" she asked him.

"Ah yes," she replied to herself, "I remember. He has gone to drive the English from our lands." Marie smiled a lopsided grin, then became terrified. "He will not be home for dinner, will he?" By now the sky was lightening with dawn. Somewhere deep inside her she remembered what she was. After all, she had fed, and now she knew the dawn was upon her.

"Beddy byes!" she exclaimed in Occitan and headed for the large displaced stone that covered her hiding place. With vampiric strength she pulled the stone back behind her and made her way down the small cave to the sandy floor.

Cautiously, silently, the pooka followed her in his 'human' seeming. His armor, with the power of the glamour it was constructed from, provided light.

Marie curled up to the rancid doll and whispered to it, "It hurts, Poppy."

Crying softly, she slipped back into dormancy. Sighing, the pooka sat beside her, and lay a soothing hand, warm and soft, against her shoulder until she slept.

Once he was sure she slept, he stepped back and changed back into his true seeming, a pure white unicorn with a silver horn. He lowered the horn until it touched her over heart and a warm soft glow surrounded the trio as the pooka began Marie's healing.



## Poppy Rising

It was dusk. Marie stood, for a moment all that had happened was clear in her mind. She had been beheaded. The duke, her husband (in name) had had her beheaded and had cast her body into a cave. She thought for a second, she remembered being entombed, and Bernius had come for her. Where *\*was\** that rat? Where was she...

The pooka listened as he had for centuries. Although she bore the body of an adult, she was clearly still a child in her mind. Gawain need not have made such a fuss, merely pointed her out. He sighed, and watched the girl.

She saw Poppy, her doll. "Poor Poppy, cast aside like so much fluff and nonsense." Marie picked it up and cuddled it.

"You tried to be pretty for him, why did he not love you? A wedding night is special, not to be spent all alone like this, I will hold you." She brushed the doll's hair with her fingers and straightened its dirty dress. It watched her through its one painted eye. The doll's hair caught on the wooden point as she crushed it to her chest.

"Poor Poppy, it hurts. He is down in the hall, drinking with his English harlots and we are all alone." Marie smelled the perfume and powders she wore. "I know you want him to love you, after all he did marry you. Father is gone, fallen in battle, and he won't be home in time for dinner."

Marie rocked the doll, comforting it. Finally she stood again, now stronger. Unlike the previous night, her head did not loll about. It had reattached.

The mind, unlike the head, was not so readily attached.

Marie skipped to her entry stone, "Let's see what's about in the hall." She slid it to one side and stepped into the empty Spanish fort.

"Marie?" the pooka ventured, concerned. "Can you hear me?"

She held up the doll and looked at it. "Of course I hear you, silly girl. You're standing right next to me."

"No, not Poppy, dear one. Me, Marcavalo." he clarified.

Marie started to reply, then noticed the point of the stake again. "How dreadful. No wonder the duke hates me so, I have a stake in me." Dropping the doll, she tried in vain to reach her back to pull it out, but to no avail. Like a top she spun around in the middle of the hall with her arms stretching behind her and finally fell.

"Well," she said to the discarded doll, turning her back to it, "don't just sit there like a lump. Please help me, Poppy."

"Allow me?" the pooka offered, grasping the base of the stake in his teeth, and carefully drawing it forth.

Marie gasped and doubled over. "Ahhh," she exclaimed. The stake clattered forgotten on the stone floor. She sat that way for several minutes in the middle of the stone floor, silent.

"He never came to me, Poppy," Marie began again, still curled up. "Am I so repulsive that he can not even look at me? For nine years of marriage he never came to me." She began to sob softly, finally adding, "...and I waited."

She folded inward, lost in her maze of fragmented memories.

Feeling hunger, Marie uncurled and looked for her horse to take her to the village. The pooka, still in it's unicorn form, was watching her and she went to it, stroking it's pure white head. "Lovely steed, did someone stake you as well?" She ran her hand across the smooth silver horn. "But no," she said, "it must be part of you, for a wound such as that would have killed you."

The pooka held as still as it could for her, smiling inwardly. Yes, it could see why Gawain had fallen for her.

