

DARKEST KNIGHT

by

Delilah Devlin

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Chapter One

Maddie shivered at the creaks and groans as the portcullis slowly rose. The wind carried the noises and filled the silences in between with a howling that sounded like the hounds from hell had arrived at the castle gate. And in a way, one had.

Shouts outside the curtain wall had alerted them only minutes before of Lord Garon d'Angerville's arrival. With time to throw only a bliaut over her sleeping shift, she stood on the first step of the keep, holding a tray with a goblet of wine, ready to render a proper greeting to her overlord.

"Are you sure this is the way you wish to go about this, M—Maddie?" Egbert asked, fidgeting at her side.

She swallowed against the sudden dryness in her mouth and nodded.

"It be on yer head, then," he said, his always mournful tone as dire as one of Father Ansel's Sunday sermons.

The clatter of many hooves on the cobbled bridge beyond the gate was thunderous. From the encroaching darkness, the sounds were as deafening and ominous as the dark shapes looming on the gatehouse walls. The torches she'd ordered lit sputtered and flared, distorting their forms, elongating them so the men riding through the entrance appeared as giants.

Already tired and on edge from the days-long wait, Maddie's fevered imagination painted them darker still.

"Are they devils?" Egbert asked, his narrow shoulders shaking. "No one travels on a night with nary a speck of light in the sky."

"Hush!" The storm whipping at her clothing, and the fatigue from months of worry over this very moment, combined to make her own hands shake and dampened an already foul mood.

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The horsemen entered the bailey and a large shape separated from the contingent that approached the keep. As he drew closer, her fears weren't eased one whit. The warrior sat atop a huge, black destrier, forcing her to raise her gaze quite high to seek his face.

He wore a helm that left only his square jaw exposed. The darkness cast by the metal nose guard concealed his eyes. Only his mouth gave hint of his mood – a thin straight line with the corners crimped downward.

Aware that he stared at her, Maddie's knees trembled, but her tray never rattled. She squared her shoulders and shot a glance about her at the castle folk. "Stephen!" she called to the stable master. "See to their horses."

In moments, boys scrambled to accept reins, and the creak of leather and the clank of iron filled the air.

The stable master stepped close to the dark warhorse at the foot of the steps, but the warrior's gaze never left Maddie.

She licked dry lips with a dryer tongue. "Lord Garon?" she asked, although there could be no question who led this contingent. All gazes remained on his intimidating figure. "Please come inside, Milord. Your people will see to your comfort and that of your men."

His mouth twisted in an alarming sneer. "And who will see to mine?"

Maddie's heart leapt to the back of her throat. "I will, Milord."

A long pause indicated he looked her up and down. "Who the blazes are you?" he asked, his voice a deep, hollow rumble.

Maddie remembered to curtsy, and then straightened, girding herself to speak the lie aloud. "Your housekeeper, Milord. I take care of things now." The last at least was the truth.

Lord Garon grunted. Without a glance at the stable master, he tossed down his reins and dismounted.

When he turned, Maggie's breath caught. *Lord, he's a tall man. I thought it was just the horse!*

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Maddie lifted the ornate chalice from the tray to deliver her much-rehearsed welcome.

Instead, his lordship's lips pressed into a tighter line and he brushed past her.

She was left gasping on the bottom step. "What a rude ogre!" she exclaimed, annoyed he hadn't fallen in with step one of her plan.

"Watch your tongue, madam," an accompanying knight said as he followed the lord up the steps. "He has exceptional hearing."

"M-Maddie?" Egbert said, nodding toward the door.

She shoved the tray at his belly and grasped her skirts high to rush up the steps.

The plan had seemed so simple. All she needed was to get him alone, and addle his sight with a little wine or ale so he'd not care she wasn't the comeliest creature in the keep. Then she would seduce him.

And the sooner, the better. The longer she took losing her virginity, the greater the risk he would discover her identity. The truth was, she would rather copulate with the devil himself than be returned home.

However, this business of copulation, which had seemed a simple, messy, perhaps even enjoyable act according to the laundress, now boded a daunting trial.

After all, the lord of the keep was a giant and dour as a priest at confession. The thought of being naked with him and accepting his manstaff into her body frankly petrified her.

She rushed through the massive doors, hoping her preparations would meet with his approval. Nothing else could mar her well-thought out plan.

Inside the hall, his lordship stood in the center, hands on hips. Unlike his men, he wore no chain mail, only a leather hauberk to protect his body. He'd removed his headgear, revealing hair black as midnight and a face hard as carved granite.

He was everything she'd remembered and more – more frightening, more imposing – and more beautiful because of the differences. Thanks be to God, he hadn't recognized her.

His gaze narrowed on the hall, and she looked around to see what might have displeased him already.

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Around him, servants scurried, delivering warm food to the men-at-arms as boys eagerly divested them of their armor. If she hadn't been observing him so closely, she might not have detected the change. He scarce seemed to notice the din of activity. His mouth lost a little firmness. His hands unclenched on his hips, and his chest rose and fell deeply.

