



WHITE
KNIGHT

SUZANNE M SABOL

A BLUSHING DEATH
SHORT STORY

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Chapter 1

My butt hurt. My back hurt. And there was a steady throbbing behind my eyes that was both annoying and painful. It wouldn't have been there if I wasn't trying too hard to concentrate while sitting on the floor, surrounded by people staring at me. I hadn't thought that I'd be sitting on the hardwood floors for hours on end in the middle of a power circle drawn with ivory soap. Chalk was too hard to get out of the wood grain and Josephine said the material for this shouldn't matter. We'd already tried salt but with a million people in the house, the circle kept getting distorted. I just needed the boost . . . maybe . . . we weren't actually sure . . . better safe than sorry, right?

Patrick was lounging in the wingback chair with his ankle resting on his knee and his fingers tented and pressed against his full lips. He was the picture of relaxed observation. However, our *Ward/Warda* bond—basically a metaphysical marriage that gave us a little better insight into each other—told me otherwise. He was just as nervous and frustrated as I was.

Dean, on the other hand, sat on the edge of the sofa, his forearms resting on his knees and his hands clasped together in a tight fist. Nah, he didn't seem tense at all. Tension vibrated off of him in waves of aggression, making me worry and tightened my own shoulders in response.

They were both staring at me with determined focus, waiting for me to do . . . something. Yep, this was helpful.

"Stop staring!" I snarled.

"What would you prefer us to do instead," Patrick asked, a patronizing calm oozing from every word that drove me insane. I knew he wasn't calm and I knew he had shit to do; contracts to finalize, and orders to go over with Miguel. Patrick ran several night clubs around Columbus, as well as a shipping logistical consulting firm, and other enterprises that had his hand in almost everything in this city. It should have kept him busy and out of my hair. Also, as the vampire liege, he had plenty to oversee. He was basically king in our little kingdom which was getting larger and larger with each passing day.

"Don't have anything else to do," Dean grumbled, even though I knew different. He had the final walk through on the new children's wing that he and Patrick had subsidized. Trevelyan Dean Construction was one of the largest and most successful Construction operations in the city. The pediatric cancer wing would be a shining achievement and bring in business by the truckloads. Plus, as

Alpha of the Northwest Territory pack, Dean was head honcho and since we'd gotten back from the hocking hills where we'd finalized arrangements for the upcoming *Manit*—a.k.a. meet & greet—for the shifter packs in North America, there was plenty of shit to do. I know. I'd made the list.

But no. They were both here. Sitting in chairs in our living room. Staring at me for what seemed like hours which wasn't helping me relax. The rain outside beat a continuous rhythm on the windows and I tried to focus on the sound of the drops pelting the glass instead of the eyes focused determinedly on me.

We'd relocated all the furniture back against the walls and rolled up the rug so Brittany, our resident witch, could draw the circle. She was much better at drawing them and making sure the symbols were correct than I was. I couldn't draw for shit.

As I wiggled around trying to get comfortable, Brittany laughed in the kitchen. Through all the noise in the house and all the people lurking, I couldn't hear what had been said and it irritated me. They were in there having a grand time and I was here . . . struggling. By my count, there were fifteen people, both vampires and werewolves, hanging around the house and had been all day. The tension grew as they all waited for me to do some magicky voodoo and jerk some poor, unsuspecting being from the Outer Realm. And the fact that each one of them pretended to go about their day as they anticipated all hell breaking loose was making me grind my teeth. This was such a bad idea.

I closed my eyes and started again. Breathing in and out, focusing on the center of my body and trying not to feel two pairs of eyes staring at me. A slight rumble vibrated through the living room and I realized the sound came from me, growling in frustration.

Perhaps sensing my irritation and fraying nerves, Patrick asked a simple but complicated question. "How did you manage to draw the pixies through the dimensions previously?"

"I don't know," I growled. "I was focused on staying alive to really think about it that hard."