"A sip from each, like the butterfly," Marie said as she mounted, "I remember, Bernius." She began to sing a child's rhyme about butterflies as she rode into back into the city of Crescent Isle.

As the night before, Marie picked an unsuspecting passer by and fed very lightly. She rolled her victim with great skill and left no trace of her visit.

Marie, astride the pooka, returned quickly to the fortress. She looked around, as if seeing it for the first time. "Poppy, is my husband the duke returned from his campaign?" Picking up the doll she told it, "I shall have to prepare. Perhaps tonight he will finally visit me, Poppy."

Marie spun around, swinging the doll. "I shall dress for him, and make myself up. I do hope he comes, Poppy. I am so lonely..." she stopped spinning and looked at the floor. Her shoulders fell.

"I miss father. I waited, but he never came home for dinner. I do hope the duke will have dinner with me."

Marie sensed the sunrise, looking to the lightening sky. "But first we must nap, to be rested for him." She gathered up the doll and the stake, which she held over her head like a torch (and apparently used it as such, though it was unlit). "Come, Poppy, we will be ready for the dukes arrival at dusk." The pooka slipped back into the hiding place, unobtrusively staying close to his charge. Once again Marie put the stone back behind her, concealing her priest hole.

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Marie awoke disoriented. There was sand in her bed, and she was glowing softly. She shook her head violently.

Two nights before it would have flown across the room and she would have had to search for it again. Tonight it was well attached. There was a gory hole in her dress between her breasts, and a coinciding one in the middle of it's back, but her flesh was whole and smooth. Her blonde curls fell around her face as she rose, sprinkling her with sand. Her dress, once bright and frilly, was torn and filthy. Her beautiful face was smeared and dirty.

"Feeling better?" the pooka asked, as soon as he had morphed back to human form. He looked around the room a little, and sighed. She really needed cleaning up, and some fresh clothing, but at least she wouldn't be hurting any more. At least, not physically.

"Better?" Marie replied in archaic French. She looked around. There was a stake, no a torch, stuck into the sand next to her. The doll, her companion, lay face down on the sandy floor. There was a French knight watching her. "Where is my bed?" she asked him, "Have the English taken it?"

"I do not know." the pooka sighed, "Perhaps they have?"

Marie's bed was nowhere to be seen, nor any of her furniture. Just the wardrobe door, closed in the corner, remained of her bed chamber. "Of course, the English have taken it all. They've taken everything, even my window." She started crying, remembering the night before. The chain mail still hurt where it was pressed into her tender flesh as she was raped.

Silently, the pooka offered it's arms and his shoulder for her comfort.

The dukes laughter still echoed, and Marie looked around wide eyed, terrified. He was not here now, though. It was just her memory.

"Poppy, what did I do?" she asked the doll. "Why have I displeased him so?" She began to weep. "For nine years I waited for him. I was only fourteen when he left, of course he wouldn't want a child. I know that now. But here, I am no child!"

She held the doll at arm's length, as if holding a friend's shoulder. "I ruled his duchy, what was my fathers duchy, for him faithfully. I kept the vow."

Marie's arm dropped, 'Poppy' rested forgotten in her grasp against her dirty leg. She walked to where the window would have been and looked at the wall of the cave. "Was his vow to me just a validation of his claim to father's holdings? His promise to protect me just words? Did I fail in some way to fulfill my part?"

She went back, recalling step by step what had gone awry.

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The duke was returning after campaigning for nine long years, she was a child when he had left. She had handled his affairs, in his name, while he was away. Marie had prepared meticulously for her husband's return, and the long awaited consummation of her marriage.

The hall was awash with color, the cooks were busy with the welcome feast. Marie had painted and coiffed herself, picking her most beautiful trappings for this night. She had glowed with her beauty when she sent word to the duke, requesting that he visit her chambers.

And he had come to her. After his rest from travel and his meal, there came a knock and a call at her chamber door. He had entered, with five of his personal guard, but his eyes were steel, cold upon her. Her heart had fallen then.

"I have brought what you desire, whore," he had said to her. Before she could protest his cruelty he turned to his guard. "There she is, the stupid French harlot," he had said to them, "have at her."