In that instant, Maddie lost a measure of her fear. Here was a man savoring his first night home after a long absence. He had a heart and cared for something at least. Perhaps he wouldn't be a complete troll when making her his wife.

Garon shut out the noises swirling around him and breathed in the scents of his home. The smells remained unchanged despite eight years away – wood smoke from the hearth, the moist, mustiness clinging to the stone walls, roasted meat, and women. Unchanged from his memory, but enhanced by his “affliction”.

Now he could easily discern pheasant from roast beef, sage from rosemary – the laundress' ripened odor from the housekeeper's more delicate musk, which wafted in the air behind him where she hovered.

Sight as well as scent was much improved. Even the darkest corners, far from the blazing torches in their sconces, were revealed in varying shades of gray – crisp as the autumn air outside. Outside in the dark, the housekeeper's eyes had been pale in her pinched, pallid face. He wondered now whether they were blue or hazel.

Sounds reverberated on the walls, a steady rumble of quiet conversations punctuated with sharp bursts of laughter. But the only sound that raised his interest since their arrival was that of the housekeeper's heart as she'd waited on the steps of the keep – an agitated tattoo indicating fear despite her calm demeanor.

She'd called him an ogre! If she only knew the true nature of the beast, her trepidation would become terror.

“Milord, I've secured sustenance for you in your chamber,” Raymond, his captain-at-arms, murmured beside him.

“So quickly?” The throbbing hunger building in his belly had been nearly unbearable the last score of miles.

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"Sisters. A friendly pair. They approached me. Said you'd remember them."

He did. Sturdy, lusty blondes. Their names escaped him, but he well remembered how they'd played in his chamber, offering him hours of sensual delight. This time, however, the play would be quick, even deadly if he couldn't harness his appetite. "You will wait outside the door and listen, in case I have need of you."

"Yes, Milord. If the silence is overlong..."

Garon gave him a sharp, grim nod and turned toward the stairs.

The housekeeper waited at the bottom step, her hands worrying the frayed end of the braided rope securing the castle's keys around her waist. Her shoulders straightened at his approach. "I've ordered a bath sent to your chambers."

"Later. My man will tell you when I am ready." He brushed past her, ignoring the heavenly scent of her skin and the pulse that throbbed at the base of her white throat. Her startled eyes were indeed hazel and too innocent for his purposes.

Brown eyebrows lowered in a frown. "But, Milord, the water's already set to boil. It will be no bother —"

He continued up the stairs, catching a murmured curse from the woman.

So eager to please. She must wonder if her position was secure. At the death of his steward two years past, he'd been informed another had taken over the management of the estates. As she seemed the one in charge, he assumed she was capable, for the land he'd passed through had shown signs of a recent, orderly harvest, and the keep was clean, the servants exacting in their care. Tomorrow night, he would tell the woman her place was safe. He had little interest or ability in seeing to the daily running of the estate.

That she was a woman filling a man's shoes was only an annoyance.

He'd learned the hard way a woman could best a man without brute force. Sly intelligence and seductive wiles could win the battle when a man's attention was centered between her legs. He had lost nearly everything to one such heathen bitch. A Saracen's whore with a thirst for blood.

He shoved open the door of his chamber. A fire blazed in the brazier in the far corner. The twins lay naked, warming the covers of his bed. Older now, their figures a

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little overblown and fleshy, their lips curved in welcome. His body clenched as his hunger overrode his caution and he climbed onto the mattress between them. The problem of how to take one without the other screaming the roof down about his ears was less of a concern than feasting on the bounty before him.

“Shall we undress you?” the one with a mole above her lip asked as she scooted closer.

“Later,” he growled, earning delighted giggles from the women. He twisted her body over his, her blond hair forming a curtain to conceal the nature of his “taking”. Her screech of delight ended in a shocked squeak as he bit into the tender flesh of her neck.

“Milord?” she whispered, her hands pressing against his collarbone for a moment before her fingers curved into his shoulders, clutching him closer. She moaned and her hips ground into his burgeoning erection.

“All that from just a kiss?” the other said, a plaintive note in her voice. “Save a little for me, Anne.”

Garon’s hands fisted in her hair, holding her still while he drew blood from the twin piercings at the side of her throat, sucking hard to assuage his hunger. Tasting of salt and copper, her blood coated his tongue, filled his throat, and spread warmth throughout his body.

He sucked harder and she cried out, the rapture overtaking her body to set it trembling above his. As her hips ground harder into his, he widened his legs, and slipped a hand to her buttocks, kneading her generous mounds, and then pressing the hard bone of her mons against his cock. He matched her rhythm, bucking against her writhing body to ease the second hunger growing inside him.

A sharp knock on his chamber door penetrated his bliss-fogged mind and he withdrew his teeth, lapping her neck to clean away the smears of blood and close the small wounds he’d inflicted.

She murmured sleepily and burrowed her head against his shoulder, her hips slowing as she fell asleep.