"Then this is the perfect time to focus on process," he replied with an edge of irritation.

"How do ya shift?" Dean asked, redirecting. I was the Golden Anidae, Queen of the Wolves. I could shift into a wolf but I wasn't a werewolf. I drew power from Dean and the pack whenever I wanted and changed shape. Where the werewolves were a physical change – bones, skin and fur shifting the fundamental physical aspect of their form – my change to wolf was pure, unadulterated magic. My

blood had never been mixed with a werewolf's to force the change. I couldn't really explain it in a way that made sense beside magic, but it was cool as hell.

"That's easy," I said, slumping back and leaning on my hands behind me. I stretched out my legs and tried to find a position that was at least a bit more comfortable. "I just think about you and wrap myself in the scent of the pack's magic. Then, poof, I'm a wolf."

"Following a similar process may be an excellent starting point," Patrick offered.

"I don't know that I wanna do that," I answered remembering the unfiltered fear that coursed through my veins when Baba Yaga had first infected me with her dark fae magic. The pack magic felt like home, warm and comforting. I felt safe wrapped in it. Baba Yaga's magic was, at its root, terror and chaos.

"Relax, baby," Dean cooed. My entire body had tensed up until my muscles started to ache from the pressure and I was on the verge of hyperventilating. "We've got you," he added, and as much as I wanted it to help, it didn't.

I sighed and shook out my body trying to release the anxiety that sat like a brick in my belly. I could do this and it wasn't like I was calling Baba Yaga herself, right. I was just trying to find one little pixie. I mean, they were nasty little bastards, all feral aggression and sharp teeth, but they were tiny—only four or five inches tall. I could handle that. I could. Sinking back down into my meditation, I crossed my legs in a yogi style and re-centered my breathing.

My mind wandered back to the void of Baba Yaga's mountain, the feel of her magic, and the burn of it in my veins as it gripped my very essence, morphing with me. I wrapped the smell of black licorice around me, the scent that always seemed to permeate when the Winter Serpent was about. I focused on the feel of her magic, the punishing pain of her presence. There was nothing sweet or welcoming in dark fae magic and I allowed fear to churn in my middle like a brewing storm.

A dark ocean formed in my mind's eye, a long black expanse that felt as though I could walk forever and never come out. I could feel beings lurking in the inky pitch but in the tunnel I'd created, I was safe from them. At the end, a single bead of light thrummed with magic. I imagined the rainbow of colors the pixies had been in Likho's castle when Dean and I had entered the Outer Realm to save Patrick. I focused on that point before me and called with my magic.

I tugged on that thread of magic, listening for the flapping of wings. Resistance flooded my being and I sunk more of my magic into the draw. Maybe a little too much. The bow string of magic attached to the beam of light on the other end snapped and a pop of power reverberated through the living room, making the windows quake in their casings.

“Duck!” Dean shouted. I didn’t hesitate, hitting the ground and covering my head with my hands.

Chapter 2

The living room filled quickly with people, as everyone in the house rushed in to see what had happened.

“Close it in!” Patrick bellowed and I attempted a glance up from under my arms.

“Get out!” Dean ordered at the same time.

A shimmering stream of white light zigzagged across the ceiling. It hovered in midair like a hummingbird and as it met my gaze, I relaxed a bit. Slowly, I got to my feet not wanting to spook it. Paper-white skin with eyes and wings that shimmered gold in the light created an angelic halo effect. His hair, the rich earthy color of peat moss, was braided down the center of his back. He was dressed in soft leather pants the color of camel fur and laced up the side of each leg. An empty sheath was strapped to his thigh as he held the dagger in his hand. In addition, a quiver and bow was slung over his back. I wondered how he drew the bow with the wings.

The pixie dove again, slashing skin and marking thin crimson lines across my people with his dagger. He was cutting across the veins in their necks, aiming for the jugular and carotid. A single pixie was annoying. A swarm of them was deadly. Lethal little bastards. Swatting and batting at the pixie, people cleared out and rushed to close the pocket doors on either side of the room.