Marie began to cry as the scene played out in her memory. They hadn't even removed their mail shirts. The cold steel was pressed into her fine soft skin, shredding her best gown. She had begged, pleaded to him to make them stop. He had replied with only coarse laughter.

"Marie? What is it? Why are you crying now?" the pooka asked, unable to follow the memory.

"He loathes me," she answered it in whispered modern English, rapt in the memory that was playing itself out before her. "His guard... he has given me to his guards. The five of them are raping me. They are still wearing chain mail, and it hurts so bad." By now Marie was shaking visibly and added almost inaudibly, "He's laughing."

The pooka nodded, hugging her again.

When the five had finished with her, and she lay bleeding and only semi conscious on her ruined bed linens, the duke approached. "Now," he had whispered to her, "can I truthfully say you knew another man before I could consummate our marriage. Was there no other in nine years that could have saved you this?" She had cried. "Stupid girl. Our marriage is now annulled. You will be dealt with after the priest has declared it so."

And she had lain there in the dark. Somewhere in the castle had been the sounds of revelry that a returning army generated, but not in Marie's chamber.

Marie's chamber was silent.

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Memory fading, she turned from the imaginary window and saw the French knight watching her. "What news is there?" she asked in Occitan. She wondered idly how he had slipped past the English.

"You are saying that he even now is planning my demise?" Marie raised her eyebrows at the knight. "Of course!" she continued, "For nine years I have lorded this land with a fair and even hand. He fears that the people will follow me if I yet live."

"Oh, where is Bernius," she began to weep, "what am I to do? I cannot flee, I would surely be found out."

"Bernius has a way out," she told the pooka with a conspiratory look of wild desperation. "I must trade the daylight for my life, but when the axe falls I will not perish." Now totally rapt in her mental imagery, Marie watched Bernius approach and ignored the pooka as if it had never been.

"Ah, yes, I will awaken in the crypt and you will come for me. They will not know I yet survive, and we can be gone from here!" Marie closed her eyes and bared the smooth white flesh of her neck.

She felt the vampire strike.

Marie looked around the cave and felt the sand under her feet. Her arm drew the doll to her. "Yes,

Poppy, I am scared too. It will hurt, but Bernius says it is only a passing trouble. He will find us in the crypt and complete our transformation." She went to the same 'window' as before and looked out. "Our last sunset, my Poppy. Look at the flowers, so red and happy, dancing on the breeze. That is why father called you Poppy. We were his Poppy, in our red dress, dancing on the breeze." She turned from the window. "Let us see to the hall, one last time. Be brave, little Poppy, Bernius will be our papa now."

Marie walked to the stone entry way, and felt the daylight rising on the other side. "All is lost, Poppy. We shall be hungry this night, father hasn't come home for dinner." She wandered back to the cave weeping and went to the very modern door in the corner.

"Perhaps Marie has left something for her Poppy in the wardrobe." Opening it, she stepped into a small, spartan room with a bed, a desk, and a computer terminal. A phone hung on the wall. One end was a kitchenette with a refrigerator and microwave. She deftly took a pouch from the freezer and put it in the microwave. A few minutes later it dinged, and she mixed the contents with a vacant, distant stare.

She stepped from the shelter and back into the cave. "Look what I have found in the wardrobe, Poppy. A lovely red apple." Marie offered it to the doll, who responded with a silent one eyed stare.

"Well then, I shall eat it if you don't want it." Marie sank her fangs into the pouch of plasma, draining it and casting it aside. Poppy looked on in horror as her husband's body fell lifeless to the sand. The vampress and the doll curled up together as one and fell into the dreamless dormancy of the dead.

This time, instead of laying down with her, the pooka slipped out, created a fairy gate, and stepped through to look up Gawain, to let him know how she was doing

## Darkness Waning

Gavin leaned back in the captains chair at the helm of the G'Tor. The engines were silent. Small, Caribbean perfect wavelets lapped at her playfully and the deck was bustling. Fishing lines were flying everywhere as everybody tried to cast at once. The safest place right now was in the wheelhouse.

Gavin's hand rested on the ample first aid kit, as it always did during the first cast.

