

Chapter 1

Edinburgh, Scotland, 1844

I've memorised their every accusation: *Murderess. She did it. She was crouched over her mother's body, covered in blood.*

Behind me, several ladies are gathered close, gowns touching, heads bent as they murmur. A common sight at every ball I've attended since coming out of mourning a fortnight ago. Their comments still sting, no matter how often I hear them.

'I heard her father caught her just after it happened.'

I jerk away from the punch-dispenser. A panel opens on the gold cylindrical device's side. A metallic arm extends, takes my porcelain cup from under the spout and returns it to the table.

'You can't believe her responsible,' another lady says. She's standing far enough away that I only just catch her words above the other discussions in the crowded ballroom. 'My father said she must have witnessed what happened, but surely you don't think—'

'Well, my brother was present at her debut last year and *he* told me she was completely covered and elbow-deep in ... Well, I shan't go on. Too gruesome.'

'The authorities insist it was an animal attack. Even the Marquess of Douglas said so.'

'He couldn't accuse his own daughter, now could he?' the

first replies. 'He should have sent her to the asylum. Do you know she—' Her voice dips too low for me to hear the rest.

I grip the fabric of my dress. If not for the thick silk, my nails would have bitten into skin. It's all I can do to keep myself from pulling out the pistol hidden beneath my petticoats.

You're fine, I tell myself. You're not angry. They're just a bunch of ninnies not worth being upset over.

My body doesn't listen. I clench my teeth hard, releasing my dress to press my thumb against the quickened pulse at my wrist. One hundred and twenty beats later, it still hasn't slowed.

'Well?' a voice next to me says. 'Are you going to take some punch or glare at the contraption for the rest of the evening?'

My friend Miss Catherine Stewart regards me with a reassuring smile. As usual, she looks absolutely beautiful in her rose-pink silk gown. Her blonde curls – all perfectly in place – shine from the overhead lights as she leans in, plucks a fresh cup from the table and passes it to me.

My breathing is a bit ragged, audibly so. How utterly annoying that is. I hope she doesn't notice. 'Glaring at inanimate objects has become my new favourite pastime,' I say.

She scrutinises me slowly. 'Oh? I thought you might be listening to the chatter at the other end of the refreshment table.'

The gaggle of ladies gasp collectively. I wonder what transgression they have made up for me this time – other than the obvious one, of course.

No, best not to think about it. If I do, I might resort to threats of bodily injury; I might even pull out my pistol. And if I do that, I'll *really* be put in the asylum.

I place the cup under the spout and shove the machine's button much harder than necessary. Steam spurts from the top and punch pours out, filling my cup almost to the brim. I remove the cup and sip.

Dash it all. Not even a hint of whisky yet. Surely someone

has sneaked in a flask to save us all from the tedious chatter. Someone always does.

'No witty rejoinder?' Catherine asks with a click of her tongue. 'You must be ill.'

I glance at the gossips. Three young ladies are garbed in near identical white gowns, each decorated with various-coloured ribbons and flowered adornments. I don't recognise any of them. The one whispering has dark hair pulled back from her face, a single ringlet resting on one shoulder.

Her eyes meet mine. She quickly averts her gaze and whispers to her companions, who glance at me for a moment before turning away. Just long enough for me to see the distress in their features, along with a touch of malice.

'Just look at them,' I say. 'They're about ready to draw blood, wouldn't you say?'

Catherine follows my gaze. 'If my eyes don't deceive me, her claws have most certainly come out. Did you happen to hear what she said?'

I exhale a bit louder than necessary and try to calm myself. There's a place for my rage inside me, a hollow I've carved to bury it deep. That daily control allows me to feign a pleasant demeanour and an incandescent smile, complete with forced bubbly laughter that's a touch vapid, even stupid. I can never let the real me show. If I do, they'll all realise that I'm far worse a woman than they imagine me to be.

With all the poise I can muster, I sample more punch. 'That I am the very picture of grace,' I say sarcastically. 'You know very well what she said.'

'Wonderful.' Catherine smooths the front of her gown. 'I'm off to defend your honour. Expect me triumphant upon my return.'

I step into her path and say bluntly, 'No. I'd prefer you didn't.'

During my year in mourning, I've apparently forgotten the

fine art of the polite insult. The old Aileana Kameron would have sauntered over to that group of ladies and said something amiable and utterly cutting. Now, my first instinct is to reach for one of the two weapons I have with me. Perhaps the solid weight of the blade in my hand would be a comforting thing.

