

Chapter One

I couldn't get out of the car. Ridiculous. I was a bad-ass vampire. I knew this place, had been here a hundred times or more. Sure, not all of them had been good times but at least I'd had Jerry by my side. Now Castle Campbell in all its ruined beauty was just yards away and I felt the determination that had carried me across an ocean and several countries drain right out of me.

I had to smile though when I noticed the Laird had let the National Trust open the place to tourists at five pounds a pop. Not that the family of vampires cared what happened during the day in the stone fortress above their heads. The family would sleep like the dead in the luxurious quarters they'd built centuries ago below ground. It was dark now and the tourists were long gone, the tea and gift shop in the tower closed.

"Get out of the freaking car." I hit the plastic steering wheel. Talking to myself. Trying to screw up my courage. Because

I wasn't supposed to be here. Jerry had asked for time. To think about our relationship. And had I given it to him? Of course not. Glory St. Clair worked on her own time table. And right now I needed, desperately, to see my man and explain some things. But actually sitting here, staring at the castle where his mother had treated me like a whore her son had dragged home centuries ago, had brought me crashing back to reality.

Maybe Jerry would be better off without me. I was a freak. Not who or what he'd thought he'd fallen for all those years ago. He deserved better. For once, his mother and I agreed. I sagged against the car window. What had I been thinking?

A knock on the glass next to me made me jump. My vamp instincts sucked if I could be surprised like that. I rolled down the window. El cheapo rental car didn't even have power windows.

"Aren't you coming in?" Jeremy Blade, Jeremiah Campbell III, my sire, whatever you wanted to call him, smiled at me.

"Do you want me to?"

His answer was to jerk open the door and haul me into his arms. "How can you ask that? Do you have any idea how much I've missed you?" He buried his face in my neck and just inhaled. In vamp terms that was the equivalent of "The Hallelujah Chorus".

"I was supposed to give you some thinking time." I murmured this against the soft wool of his plaid, carelessly thrown over a cotton shirt. I inhaled him too, soaking in the dear, achingly

familiar scent of male and Jerry that I craved with everything in me.

"I shouldn't have taken off like that. You needed me." He leaned back and looked into my eyes. "God, but I'm sorry." He kissed me then, making sure I knew just how much he cared. Tears pricked my eyelids but I wasn't about to let them fall and ruin this moment. My gamble had paid off. And things would only get better once Jerry knew the truth about how we'd met and fallen in love.

I smiled as he pulled back. "I have so much to tell you."

"No kidding. Like how you managed to cross the Atlantic." He glanced at my rental car and dismissed it as unworthy. "I would have sent a plane for you, Gloriana."

"The details about my trip can wait. I have big news for you, Jer." I held onto him, so glad to finally be with him because the trip had been harrowing and not the lighthearted adventure I'd paint for him when I got around to sharing. I'm always on a budget and the death sleep makes travel complicated. Enough said.

"Come inside, lass. Mara had just arrived when the servants spotted you on the security cameras. She claims to have big news too." Jerry tugged me toward the heavy wooden and iron door to the family quarters hidden behind clever landscaping.

"Mara." Not my favorite person. She'd always wanted Jerry for herself.

"You can be nice to her for five minutes. Then we can be alone." Jerry gave me such a brilliant smile, I had to stop him in the doorway and kiss him again.

"Are you sure we can't slip away into the pasture for a real reunion instead? I remember a time or two..."

My lover laughed. "Or twenty. Not yet. Da is inside and eager to greet you. He always did love you, you know. My mother is in Paris so you can relax on that score. And we'll make sure Mara is sent on her way quickly." Jerry slid one hand around my waist and the other up to investigate my plunging neckline. "Very quickly."

"See that you do." I sighed as he kissed me again, lingering over it as his hands explored me. I'd stopped in the village of Dollar down below the castle and booked a room so I could freshen up before I'd come here. I wore a low-cut sweater in his favorite blue with a skirt that showed off my legs and distracted from my hips. I pulled back and glanced around. "Where are these security cameras? Are we giving some worker a thrill?"

Jerry nodded toward a dark corner of the doorway. "Afraid so. Da's outfitted the entire area with cameras, sensors. He's big on security and you know how the clan is about the feud with the MacDonalds."

"Don't start." I held up my hand. "Let's get this deal with Mara over with. Then we can be alone."

"I'm with you there." He pulled me into the large living area where his father sat talking with Mara, the widow of Jerry's best friend.