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He reached out to snag the other sister, dragging her to his side. When she aimed a kiss at his mouth, he turned from it, not wanting her to discover the length of his teeth, and dragged his lips along her throat. She moaned and nestled closer to his side.

A knock sounded again. "Yes, Raymond," he shouted. "All is well."

The door flung open and the housekeeper stomped into the room, her gaze widening on the two naked women. Her mouth gaped, and then shut with an audible snap. Her gaze rose above the bed as though she were examining the ceiling for cobwebs. "I've brought your bath," she said, her voice tight, red flags of color staining her cheeks.

With the sharpness of his bloodlust dulled, Garon's carnal appetites arose full-blown – bidden by the shock and outrage warring in the mousy housekeeper's expression.

Why her face and reed-thin form should appeal didn't matter. That he had to have her and wipe away that look of disgust pouting her full lips did.

His mouth curved to convey wicked delight. "A foursome, then?"

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Chapter Two

Her gaze slammed into Garon's and she gulped. "I beg your pardon?" she asked, her words a trifle shrill.

The woman draped over him like a lumpy blanket stirred. "Milord?" she asked, her words slurred.

Recalling where his hand lay, he smoothed it up and down her flank, drawing the housekeeper's gaze. The woman beside him rose on an elbow to stare daggers at the brown-haired mouse.

The housekeeper's lips thinned, and her chin jutted upward.

It was just as well that she was repelled. Although he fully intended to sup from her tonight, he didn't want her entertaining any romantic notions concerning their coupling. Better to keep a distance from her and all the castle folk. Soon enough, his nocturnal habits would arouse their curiosity.

Ready for a second, more satisfying meal, he delivered a swat to Anne's buttocks.

She jerked to awareness and pushed back her blonde hair. Her glare quickly turned to puzzlement as her fingers rubbed the side of her throat. "I thought..."

"You dreamed," he said, holding her gaze.

Her expression dulled, and she nodded.

"Your bath, Milord?" the housekeeper said, her voice sounding strained.

Garon raised a hand to cup Anne's face, and he caressed her bottom lip with his thumb. "You and your sister may go now."

The sister's breath huffed, but she knew better than to protest. Rising from the bed, she strode naked toward the door, casting a glare at the housekeeper as she passed.

He lifted his chin. "Go, Anne."

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Anne gave him a dreamy smile and slid off the bed, passing the other woman as though she didn't even see her standing there. And likely she did not. Beneath the power of his suggestion, her senses would not return until after she had slept.

When the sisters had departed, the housekeeper drew a deep breath. "Would you like wine while you bathe, Milord?"

"Is that all you're offering?" he asked as his voice dropped to a low purr.

"Ale then?" Her voice grew small, her eyes wary.

She'd likely recite the entire stock of beverages in the cellar if he didn't approve one quickly. He was tempted to allow her to continue just to see that hint of anger sparkle in her eyes again. But he was ready to get onto the business of bathing – and baiting the chit. "Wine will be fine."

She nodded and turned back to stick her head through the door, issuing orders to staff waiting outside to do her bidding.

He studied her for a long moment, his glance following the end of her long, brown braid to the bottom that barely rounded the back of her gown. Below that stretched an astonishing length of fabric. Her legs were quite long.

Garon was dying to know whether they were sturdy as his warhorse, spindly as a nag's, or slender and supple as the legs of an Arab's steed.

She flung open the door and a parade of castle folk trooped inside, delivering the copper tub and buckets of steaming water. When it was full and the temperature met her specification, she ordered them out, leaving herself quite alone with Garon.

Just before the door slammed closed, Raymond appeared in the opening with a smirk on his lips. The bastard was enjoying the spectacle a little too much.

"Your bath?" she reminded him, sweeping her hand toward the tub.

"You will assist me?"

She swallowed and nodded. "Yes, Milord."

He rolled from the bed in one quick movement, startling a gasp from her. He pulled the hauberk and clothing from his upper body and dropped them to the floor.

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Her gaze swept over his chest and downward, locking on the long ridge tenting the front of his chausses. Startlement registered in her expression, but she bent and untied the straps at the top of his boots, her hands revealing only a small tremor.

He toed the boots off, one at a time.

She eased his stockings off his feet. Then she drew in a deep breath and straightened, her hands reaching for the top of his chausses.

He held her gaze while she fumbled with the knots, her fingers barely grazing his belly. She drew the ties slowly open and dragged down the chausses, along with his underclothes. When the fabric snagged, her gaze dropped, and she hesitated at the sight of his clothing caught on his erection.

Garon held his breath, surprised by the intensity of his reaction to her nearness. His nose hovered just above her herb-scented hair. His heartbeat raced with hers. Heat built in the small space between their bodies.

Her jaw tightened as she delicately pulled his pants outward to free them from obstruction, and then she had her first glimpse of the reddened bulb of his cock, nestled in the hood of his foreskin.

Her glance rose to his, her lips tremulous for a moment before she firmed them into a straight line and crouched to slide the fabric down his flanks, pushing it to the floor.

