

# *Vampiric Romance*

## *Siggy Commission for The Quelch*

High up in the alpine of treacherous mountain and sheer cliff faces with bottomless crevices speckling the land like the open maws of earthen beasts, a curious horde of glowing orange orbs dart through the thick trunks of primeval wood, breaking the pitch black of night while painting the surroundings in warm oranges and brilliant whites. Accompanied by the distant raucous of an irate mob and the slow rumble of their combined boots tromping through the woods, it was clear that something big was going on.

While some in the crowd held flaming torches, weathered axes and rustic crossbows primed with sturdy bolts and ready to fire, others wielded oak staves carved into the shape of a cross with its lower portion tapering off into a bladed stump fashioned from haphazard strokes and purposeful tampering to ensure as many splinters stuck out as possible to bring out the highest level of pain in the unfortunate soul on the receiving end of it.

But it wasn't a human the group were hunting, nor did it have a soul in the first place. It was something that they blamed for all their ill fortunes under the misguided beliefs a blinded group of fools had come to bear from another land. It didn't take long for the 'unenlightened' masses to band together armed with the information and skills taught by these foreigners to bear on the unholy threats that plagued the land and its people. From mischievous spirits to the Wood Folk they once held reverence for, all things fantastical and otherworldly would soon begin to fade from the land as a new generation of faithless folk arose to supplant their elders' fervent beliefs in the old ways.

And once the weaker ones were disposed of, the unruly mob began to grow bolder, eventually coming into conflict with stronger entities that would be the first to spill human blood in defense of themselves and their brethren. But with humans being the arrogant creatures they were, each loss only served to fuel their self-righteous belief that the creatures they were up against were nothing more than animals and were better off culled from the face of the land, land they saw as theirs and theirs alone despite the treaties of the past that allowed the sentient races of man and beast to live together in harmony.

But even beasts had their limit, and while they stood stronger than a hundred men alone, the humans' seemingly endless numbers and crude weaponry would eventually fell them. No matter how much they wanted to be left alone, the bloodthirsty mob would always return with more numbers to buffer their ranks and new weapons with which to kill them with. Eventually a decision would come to be made in the form of a mass exodus from the land in the hopes of finding greener pastures elsewhere. But some would choose to stay, with too much emotional baggage and attachment holding them back, they had seen fit to remain, maybe even to buy their fleeing companions time while the humans went after them.

Chief among these was a Higher Vampire going by the name of *Danitha*, a rare occurrence even in the realm of the supernatural. Higher Vampires were creatures of the night, feasting on the blood of animal and human alike before returning to whichever place had taken their fancy, sequestered in the darkness offered by mountain peaks or thick forests that had been around for as long as they have. One quality that set them apart from their lower brethren was their strength, speed and the ability to use magic to bolster their already impressive repertoire of offensive and defensive skills. Add to that a powerful mind capable of independent thought and comprehending the world around them, and you had Higher Vampires that were very much able to formulate strategies and plans of attack, the fearsome string that bundled it all together.

One would think these cunning creatures to look like bestial gargoyles with wings and fangs, but that description only held true for the less intelligent and devolved kin of the Higher Vampire, undead creatures risen from the dead to do the bidding of their more intellectually capable masters. Instead of raw aggression and ferocity, furtive deception and cunning was the bread and butter of any Higher Vampire whose outer appearance was nearly indistinguishable from any other human except for a few key exceptions that could be hidden with magic.