'Don't be silly,' Catherine says. 'Besides, I've always disliked Miss Stanley. She dipped my hair in an inkpot once during a French lesson.'

'You haven't had a French lesson in three years. Goodness, but you can hold a grudge.'

'Four. My opinion of her has not improved with time.'

She tries to manoeuvre around me, but I'm too quick. In my haste, I bump into the refreshment table. China cups clink together and a few saucers teeter close to the table's edge. The group of ladies take note and whisper even more.

'For heaven's sake!' Catherine stops. 'Are you really going to stand here and drink punch while that harridan falsely accuses you of—'

'Catherine.'

She glares at me. 'Say something, or I will.'

None of them – including Catherine – realises that the rumour isn't inaccurate, only understated. I've committed murder exactly one hundred and fifty-eight times in twelve months. My tally now grows almost every night.

'And what would you have me do the next time?' I ask. 'Shall I confront everyone who says the same?'

She sniffs. 'It's ridiculous, old gossip that's soon to become stale. People like Miss Stanley refuse to let the topic die because they've nothing else to discuss. No one actually believes the horrid rumour.'

I shift from the table then. The Hepburns' ballroom is crowded with groups of people milling about, enjoying refreshments before the next round of dances begin.

A crystal chandelier hangs in the middle of the room, newly outfitted with electricity since the last time I was here. Floating lanterns drift about just below the ceiling, each glass casing decorated with its own distinct, ornate design. Their inner mechanisms hum as they hover above the crowd. Shadows from the tinted glass play along the floral-patterned wallpaper.

As I study the groups of people in their fine dresses and tailored suits, more than one head swivels in my direction. Their gazes are heavy, judging. I wonder if those who were there for my debut will always see me as I was that night – the blood-soaked girl who couldn't speak or cry or scream.

I brought misfortune into their tidy, ordered lives, and the mystery of my mother's death has never been solved. After all, what sort of animal slays as methodically as the one that killed her? What daughter sits next to her mother's corpse and doesn't shed a single tear?

I've never spoken a word to anyone about what happened that night. Never displayed any outward signs of grief, not even at my mother's funeral. I simply didn't respond the way a guiltless girl should have.

'Come now,' I murmur. 'You've always been a terrible liar.'

Catherine scowls in the direction of Miss Stanley. 'They're just being hateful because they don't know you.'

She sounds so sure of me, certain that I'm innocent and good. Catherine did know me, once. The way I used to be. Now there is a sole individual alive who truly understands me, who has seen the destructive part of me that I conceal – because he is the one who helped create it.

'Even your mother suspects me of some involvement and she's known me since I was a bairn.'

Catherine smirks at me. 'You do little to improve her opinion of you, what with you disappearing at every assembly she escorts us to.'

‘I have headaches,’ I say.

‘A good lie the first time, but suspicious by the seventh. Perhaps try a different affliction next time?’

She sets down her empty cup. Immediately, the dispenser’s arm picks it up and places it on the conveyer that returns dirty dishes to the kitchen.

‘I’m not lying,’ I insist. ‘The headache forming at my temples right now was caused by Miss Stanley.’

Catherine rolls her eyes.

The orchestra at the back of the room strikes a few practice chords on their fiddles. The strathspey is about to begin, and the dance card that hangs from my wrist is surprisingly full. Aristocrats are nothing if not hypocritical. They have invented a crime and condemned me for it, yet the business of our acquaintance continues uninterrupted. My dowry is a draw many gentlemen won’t ignore.

The result: not an empty spot for a dance, and hours of inane conversation. At least I enjoy the dancing.

‘Your Lord Hamilton is leaving his companions,’ Catherine observes.

Lord Hamilton manoeuvres around a group of ladies near the refreshment tables. A short, stout man about twenty years my senior, Lord Hamilton has a receding hairline and a penchant for cravats of unusual design. He also has an unfortunate habit of patting my wrist – which I suppose is meant to comfort me, but makes me feel all of twelve years old.

‘He’s not *my* Lord Hamilton,’ I say. ‘Good heavens, he’s old enough to be my father.’ I lean in and whisper, ‘And if he pats my wrist again, I shall surely scream.’

Catherine lets out an unladylike snort. ‘You’re the one who agreed to dance with him.’

I cast her a withering glance. ‘I’m not a complete boor. I won’t turn down a dance unless someone else has claimed it.’

Lord Hamilton stops before us. Today's cravat has mauve, green and blue dye splashed in a strange pattern on the silk. Ever the gentleman, he smiles politely.