He stepped out of the last of his clothing, and nudged them to the side with his foot.

Her gaze remained lowered as though she were counting the hairs sprinkling his toes. He gave her time to gather her courage, although he wondered why she was so filled with hesitation. She didn't even know him yet.

From his first impression, he hadn't thought her timid. Perhaps a tad innocent, but the bold way she'd pressed him to reach this moment didn't fit with the small hint of fear her shallow breaths betrayed.

Before that thought had ended, she dragged in a deep breath and her gaze swept upward, resting for a long tense moment on his cock, which twitched inches from her mouth.

Later, sweetling. "My bath?" he reminded her.

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“Over there.” She pointed behind her, but her gaze didn’t rise above his hips.

Rather than feeling impatience for her slow climb to arousal – and he did take her open fascination for his cock as a sign of arousal – warmth filled him, along with an intense gratification. Ruffling the mouse’s fur would while away many an hour – perhaps even several nights.

He stepped over the rim into the water and found the temperature perfect. Settling into the tub, he sighed and rested his arms along the rim of the tub.

“Shall I scrub your back?” she asked.

He turned at her question to find her naked, her bliaut and shift puddled on the floor. Her legs pressed close together as if attempting to hide the dark ruff of hair between her legs.

Lord, what legs! Long and slender – definitely more like an Arab’s steed.

His body tightened impossibly hard, his cock filling to bursting and riding high against his belly despite the warmth of the water.

Her breasts were small, round as apples and rosy from her blushes, rising and falling quickly with her gusted breaths. Her long hair was loose now and she pulled it forward to settle over each breast, but the tips of her nipples had lengthened and peeked between the curls.

His mouth watered, and he licked the tip of one long incisor. He’d suckle from the stems protruding from her rose-brown nipples, perhaps nipping them if she seemed amenable to a little rough play. He caught himself before he smiled, before he revealed the twin-edges of his hunger.

As she approached the tub, Garon wondered who would ensnare whom.

“I, um, didn’t want to get my clothing wet,” Maddie said, wrapping her arms around her belly before she realized the movement pushed up her scant bosom. She quickly lowered her arms and bent to pick up the clothing she had tossed to the floor.

His indrawn breath halted her, pulling her gaze, although she’d been fighting herself not to stare at him. Short of turning her back fully, she couldn’t *not* look. He filled the room with his broad shoulders, deep chest, ridged belly, and thighs that were

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roped with well-honed muscles. Never mind that hidden beneath the rim of the tub were the most disturbing attributes. His powerful form was forever etched on her mind.

And Lord, the part that proclaimed him male was most impressive of all! Darker than his burnished skin, the long shaft shone like silky fabric, with ridges of blue veins mapping the surface. The rounded head, protruding from the cowl of his foreskin, was berry-red.

That was the part he would insert into her woman's furrow to till his crop of children – or so the laundress had described the act. The woman had stumbled for a “proper” way to describe it, but Maddie had heard the coarse terms before. *Swive. Fuck.* Both made her cringe inside, so “tilling” it was.

Although how exactly he would “till” her field was never firmed in her mind, but every woman submitted to the tilling at one time or another. She'd survive. No matter that his “hoe” was quite large. Anne and Kate, *the brazen hussies*, had both seemed eager to fornicate with him. Perhaps it diminished once it squeezed inside.

His lordship shifted in the large tub, causing the water to overspill the rim.

Maddie rushed forward to lay down linens on the floor.

“Never mind that,” he said, his voice purring like a large cat. “Attend me.”

In her haste, she'd forgotten her state of undress. His gaze looked her up and down where she knelt beside the tub. *I'm here to seduce him, not clean the floor.* Still, she was not quite ready to be this close. “Would you like wine while I bathe you?” Something to occupy him so that his piecing gaze wouldn't linger so long over her meager curves. Maddie knew she could not compare to the bounty the sisters offered.

“Only if you'll join me.”

Drink with him? “I brought only one cup.”

“I'll share.”

The low timbre of his voice lifted the fine hairs on the back of her neck. Every word felt charged with double meanings she was too addled to understand. Wine would likely soothe her ragged nerves. She approached the side table and poured a full glass of wine, promising herself to take small sips.

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He sipped the wine, seeming to savor the flavor, but not significantly reducing the amount in the cup. He offered it back to her.

She tilted back her head and pretended to take a long drink, then handed back the cup quickly, hoping he wouldn't notice she'd barely tasted it. Relieved when he waived it away, she set the cup on the floor beside the tub and wondered why she didn't take the full measure. The wine would loosen her fear and ease the pain of her first breaching, but something warned her to keep her wits about her this night.

Lord Garon's dark, watchful gaze left her uneasy about his intentions and passions. She'd heard some men practiced sinful sexual arts, and he had lived for several years among heathen peoples. No telling what perversions he'd learned.