For one, their hide was of a deathly pallor not unlike that of a corpse with an equally cold chill to the touch. And while it was hard to see from afar, a closer inspection bears fruit in the form of serpentine slits for irises, deep set in the middle of alluring eyes that could enchant any weak willed minds with ease. But with their command over magic, these 'blemishes' were easily hidden, allowing them to seamlessly blend in with humans wherever they lived, to make connections if they so pleased but more importantly; to satiate their hunger for human blood. While some only fed in moderation, others took on the mantle of serial killers and bandit lords, becoming too addicted to see the harm they did to both sides of the conflict. Ruining the reputation of Higher Vampires and stirring insecurity and distrust in the humans. *Danitha* was capable of all these things and more, but unlike her brethren, she preferred a life of solitude, hunting local animals in the abundant forests to keep herself filled at night before returning to the derelict but still standing keep hidden away at the top of the mountains with its craggy spires blending in perfectly with the rocky terrain and blanketing snow. After a millenia's worth of time alone and endless meditation, the vampiress had become immune to her kind's innate thirst for human blood, or at least, that was what she had convinced herself of until now, when her repetitious life of self imposed isolation had come to an end to answer the call of her magically inclined supernatural fellows. Leaving her domain after her senses had told her of an intruder that hadn't dared enter past the front door separate from the larger crowd of humans wandering by far below torches and weapons demanding blood.

And now as she pushes herself up against a gnarled tree trunk with a searing wound in her side, that bloodlust she had thought long banished had begun to flow freely within her veins, gritting her teeth against a wracking feeling she had long forgotten; pain.

Whatever it was that the humans had shot her with was enough to bypass her natural defenses. And while she had the wit and speed to dodge one, not even a Higher Vampire could dodge a web of criss-crossing shots that came from every single direction. And it didn't help that the mob had some sort of vile masking scent over them, making it exceptionally hard to land her strikes amidst the glare of their flames and the nauseating sight of the holy crosses they bore atop those wooden stakes of theirs. When the noise of the humans impending approach reached her ears atop her hidden perch, she had thought them to be easy pickings, scowling at the mindless hoard on yet another one of their nightly hunts for the inhuman.

But after her first kill with a swift decapitation with her rending claws, the resultant assault against her senses from the humans visual and auditory wards had left her open for a counterattack.

Left with no other choice, Danitha was quick to retreat, only realizing she had been struck in the side once the slight stinging from the initial impact had grown into a furious throbbing in the flesh around the puncture wound while life energy begins to leave her body from the small yet devastating wound. If one bolt was enough to do this to her, then Danitha shivered at the idea of what would've happened if all those bolts from earlier had found their mark.

*'This is ridiculous! Since when did those rats get so smart anyway?!*

After so long without human blood, Danitha was in no state to fight a group of well armed humans, and with the wound in her side, she would probably be the first of her kind to die lying against a tree, not to another or to the bite of a sword but because she lost too much blood.

But even if she survived, there was no way she would be able to withstand the rays of the morning sun. While it wouldn't kill her outright, the resultant coma would, if she were to fall asleep in this state...it would be her last nap for sure.

**"Need...to move...can't just...agh!"**

No matter what she tried however, moving was futile with her worsening wound. Once she had stopped moving and the initial adrenaline had faded, Danitha was doomed. Without help, she could do nothing but curse her fate, looking up at the starry skies above shrouded by the twisted branches and speckled leaves of the towering trees above.

With what little remained of her strength continuing to leave her, Danitha's struggle to survive ceases as crimson arms fall to her sides, exposing the pus ridden wound staining her extravagant snow matted dress, letting out a hoarse chuckle as the strength to maintain her posture fades, leaning forward while barely missing the sight of an approaching figure from the darkness, creeping slowly and hunched over as they sought to creep up on a helpless vampire in her dying moments.

*'I'm sorry Fran...I don't think I'll be able to...hold up my promise after all...'*

Unlike the angry mob of humans however, Danitha could clearly smell the scent of the stranger. Despite the bulk of it's silhouette, she could tell the human was a female, young yet mature in more ways than one. An experienced survivor skilled in the arts of medicine evident from the musk of herbs in her pouches and in the calluses on her fingers from years of scouring plants and trees in search of her ingredients.

But the scent of earthen leaves and sun kissed dew told her this human wasn't native. Unlike the others who usually reeked of fish and stale wood, she smelled...attractive...foreign...and yet, familiar.

With her eyelids growing heavy and her body running colder than death however, Danitha wouldn't be able to contemplate whoever this stranger was for much longer as she falls unconscious right before the mystery woman peels apart her hood, revealing a soft wave of auburn hair framing a naive young face with the excess done up into a neat, flowing ponytail. She couldn't hear what she was saying, but she didn't care.