'Good evening, Lady Aileana,' he says, then nods at Catherine. 'Miss Stewart, I trust you're well.'

'I am indeed, Lord Hamilton,' she says. 'And may I say, that is quite a ... *striking* cravat.'

Lord Hamilton peers down at it fondly, as though someone has complimented his greatest achievement. 'Why, thank you. The dyes form the outline of a unicorn. Part of the Hamilton crest, you see.'

I blink. If anything, it resembles a sea creature of some kind.

Catherine, however, simply nods. 'How wonderful. It suits you very well, I think.'

I remain silent. I'm so terribly out of practice with social niceties that I might actually tell him the mauve splashes look like tentacles.

The orchestra strikes a few more chords as couples move to the centre of the room and take their places for the dance.

Lord Hamilton extends his gloved hand. 'May I have the pleasure?'

I place my fingers in his palm, and – hell and blast – he pats my wrist. I distinctly hear Catherine's stifled giggle as she is led off by her own suitor. I glower at her over my shoulder as Lord Hamilton and I walk to the dance line. He deposits me at the end and stands across from me.

But just as the orchestra begins to play, an odd taste sweeps across my tongue from front to back. Like a volatile mixture of sulphur and ammonia, hot and burning as it trickles down the inside of my throat.

A vile swearword almost escapes my lips. There's a faery here.

Chapter 2

I close my eyes and try to swallow the faery's power. The chemical tang in my mouth is so sharp that I want to cast my accounts over the ballroom floor. Heaving once, I lose my footing and pitch forwards.

'Oof!' I careen into the lady nearest me. The wide skirts of our dresses collide and we almost topple onto the marble tiles. Just in time, I grip her shoulders to steady myself.

'My apologies,' I say, my voice hoarse.

I look up at the woman then. Miss Fairfax. She regards me with well-controlled mild distaste. My eyes dart to the other dancers. Many couples in the strathspey crane their heads to see the commotion. Though the jaunty music plays on, everyone – everyone – is staring at me.

Some of them whisper, and I catch their accusations again. Or I think I do. *Murderess. She went mad. The marchioness's death was—*

I pull myself away from Miss Fairfax. It takes every ounce of effort to tamp down the memories that threaten to surface, to stay where I am and not run. I know what Father would say. He would tell me that I am the daughter of a marquess, and I am responsible for representing the family name at all times.

'So sorry, Miss Fairfax. Lost the count,' I say.

Miss Fairfax merely straightens her skirts, pats her mussed brunette hair and lifts her chin as she rejoins the dance.

'Lady Aileana?' Lord Hamilton says. He appears quite concerned. 'Are you all right?'

I force a smile and speak without thinking. 'I'm terribly sorry – I must have tripped.'

Oh, dash it all. *I feel faint*, I should have said. That would have been the perfect excuse to get up and leave. How could I be so stupid?

Too late now. Lord Hamilton simply smiles, grips my hand and guides me back to the line. I avoid the prying gazes of my peers and swallow down the last remnants of power on my tongue.

I have to find the blasted creature before it lures its victim. My instincts tell me to leave the dance, find the faery and slaughter it. I spare a glance towards the exit. Dash my reputation and the idiotic notion that a gentlewoman shouldn't cross a ballroom – or leave it – unescorted.

I feel the dark part inside of me stir and rise, desperate to do only three things: hunt, mutilate, kill.

Oh, I want to, more than anything. The faery is nearby, just outside the ballroom. I step out of the strathspey and head towards the door. Lord Hamilton intercepts me and asks a question. I can't hear it over the pounding need, my murderous thoughts.

Responsibility, I remind myself. *Family. Honour.* Damnation.

I reply to Lord Hamilton's question with a simple, 'Of course.'

He smiles again. I feel sorry for him, for all of them. They think I'm the only monster in their midst, but the real danger is the one they can't even see. Faeries select their victims and compel them with a small push of mental influence, then feed from them and kill them.

Five minutes. That's all I need to find the creature and shoot

a capsule into its flesh. Only a little time unobserved to—

I grip Lord Hamilton's hand hard. I've been out of society so long, and the hunt has become second nature. I have to hush my barbaric thoughts or I'll act too soon and lose myself. My etiquette lessons repeat in my mind. *The daughter of a marquess does not charge out of a ballroom. The daughter of a marquess does not abandon her partner in the middle of a dance.*

The daughter of a marquess does not hunt faeries.

'—don't you agree?' Lord Hamilton is asking, pulling me back into the dance.

