

SEEING RED

A Tale of the Wild Hunt

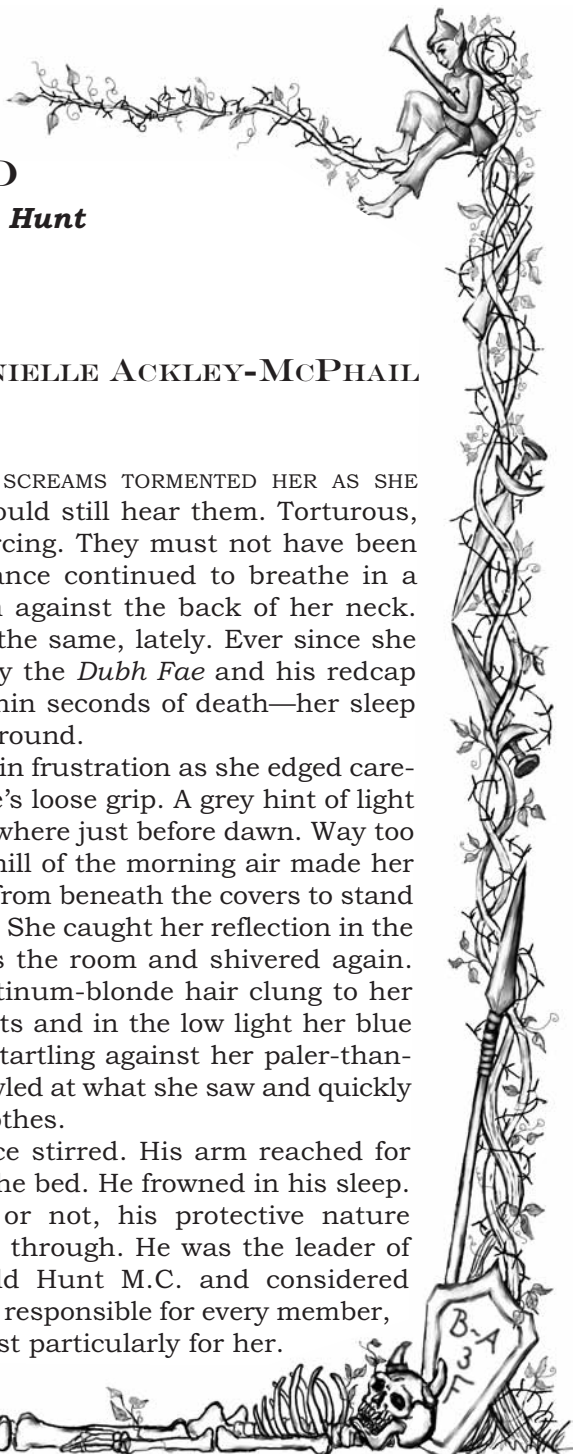
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SUZANNE'S OWN SCREAMS TORMENTED HER AS SHE awoke. She could still hear them. Torturous, agonized, piercing. They must not have been aloud, though, as Lance continued to breathe in a slow, relaxed rhythm against the back of her neck. Most mornings were the same, lately. Ever since she had been captured by the *Dubh Fae* and his redcap minions—coming within seconds of death—her sleep had been a stalking ground.

Suzanne growled in frustration as she edged carefully away from Lance's loose grip. A grey hint of light placed the time somewhere just before dawn. Way too early to be up. The chill of the morning air made her shiver as she slipped from beneath the covers to stand naked beside the bed. She caught her reflection in the bureau mirror across the room and shivered again. Damp tendrils of platinum-blond hair clung to her face, neck, and breasts and in the low light her blue eyes were dark and startling against her paler-than-normal skin. She scowled at what she saw and quickly shimmied into her clothes.

Behind her, Lance stirred. His arm reached for where she'd been in the bed. He frowned in his sleep.

Awake or not, his protective nature showed through. He was the leader of the Wild Hunt M.C. and considered himself responsible for every member, but most particularly for her.



Again, she felt the sting of frustration as she willed him to remain asleep. She loved Lance Cosain, but he never seemed to get the fact that she needed to stand on her own, not because she *had* to, but because it was important to her to be *able* to. She'd even held a job once; for nearly a year she'd manned the drying furnace at the local auto plant, where the fresh paint was hardened into a protective shell. A very unfae occupation. That had been part of its charm. She hadn't needed the work. What she needed was to prove she could do it.

Her current fear was an example of that. If she did not conquer it on her own it would never truly be overcome. And yet memory of the manner in which Lance had already attempted to remove all things red from her presence slammed against her thoughts. Well-intentioned as the attempt was, she couldn't let him do that. Besides being impractical, it would cripple her. Remnants of an older fear rose up at that thought. She would let no one make her weak again. *No one.*

As she stood there trying to rally for the day, the room around her took on a steadily growing red tinge from the rising sun. Suzanne tensed and refused to close her eyes against it, fighting to get control of the panic, resisting the urge to crawl back into Lance's arms and pretend she was safe. It would be a lie, though. The faster her heart beat, the more her skin crawled, as if distant eyes watched her, waiting eagerly for the chance to cause her to bleed. That quick she relived the attack, was back at the blasted crossroads, bound and helpless as the *Dubh Fae's* Dragon Tears ate through her and the redcaps feasted on her free-flowing blood. Suzanne shuddered. The panic gained ground until she nearly crumpled to the floor. Sheer will alone kept her standing tall, her slender frame too taut now to tremble. An improvement after last night, where she'd been curled nearly fetal in Lance's arms, but still unacceptable. She reminded herself that *Delilah's*—and thus the crash space above the bar—was well-shielded by protections maintained by every mage in the ranks of the Wild Hunt.

It wasn't helping. Her demons were in her head.

Again Lance stirred in the bed behind her; he grumbled and came a little more awake. The flashback lost part of its grip on her as her thoughts latched on to him. It was tempting, so tempting, to let him make things right. Furious with herself, she scrubbed her hand hard across tear-dampened cheeks.

Before he roused fully, Suzanne leaned over and tucked the warm blanket back around him, ran her hand gently over the soft