If this was to be her end then she would gladly accept it...at least then the only thing she would have to worry about was her dearest chiding and reprimanding her for failing to hold up her end of their promise even in the afterlife...if there was such a thing anyway...

### ***~The Wanderer~***

**"Shit...her wounds...this isn't right...how...no, this isn't the time for that, need to get her somewhere safer first!"**

In all her time as a healer, Freya had never seen wounds like these before; necrotized around a puckered hole, flesh that looked as if it had been dissolved, blood and mucus pooling in burned crevices. While the cause had clearly been the iron bolt lying half buried in the snow by the woman's side, the damage looked like someone had poured a powerful corrosive down the wound. It was ugly...

But Freya had no doubt in her mind that the lady could be saved. Even now as she wraps temporary bindings with herbal paste over the wound after cleaning it up as best she could, the signs of life were there despite the ice cold chill of her skin and the deathly white coloration, but they were there, and as long as she was under her care, Freya just couldn't leave someone to die out here in the middle of the frigid mountain tops with a raging mob of villagers she could only assume were the ones responsible for her injury. Probably shooting her by mistake in the darkness of night, but leaving her to just die under a tree? Despicable.

Hefting the stranger on her shoulders after securing her limp body comfortably to her travel pack, Freya sets off in the opposite direction back where she had come from. If her guess, no matter how far-fetched, was

right, then the only place she could've come from was that ruined castle she had found a few hours earlier. Its doors hung open with plentiful amounts of snow caking the entrance hall, but that was as far as Freya had dared to go after the eerie vibes she had felt running all over her discouraged her from going any further as she peeled her eyes away from the darkened interior of the dilapidated castle, looking like the bottomless maw of an immense stone beast.

But now that very same darkness was her best hope at getting her patient somewhere safe. She couldn't afford to let fear get in the way of her mission.

Dashing past the zig zagging rows of trees and foliage while dodging past crooked roots and low hanging branches, the trained medic speeds through the snow caked terrain back toward where she remembered the obscure path that led to the castle, the muscles in her legs were already throbbing from a days worth of travel to get to this tundra, and running a marathon uphill with a person on her back wasn't going to do wonders for her constitution. But without proper supplies to last the night and a roving band of irate villagers around, she could only push onward and hope she made it in time.

With adrenaline fueling her onward and the numbness that followed after her pain, Freya's boots finally touch solid stone as the cracked cobble and tattered ivory of the abandoned structure replaces the numbing whites and grays out the outside, providing some levity and respite from the biting chills of endless winter. But after moving on past the stairs, Freya had half expected to find herself lost in an endless maze of corridors and doors that led nowhere, only to find a rather straightforward path leading to the only vacant room in the entire place, a room that showed signs of recent habitation from the cleanliness of the furniture to the lack of dust and grime anywhere on the floors. There was even a fireplace with a burning ember still going strong.

Laying down her pack without breaking a sweat before detaching the woman's shivering body, the doctor knew she had very little time left to do much else before her patient succumbed to her wounds, laying out a mat on the floor to clean her wounds, doing away with her withered dress to reveal a slightly aged woman's body clad in pristine underwear that still retained signs of its former glory here and there. From supple flesh to wide, gentle curves and even a face that held not even a wrinkle or sagging flesh, Freya had to admit she was quite the looker...maybe even better than she was!

But her attention wouldn't remain on the lady's amazing figure for long as she moves to unwind the bandages from her sickening wound, only to raise her brow in confusion, blinking a few times after feeling something wasn't quite right with the wounds she was examining and cross referencing from those in her not too distant memories. There were fewer sores, the nasty burns were gone and the deep bore into her waist had marginally healed over enough to look like a puckered pimple than a bloody hole. Even the flaking skin and discomfoting webs of blackened veins weren't there anymore...had she been seeing things and rushed all this way for nothing? Or maybe...

