

3. The Ruby

Guinevere

"I believe the lady said no," Cillian sighs, glancing at his ngernails unenthusiastically

"And who the f**k are you?" Keagan snarls, his grip tightening on my wrist.

Cillian gives him an amused smile, his long legs taking gracious strides over to us. He was a tall man, easily over 6'4 with a handsome face and muscles rippling under his button down shirt. Dressed in a gorgeous black suit, he looked like the Prince that he was, power exuding from his being. I could feel Keagan shrink back a bit as Cillian towers over him, a crooked smile on his face.

Keagan attempts to hide his fear but I can still hear his heart pound against his rib cage as Cillian leans down to Keagan's ear.

"Why.... I'm her boyfriend," Cillian whispers.

The blood drains from my face and I cough in shock.

"B-Boyfriend?" Keagan repeats, looking back at me in confusion. "You have a boyfriend?"

I stare at the two men, my mind still jumbled up at the fact that a bloody vampire was staring at me. And not just any vampire, Cillian Knight, one of the Prince's of one of the most proluc Vampire clans in the United Kingdom. What the hell was he doing here in the States?

Cillian's laugh nally gets me out of my trance and I gain control of my voice again.

"Y-yes. We just started dating yesterday," I say, forcing a smile. "So if you could please leave, I'd like to close up shop and head home now."

My heart was racing uncontrollably. If Cillian found me here, there was no doubt Roman would too and there was no way I was going back to being his prisoner. Not a chance.

Keagan sizes up Cillian but it was obvious who would win the match. With an annoyed growl, Keagan let's go of my hand and storms out of the shop, muttering stupidity under his breath.

Cillian chuckles to himself as he watches Keagan leave.

"It's too bad he had to go. I was looking forward to an early evening snack," he says, licking his fangs.

I don't say anything, too busy eying the door and calculating my escape.

"Ah, Gwennie," Cillian laughs, his piercing eyes settling on me. "You know better than that."

Within a blink of an eye, he was standing beside me, leaning down to my neck, feathering light kisses on my throat. I don't dare move and hold my breath as he inhales my scent.

"You smell exquisite, Gwennie," he chuckles, his cold breath making my skin explode in goosebumps. "If I remember correctly, you taste just as good," he moans as his tongue slides across my bare esh.

The memory of his rst bite ashes before my eyes and I close them tightly to make it go away. I hated that day.

I raise my hand to slap him but he catches my wrist before the blow reaches his face.

"Careful with the goods, Gwennie," he snickers, his cold ngers sending chills down my spine. "I'm a drone, remember? My entire livelihood depends on my looks."

I snarl at him, shoving him away from me as he laughs. Eager to put some distance between us, I try to nish restocking the shelves. Cillian leans against the counter and watches me, infuriating me even more.

"What is it you want, blood sucker?" I snarl, never once looking at him.

He feigns hurt. "Why Gwennie, there's no need for name calling. I'm just here to visit an old friend."

"I'm not your friend!" I snap, spinning on my heel to look at him. "And stop calling me Gwennie. I'm Sarah here. Now what exactly is it you want from me?"

He gives me an amused look and stands to his full height.

"I need your help, love," he says, offering me his signature crooked smile.

"I'm not helping you do anything," I huff, turning back to my books.

Suddenly, I feel a tight grip on my arms before I'm slammed against the bookshelf. Cillian's hand wraps around my neck as he leans into me again, his lips brushing up against my cheek.

"I wasn't asking, Love," he murmurs before letting me go and turning on his heel.

I slump onto the oor, blinking furiously as I gather my wits about me.

"I don't take orders from vampires," I mutter as I pick myself up off the oor and dust myself off.

"Perhaps not, my dear," he sighs, a bit of annoyance in his words. "But you will listen to me," he smirks. "Unless you want the little boy and the human dead."

The blood drains from my face.

He knows about Natalia and Dakotal?

"You know it's been so long since I've fed on a werewolf pup," Cillian chuckles to himself. "I'm looking forward to a..."

"If you so much as touch him, I will..."

"You'll what, Gwennie?" He snickers, stalking over to me so that his tall, lean body towers over my own. I try my best not to cower and hold my ground. "You'll kill me?" He adds with a laugh. "You forget, love, I'm already dead."

"There are worse things than death," I grumble to myself.

He studies his hands for a moment before looking up at me again.

"I need your help nding the Ruby," he says after a long pause.

I knew instantly what he was talking about but feign ignorance to esh out what he wanted to know.