Perched upon the wall-mounted television, the little white menace slipped his dagger back in his sheath and drew the bow and two arrows. It was so quick; as if he had slid the bow through the gossamer instead of over it, he was that quick. With a blistering speed, he fired two arrows in quick succession, sinking one into my shoulder.

“Damn it!” I shouted as one of those arrows sunk at least an inch into muscle just under the bone. The second in my thigh. That shit hurt. Yanking out the needle in my shoulder first and then my thigh, blood oozed from the wounds. Patrick and Dean stormed toward me as I stood in the center of the room, a perfect target. Behind me, the pocket doors finally closed and the four of us were alone.

The little shit knocked two more arrows and without thinking, I used my blood to throw up a blood-ward around us that took the shape of a dome encompassing the entire power circle I was still standing in. The little bastard’s arrows ricocheted off my ward and a confused furrow creased the little pixies gaze. He floated down, easy as a falling leaf and landed lightly on my ward. His steps rippled out in

the magic, a rock breaking the surface of a lake. He knelt, brushing his hand across the surface and it felt as if he'd grazed his fingers across my skin. I shivered at the contact as chills ran up my spine. Meeting my eyes with a question on the tip of his tongue, the pixie leaned down and licked the ward.

"Ugh," I cringed, "that's disgusting."

"She's delicious, isn't she," Patrick growled, his dark eyes focused on the pixie's every move.

A slow grin crept across the pixie's mouth, exposing sharp teeth and an appraising intelligence. "*Boginya*," he whispered.

Trepidation filled my being and I backed away a step, stepping on Dean's foot. He gripped my shoulders to steady me but it didn't matter. I was pretty sure I'd understood what the little bastard had called me-goddess-and I didn't like it one bit. It couldn't be. Maybe I'd translated the word wrong.

"What'd he say?" Dean asked me, obviously feeling the tension turn my entire being into a slab of granite.

I shrugged, unable to answer. They'd sniff out a lie in a second but a shrug was as noncommittal as I could get. A soft knock on the pocket door startled me and the pixie's gaze shot up at the sound.

"What?" Dean barked, probably aware of my evasion.

"Yeah," Britt interrupted with a snide tone. "They didn't want to bother you but we've got a problem out in the park."

"We are a bit occupied in here with the pixie," Patrick bit out.

"You're about to become busier," she said in that way that petulant teenagers have of proving their point. Before I could answer, the sharp cry of a woman's shriek cut through the silence. As one, we all turned toward the picture window and my mouth fell open in surprised horror.

A woman stood on the outside of the fenced-in playground, still holding a leash. On the other end, I assumed had been a dog. Instead, the leash ran taut to the mouth of a giant snake the size of two train cars. Its scales were a kaleidoscope of colors, shimmering in the sheet of rain drenching the entire city.

"What the-" I bit out.

“I think you yanked more than the pixie from the Outer Realm,” Britt said and my stomach tightened in dread.

Chapter 3

I dropped my ward, completely forgetting about the pixie. The white streak of light fluttered next to me but didn't attack which I was thankful for and we both moved to the window. Staring out at the giant snake, we watched as it reared up like a cobra and the stupid woman tugged on the leash. Was she trying to free her dog? Let the leash go!

"Run," I whispered but the woman tugged and I realized that her wrist was stuck in the leash's grip. "I can't let that thing get away. It just ate someone's dog," I said, almost talking to myself.

"Let's go kill it then," Dean grumbled on my left as if we killed giant other-worldly snakes every day.

"And our friend?" Patrick asked from behind me, his hand on my shoulder. I glanced at the pixie hovering a few inches to my right.

"*Ya sluzhu Boginya,*" – I serve the goddess - the pixie said. "*Mwe doszhny unichtozhit Bolla, prezhde chem on transmogrifitsiruyet,*" We must destroy the Bolla before it . . .