**"That can't be...no such thing as vampires...not out here...C'mon Freya...you're not superstitious! She's just some poor lady who needs help, that's it!"**

Getting to work on patching up her wounds, the wanderer's mind drifts elsewhere, thinking back to all the rumors she had heard while on the road far out back where she had come from. Tales of night creatures and the roving bands of villagers out to hunt them all down. While there weren't any concrete sightings for ages besides the tales old folk told to young uns to keep them well behaved, participants of said raiding parties brought back undeniable proof of their kills; the skull of a massive ram like beast, the eye of a cyclopan ogre. Many such prizes made the rounds and in turn, more bodies to fill their ranks, eager to flush out the denizens of the dark they had no idea were living so close to them all this time. Of course, Freya had never seen them in the flesh, always on the move and with little stops in between her travels, all she concerned herself with were the needy. She wanted to see the world, but one with medical knowledge was rare, and so she had also made it her mission to aid whoever she could along the way.

But after years of traveling ever since leaving her hometown with the passing of her parents when she was but a young teenager, Freya had begun to harbor doubts about whether the world truly was worth seeing, losing her faith with each mottled wasteland and starving commune she passed.

Beyond the endless stretch of mountains and forest bordering her country's limits laid her next and final destination; a snowy hamlet where it was said that all were welcomed to join into the locals' rural lifestyle with a bountiful forest around them to provide for all. But upon reaching it, she found not peace but misery; angry townspeople who lashed out at foreigners, swept up in a storm by missionaries of the faith prevalent in her land as they prepared brutal weaponry buried the dead lost from the raids against their supernatural foes, foes she was sure definitely didn't need culling if their races have lived together for this long without major conflict. It all weighed down on Freya's mind heavily as she strode through the village, silent and despondent.

To take her mind off of it all, she had gone on a little exploratory hike through the tundra and the heavily wooded forest that marked its borders. That was how she had eventually come across the strange castle after her skilled eyes had found the path leading up to it. And when that strange foreboding feeling drove her away, it wasn't until a good few minutes later when a pained cry had caught her attention, leading to current events where she had found this strange woman out here in the middle of the wilderness with what should've been a fatal wound in her side. While saving a life was Freya's steadfast goal, she had been fully prepared to give this displaced stranger a proper burial if she was too far gone.

But as her hands carefully dab a cloth over the lady's wound and dressing, she could tell that it definitely wasn't a trick of the light. Her wounds were healing incredibly fast as if spurred on by the medical cream and healing ointments only intended to disinfect the affected area. She could see the individual flakes of dead

meat piece themselves together, slowly but surely, the wound was healing and it wouldn't be long till it was fully plastered over in the rest of her pristine skin...which still felt unnaturally cold despite the warm fireplace she had laid her out next to.

**"Her skin...its so...smooth...soft, tender...but...colder than any dead body I've handled...could she really be one of them?"**

Vampires; creatures in folklore that were faster than you could see and silent in their movement. With appearances that matched humans, they could disguise themselves, make friendly talk, and before their victims knew of the danger they were in, sink their fangs into them, sucking out their life-force until nothing but a drained husk remained.

*'B-But then that makes no sense...if she was a vampire, how'd she even get these wounds in the first place? Maybe she just...heals really fast! Everyone's different after all, right?'*

Sighing before wondering what to do next with her efforts to clean the lady's wounds proving ineffective against her impressive metabolism, Freya applies the last slithering of cream before bandaging her waist. Pushing off the floor with her patient's body cradled gently in her arms, she stumbles over toward the well kept bed in the back of the room away from sealed windows. As stuffy as the room was, she had to respect the homeowners wishes for privacy.

By the time all was said and done, the pale woman was tucked up in the sheets and dressed in fluffy new nightwear Freya had picked out from the wardrobe, breathing gently in deep sleep as the curious brunette runs a hand over her chilling forehead, brushing at platinum locks of well cared hair before retracting her hands away from the otherworldly beauty before her eyes. Shaking her head as she does so while turning her attention to more important things at hand.