But a bath was just a bath. Perhaps he would enjoy easing aching muscles after his long journey. Perhaps lethargy would ensue, and the "tilling" would not be quite the vigorous exercise she feared. She picked up a square of linen and dipped it into the bath water, aware his gaze followed her every movement. Working a dollop of soap into the linen, she took overlong working up scant suds with the scented soap. She gasped when his hand curved around her wrist.

"I don't want you to wash me." His hand tightened, and she dropped the cloth to the floor.

Her heart hammered in her chest. "No?" she asked, the word sounding thin to her own ears.

"No. I asked you to join me."

"You meant in the tub? With you?" Her gaze widened on his wicked smile. "But there's no room."

"Climb onto me." He tugged her gently, but she could feel the strength in his clasped fingers and knew he could force her if she refused.

Her hand trembled. "I'm to share your bath?"

"You're repeating yourself." His thumb rubbed the pulse throbbing in her wrist. "You're to see to my comfort, yes?"

"Of course," she said, breathless now. "Joining you will bring you comfort?" At his nod, panic rose. She'd hoped to acquaint herself with his body by bathing him, not

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sitting on him! “You have so many to see to your comfort,” she said, trying to draw out the moment long enough to calm her skittering nerves.

“You chased away the other comforts. I only have you at the moment.”

“Wouldn’t a wife provide better for your comfort?” *Good Lord, why did I say that?* The last thing she wanted was him thinking about a wife—

“I’ve nothing to give a wife.” His jaw tightened, and his gaze hardened. “I’ll never take one.”

Caution flew with the heat of her anger. “But you were betrothed.”

“To a child, before my fortunes changed.” His gaze fell away and the muscles of his throat flexed. “The contract was broken,” he said, his voice losing its hard edge, leaving his words sounding hollow.

Maddie’s anger died at the regret she read in his stark expression.

Foolish man! Whatever horrors visited Garon during his time in Palestine, she would find a way to help him through it. More convinced than ever of what she must do, she gripped both sides of the tub and climbed into the water.

Maddie carefully placed her feet on either side of his hips, as there was no other space to stand. Unfortunately, she was very aware that her legs gaped open and he could see *everything*.

Despite the momentary bleakness he’d revealed, Garon looked aplenty. His eyelids dipped, his nostrils flared, and he drew in a breath as though he was breathing in her scent.

Maddie’s legs trembled.

“Lower yourself,” he said quietly, tugging her down so her knees fit snugly on either side of his hips. “Now, that’s better, isn’t it?”

Maddie swallowed, unable to speak. He’d centered the ridge of his sex along her furrow. Better was not the word she would have chosen. *Disturbing. Alarming.* Both terms were more apt.

He appeared to wait for an answer. His gaze resting on her face, which she knew blazed hotly.

She cleared her throat. “Yes. That’s much better.”

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"Now that we're comfortable, why don't you tell me how you came to be in my keep." He said this as he pushed back her hair, baring her breasts to his gaze. His hand drifted from her cheek and downward to her chest.

She hadn't known she'd been dying for him to touch her intimately until the moment came. Her chest rose, her breast fitting into his palm as though crafted just for him. The calluses roughening his skin abraded the tips, and her flesh yearned for a deeper caress. "Later," she said, not recognizing the breathy voice sliding from her throat.

His other hand rose and fondled her flesh, and Maddie lost the stiffness that held her back erect, leaning closer, sighing when he thumbed her nipples, swirling on the points until she was gasping.

Her hands landed on his shoulders and kneaded the hard muscles they found there, clasping him as hard as her knees were his hips below the water.

One of his rough hands smoothed around her back and brought her body closer, until his breath gusted on her open lips. "I would kiss you," he whispered.

"Please," she breathed the word and closed her eyes, reveling in the sensation of his cock resting hard and full against her sex, her breasts sliding against the whorls of black hair on his chest.

"I'll frighten you." His hands cupped her face now, his thumbs sweeping over her eyes, her cheeks, her lips.

Maddie shivered, keeping her eyes closed. "You already do. What does it matter?"

"I'm not ready to share all my secrets."

"A kiss would be so revealing?"

He rubbed his lips against hers, and then nuzzled her face, stopping with his mouth beside her ear. "Mine could kill you."

Her woman's core clenched deep inside her belly. He thought a kiss could kill? *The poor, tormented man!* "Oh. Then I'll wait." She opened her eyes, finding his gaze, sharp and predatory, staring back. Unaccustomed to sharing intimacies with a man, nevertheless, she recognized arousal. Her confidence in her appeal to this man rose. She licked her lips. "Is there something else you would have of me?"

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His glance dropped to where their chest met. "Give me your breasts."

Though untutored in lovemaking, she knew his meaning, and while she could have wept over losing the hard ridge pressed against her sex below, she rose on her knees to deliver one breast to his waiting mouth.

His lips latched greedily onto her flesh and his arms swept around her back, pressing her so close she could hardly breathe. She forgot the need as his mouth sucked her nipple inside, his tongue swirling, then fluttering on the tip.

Below, his cock nudged between her legs and the crown found her opening, pushing inside just enough for her to feel pressure, feeding a growing need for him to fill her completely.