Up on the deck, a bright blue spark of light appeared, a reflection of the sun on brass it seemed, until it began to expand into a disk of approximate man height. Then it began to swirl as a figure was silhouetted in the glare, and Marcavalo stepped through. The 'Gate' vanished behind him. "Gawain?" he called.

Several of the fishermen on deck stood with their mouths open and one of them said "Holy shit!" All of them, fortunately for Marcavalo, stopped casting.

Gavin stood, nearly falling, and leaned out of the wheelhouse. "Here, you're scaring the fish and it's Gavin. Better get out of the way. Come into the wheelhouse till their lines are in the water."

Marcavalo shrugged, and climbed up to the wheelhouse, saying "Gavin, Gawain, it is all the same."

"To you and I it is, but humans put great power in naming things," Gavin winked at Marcavalo. "So, do you fish? I have an extra rod..."

"I have in the past..." he smiled, "Marie is doing well, but she wavers between the child and the woman."

Gavin took a deep breath. "She yet lives," he said as his eyes grew distant. "I had feared the worst, Marcavalo. Thank you. Many times have Gywnrheged and I sang together, and sometimes I fear that sword, but rarely have I regretted the consequences"

"She lives, and her body is whole again." Marcavalo assured him. "I will tell her of your love, and she will wish to meet with you."

"I will take your assurances, Marcavalo, but do not forget that I opposed her in her struggle with her daughter." Gavin smiled weakly. "I believe her to be an uncommon person, but I simply did not get the chance to know her well...."

"She is growing closer to her present, in her mind, a little at a time." Marcavalo stated, looking out over the ocean, "It won't be long, at all."

"I understand," Gavin offered a hand to Marcavalo in a gesture he knew the pooka may not comprehend. "You have the task that I've set you to. Perhaps, when there is nobody's life in the balance, you will have time to bend a rod with me."

Marcavalo nodded, smiled and then stepped back, to vanish into another blue disk.

\*\*\*

Poppy awoke. She was alone, lying on the sand in what appeared to be a cave. It was very dark, but somehow she could see. Her dress was torn and filthy, but she seemed to be all right. The stone of the cave was rough and dark. Somewhere she could hear the sea, and the sand smelled of salt.... a sea cave then.

For the first time in centuries she stood. There was a doll here, a poor broken thing that had once been loved. Near it was the body of a man.

Poppy shuddered in horror, it was her husband the duke. She had killed him. "Oh god," her voice echoed, "what have I done." Shaking her head violently, she looked again and realized it wasn't a body at all, it was a pouch of some sort. Her hand reached out and touched it. It was plastic, she thought to herself.

She could identify plastic, it was a modern material. Memories of centuries poured into her mind like a flood. "Sacre bleu," she whispered, "I am \*old\*." Bringing the pouch to her tongue, she tasted the plasma it had contained.

"Bernius," she whispered, "what have we done?"

Emotionally she was raw to the point of numbness, but her mind was bright and clear. Poppy looked around. There was a passageway upwards, and an incongruous door set in one corner. She went to the door and opened it, finding a bedchamber. Her memory identified all the things here, including the microwave, refrigerator, and phone. She had used these things before, but they were strange to her.

She remembered how to use them though, and she fixed another pouch. Sipping the plasma, she drew some water and stripped off the tattered dress. Poppy washed up, cleaning several days worth of dirt and dried blood from herself. When she was done, she went to the mirror.

The woman before her was gorgeous. She was nicely curved with a beautiful face framed in blonde ringlets. A short search of her memory affirmed that it was her, Marie of Aquitaine, daughter of the Marquis. Her chin raised slightly as she pondered herself.

Her thoughts crashed. Father was dead, lost in battle with the English, and would not be home for dinner. She set her shoulders.

Father had died. He would have, she was nine centuries old. The duke would have died too, and Bridgette her handmaiden, and all the cooks and maids and footmen.

And the English invaders in their chain mail.

Crash.

She looked in the mirror. No scar or blemish spoiled the smoothness of her skin. Her hands ran along her firm breasts and down her sides to her legs. Poppy examined the little crinkles of each aureola, and the fine soft hair on her legs and arms. She was whole, and nine centuries past them now.