"What?" I asked. "I didn't understand that last bit. Trans- what?" Okay, here's the thing, my Russian was pretty good thanks to Baba Yaga's weird magical implant and my own college studies but my vocabulary wasn't limitless.

The pixie huffed at my confusion and his gold wings fluttered faster as he sneered at me and pointed out the window.

"What did you understand?" Patrick asked calmly. That was my husband, calm and calculating. It could be frustrating sometimes.

"He serves . . . me," I said, not willing to voice the goddess part. "And we must destroy the . . . Bolla?" I asked the pixie looking, for confirmation. He nodded and I kept translating, "before it-" I stopped, it was *transmogrifitsiruyet* that I didn't understand.

"We work together then," Dean said with a confidence I didn't feel.

We turned and Dean shoved open the pocket doors. On the other side, Brittany stood with her hands on her hips and a smirk curving up the corner of her lips. Perky, with a long blond ponytail and a lean slender build, she was the perfect example of a California girl, born and raised in Ohio. Brittany's

magic was unstable and untried. She was learning, testing her abilities and the boundaries of her power with each passing day. But she was only now discovering exactly what she could do. I liked her and she was much braver than she gave herself credit for. The fact that she wasn't hiding in her room right now, spoke volumes of her grit.

I grabbed, Gladi – my gladius steeped with magic, I'd carried her since finding the relic in Las Vegas- and headed to the door. Everyone that had been in the house, preparing for the next catastrophe, was now on the front porch ready to fight.

The rain drenched us immediately and I brushed my hair from my face. "First," I said, taking a step down. "We keep it from eating that-" I said as the snake jerked the leash, yanking the woman up. She screamed for a moment before the snake snatched her out of the air and swallowed both her and the dog whole.

"Shit," I hissed. "Okay, new plan," I bit out. "Keep it contained then kill it."

"Um, what's it doing?" Brittany asked, leaning over the side of the wrought-iron railing behind me to see what was going on around the mass of hulking muscular bodies blocking her view.

Magic shimmered around the snake in a yellow sheen of iridescence, rippling over the snake's body like heated air. The snake jerked and roiled as limbs erupted from the body with fully developed toes and talons. Its back split open as vertebrae rippled down its length, creating a spine. From the new skeletal frame sprang leathery wings the color of the sun.

"I believe I understand what word you were struggling to translate," Patrick said, staring at the beast, clutching his longsword.

"Transmogrifies," Dean whispered, finishing Patrick's thought.

"If it gets airborne," I said, "We'll never get to it." I glanced at Patrick and then Dean, seeing the same concern on their faces. The pixie slung his bow back over his shoulder and drew his dagger again. "Britt?" I asked, turning to face her.

She met my gaze, her expression uncertain as she bit her bottom lip. "I think I can keep it close to the ground," she finally said. "What about you?" she asked, knowing I could put up a blood-ward that was pretty big.

My wards were easy enough to create but it required blood and for one that size, Dean, Patrick and myself would be separated and immobile. “Not without the three of us triangulating the magic.”

“We won’t get there in time,” Dean said.

“Do it Britt,” Ev said.

“I’ll be vulnerable,” she whispered, hesitant.

“I won’t let anything touch you,” Ev vowed, meeting the younger woman’s gaze. Something unspoken passed between them and she nodded.

The snake/dragon – Fluffy - started moving and testing out the new wings, flapping them gingerly at first. It was now or never. “We’re out of time, Britt. Do it!” I shouted as I jumped the last few steps and sprinted toward the park. The entire group was behind me, racing to get inside the circle of magic before Brittany threw it up and we were either in it or not.

I crossed the street and hit the grass. The rain had made the ground soggy and slippery and I fought to keep my footing to clear the distance. The pixie dipped and sagged under the weight of the rain, fighting to stay airborne. I plucked him from the air and set him on my shoulder, waiting until I felt the tug of his grip in my hair. Beside me, Patrick and Dean kept pace as we ran.