Maddie writhed in his arms, cries breaking free. They sounded like someone whimpering. *Nonsense, I never whimper.*

When his tongue clamped on her nipple and rubbed it against the top row of his front teeth, she wasn't sure whether it was painful or pleasurable. *But it was divine.* Angels playing harps couldn't match the Hallelujah chorusing in her mind. Her whole body convulsed, and she drove down, trying to take him deeper inside her, but his arms held her away from her goal.

"Please." Her hands clutched his head to her breast, urging him on.

He released her nipple and skimmed upward to her neck. "Forgive me," he whispered. Then his lips opened wide, and his teeth sank deep at the same time as his hips pumped upward, driving his cock deep into her body.

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Chapter Three

Garon groaned as her blood filled his mouth, and he swallowed her sweet essence. He'd felt the obstruction that proclaimed her a virgin, heard her strangled scream the moment he'd breached her, but he was helpless to stop now.

He planted his feet in the bottom of the tub and tunneled upward, driving his cock into her tight channel over and over as he drank from her, rapture stealing his mind.

She writhed on top of him, fighting his hold above while driving her hips in opposition to his thrusts. Her cries were broken, animalistic in their harshness as she fought and fucked him.

Her channel clasped around him in rhythmic caresses that pulled him deeper, squeezing him so tight it stopped his release, but her grasp was as addictive as her taste, and he hammered deeper.

"Milord! Garon! For god's sake you're killing her!" Raymond's shout broke through the red haze of his lusts, and he disengaged his mouth, his chest heaving, his body shaking with unassuaged need.

"Milord. She's still bleeding."

Shaking away the inner beast threatening to overtake him, Garon was shocked to see the rivulets of blood seeping in rhythm with her heartbeats, and quickly laved the piercings to close them.

More damning, he finally saw she'd fainted. He'd never noticed while he nearly drained her of life. Filled with shame, he eased his cock from her body.

Raymond pulled her from the bath and walked with her to the bed. She lay limp in the other man's arms and didn't offer a single murmur when he lay her down on the coverlet.

Garon rose, water sluicing off him, dread filling his belly. "Will she recover?" he asked, afraid of the answer.

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Raymond cast a glare over his shoulder. "She will. I'd have thought the sisters would dull your appetite."

Garon didn't protest the rebuke. Raymond was more than just his captain-at-arms. He'd proven himself a friend over the long months since Garon had woken as one of the damned.

Garon deserved harsh words. He deserved far worse.

He strode to the bed and looked down at the woman, lying motionless against sheets as pale her face. If not for the sound of her pulse, slowing now but strong, he'd have worried more. Blood smeared her neck and her inner thighs.

She'd been a virgin – a virgin, living in his keep – a woman who his people followed as though she had the right to lead them.

"I thought you'd no taste for virgins, Milord," Raymond said, staring at her thighs.

"I was misled." *In many more ways than this one.*

"Do you want me to take her below?"

"Leave her. I'll attend her."

Raymond lifted one sardonic brow. "And will you attend your need before you see to hers?" His gaze dropped to Garon's erection, still painfully hard.

"I'll not abuse her further. Get some rest."

Raymond gave a short bow and departed the room, leaving Garon alone with his wife.

Maddie awoke to a sound unlike any she had ever heard – a steady, moist slapping, punctuated by low grunts. She peeked from beneath her eyelids, only to discover her husband pumping his hand forcefully up and down his cock above the tub.

"Don't you know you'll go blind?" she exclaimed, forgetting about the embarrassment of finding him conducting such an activity in her concern.

"I won't go blind," he gritted out. "Go back to sleep."

"Father Ansel says –"

"Father Ansel's a virgin and doesn't know a damn thing – same as you," he said, his face reddening as his hand moved faster.

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Somehow seeing him thus engaged, took away a little of her unease. He realized she'd been a virgin. Another hurdle passed. Now how did she tell him their consummation had sealed the marriage contract?

"You should let me help you, seeing as how I'm the cause for...that."

His hand paused and he turned a glare black as Satan on her. "You will stay where you are."

Maddie thought she might have him figured out. He blustered as mean as a demon, but he saw to his own need rather than slaking his desire on her. Another noble might have taken advantage of the fact she'd been senseless.

Determined to make him see the advantages of having her for a wife, she rose to sit on the bed, letting the coverlet slip to her waist. "I'm too sore to have you inside me again so soon, but I'm told a woman's mouth can be just as pleasurable for a man."

He rolled his eyes toward the ceiling, and his hand loosened its grip. "You shouldn't talk to me when lust is riding high."

"Because you'll forget yourself again and drain me dry?"

His head snapped toward her, his eyes narrowing. "What would you know about—?"

She waved her hand, pretending nonchalance while her heart tripped rapidly. One misstep and all would be lost. "Your bite told me everything."

"Madam *Wife*, tell me how you know."