**"Like where I'm going to rest for example...all the rooms are boarded up...maybe, the couch? Surely she wouldn't mind...after all I did save her life...sheesh, who am I kidding..."**

Puffing her cheeks out as she turns to move toward the fireplace, Freya settles down on the smooth carpeting, packing up her medical supplies before sluggishly withdrawing her trusty sleeping sack from the back, patting it down before putting her head on the custom made bag filled with soft hem and cotton, gingerly lying down to give her weary body and deflated mind some well deserved rest from the events and disappointment of the day, unaware of just how much time had already passed as the first rays of the early morning sun crests over the horizon, bathing the treetops below with a warm orange glow while the snow capped peaks glimmer brilliantly like polished diamonds. An effect made possible thanks to the special stone that made up the terrain in the region.

With the rampaging mob retreating back to their settlement for their own R&R and peace temporarily returning to the mountains, that left Freya and the stranger at peace to rest to their heart's content. Something the traveling healer doesn't hesitate to do as her aching body quickly succumbs to the pleasures of sleep, letting out tiny whistling breaths that breaks the monotonous crackle of the fireplace every so often.

Unbeknownst to Freya however, the second occupant wasn't as deep in the realm of the unconscious as she assumed her to be, stirring from her pseudo nap with a click of the tongue and a wince at the subtle throbbing she felt in her abdomen. Danitha had been hoping her nose was wrong, but as her eyes narrowed at the sight of the human female sleeping so casually in front of her fireplace with her embroidered dress lying in tatters beside her, she knew this wasn't a dream or the afterlife.

Inspecting the woman's bloody belongings and medical utensils with keen vision, the unpleasant memories of the previous night's events come rolling into her mind alongside the fatal wound she had received...and that lumbering figure emerging out of the darkness of the woods before her eyes shut tight, clutching her bandaged waist while keeping her eyes firmly locked on to the waifish woman sleeping so casually in the lion's den she had unknowingly entered.

*'That smell...and those bags! Its that stranger I saw before I lost consciousness! And my body...there's no way it should have healed this fast...its got to be her doing!'*

Why would some lowly human even save her? Who was she? Did she bring others? There were so many unknowns at play here that it made Danitha's brain hurt just trying to consider them all. While she would've liked to simply kill her then and there, her first brush with modern man had taught her to be patient, to take a step back and examine what she knew before making her move.

With her arms folded over her bosom and a deep sigh known, the frustrated vampiress slides back under the sheets. With the sun now out and her wound still healing below the surface of her mended skin, Danitha could do nothing but rest. But once nightfall came however, she would need to tend to this curious matter concerning her unwitting savior immediately.

As much as she despised the thought. She had to admit that she wouldn't be alive to fuss about the situation right now if it weren't for her and those nauseating concoctions of hers which she could still smell radiating off of her body, making a mental note to wash herself off once night fell and her body was back in tip top shape.

*'That is of course...if the little lady proves cooperative, depending on the outcome...the bath might be a little delayed...'*



And so she would sleep for the rest of the day alongside her uninvited guest, but as much as he tried to will herself to sleep, Danitha's brain just couldn't let its guard down. For so many years now she had lived in isolation, in peace. To have another warm body so close by now? It was like being asked to sleep next to a hibernating bear...harmless for now, but when it awoke? Would it immediately maul her to death or simply prod her awake out of curiosity? That was how she saw Freya; an unpredictable and sudden factor she had to contend with.

Exhaustion would eventually like Danitha's mind however, allowing her some measure of momentary peace. At least until the sun set and her instincts drove her awake. And with Freya's irregular sleep schedule, she would soon find herself sharing the night with Danitha as both women stir in their sleep upon the passing of noon and the arrival of a cool, tranquil evening. But Freya was not a vampire, and her body still needed some extra time before it was ready to move. Time enough for Danitha to make her preparations as she rises without a sound before fitting over to her wardrobe, picking out a fresh change of clothes for herself and for her guest, as fair as she looked, the heavy odor of stale leaves and damp mud radiated off of her in waves. She was sorely in need of a bath. Despite the possibility that she might need to kill Freya, Danitha was a stickler for appearances. First impressions mattered a lot to the prim noble lady so turning up to a gathering, no matter how small dressed like some northland savage was completely unacceptable!