I shake myself. 'Of course.' I actually manage to sound reassuring.

Lord Hamilton pats my wrist and I grit my teeth against a violent response as we circle another couple.

The strathspey seems to go on for ever. Left foot hop, right foot back, left foot into second position. Instep, third position. Right knee bent, second position. Over and over again. The music doesn't register any more; it has become a background of screeching strings, and the dance is only halfway over.

My hand brushes the side of my blue silk dress, right over the spot where my lightning pistol is hidden. I envision myself hunting in the corridors, taking aim—

Calm, I tell myself. I study the fine details of the room again, the mosaic lanterns that continue to float over our heads. Above them are the clicking brass cogs and wiring along the edge of the ceiling, all of it connected to New Town's electricity system.

I focus on the clicks, on mentally reciting my lessons. Propriety. *Click*. Grace. *Click*. Smile. *Click*. Kill. *Click*.

Hell and blast.

The fiddles screech on. Lord Hamilton says something else and I manage to smile and give a non-committal nod.

I try again. Politeness. *Click*. Modesty. *Click*. Civility—

At last the music stops, and I turn to Lord Hamilton. He

offers his arm without comment and leads me to the perimeter of the ballroom. I eye the door again.

‘I say,’ Lord Hamilton murmurs, ‘where is Miss Stewart? I shouldn’t leave you alone.’

Thank heavens Catherine is nowhere to be seen. She is one less person I have to excuse myself from.

‘You’re forgiven,’ I say in that charming voice I hate. ‘If I might beg your pardon, I must take my leave to the ladies’ parlour for a few minutes.’ I touch my temple lightly. ‘A headache, I’m afraid.’

Lord Hamilton frowns. ‘Tch, how dreadful. Do allow me to escort you.’

Once we reach the double doors that exit into the hallway, I stop and smile. ‘There’s no need for you to leave the ballroom, my lord. I can find the parlour on my own.’

‘Are you certain?’

I almost snap at him, but force myself to breathe deeply and regain some composure. My desire to hunt is pounding, unrelenting. If it consumes me, politeness won’t deter me. I’ll want nothing but blood and vengeance and release.

I swallow. ‘Indeed.’

Lord Hamilton doesn’t appear to notice a change in my behaviour. He simply smiles, bows from the waist and pats my wrist again. ‘Thank you for the pleasure of your company.’

He turns to leave and I step into the hallway, breathing a sigh of relief. *At last.*

As I tiptoe down the corridor, away from the ballroom and the ladies’ parlour, my mouth tingles when the faery power returns. My body is growing more used to the taste after its initial violent response, and I recognise the particular breed it comes from. A revenant.

I have only ever killed four revenants, but never on my own, so I haven’t yet grown as accustomed to the potent taste of their

power as I have to that of the other breeds of fae I kill more often. In my limited experience, they have three vulnerabilities: an opening along the thoracic cage, just over the left pectoral; an abdominal cavity with a slight soft spot in otherwise impenetrable skin; and rather sub-par intelligence.

Revenants make up for their weaknesses with solid muscle, which makes them difficult to kill. Then again, I do love a challenge.

I reach into the small pocket sewn into the folds of my ball gown and pull out a thin, plaited strand of *seilgflùr*. A rare soft thistle nearly extinct in Scotland, *seilgflùr* gives me the ability to see faeries.

The thistle was almost entirely destroyed by faeries thousands of years ago to prevent humans from learning the truth – that the plant is a faery’s only true weakness. Oh, they all have some spots on their bodies that can be punctured by an ordinary weapon, but that would still only injure one of them. *Seilgflùr*, though, is deadly enough to burn their fae skin and even inflict a mortal wound. I use it in the weapons I make to hunt them.

I tie the *seilgflùr* around my neck and start forward again. My muscles are ready, relaxed, honed from twelve months of gruelling training with Kiaran. My techniques have improved during the nights when I have slaughtered faeries without his help. Kiaran claims I’m not ready to hunt on my own. I have proven him wrong a dozen times. Of course, he doesn’t know I’ve been disobeying his direct order not to hunt alone, but I have a distinct tendency to disobey him when the opportunity arises.

The taste of the faery’s power leaves another strong pulse against my tongue. It must be somewhere around the next corner. I stop abruptly. ‘Brilliant,’ I mutter.

The corridor leads to the bedrooms. If I’m caught inside, there would be no preventing the ensuing scandal. My reputation is

intact only because the rumours about me haven't been proven. Being caught nosing around the Hepburns' private quarters would be a real issue my already questionable reputation can't afford.