"A Ruby?" I ask. "What do you want a Ruby for?"

"Don't play stupid, Guinevere," he snaps back. "The Ruby of Truth."

I run my nger along the spine of an old book, feeling the creases of its usage.

"What truth do you seek?" I inquire, keeping my eyes on the book.

He says nothing and it pisses me off.

"You're asking for my help. I should know why you are looking for the Ruby!" I demand, slamming the book on the counter.

He hesitates for a moment, wondering whether to tell me or not.

"My Queen is dying," he says quietly, his eyes cast down, a slight tremor in his voice. "Letum."

Like witches, vampires are immortal beings, immune from aging and diseases... but they were not immune to spells and magic. Letum was an ancient protection spell placed on certain human bloodlines. A vampire merely had to drink the blood of a Letum human and they would be condemned to a slow and painful death. Letum blood was indistinguishable from normal healthy blood. It had no taste, no smell, no difference in color. Legend has it that a fae cast the spell to protect a lover from the vampires; others say it was a witch. Regardless, Letum blood was a death sentence to anyone who drank it.

The rst symptoms were forgetfulness and fatigue. Then came the madness, the inability to think a coherent thought, followed by death. It could take years for a vampire to slowly descend into madness before Death took them out of their misery. If Cillian's Queen had Letum, there was no saving her. Her death was only a waiting game now.

I almost feel bad for him. Almost. But I had much more pressing matters to think about.

This explains why a drone was away from his nest, I think to myself. But why did he need the Ruby?

"That doesn't explain..."

"I need the Ruby to nd a Seeker," he sighs, pinching the bridge of his nose. "My clan needs a new Queen."

"Why don't you just take over?" I joke.

I knew exactly why he couldn't but it was funny nonetheless to hear it from his mouth. I loved vampire societies. Unlike werewolves or dragons, vampires were matriarchal, led and run by women. As a drone, Cillian had but one job and it involved using his c**k to please his Queen. His title as Prince meant nothing more than that he was one of his Queen's favorite play things. He had no right to rule his clan.

He ignores my comment, looking even more annoyed than before.

"The Ruby, Gwen. I need the Ruby," he growls.

I raise an eyebrow at him. I didn't have the slightest idea where the Ruby was. It had been decades since I last heard of it.

"What makes you think I know where it is?" I ask.

He closes the space between us, trapping me against a bookshelf.

"Rumor has it," he whispers, gently caressing the side of my face. "You were recently in contact with the last known users of the Ruby."

I raise an eyebrow at him. "Who?"

"I believe they go by Tais and Ira," he smiles as my face once again drains of color. "Oh so you do know them?" He chuckles. "Excellent. Then this should be easy."

"Those witches are dead," I respond.

"Perhaps," he shrugs. "But their things are not. Surely, they kept the Ruby among their possessions."

I knew now what he wanted from me but I could not go back to River Moon. Not with Roman still looking for me and not with Chava being so close. I barely made it out the rst time. I don't think I'll be able to leave if I see him again.

Cillian notices my fear and smirks to himself. "Judging by your face, you're running again. Who, might I ask, are you running from now?" He chuckles.

I glare at him. I didn't owe him any answers.

"It doesn't matter," I snap. "I don't owe you anything so just leave me alone!"

"Oh but you do," he sneers, ashing his fangs at me. "Remember? I helped you escape. So unless you want to go back to your kingdom, you'll go get the Ruby from the mutts... your Majesty."

He bows to me, bile threatening to erupt from my mouth. I hadn't been called that in over a century. Cillian laughs at my disgust.

"Oh now there's now need for such a sour face, Lady Alderon," he smirks.

"Don't call me that!" I growl as he bursts into laughter.

He knew exactly how to push my buttons but I needed to focus. Natalia and Dakota's lives were at stake. I take a few deep breaths to collect myself, needing to gure out how to get the Ruby and get the vampires out of my hair for good.

Now where would those witches put the Ruby?

A dark thought enters my mind.

"The Ruby has most likely been discarded along with Tais and Ira's belongings," I sigh. "There's no point going to..."

"Well then you better hope it's still there, my dear," he snaps, inching closer to me. "Because the life your little human friend and her pup quite literally depend on it."

My heart pounds against my ears as I watch him walk towards the door.

"You have 72 hours to retrieve the Ruby. Get it and bring it here to this address." He hands me a note with some words scribbled on it. "Succeed and we won't touch a hair on your little friend's head," he says over his shoulder as he gets to the door. "Don't, and not only will I eat the pup, but I'll make sure you return to your Kingdom. Good luck, my dear."