"You know who—" Her mouth snapped shut and she determined to steer the conversation from her little subterfuge. "'Tis why I came to live here—not that another vampire wanted to sup from my neck, but after my father died, my mother remarried. My stepfather is a werewolf and being the alpha dog he is, he considered me fair game since I was part of his new pack."

"Werewolves...exist?" he said, his expression registering wonder.

Maddie gave him a small smile, "As do ogres, trolls, and witches. I've learned much since his rude behavior opened my eyes."

"Did he hurt you?"

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"Lord no, just sniffed around me so much I knew I didn't have much time to save my maidenhead...for you."

Garon's eyebrows drew together in a frightening frown. "I can't offer you children."

"That is a problem," she said, keeping her tone even, her argument logical. "In order to retain our place here and defy detection, I must reproduce. Later, after we have gotten to know each other better, you might choose a man to see to it." The thought made her stomach clench in revulsion, but she didn't let him see it. Better to have him believe she was the perfect accomplice to his subterfuge, not a lovesick bride.

His brows rose. "To see to it?"

She nodded once. "To plant a babe in my belly."

"Do you not fear lying with me again?"

"Fear it?" she laughed softly. "I nearly died from the pleasure you gave me. Fainted dead away."

His face lost some of its hard-edged defensiveness. "I thought..."

"That you'd taken too much blood?" She stood, willing strength into her wobbly legs, and walked toward him. With his gaze clinging to her body and his cock twitching, his body betrayed his eagerness. He could glare all he liked, but he needed her. Wanted her.

She stopped in front of him and gazed up into his eyes. "I would have you kiss me first."

His jaw clenched. He didn't move to close the space between them.

"*I know,*" she said, reaching to lay her palm against his cheek. "Your kiss can kill. But the beast inside you is dying for what comes next."

He groaned his mouth descended to cover hers, his tongue sweeping inside her mouth.

Maddie clutched his shoulders, afraid she'd crumple at his feet. His kiss took her breath away.

Then his mouth softened over hers, his lips molding hers as though he ate her mouth. She slid her tongue along his then swept inward to touch his teeth, finding the

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long, sharp fangs that proclaimed him part demon. She pricked her tongue on one sharp point and lapped over his, sharing her blood in a bond truer than their written contract.

Garon broke the kiss, pulling his head back, his chest heaving. "You were a grubby child in pigtails the only time we met."

"And you were the embodiment of all my girlish fantasies. I fell in love with you from that first sight."

He shook his head. "I don't know anything about love."

"I will teach you." She leaned away and ran a finger along his cock. "As you will teach me. 'Tis the truth, I want you for my husband, Garon. You know that you need me as your wife and partner. Together, we can build a life."

"Right now –"

"Right now," she said lifting one brow, "you need a little wifely attention." Giving him a sultry smile, she knelt on the linens in front of him and grasped his cock in both hands, hoping the laundress' more embarrassing lessons would please him.

Garon held his breath as her mouth opened wide over his cock. Madeleine du Bary – no, Madeleine d'Angerville learned fast. Her hands wrapped firmly around the base of his cock, pulling back his foreskin as she circled her tongue on the swollen crown. Her tongue and lips smoothed and suckled until he grasped her hair hard and showed her the rhythm that would bring him release.

As he pumped into her hands and eager mouth, he groaned, filled with an elation she drew from his body and his heart. Her wondrous hazel eyes reflected hope and love, two concepts he'd stopped believing would ever be his to know.

Her teeth gently scraped his cock, and one hand slipped beneath to cup and knead his balls. He threw back his head, helpless to withdraw as cum spurted into her throat. "Maddie!" he cried out, swept away by the magic of her gift.

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Dawn peeked beneath the leather covering the window, hitting the floor far enough away not to cause her any immediate alarm. Maddie noted the fact and knew that soon her warrior would have to rest. She moaned and lifted her hips, urging him to hurry her release.

The man was driving her insane. His fingers and thumbs rubbed and plucked at her outer lips repeatedly, building a slow-burning heat all along her furrow and deep inside her channel. As a result, an embarrassing amount of moisture seeped from between her legs. His mouth suckled the tender inner lips, and his wicked tongue darted in clever little strokes to lap at the excitement slipping from her body.

Garon seemed to consider her cream tastier than wine – at least, that was what he told her.

“Garon, please!” she said, tugging at his ears.

His laughter gusted hot against her open sex and Maddie wondered what anyone bursting through their door would think of a husband performing such a wicked act upon his wife. Father Ansel would surely have plenty to say during his Sunday sermon. She giggled at the thought.

“You think this funny?”

“I’m sorry. I didn’t know a man would like doing something like this or that it would be so pleasurable.”

“You’re exactly to my tastes, and I’m ravenous,” he growled and rubbed his prickling beard over the small knot of nerves at the top of her opening.

“Husband!” she said, jerking against him, so sensitive was that one little bump. “I think I’m recovered well enough to—”

“Maddie, I promised myself I wouldn’t take you that way until you’d healed.” His tongue lapped her from perilously close to the other unmentionable opening upward to the knot that was quickly hardening like a pebble.