And they had been mostly good centuries, except for the cruelties she herself had perpetrated on others. She shuddered slightly as the memories flowed past.

She would need a very understanding priest.

Poppy remembered her daughter. Not a mortal one, but a vampiric scion, she had never had children. Her heart felt a twinge of pain, but Virginia was a good woman and on her own now. Poppy remembered her leaving.

Crash.

Poppy went numb, fighting the anger and pain inside. It flowed from her father's death and up through her husband. Like a river it broadened, covering the English, then the French, enemies, strangers, friends, men, other women, and finally Virginia. "No!" she screamed, running into the cave and gathering the little doll in her arms, "I won't let them hurt you anymore!"

"I won't let you feel them anymore. I won't let you feel anything."

"I \*don't\* feel anything anymore," she said to the little doll with authority. "I \*want\* to feel them. I don't \*want\* that kind of protection, and I don't need it. I am \*not\* a child." Marie threw the doll to the floor and picked up the stake.

"I don't need protecting!" The stake plunged toward the little doll's sawdust heart. "I need..."

She stopped dead. "...to be loved."

The point of the stake rested against the doll's dress. Marie dropped the stake and picked up the doll. She was crying.

"Of course I do," she told the pooka that had been watching her with a smile, "of course I do. How silly of me."

Marie looked into the eyes of the pooka. "Why must we always start at the bottom rung when we've fallen from a ladder?" Marie asked. "It's not like a horse, which keeps its place along the road when one falls off."

The pooka chuckled softly, and offered his arm.

She took the offer and once again raised herself from the sandy floor. Carrying the battered doll into the shelter, she reverently put it on a shelf, "You will remind me, Poppy," Marie told it, "should I ever forget again that I was once a child."

Marie cleaned herself up again and went to the little wardrobe. She selected panties and an orange sun dress with bright red flowers on it. A simple pair of sandals completed her outfit.

It was nearly dawn, and she hadn't been out in two nights. She raced up the passage and slid the stone back, breathing the warm damp air. Sitting on a fallen stone, she looked out over the dark sea. "Father, Bernius, all my lovers over the countless nights, and now my daughter are lost to me." Marie d'Aquitaine turned to the pooka, the one that she now realized had been with her the whole time, "Who is left that loves me?"



"Gawain." the pooka stated firmly, solemnly.

"Would that I knew a Gawain, or even a Galahad," Marie responded. "The only person I know whose name is even close is Gavin, Virginia's fisherman." She looked at the floor with sagging shoulders, "Alas, fair pooka, I am feared that I have fucked that up with authority."

"Gavin... he is the same one. His name means the same. He has asked that I watch over you, protect you, until you and he are together again." the pooka smiled softly, "He is the one who loves you still."

"Yes," she affirmed. "Of course he does, I saw the pain in his eyes as I fell." She looked down again, "as my \*head\* dropped," she corrected quietly. "Tell him I will be in One Eyed Eddies tomorrow after dusk, if his heart still has interest in me..."

"I will. And I will wait there with you when the time comes." it replied.

"I thank you for watching over me, fair pooka. Perhaps, if not for you, I would not have fared so well this time."

"The debt was already paid." Again the blue spark, expanding to a disk, and the pooka stepped through it, vanishing it along with himself.

The sky over the Spanish fort was lightening. She watched it for as long as she possibly could, then she slipped back into the shadows and put the stone back. She fixed another pouch of plasma, sipped it with growing lethargy, and finally lay down on the narrow bed to sleep.

## Carpe' Nocturnum

At dusk, as usual, Marie awoke. She was in a strange bed, and disoriented for a moment. The part of her that was Poppy started at the sight of blood and she almost dropped the half empty pouch of plasma. It had leaked a little during the day, and her hand was red brown with the dried fluid.

She was in her hideout. Long ago, in times of trouble, churches were built with a hidden exit or chamber. The 'priest hole' allowed the priest to escape if the town was occupied, and Marie had used the idea. Her hideout had enough supplies to last several weeks, and was connected to a network of caves on the north coast of the island, allowing escape.