A pulse of magic thrummed through the air, and suddenly the rain had stopped. I glanced up at the dome of magic caging us in, the rain and some of my people out. Miguel, Tag, and Moose, as well as a few more, were standing on the other side of Brittany’s bubblegum pink dome, left out of all the fun.

Chapter 4

I shrugged and turned back toward Fluffy. The monstrous beast shook out its new form, flapping gigantic wings to take flight into the air but couldn't. Brittany had done it, containing the Bolla to a reasonable field of engagement. It could still get up in the air but ran out of space quickly, a caged tiger.

"Booker," Patrick called to the other vampire.

Carrying a pair of battle axes, a single headed blade on one side and a pick on the other, Booker met Patrick's gaze with a gleam of excitement as he twirled the battle axe in his left hand. Made of carbon steel and etched with a design that Booker had specified, they were beautiful weapons that he wielded as if born to them. Having been born in a small farming village in Sweden in the dark ages, he probably had used a battle axe or two in his lifetime.

"We're going for the wings," Patrick said, grasping his longsword in both hands. Without another word, the two vampires took off at a dead sprint toward Fluffy.

Mike, the only other werewolf who'd made it inside the bubblegum pink dome, darted through the playground and around the outside of the creature. Dodging spiked barbs that had erupted onto the creature's tail, Mike clutched onto Fluffy and hung on for dear life as it began to swing that massive appendage back and forth.

Dean dropped his clothes. Naked he shifted instantaneously into a gigantic silver wolf with eyes that shone a bright Caribbean blue. He grinned at me as if he was having fun and leapt up, sinking his teeth into the neck of the beast. Goo erupted from the wound, coating Dean in its green blood.

Glancing over at the pixie resting on my shoulder, I said, "I guess that just leaves you and me? Let's get up there and see if we can do some damage." I ran, full out, toward the dragon. Vaulting myself and the pixie up, stepping first on its large fore leg, then the long, lean solid expanse of its back, I slid on the slick scaly surface. With nothing to grab on to and one hand occupied with Gladi, I had no other option. I slammed the blade into the creature's back and clutched her hilt as it took to the air. Ah shit, we were flying.

"Are you okay," Patrick called from behind me. Taking a chance and glancing over my shoulder, I gave him the thumbs up. He grabbed the base of the dragon's wing, then raised his sword and slashed through the leathery film of the wing. As the dragon flapped to get higher, wind tore the rippling flesh

and made the wound a much larger hole. "Go for the other wing," Patrick called to Booker. The other vampire leapt, slicing his battle axes. Rending flesh and blood, Booker sunk a pick into the dragon's body for purchase and slashed the blade through the other wing.

Fluffy sank and I knew I had to move. Gripping with my legs, I yanked Gladi from the creature's back and crawled up its neck until I managed to wedge myself just behind its jawbone. As Patrick and Booker tore more holes through the wings, the dragon flailed. I glanced back and yelled, "Get clear!"

Mike, on the other hand, was yanking the spiked barbs from Fluffy's rainbowed flesh. Blood cascaded from the wounds and the dragon lost control of its pitch and yaw, slamming into the shelter house, crashing the roof and side wall. I didn't have a grip on, well, anything and was flung from the back of the dragon's head, slamming onto the remaining shelter house roof.

The wind left my body in a hot rush and my head rang, having slammed my head against the shingles. Fluffy was also slow to get up, staggering and hitching as it moved. Shaking its head to reorient itself, it was determined to get up. I also got to my feet. My joints and back were killing me but I didn't have a whole lot of time. Getting to my feet, I sprinted across the roof and jumped onto the creature's snout.

The pixie flew from my shoulder and drew his bow. I wasn't sure what he was going to do with the little slingshot or how much damage he could do. Considering his size compared to Fluffy, I didn't have high hopes but I applauded the effort. The dragon attempted to shake me off but I'd planted my feet in its nostrils which I tried not to think about too hard and gripped the edge of its mouth on one side, careful not to cut myself on the gigantic teeth or fangs.