“But Garon,” she said, fighting for breath, “I’m dying for you to come inside me again. Please!” she keened.

He paused, and looked up into her eyes. “I might not be able to stop if I hurt you.”

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She pulled at his shoulders until he relented, moving up her body to lay over her. Unfortunately, his knees pressed her legs together preventing her from opening to accept him. She pouted her lips. "This won't work."

"Maddie..." he said, his voice rising in warning.

She'd learned very quickly he liked to be in charge. "Please?"

His brows furrowed in a fearsome scowl. "We'll go slowly."

"Of course," she said, knowing that "slowly" never lasted more than a few seconds between them.

Garon groaned and rested his head on her shoulder. "Had I known what a monster I had created..."

She pinched his sides and wriggled, freeing her knees to bring them up on either side of his hips. "This is how it's usually done."

A knock sounded at the door. "They'll want the sheets," Raymond shouted from the hallway. "I've brought fresh ones."

Maddie giggled. "They only need to remove the bathwater – it's quite pink."

"Good lord, they'll think I gutted you." He reached to grab the sheet from one corner of the bed and tugged it free, then reached for another corner.

"You know it would be much easier if we both got off the bed first."

"Not as pleasurable though," he murmured as he centered his cock and pushed inside her body.

Maddie's breath hitched at the burning.

He halted all movement. "Shall I stop?" he asked, his jaw clenched tight.

"I'll kill you if you do," she said, between gritted teeth, relieved when he pushed deeper.

With the sheet bunched beneath them, Garon rolled abruptly, taking her with him.

When she caught her breath, she realized she was once again riding his hips.

"Raymond, you can have the sheets now."

"Garon!" she exclaimed her hands coming up to shield her breasts as the door slammed opened.

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Raymond's dark eyes widened. "You could have told me to come back later, Milord." He cast a glare at Garon, but nodded politely to Maddie. "Madam."

Instead of letting Raymond snatch the sheet and leave, Garon pulled her hands from her breasts and offered one to Raymond. "Lady Madeleine," Garon said softly, "Meet Raymond, my captain-at-arms."

With Garon's cock stretching her inner walls, Maddie could not conceal the other signs of her arousal. Her cheeks heated, her breaths were shallow, and her nipples tightened into painful points.

When Raymond grasped her hand, she looked into his amused gaze and realized something she'd not noted in the few moments she'd glimpsed him the night before. He shared the same dark eyes and hair as her husband. His shoulders were every bit as broad. His height was just as impressive, but the rugged edge of his jaw and the sharp blades of his cheekbones were most telling.

She cast a startled glance at her husband who'd watched her as she came to the realization. "He's your brother."

"Half-brother."

"Garon?" Raymond let go of her hand.

"I'll explain later. What I'd like to know is how you discovered she is my wife," he said, sliding a narrowed glance at Raymond.

Raymond grinned. "Egbert wouldn't stop his nervous twitching until he'd consumed nearly a pitcher of ale – then the whole tale came spilling out."

"Ah well. I won't ask why you didn't warn me," Garon said, his hand gliding over Maddie's bare breast. "I'm pleased with the result."

"I thought as much," Raymond murmured, his interested gaze following Garon's caress.

"You two will know each other well," Garon said. "Introductions were needed. Leave us now."

With a final glance that raked over her naked body, Raymond left.

Garon grasped her hips and rolled once again, settling his body over hers. His hips flexed, driving his cock deeper still. "Another problem solved?"

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Dazed with passion, she nodded. "But not too soon, please."

"Will you find him acceptable?"

"He is much like you. I can pretend."

He kissed her lips and pumped inside her, branding her with his mouth and body.

Maddie's thoughts spun away, soaring on the wings of the rapture he built inside her heart and body.

"Perhaps we will take you together," he murmured, hooking her knees with his arms and lifting away to increase the strength and depth of his strokes.

Maddie cried out, the image of both men hovering over her flesh and the liquid heat melting her channel with his thrusts, combining to hurl her over the precipice.

When they'd both sufficiently recovered their breath, Maddie settled her head on his shoulder and idly fingered the dark hair on his chest, tugging him back to wakefulness. "Is it really possible for both of you to take me at the same time?" she asked, keeping her tone quiet—trying not to show how excited the thought made her.

Garon turned his head on the pillow and opened his eyes, a wicked grin splitting his face. "And I thought you such a mouse!"

She plucked his hair hard. "A mouse!"

He laughed and pulled her over him. "One more ride before we sleep?"

Maddie snuggled her sex down his cock, fitting him slowly inside, and then rocked against him, finding the crisp, curly hairs at the base of his groin caused a delicious friction. She rubbed and ground her mons against him until he uttered an oath and gripped her hips to lift her up and down his shaft.

"Getting impatient?" she gave him a sly smile. "I wonder if Raymond will find your bite as pleasurable."

He growled like the beast he was and pumped harder.

Fighting for breath, Maddie leaned down until her mouth hovered just over his. "I think we'll both sleep like the dead today."