Marie washed up and changed her rumpled dress. She fixed her hair (which didn't need much), put on her make up, and tried to make herself look like she hadn't gone to any trouble. Finally, admiring her work in the small mirror as best as she could, she decided she was as ready as she would ever be.

She stepped out into the cave. The pooka, in human form, was waiting for her. "Sorry I took so long, I guess I must be a little nervous."

The pooka smiled and nodded, then in true chivalric fashion offered his left arm for her to hold to.

She took the offered arm and allowed him to lead her across the sand floor of the cave and up to the Spanish fort. It was very dark, the moon had yet to rise, but she could hear the waves battering the rocky shore.

"Shall we take a short cut?" He asked solemnly. When she nodded, he opened a portal for them, and they were able to step through, and right into the back room, where the telephones and restrooms were.

One Eyed Eddies wasn't the kind of bar one went to meet ladies, it was a good place to get drunk or work out ones problems, or both. Fishing nets hung on the walls as decoration, and the tables were hatch covers. Thirty years ago it would have passed for a tourist place with a nautical theme. Now it was the real thing, a dockside dive.

Gavin sat at one of the tables near the back with a Killian's. No rum tonight, he hoped to meet someone.

In the back of the bar, near the phones, Gavin watched a bright blue spark of light appear. It expanded into a man high disk, then began to swirl just like he remembered. Two figures stepped through, but Gavin's attention was focused on the smaller one. The 'Gate' vanished and the pair stood in One Eyes. A tomb like quiet settled over the bar.

Marie was simply stunning in a short off white dress with a wild splash of red in the shape of a hibiscus flower covering most of it. Her curls softly framed her face, and her eyes were bright and clear. Gavin stood and waved shyly with a boyish grin on his face.

Nobody ever yelled, "Hey, over here!" in One Eyed Eddies. One was never sure what would answer.

Once it was clear that it's geise had ended, the pooka nodded to Gavin, and let Marie's arm go. He'd find her if she needed him.

Gavin's eyes met Marie's and locked there as they approached his table, the pair stopped an arms length apart. The waitress came over to the newcomers before they sat down. "What'll it be?" she asked.

"Bloodwine," Marie answered softly while still looking into Gavin's eyes.

Gavin's brow wrinkled in thought, as if he were considering and discarding possible openings. He finally opted for the most simple.

"Hi," he said.

Marie smiled. "Hi," she responded quietly.

Gavin returned the smile. "Um, you look well," he offered.

"I've been in a lot of... turmoil,"

"Me too," he replied quickly, "I'm really sorry,"

"No," Marie said as her finger leaped to his lips, "let's not go there, I'm much too old for regrets. What happened is over so let's start fresh." Marie held her hand out to him, "I'm Marie, but friends call me Poppy."

"Poppy," Gavin said as if savoring the word as it flowed over his tongue, "a lovely flower and a lovely lady." He took the offered hand and kissed it softly, then bowed low. "Gawain of Rheged at your service, my friends call me simply 'Gav'." He pulled a chair out for her.

"You do that well, have you been practicing?" she asked as she sat down.

"It's like riding, one never forgets," he smiled at her.

"You have me at a loss, Gav. You know how old I am, but you confuse me. I know you are about during the day, but your actions and words seem too old for a mortal."

"I am Gawain son of Urbgen, prince of Rheged, right hand of the Cenna Y'Fallon,"

"...and knight of the round table." Marie finished with her jaw dropping. He was a British knight. Images of firelight on chain mail, pain, and blood flashed through her mind as it wrapped around them.

"Are you alright," his voice echoed into her consciousness.

"Yea, just remembering. I lived during the hundred years war and had some bad experiences with English..." she said softly as she came back to the present.

Gavin touched her cheek with his fingertips. "They're not here," he said.

"They're not now," she replied, remembering the beach.

He looked deep into her eyes and took her hands in his. "Besides," he said, "the English were invaders

in my birth time, I am a Briton."

Her lips parted slightly and Gavin drew them together, meeting her lips with his own. They took their time, and when they finally broke he said, "I missed you so much."

"You barely knew me," she corrected.

"Still, you touched something...."

"Yes," she agreed.

Smiling for reasons only known to itself, the pooka turned to go. The child, Poppy, was safe.