The pixie fired an arrow above my head and straight into the bulging sphere of the dragon's red eye. In an explosion of magic, green energy burst from the Fluffy's socket, reeking of sulfur and surprisingly citrus. The pixie fluttered back in the onslaught of magic and I fought to hang on as the creature reared its head and roared. Slimy green goo oozed from the eye socket and covered, my arms and then my chest. I raised my head to keep my face out of the gunk but my hair was toast.

"Gross, Fluffy," I groaned, inching my head up and away as far as I could.

The pixie fired another shot into the other eye. A second burst of magic erupted from the dragon. The creature thrashed and flailed, screaming a shrill cry that pierced my ear drum and a pop followed, dimming the rest of the cacophony of sound. Fluffy shook its head frantically, struggling to

defend itself. Covered in dragon blood, my grip was slipping and I couldn't hold on as Fluffy bucked its head. I was flung up into the air, weightless in the freefall.

I opened my mouth to scream as I went airborne, but nothing came out. I caught sight of the ground beneath me and it was a long way down. The pixie kept firing arrows but they were too small to do any more damage. As I flipped in the air, Fluffy lifted its head to roar again and I slammed into the top of its head and between the empty eye sockets.

Before I could think too hard about it, I pointed Gladi down and plunged her blade between Fluffy's eyes. Her tip sunk a few inches into skin and then hit bone and stopped. The skull was too thick for her to penetrate and her anger at being denied her dinner coursed through me. Still covered in goo, my butt started to slide back down Fluffy's head and onto its neck. I only had a moment or two before I fell off and my chance at killing this monster was lost. As the beast began to tilt its head up again to buck me off for good, I had the perfect angle. I freed Gladi from the bone and plunged her down through the empty orbital cavity and straight into its brain.

The dragon froze for a moment as Gladi pierced its soft tissue. Fluffy lost all muscle control and collapsed to the ground, taking me with it, in a heap of dead dragon. The head crashed to the ground and I was hurled from Fluffy like a sack of potatoes, hitting the ground particularly hard in a thwack of mud, and gore. I laid on the ground for a long moment, unmoving. I wasn't sure I could move. Everything hurt. A bright white and gold light flashed above my head and I squinted against the harsh light of the pixie.

"Good work," I said, not bothering with the Russian anymore. I didn't have the strength to think in two languages at the moment. He landed on my chest and collapsed, crossing his legs and resting his bow in his lap. Sitting comfortably on my breast bone, the pixie panted with exhaustion and I didn't have the energy to shoo him away.

The sounds of slurping and chewing caught my attention. I turned my head to find everyone but me and the pixie, either eating dragon flesh or drinking its blood. My stomach turned over as I watched Dean take a chunk out of its neck and swallow it whole.

"That's not a good idea. You have no idea what it will do to you," I said but no one paid attention to me. Brittany's bubble of magic burst from around us and the rest filed in, striding past me to the corpse. Dean and Patrick made their way over to me from opposite sides of the dragon and I refused to get up to meet them. I wasn't doing shit for the rest of the day. I don't care what they said.

Dean plopped his hind quarters down beside me and licked my face. Patrick laughed and held out his hand to me. Taking way too much effort, I lifted my hand and clasped his tight grip. The pixie fluttered and moved to my shoulder. Patrick jerked me to my feet and hugged me to him.

“That was very enjoyable,” he whispered to me and I just shook my head. “Did I hear you correctly?” He asked and I peered up at him. “Did you call it Fluffy?”

“Yes,” I answered, “It seemed less menacing than dragon scourge.”

“True enough,” he replied with a grin.

“How do we get rid of something that size?” I asked as Dean rubbed up against me and then sniffed his clothing which were soaked through. There was no way he was getting them back on, plus, his fur was coated in dragon goo. I imagine he came to the same conclusion as he huffed and came back to stand next to me. Sinking my hand into his blood soaked fur, I gazed up at Patrick.