*'Dare I say these dressings are more than acceptable for compensation are they not? The girl should be flattered...'*

Patting down the form fitting dress she had prepared for Freya while scribing a note of directions on yellowed paper, Danitha makes her exit from the room, closing the door behind her before slowly walking through the derelict halls of her home, inspecting each and every nook and cranny in search of any more surprises. Although her mind was intricately linked with her domain, it never hurt to check twice, especially after realizing just how far these humans had come when it came to inventing new ways to weed out her kind and put them to the blade.

But after making her way up to one of the few surviving spires atop her ruined home, Danitha was more than convinced that no one else was here. The air was cooling, relaxing to breathe but the silence was no longer the same, not with another warm body sleeping down below. Even now from atop her perch, she could hear the soft breaths of air escaping the woman's lips, the rhythmic beating of her heart, the slurry of lifeblood rushing in her veins...it all served to stir old memories, bringing back images and scenes long thought lost to the ancient vampire as she clutches at her breast in pain and sadness upon the reminder of an old friend.

**"Ahh...dearest Fran..."**

Sighing despondently before staring out at the tree tops below, her solemn eyes could spy no further human activity in the woods. No angry calls for blood, no ominous orange lights, the woods were calm today...

*'Which means I can feast till I'm satisfied...though I wonder how many others remain...'*

Shaking her mind off of such mood dampening thoughts, Danitha leaps down from her roost, flitting silently through the evening sky while discarding the obscuring hood she had been wearing mid-flight to reveal an ornate outfit that balanced gothic elegance with sultry beauty. Consisting of a tight leotard with concealing clasps for her immense bosom to nestle in, a crimson band of unknown make serving as headgear and a wicked cloak with a frayed collar that fans outward in menacing spikes, it was one most people would consider outrageous with so much skin exposed especially around the lower regions where there was only a dangling loincloth to conceal its wearers decency, but to the vampire, it was one of great import and nobility amongst the Higher Vampires. One of the last few surviving pieces passed down from ancient seamstresses and powerful sorcerers, Danitha only ever wore the precious dress during times of duress. And now when humans were out and about calling for the blood of all fantastical beings? Now was such a time to wear it, even while on the hunt for simple prey animals that would satisfy her hunger, and after losing so much blood followed by a quick but strained recovery? She was starving...

**"Ah! That's right...does a girl such as her even know how to put on a dress?"**

### **~Recollections~**

*An argument between two adults, one man and a woman. Yelling unintelligible words and throwing heavy objects around a cramped musky room far too dark to make out. The voices were familiar yet distant, but without a face to cling on to, no mental connections could be made. But that didn't seem to stop the strange ache in my heart from making itself known, as if I knew the conversation was focused on me.*

*And nothing they had to say was remotely good...*

*From there, the scene begins to change right before the approaching voices could reach the molding door that hid me from them; thick black smoke smelling heavily of ash and cooked flesh fills the air around me, the solid faith of oak beneath my feet softens for bloodied mud and the discomforting warmth of home fades for the chill of a rainy morning just outside a ruined village dotted with the ruins of shattered homes and salted farmland. And amongst the debris, bodies...so many bodies...but their faces, just like the voices...I can't see any of them...*

*Another transition and I'm suddenly in a cave, rocky outcroppings...a table fashioned out of a boulder lit by crude wax candles and littered with old memoirs and formulae. And on the far side of the damp hole I remember far better than that musty old house that's supposed to be the place I spent most of my childhood in*

*sits a man, my mentor. The father figure who taught me the secret medicinal techniques and recipes along with the parental guidance and lessons that made me who I am today. This is probably the one and only period of my life I still hold dear...and the calm before the storm so to speak.*

*As my mentor recedes into the suffocating darkness surrounding me, an invisible force pulls me past a torrent of horrid experiences, a collection of all the tragedy, the blatant disregard for life, the terrors of war and mind breaking suffering the survivors had to live through. It was a disgusting miasma, but even in my dreamlike stupor, I knew it was my own mind, misguided and disillusioned after years of traveling on my lonesome without anything to my name besides the survivalist gear my mentor had taught me to craft and maintain. Living off of nature's bounty while traversing the broken lands of men in the hopes of a better place, that was my life.*