I shift on my feet. Perhaps if I'm very quick—

'Aileana!'

I whirl. Oh ... *hell*.

Catherine and her mother, the Viscountess of Cassilis, stand in the corridor behind me by the double doors leading into the ballroom. As they approach, Catherine stares at me with surprise and confusion, and her mother – well, she regards me with blatant suspicion.

'Aileana,' Catherine says again when they reach me. 'What are you doing over here?'

Both women share the same shining blonde hair and wide blue eyes, though Lady Cassilis's gaze is shrewd rather than innocent. She has the keenest ability to notice even the smallest infraction in propriety. Nay, even the merest hint of disgrace.

Dash it all. This is bad, being caught heading in the direction of the Hepburns' private wing. This isn't where a respectable woman would be. Or, at least, she wouldn't get caught here. That's the important bit.

'Catching my breath,' I say hurriedly, breathing hard for emphasis. 'Lord Hamilton is very quick on his feet, you know.'

Catherine looks terribly amused. 'Oh? Well, for a man of his age, I suppose.'

'So,' I say, narrowing my eyes at Catherine, 'I'm here to relax a moment. That's all.'

'My *dear*,' Lady Cassilis says with heavy emphasis, 'you should relax in the ballroom, which is *this* way.' She inclines her head towards the doors down the hall.

The faery power leaves a distracting pulse against my tongue – it must be extending its powers again to draw someone in.

My body tenses in response. ‘Oh, aye,’ I say. My voice sounds strained. ‘But—’

‘Yes,’ the viscountess corrects. “Aye” sounds so *terribly* unsophisticated.’

Lady Cassilis is among the small but growing number of Scottish aristocracy who believe that if we speak like the English, Scotland will be considered a more civilised nation. It’s a load of rubbish, if you ask me. We’re perfectly urbane as we are. But I’d rather not debate the matter in a hallway while there’s a bloodthirsty faery on the loose.

‘Aye, of course. I mean, *yes*,’ I respond. Heavens, isn’t there any way to gracefully extricate myself from this conversation?

‘Mother.’ Catherine inserts herself between us. ‘I’m certain Aileana has a reasonable explanation for ... loitering here.’ She turns to me. ‘I thought you promised this dance to Lord Carrick.’

‘I have a headache,’ I say, trying to sound as innocent as possible. ‘I was searching for the ladies’ parlour to rest.’

Catherine raises an eyebrow. I return it with a glare.

‘Well, do let me come with you,’ Catherine says.

‘Ah, the ever-persistent headache,’ Lady Cassilis says. ‘If you intend to nurse it in the ladies’ parlour, you’ll find that at the *other* end of the corridor.’

The viscountess narrows her gaze at me. I have no illusions that if she had proof of my ill behaviour, Catherine would have been barred from spending time with me long ago. Lady Cassilis might be my escort to formal functions, but only because Catherine asked her to, since the viscountess and my mother were friends. I can’t imagine what on earth they had in common.

‘Regardless,’ Lady Cassilis says, ‘a lady ought never to leave a ballroom unescorted. As you well know, Aileana. Need I remind you that this is yet another breach in etiquette, being alone in an empty corridor?’ She sniffs. ‘I fear your mother would be quite aggrieved, were she still with us.’

Catherine sucks in a sharp breath. I clench my fists and gasp. Grief rises briefly inside me, quickly replaced by rage and the overwhelming desire for vengeance. For just one kill to bury the painful memory of my mother's death once more. Even my careful control has its limits – I must find that faery before my need consumes me.

'Mother,' Catherine says deliberately, 'if you could wait for me in the ballroom, I shall be there directly.' When Lady Cassilis opens her mouth to protest, Catherine adds, 'I won't be long. Just let me see Aileana safely to the parlour.'

The viscountess studies me briefly, lifts her chin a notch and strides to the ballroom.

Catherine sighs. 'She didn't mean that.'

'She did.'

'Aileana, whatever you're planning – be quick, or I may be unable to visit for elevenhours on Wednesday. Mother—'

'I know. She thinks I'm a bad influence.'

She winces. 'Perhaps not the best.'

I smile. 'I appreciate you lying for me.'

'I never lie. I merely embellish information if the situation calls for it. For example, I intend to tell Mother that this *headache* of yours is severe enough that you may miss a few dances.'

'How very tactful of you.' I pass Catherine my reticule. 'Would you hold onto this for me?'