"Well, now, it was Gloriana. Welcome to the castle, lass. Mara, look who's here." The Laird, Angus Jeremiah Campbell II, got up to hug me then led me to the couch to face Mara. We exchanged wintery smiles. As usual, she was dressed expensively to show off her slim figure. She had the dark red hair, pale skin and altogether perfect looks of a true Scottish lass. I was the epitome of blonde, blue-eyed Englishwoman. Or I'd always thought of myself that way. It had marked me an outsider when I'd first arrived on Jerry's arm.

After Jerry and I squeezed together on the love seat, Angus asked me questions about my trip and I answered in a general way. Apparently Jerry hadn't told his father about the problems between us that had sent him home this time. I sure wasn't going to bring them up and the warm reassurance of Jerry's hand on mine helped me know I didn't need to be in a hurry to do so.

"Well, Mara. Jerry says you have big news." I was eager to move things along.

"I do." She smiled shyly and glanced at Jerry then held out her left hand. The huge diamond on her ring finger should have given us all a clue. "I'm getting married."

"Wow. Just wow. Who's the lucky guy?" I leaned back, happy when Jerry stayed seated next to me, his hard thigh snug against

mine.

"Davy McLeod. You know him, Jeremiah. He says you two used to race horses together at Newmarket." Mara stared down at her ring and actually looked happy.

"Sure. Davy's a good man." Jerry played with my fingers. I had a feeling he was thinking that I'd never accepted a ring from him. But then we now had a clue why not, didn't we?

"A fine clan, the McLeods. Allies in times of war. Not like those backstabbing MacDonalds." The Laird got up and kissed Mara's cheek. "Well done, lass. Well done. I wish you happy."

"And you, Jeremiah. Do you wish me happy?" Mara stood and the gentleman in him got Jerry to his feet instantly.

"Of course. If you want this and love the man, have at it." Jerry put his hands on her shoulders. "But if you need money or feel pressured for any other reason... Well, you are my daughter's mother. I will always make sure you are cared for."

"How thoughtful." Mara stared up at him and for a moment I saw the bitter twist to her mouth that told the true story. She'd always wanted Jerry for herself. But she realized now that she couldn't make him love her and had apparently decided to cut her losses. This McLeod obviously had the bucks and was a decent guy if the Laird approved of him. Knowing Mara, she'd already run him through his paces in the sack as well. I kept my mouth shut. I knew anything I had to say would be unwelcome at this point.

"You know you and I..." Jerry glanced back at me then shook his head. He leaned down to kiss Mara's cheek. "Be happy."

"Of course. Will you walk me to the door? Help me with my cloak?" She smiled and smoothed her designer skirt.

"Certainly." Jerry proffered his arm in the courtly manner of centuries past.

I couldn't sit still. Something about this whole show seemed off to me. Mara was being docile, almost robotic. Where was the fiery woman who would have at least made a cutting remark to me? Instead she'd treated me like I was invisible. Which was an improvement but so not like her. She should have been gloating, bragging about the rich, handsome husband she'd captured. Even waved that rock under my nose. I was steps behind the pair as they reached the door to the outside.

"I shifted here and will shift away again. I'll be all right. Davy's waiting for me in the village." Mara let Jerry help her with her long cloak. The Kilpatrick plaid, of course. Once she married, she'd start wearing the McLeod colors. Everyone in this country wore their plaids like a badge. Jerry had on his kilt and looked a treat. Even the laird was lounging in his plaid in front of his big screen TV which he'd just turned on. "CSI" was starting. The man loved blood any way he could find it.

"Be careful." Jerry settled Mara's long cape over her shoulders and fastened it at her neck.

"Always." Suddenly a knife appeared in her hand. "Too late for you." She plunged it into his chest.

"Jerry, my God! Angus! Help!" I lunged toward her as Mara lifted the knife again. Jerry grabbed her arm but she'd obviously wounded him seriously with the first blow. He slumped, dragging her down to the floor with him where he seemed down for the count.

I jumped on Mara and wrestled the knife out of her hands tossing it away with a clatter. Then I pulled her off of him and shoved her hard, knocking her head against the stone floor. She struggled like a mad woman, scratching and hitting at me.

"Stop it! What the hell are you doing?" I slapped her face and her eyes widened, like she was coming out of a daze.

"What? Get off of me!" She twisted her hands, trying to get free. Then she turned her head and saw Jerry lying in a pool of his own blood. "Jeremiah? Who did this to you? Gloriana! Did you hurt him?"