*But then came talk of the supernatural, of fantasy being far truer to life than we all thought possible. Magical beings it was said, from folklore to legends, all of these could be explained by the existence of flesh and blood monsters that, until now, had lived alongside us in secret...although I never paid these rumors much mind, I must admit; It did pique my interest somewhat as I fantasized a meeting with a stunning vampire lord. Tall, pale and handsome...or maybe a mysterious woman with a cold heart and a piercing gaze? Ahh, the possibilities were endless!*

*Right as I begin to daydream about women however, the myriad scenes of dilapidated towns and dying land fades away in exchange for total darkness littered with pale gray tree trunks and dancing orange lights. And in the distance, angry yelling and triumphant chants echoed from an unseen mob...*

*And down the middle of the sparse forest, at the base of an exceptionally large tree laid an unmoving figure, limp, lifeless and bloodied.*

*Rushing forward to help, I shake her shoulders before recoiling at her deathly pallor and freezing body temperature, she had to be dead. And yet, I could feel, see her breath. It was short and shallow but miraculously she was alive. Setting down my pack in order to get her somewhere safe, I turn my eyes away from the pale woman in order to prep it for transport...only to feel death curl its unfeeling grip over my neck.*

*A snarl and brilliant pain over the base of my neck...and then it was all over...*

### **~Meeting~**

Awakening with a start, a panicking Freya begins to thrash, feeling an unfamiliar damp sensation in her hair and skin, all while a pleasant yet suffocating weight clamps down on her body, feeling as if an immense snake had coiled itself tightly around her while she slept. And right after being released from a terrible dream

involving twin icicles biting down into her neck? The sudden assault to her senses wasn't helping to maintain the wandering healer's composure.

**"Gaah! S-Stay away!"**

**"Oh my~ So much energy! Calm yourself dear, its just the collar tickling your tiny little neck! I must ask though, how did you manage to keep hair this...refined? I initially took you for a wandering savage!"**



**"S-Savage?! Who do you even...wait! You're?! Aren't you supposed to be sleeping? It's way too early for you to be awake!"**

**"Oh come now dear, don't fuss over the little things, here, let me fasten the tie, I was almost done until you decided to start bawking!"**

**"N-No thank you! I'm completely fine! I can cloth myself!"**

**"Really now? Do you actually know how to put on an extravagant dress such as this? If so, I can stop now and let you do all the rest...or if you aren't up to it, you could always quit...though you'll find that your old clothes are currently hanging out to dry...and this dress is all that I have~ So what'll it be?"**

Danitha was clearly enjoying Freya's flustered indecision, smiling widely as she felt the humans grip around her wrists lighten, allowing for her dexterous fingers to weasel themselves free before turning the tables and taking Freya's dainty hands in her own, stroking at her smooth sun kissed skin whose lovely peach hues contrasted her snow white skin. It was hard to believe this was the same smelly human she had tossed into the baths. For one capable of sleeping through being manhandled in a bath, it came as a surprise to know an accidental tightening of the choker and a brush on the neck was all but necessary to give the little lady a rude awakening...although she was beginning to suspect something else might be responsible for her deep sleep and adverse reaction to certain stimuli.

Although her bashful look was something else entirely...enough to stir strange feelings in the vampire's cold heart as more memories of an old friendship pour into her mind. How strange...to be reminded of Fran now of all times...was it because the two were women? Whatever the case, Danitha masks the slight curl of her

lips while moving to finish dressing up her human host. The fun was starting to wear thin now that her old memories were back in full force to remind her of old fealties and bonds.

"I'll take your silence for agreement then! Hold still...this won't take long..."

With the last notch in her crimson dress firmly tied and arranged in line with the others, Freya was free to move away from Danitha, fiddling with the flowery hem of her dress with a look of disbelief and embarrassment on her face. It was the first time she had ever gotten to wear such luxurious clothes. And although they were a bit strained and stiff here and there with a tiny bit of color fading, it was still an impressive piece, one she couldn't help but feel proud for being given the opportunity to wear.