He walks through the door only to pop his head back in.

"Oh and one more thing. Tell anyone about this little arrangement, including the ivory mutts and I will eat the pup, Guinevere," he sings, a cheeky grin on his lips. "Always so fun to do business with you, your Majesty. See you in three days..."

Cillian disappears into the night, leaving me stranded in the shop, alone and frightened.

What the hell was I going to do now?

My hands shake as I close up the shop and I practically sprint to the daycare center to pick up Dakota. To my relief, the little boy was happily playing with his toy train, not a strand of hair out of place.

I sign him out and collect his things before carrying him in my arms. I don't drive. I hated those newfangled chunks of metal. They were horrifying. Instead, I cast an invisibility spell on Dakota and I, and walk home; looking over my shoulder every once in a while to ensure we weren't being followed.

I was taking on edge the entire walk home, jumping at any sudden noise or movement. It made Dakota laugh at me.

"Silly Auntie Gwen," he giggles as we nally approach my small at on the outskirts of town.

"Oh hush!" I frown at the little boy as I set him down. We wash our hands and I pull out our matching aprons.

"What are we making today, Auntie?" He asks, struggling to roll up his sleeves on his own.

Dakota loved to help me in the kitchen.

"Well, what are you in the mood for?" I ask, helping him with his sleeves and tying the apron for him.

"Pizzal!" He laughs.

Of course, I sigh.

I pull out some pizza dough, sauce and cheese for us to work with and after a very messy hour of cooking, our lovely pizza is ready to eat. We sit at the dinner table and Dakota explains with excruciating detail how his day went. He apparently had a dispute over a dinosaur today with a playmate.

"Alright love, let's go wash up," I say, pushing him towards the bathroom.

I race him to the bathroom and quickly help him get undressed for a bath. By 8 pm, my little companion is fast asleep in my room, curled up with a teddy bear I got him a while back.

Left alone to my thoughts, I begin to pack for my trip to River Moon, praying to Earth Goddess that I would not run into Salvador and that Aurora had not discarded Tais and Ira's things just yet.

Packed and ready to go, I climb into bed with Dakota and succumb to my exhaustion. Around 3 am, a knock at the door nearly startles me to death and I grab a bat for protection. Caution in my every step, I slowly walk towards the door and peek through the peephole.

I'm relieved to see Natalia waiting patiently on the other side and immediately swing the door open for her to come in.

She notices my bag by the door. "Are you going on a trip?" She asks, pointing to the bag.

"Uh, yes," I nod, trying to come up with a proper explanation. I didn't want to worry her about the vampires keeping a close eye on her. If all went well on this trip, I would have everything sorted out soon enough. "I'm so sorry darling. Something came up and I'm needed in California."

"You're going to the wolves again, aren't you?" She asks, worry clouding her eyes and I try to ease her concern.

"I'll be back in three days time, darling," I add. "I've left some money for you to hire a sitter while I'm gone."

She frowns at me. "You don't need to do that, Gwen. I can take care of Dakota on my own."

It's my turn to frown. "I know you can darling, but I'm leaving with such short notice. I know it will be dicult for you to nd a substitute for morning."

She pulls me into a hug. "Thank you for caring, Gwennie. But I'll be okay on my own for three days. Please, just come back to me in one piece, though, okay?"

I understood her concern. She did not trust werewolves, not after all she had been through with her mate. But not all werewolves are as cruel as her mate and most cherished their mate bond. Queen Aurora and King Oliver were proof of that.

"I'll be back before you know it," I say, forcing a smile for her benet. I search my house for a piece of paper and write down a number before handing it to her. "Here. If you need to reach me during this time for any reason, call this number and ask for Aurora Altamirano."

She giggles as she looks at the paper. "You really need to get a phone."

I scrunch my nose in disgust. "I'm perfectly ne the way I am," I huff, much to her amusement. "I don't need your technology. A good letter is good enough for me."

She throws back her head in laughter before pulling me in for a hug again.

"Goddess, I love you and you're medieval technology," she chuckles.

I stick out my tongue at her as she goes to collect her son.

"Would you like me to walk you home?" I offer as she walks down the steps.

She only lived down the road but I was still worried for her now that I knew Cillian was in town. She shakes her head and waves goodbye to me. I stay by the door and watch her disappear down the street to her tiny house.

In the early morning hours, I grab my things and head for the Greyhound bus station and then take the ferry to Seattle.

Goddess protect me, I mutter to myself as I board a plane to California.