"No, you stupid bitch. You stabbed him. How can you deny it?" I climbed off of her and thrust her into Angus' arms then dropped to my knees next to Jerry. "Jerry, can you hear me?"

When he didn't answer, I got frantic, searching him for other injuries. There was only the one knife wound though and, for a vampire, it was relatively minor. It had already stopped bleeding. I pressed my hand to his heart and felt the slow steady thump. Of course he was alive, but why wasn't he

stirring? My own heart lodged in my throat as the hall filled with men and noise.

"What happened here?" Angus held onto Mara. "Lass, what's this about?"

She sobbed and leaned against him. "I don't know. I don't know. There was a knife. I only remember the knife. Someone gave me a knife. Outside."

"Witchcraft. You were spelled." Angus gestured at the men who'd gathered when he'd sounded the alarm. Obviously the security cameras had caught the whole attack. A few shouted questions and hard looks at Mara confirmed my story. "Outside, search the grounds. Who gave you the knife? What did this person look like?"

"I don't know." Mara shook her head. "A woman. Old, I think, not sure. Face covered. Stayed in the shadows. I, I couldn't help myself." She collapsed on the floor next to Jerry. "What have I done?"

"Well, you haven't killed him. Lucky for you or I'd use that knife to rip your heart out of your skinny body." I cradled Jerry's head in my lap. "Come on, Jerry, please wake up." Why had he lost consciousness?

Yes, he'd bled a lot and would need to feed, but I'd be more than happy to take care of that. Jerry was strong and healthy. This kind of stab wound shouldn't even have dropped him. I heard Mara blubbering and wanted to slap her silent.

Witchcraft? Not sure I was buying it but something was off about this whole attack.

"Careful with that knife. It may have poison on it." That was the only explanation I could come up with for Jerry's condition. The servant who'd been about to pick up the weapon jumped away from it.

"Poison." Angus dragged Mara to her feet. "Are you sure you don't remember who gave it to you?" He shook her, not too gently either. "Speak up, girl. You just stabbed my son. No lies now. Why did you try to kill Jeremiah?"

"I don't know, Laird. I feel like..." She rubbed her forehead. "I need Davy. Can you call him for me? I only remember a woman, all in black. Outside the castle. She gave me the knife and told me what to do. I didn't want to do it. But I couldn't seem to help myself. Like you said. I was bewitched, under a spell." She stared up at Angus with her bright green eyes, almost feverish now. "He's not going to die, is he?"

"He'd better not." I couldn't look at her as I ran my hand over Jerry's strong jaw and the slight roughness of his beard, there no matter how often he shaved. To my relief he moaned and his eyes fluttered open. He stared up at me for a moment then glanced around the hallway before focusing on me again.

"Jerry, are you all right? How do you feel?" I leaned closer, willing him to say something.

"Like I took a knife in my gut. But if you're offering to

feed me back to health, lass, then I reckon I'll be up and about in no time." He grinned and slid a hand to the back of my head to draw my neck down to his mouth where his fangs descended.

"Here? On this cold stone floor? Let's get you cleaned up and moved to your bed." I tried to pry his fingers off of me but he wasn't ready to let go. "Come on, Jer. This is ridiculous. I'll feed you. But not here." I glanced at his father and Mara who both watched us.

"Tell her, Da. The lass seems reluctant. But you paid her well, didn't you? I need to feed. Let's get on with it so I can go after the bastard who stuck me. Did you see who did it?" Jerry jerked me close again.

"Wait!" I put my hands on his chest and shoved. "Look at me." I bit my lip, terribly afraid that I knew what was wrong. "Jeremiah Campbell, just who do you think I am?"

"Your name? No notion. But you're comely enough and your blood smells like fine wine, damned if it doesn't." He sniffed the air but his smile faltered when he pressed a hand to his chest. "Bloody hell but that hurts. Let's get on with it. Quit playing coy and do your duty." He struggled as he tried to sit up then looked at his father. "Da, was it a MacDonald? Tell William to saddle Thunder and we'll ride out as soon as I've healed. We'll teach them to attack us inside our own home."

"Easy, lad. We'll get whoever is responsible. Lass, let him drink." Angus nodded at me.

I took a breath to keep from crying. God, please, please say I had it wrong. A comely lass bought and paid for? Jerry pulled me close until his fangs pierced my neck. He drew deep and I closed my eyes, slipping my hands up to cling to his silky hair. I sat on the cold stone floor in his father's castle, the man drinking my blood holding me as if we were strangers. Jerry, my sire, the love of my life, didn't know me. What was I going to do?