But before she can get too touchy feely, a quick rap against the thick doors was enough to snap her attention back to Danitha, who was already one foot out the door, beckoning for her to follow. There were so many things she wanted to find out about this place. About her! But Freya knew when and when not to overstep her boundaries. And so she would comply, falling in behind her only to realize her boots had been replaced with equally posh heels that made her gait unsteady while devastating her confidence in putting her full weight into each step in fear of snapping the impossibly thin pole on its end. Compared to Danitha's calm elegant movements, Freya was like a toddler learning to take her first steps and understandably so; she felt much more at home out in the wilderness with her protective equipment on, not in cramped hallways dressed in fanciful garb that left so much exposed.

Examining the halls around her in an effort to help keep her mind off of her change in attire, Freya takes in the archaic design of the ebony brick and eye-catching embroidery that had survived the passage of time. It wasn't anything she had seen in her travels across the land. And when her gaze inevitably falls on the equally alien clothes the pale woman wore. It seemed so revealing, so impractical...everywhere she looked, Freya's eyes left her with more questions than it did answers, like the corridor bearing no evidence of recent tampering despite the recent memory floating in Freya's mind of ruined blocks and rafter logs piled up high right where she and her host were walking through. For it all to suddenly vanish while she slept seemed impossible so maybe she had imagined it all in her adrenaline fueled rush to get her then critically wounded lady somewhere safe?

*'Strange...I could've sworn this pathway was blocked off...was I seeing things after all?'*

**"Come dear, we're almost there! You seem curious about something...does my humble abode strike your fancy?"**

**"O-oh no! I was just...confused about something...I thought I remembered this place being blocked off last night...are you sure it's safe to keep living here? It feels like the roof might come down on us any second now..."**

Hearing that, Danitha chuckles before casting a longing gaze over the walls, unfazed by her guest's very real concerns.

**"Nonsense dear! I've lived here for a long time...these walls were built to last, and with the mountain itself serving as a natural bulwark, we are safe here, rest assured...though it does get lonely without another warm body to converse with..."**

**"Umm...ma'am? Are you...okay?"**

**"My injuries? They're coming along just fine...all thanks to you I suppose? But please, call me Danitha."**

**"Yeah but...herbal paste shouldn't be able to heal wounds like yours so quickly...in fact, for someone like you to be walking around so soon afterwards...ah! And I'm Freya!"**

**"How perceptive of you...that is precisely what I want to talk about...and if you have any more questions for me, I will happily answer them for you. Once we're seated and comfortable of course!"**

That was enough for Freya to follow suit in relative silence, for a moment there, I felt like someone had pushed a dagger up to her warm delicate flesh as if daring her to say another word. She wanted to dismiss it as just a side effect of her rude awakening, but for that one singular moment, her better judgment had successfully convinced her to drop the conversation. From there it only took a few steps before they arrived at their destination; a warm lit study of sorts with two couches facing inward around a pristine table bereft of the tea set Freya had been secretly hoping to see, but once both women were seated on opposite sides of the humble arrangement, any hope for a light hearted exchange of thank you's was long gone from within Freya's mind, sitting with her back to attention and her shoulders squared. While some part of her was mystified by her host, another was desperately telling her to make a break for it. The exit, if her memory was correct, lay just around the corner. And considering how the woman, Danitha, hinted at her injuries still healing beneath the surface (which was already plastered over in a fresh layer of pristine skin,) maybe she could outrun her? That is of course, assuming there was an ulterior motive driving Danitha's overly courteous behavior...sure, she had saved her life...but at the end of the day, Freya was still a complete stranger...and Danitha was a recluse living high up in a castle built into the peak of an isolated mountain.

Bracing herself, Freya holds in a breath as the bodacious lady reclines in her seat, gingerly running a hand over her side before staring her straight in the eye with undaunting crimson irises before her firm lips slowly open, ready to make her intentions known.

***To Be Continued...***