Catherine stares at it. 'I do believe the ladies parlour allows reticules.'

'Aye, but carrying the reticule might make my *headache* worse.' I press the purse into her palm.

'Hmm. You know, someday, I'm going to ask questions. You might even answer them.'

'Someday,' I agree, grateful for her trust.

She flashes a smile and says, 'Very well. Go off on your mysterious adventure. But at least think of our luncheon. Your cook

is the only one who knows how to make proper shortbread.’

‘Is that really the only reason you visit? The blasted shortbread?’

‘The company is also quite agreeable ... when she isn’t having “headaches”.’

She departs with an unladylike wink and saunters through the double doors into the ballroom.

Freed at last, I advance down the corridor again. My skirt rustles, its deep flounces fluffed by three stiff petticoats. Since I began training a year ago, I’ve become keenly aware of how limiting a lady’s wardrobe is. The adornments are all beautiful – and absolutely useless in battle.

As I round the corner, the faery power returns in force. I let the burning tang wash over my tongue; I thrive on the anticipation. This is one of my favourite parts of the hunt, second only to the kill itself. I imagine myself shooting it again, feeling the calm release at its death ...

Then, all at once, the taste tears out of my throat so fast, I bend over and gag.

‘Damnation,’ I whisper. The abrasive absence of its power means the revenant has found its victim and is drawing in human energy.

With another muttered oath, I gather my bulky skirts and petticoats, slip the stole off my shoulders to tie around my waist – propriety be damned – and bolt up the stairs. I glance about in dismay when I reach the top. So many doors. Now that the power has gone, I have no way to tell which room the faery is in.

I walk quickly down the hallway. The corridor is quiet. *Too* quiet. I’m painfully aware of every swish the fabric of my dress makes, every floorboard creak beneath my satin slippers.

I press my ear to the nearest door. Nothing. I open it to be certain, but the room is empty. I try another door. Still nothing.

As I palm the next handle, I hear a low gasp. The kind of

breath someone takes with only scant moments of life remaining.

I consider my options carefully. I have but a single chance to save the revenant's victim. If I charge in, the faery might kill the person before I shoot.

Quietly pushing my petticoats aside, I draw the lightning pistol from my thigh holster. I grip the handle of the weapon as I nudge the door open to peek inside.

Next to the four-poster bed in the corner of the room, the revenant's behemoth form is bent over its victim. At nearly seven feet tall, the muscled faery resembles a rotting troll. Stringy, limp dark hair hangs in patches around its scalp. The creature's skin is the pallid shade of dead flesh, speckled with decay in some places and peeling off in others. One cheek is open and gaping, exposing a jawbone and row of teeth. Faeries can heal most injuries in less than a minute, but this is the natural state of revenants. They are utterly disgusting and corpse-like.

The faery's fingertips are sunk deep into the chest of a gentleman I immediately recognise as the elderly Lord Hepburn. His waistcoat is soaked through with blood, and his skin has a bluish cast.

When a faery feeds from a human's energy, they are both enveloped an astonishing white light. Lord Hepburn isn't that far gone yet, but almost.

I hold my breath and ease up the lightning pistol until the sight is level with the revenant's pectoral, just over its thoracic opening. My grip tightens, my thumb tracing the ornate carvings on the handle of the pistol in a soft caress.

Move, I think to the revenant. Just a bit, so I don't injure my gracious host.

The faery doesn't move and I don't have a clean shot. Time to intervene.

I lower the pistol and step into the room, shutting the door behind me with a loud click.

The revenant's head snaps up. It bares two rows of long pointed teeth and gives a low, rumbling growl that makes the fine hairs on my arms stand straight up.

I smile sweetly. 'Hello there.'

I detect some small movement from Lord Hepburn and I relax slightly. Still alive, thank goodness. The revenant's black gaze tracks me as I move to stand near the velvet settee, but it stays where it is, still greedily drinking the poor man's energy.

I need to force its attention to me again. 'Drop him, you ghastly thing.' The beast hisses and I step forward. 'I said drop him. *Now.*'

My grip on the pistol tightens again as the creature releases Lord Hepburn and rises to its full height. Now that the faery has stopped feeding, the ammonia and sulphur flavour is back, scorching. The creature towers over me, muscled and dripping with some repulsive clear substance I would rather not inspect closely.

I'm filled with a familiar rush of excitement as the faery snarls again. My heart pumps faster. My blood rushes and my cheeks burn.

'Aye, that's it,' I whisper. 'Take me instead.'

The faery leaps forward.