“I do not have a disposal plan as of yet,” he answered but before I could give him a snarky reply, steam rose from the body and everyone backed away. A green flame erupted from the center of its body and burned out, consuming the entire corpse in flame. In a matter of moments, nothing but ash remained and on the ground was the burnt outline of the gargantuan creature.

“Well,” I huffed. “That solves that problem.”

The pixie slumped on my shoulder, slinging the bow back over his wings. “*Spasibo Boginya. Eto byla khoroshaya okhota.*”- Thank you, goddess. It was a good hunt.

I was surrounded by idiots.

Epilogue

I sat back in the same circle, my hair still wet having showered and dressed. I didn't want to go back into the circle covered in dragon guts and gore. I wasn't entirely sure what would happen. Mirroring me in the circle was the pixie, his dagger resting across his thighs as we stared at each other.

"You're like my very own white knight," I said with a smile.

"*Ya ne ponimayu?*" – I don't understand-he said, giving me a queer expression that was somewhere between confusion and wariness.

"Doesn't matter," I said, shaking off the dread in my stomach. I'd tried to lighten the mood and shove away my anxiety but it hadn't worked.

"You ready?" Dean asked, also freshly showered.

"I suppose," I grimaced but tried to reassure him with a half-hearted smile. It didn't work. "Look, I'm not entirely sure I can put him back. I don't know where he'll end up," I said, hesitating. "And I like the guy. Without him, that dragon would have eaten us."

"You can do it," Dean said, so sure.

"*Teper' ya gotov,*" –I'm ready now-the pixie said, nodding in agreement.

"Okay," I huffed, wriggling down into my comfy zone, but to be honest, on the hardwood floors, there wasn't a comfortable spot anywhere. Shoving all that internal shit aside, I focused my thoughts and my magic on the tiny speck of the Outer Realm sitting on the floor in front of me. I opened that long dark expanse inside my mind's eye and searched for magic that felt exactly like his. One deep breath after another, I dug deeper letting the world around me fall away until there wasn't anything left but me, the magic, and the pixie.

I stood in that tunnel, staring off into the darkness beyond. The void stretched out for eons, carrying a weight that seemed insurmountable. Ebbing and flowing around me in a constant stream, the magic was alive. I raised my hand reflexively to clear the magic in front of my face as if shooing away a swarm of bugs and realized I was making the magic shift. This void was mine to shape and create as I wished.

"Cool," I whispered.

Beside me in the void, the pixie fluttered. He watched me shift and move the magic with a tiny smirk on his full lips. Before I realized what was happening, the pixie shot out, a stream of white and gold light in the darkness until I couldn't see the trail of illumination that followed him. In the distance, a single bead of white light flared and then blinked out of existence and I felt in my bones that I was once again alone.

"I hope you made it back," I said and sighed, releasing the grip I had on my dark fae magic.

Opening my eyes, Patrick and Dean sat across from me and out of the circle.

"Well?" Dean asked.

"I think he made it back. I hope he did anyway," I answered.

"Good," Patrick said getting to his feet and holding his hand out to me once again. "Then we begin again tomorrow and try for something a little bigger to control."

I sighed. I knew there was no talking him out of this and in my gut I knew he was right. Baba Yaga was coming for us and without control over my magic and an army at our backs, we wouldn't survive.

"Tomorrow then," I answered. "But this time, no circle."

"Why?" Dean asked. I simply pointed out the window at the scorched earth in the shape of a giant snake.

"Point taken," he said.

"As you wish, Sweetheart. No circle," Patrick said, "for now." He pressed a tender kiss on my temple, drawing me to him and a zing of pride rang through him and into me. Sometimes the *Ward/Warda* bond was great and sometimes, like now, I didn't want to know my husband was plotting a global preternatural takeover and excited at the prospects.

I went upstairs to take a nap. I deserved a nap.