

Uninvited Friends

by Mia Sundby

When Isobela awoke, she found herself staring into the dark eyes of a vampire.

Though he was stood beside the chair rather ghoulishly, Ashir's appearance was as neat as every time she had met him; his long, ebony hair was loose and shining, his skin smoothed in the way only a vampire's could be, his narrow up-tilted eyes watching her with something she might go so far as to label concern, and his elegant bejewelled fingers were clasped behind the back of his deep-red-almost-black robes.

The vampire raised a brow. "Your tone leads one to imagine that you might not want me here."

"I didn't invite you in, leech." She said, though in her bedraggled state it didn't sound like an insult even to her own ears.

A slight huff of amusement was all the reaction she received.

Seating himself on the chaise-longue, Ashir Penholde eyed her from across the low table between them. "You passed out."

"Yes, I remember." She responded tartly.

"Well, for some reason your nurse saw fit to fetch me."

Isobela frowned, glancing over towards the closed doors through which the young servant had left. "Did she now..."

"I think she seems to think that we're..." Penholde paused, gesturing vaguely, his expression pinched, "'Friends'."

Her brows climbed.

Seeing her expression, he nodded grimly. "I know. Still, as a... friend, I believe it is my duty to ask what happened."

Isobela eyed him. Despite his assumed air of confidence, he seemed uncomfortable. That was reassuring.

With a sigh, she said, "The Princess wants me to return to the ruins of my Order."

Ashir's eyes widened. Inexplicably, it made her feel a little validated to receive such a reaction.

He was quiet a moment. Then, "She wants you to go back?"

"Yes."

"To a site of ruins which until very recently housed yourself and all the others of your Order?"

"Yes."

"The one which very recently was destroyed by a cataclysmic disaster spawned from another plane of existence?"

"The very same."

"Ah."

"Mm."

They were silent for a while.

Tapping her goblet, she said, "I just... I had a reaction."

"Yes, passing out would certainly be classed as a 'reaction'." He shrugged when she glared at him.

There was another long silence. Then, in a surprisingly gentle voice, he said, "I understand your... reaction. I certainly understand your reluctance, Rhinde, however... I think you should go."

Isobela stiffened. "I passed out when the Princess *mentioned* it, I'd be useless--"

"I don't think so, Rhinde."

She laughed harshly.

Smoothly, he said, "Any idiot can face a crisis; it's this day to day living that wears you out --this from someone who's lived several centuries already. You'd rather sit in this room, slowly turning mad with boredom?" Before she could respond, he leaned forward, extending a hand as he added, "Moreover, I think you should take me with you."

Taken aback, she stared at him. "Why?"

A small smile played around the corner of his mouth, revealing his fangs. "Apparently, darling, we're friends now. What are friends for?"

