



Shadow Knight

By Cassie Laelyn

“You’re a disgrace to your coven.” The guard curled his lip, sneering at me. “You deserve to rot in the caves of hell for all eternity.”

I lunged for him, only to have the shackles rip my arms back. I stumbled, smacking my shoulder on the timber floor.

The guard spat and warm dots of saliva sprayed my face.

“You’ll regret this,” I shouted.

He laughed, the sound echoing around the carriage. “I doubt it.”

The guard slammed closed the door, plunging me into darkness. Locks clanged on the other side of the door as they engaged.

Peeling myself up, I sat back on my haunches. How the hell would I get out of this?

I jerked sideways as the carriage took off down the dirt road heading to the castle where the High Priestess no doubt awaited my execution. Some powerful witch she was,

sending her guards instead of capturing me herself.

I yanked my arms again, trying to break the cuffs around my wrist. They didn't budge. The guards used the only stone that muted my powers.

As my eyes adjusted to the darkness, I scanned the inside of the carriage for something to unbolt the cuffs. A nail or a thin piece of metal. I could even fashion a damn twig into a key.

Nothing.

Flipping my legs out from under me, I leaned back against the wall as the carriage rocked about down the road. In hindsight, I probably shouldn't have revealed my power by killing the High Priestess's dirtbag lover. But he had it coming. The controlling bastard used fear as a weapon for so long, the witches became nothing more than his personal slaves.

Asshole.

The carriage skidded to an abrupt halt, throwing me onto my shoulder again. Horses reared. Shouts rang out. Swords clanged.

What the hell?

I pushed up onto my knees, angling my ear to the door. One second, the sounds of battle raged outside, the next, silence. Eerie, deathly silence.

My heart thumped.

I was the enemy. They'd captured me. No one else was reckless enough to attack the High Priestess's guards and risk retaliation.

Slow, steady boots crunched around the side of the carriage. A male voice groaned, followed by a thud.

I held my breath, bracing for a fight.

The carriage door flew open. Correction, it flew *off*, ripped from its hinges to land somewhere on the ground. I blinked a few times as my eyes adjusted. A leather-clad guy

stood where the door had been. Crimson dotted his god-like face, and his vibrant green eyes glowed in the darkness.

A wicked grin curled on his mouth. "Evening."

I sat up straighter. "Who the hell are you?"

"Your savior? Your knight in..." He peered at his black chest plate. "Blood-splattered armor?"

I lifted my chin. "I don't need a savior."

His smirk gave me the biggest urge to punch him upside the head...after I freed my hands.

"My mistake." He sheathed his bloodstained sword in the gilded scabbard strapped to his waist. "If you don't need help, I'll be on my way."

He turned to leave. I waited five seconds. Maybe three. Okay, two.

"Wait!"

"Yes?" He drew out the word as though he relished in hearing me grovel.

Cocky bastard.

"Fine."

He cupped his ear, leaning in. "I'm sorry, I didn't hear you."

"I said fine. I need help to get these cuffs off."

He cocked a brow. "A witch with the power to turn anything to ash and you can't manage a simple cuff?"

I'd definitely punch him. "They're made from obsidian, dumbass."

He smirked. "Very well."

In one swift movement, he punched his arm forward, shooting a black bolt of darkness at the cuffs. They shattered before fluttering to the floor. I gaped at the small pile of ash.

“You can...”

He winked. “Just like you.”

A groan sounded outside the carriage. The knight kicked something on the ground, causing a yelp.

I thought I was the only one. They *told* me I was the only one.

Dark magic...evil...a disgrace to my kind.

I crawled to the door. Who was this guy? How could he possess the same magic as me? Did the coven know?

Instead, another question tumbled out my mouth. “Why free me? Why risk it? The High Priestess thinks I’m a disgrace to witches, to the entire kingdom.”

He gripped my hips and lifted me with ease to stand before him.

“I’ve had visions of you. She might think you’re a disgrace.” He brushed his thumb along my bottom lip, sending tingles zapping through my blood. Something ancient ignited deep within my soul. “But to me, you’re my queen.”

I stood there, spellbound by his mesmerizing bright green eyes, until a grunt sounded behind me. The guard who’d spat at me earlier now lay face-down in the dirt, blood oozing from a wound in his side.

The knight drew closer behind me, hovering his mouth by my ear. “I left this one for you. A gift. Embrace your pretty darkness, Ariana.”

Acceptance.

He didn’t fear me or view me as a disgrace. I barely knew this guy, but somehow, I sensed with him I wouldn’t be an outcast. I’d be safe. No one would control me ever again.

I’d be free to be...me.

A smiled warmed my cheeks as I called forth my magic and incinerated the guard with a sweep of my arm.

The knight moved to my side and held out his hand. “Let’s go free a kingdom.”

“I don’t even know you,” I said, curling my fingers in his.

“They call me the Shadow Knight.” He swept his arm in a regal bow. “But you can call me yours.”

The End!

Shadow Knight was first published as part of the Wild At Heart PNR Flash Fiction writing group. The theme for August was “Disgraced”.

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