

Dark Protector Bonus Scene – Rebecca Zanetti

This takes place sometime after MARKED. ☺

The streets of Dublin were twitchy this time of year. A fall breeze wafted through the cobbled area with the scents of salt and wild roses, yet the air hummed with combined power. Enough true witches were in the area, enjoying the outdoors before the oncoming winter, that barely discernable sparkles filled the air with energy.

The surrounding feeling gave a witch like Brenna Dunne-Kayrs a lightened step and a happy heart. Unfortunately, it gave her mate, Jase Kayrs, a case of the grumpies. Yet vampires, especially a warrior like Jase, didn't exactly get grumpy. They got pissed and then deadly.

A kid on a skateboard whizzed by, and Jase growled. Again.

Brenna sighed and shifted packages from one hand to the other. "Come on. Being in Dublin is fun."

"I'm not having fun."

No kidding. She shook her head. "Would you relax?"

"Can't." Jase rolled impressive shoulders beneath a Grateful Dead T-shirt. "Too many witches around here." He wrinkled his nose in true *Bewitched* style.

Brenna snorted. "If I could wrinkle my nose and make you a toad, I'd do it." She dug an elbow into his rock-hard gut. Witches used quantum physics to alter matter and create energy, and turning anybody into a toad defied the laws of physics. Too bad.

He glanced down and grinned, his copper eyes lightening. "I do love it when you threaten me."

She laughed. "So do I."

A group of teenaged girls wandered near, instantly breaking into giggles and whispers as they moved by.

Brenna's smile widened.

"What?" Jase asked.

She shook her head and studied him. At about six and a half feet and cut hard, even without the street-stamped face and coppery eyes, he was something to look at.

Add in the long scar across his right cheekbone, and he looked dangerous to the point of being too intriguing. Aye, if she was a teenaged girl, she'd be giggling, too. "You're just hot," she murmured.

And there it was.

Those copper eyes slid into vampiric green, his secondary eye color, dark and knowing. "You making a move, Mrs. Kayrs?"

Oh hell yeah. "I might be." They'd been mated for years and had survived illness, near death, and war. Even though the war had ended, they both still had plenty of enemies out there. Yet in this time and this place, they could find peace. "What are you offering?" she whispered, letting her voice go hoarse.

His smile slid away, and he leaned toward her, the scent of male coming with him. "Everything I am or will ever be."

Her heart pretty much exploded. She smiled.

He stilled and lifted his head.

"What?" she asked, glancing around.

"I don't know. Something." He stilled and focused, his body visibly tightening. "You feel anything?"

She settled herself and opened her senses, pleased beyond belief that he'd asked. Years ago, she'd been damaged, and she'd never completely gotten her strength back. Add in the fact that she was now three months pregnant and having weird, really weird hormone surges that messed with her abilities, and she loved that he still considered her talented. Yet too many witches were in the vicinity to narrow down any threat. "I just sense witches—nobody else." Except the vampire next to her.

He nodded. "Time to get back to the penthouse."

"Sounds good." Truth be told, she wouldn't mind putting her feet up.

A shop door opened a foot away, and threat shimmered on the air. She partially turned, and before she made it around, Jase had set her behind him. The ping of a gun firing echoed low, and Jase's body jerked.

"Jase," Brenna hissed, dropping her packages.

He leaped forward and hit the gunman, a blond thirty-something witch, square on. They smashed through the glass-paned door, sending shards shooting inside a candy store.

A motorcycle zipped down the street, and Brenna caught sight of an odd-looking silver gun in the rider's hand.

"Darts," Jase bellowed from inside.

Hell. Brenna grabbed a package and lifted it to her face just as the guy fired. Three darts hit her bag, and she whirled, throwing plasma down her arms to fire. Two shots ricocheted off a sign above, burning it. She yelped and dodged out of the way just as the heavy wood dropped to the ground.

The blond witch careened out of the store and impacted a black town-car, head first; obviously he'd been thrown hard. Metal crumbled. He dropped to the stones, out cold.

Jase stalked out behind him, blood dripping down his neck, fury in his eyes. "You okay?"

"Yeah. Darts missed me," Brenna whispered. Purple flames danced down her arms. Her usual color was green, sometimes blue, but the pregnancy had turned her plasma color to purple. "I missed the guy on the bike."

Jase surveyed the area, and his shoulders went down. "Hormones throwing you off?"

"Maybe."

"Humph." He kicked the downed man over. "That's probably normal."

Brenna caught sight of his chest. "Jase..."

He glanced down at the three protruding darts and tugged them out. "Planekite, unfortunately."

Brenna swallowed. "I figured." Planekite was the mineral that harmed witches, and an enemy was distributing it across the world and now creating dart-filled weapons. "You feel okay?"

Jase kicked the guy harder. "Yep. Planekite doesn't affect vampires."

The blond witch groaned and reached for his head.

Jase smiled and leaned down to lift the guy by the lapels before turning and throwing him into the brick wall in a curiously graceful movement. Pieces of rock shattered, and the witch dropped again.

Brenna frowned. "You're enjoying yourself."

Jase blinked. He frowned. "Well, maybe a little. Things have been a bit tame, you know."

Brenna rolled her eyes and reached for her cell phone to call the Guard. "We should get this guy into interrogation."

"We will." Jase turned toward her, his gaze burning. "But first, you promised me a quickie."

Brenna gave the information to the Guard and was assured a team would be there immediately. She clicked off the phone and studied her badass of a mate. "I don't believe I said anything about being *quick*." While he appeared relaxed, a new tension emanated from him. One he was trying hard to hide. "Should we talk about this?" she asked quietly.

His gaze sharpened. "Talk about this?" His voice was deep and deceptively mild.

"Aye." She nodded, her heart rate picking up.

"Hmmm." He strode toward her, blood on his face, fury barely banked beneath his skin. "Let's see. An enemy we can't find has now not only created poisonous darts but chosen to test them out on you, my mate and the mother of my unborn son. What exactly is there to talk about?"

Her spine straightened. "It could be a girl." Ultra-sound didn't work on immortals, unfortunately.

"Vampires only have males, as you know." He gently slid her curly hair off her shoulder.

"Maybe...maybe not, and you know it." Now wasn't the time to get into the complicated issue of genetics and the evolution of such. Only time would tell if any of the vampires had daughters. "I'm a member of the Coven Nine, and as such will always have enemies." She glanced down at the prone witch. "You put them nicely into walls, so all is good."

"All is *not* good." A muscle clenched in his jaw.

Down the street, the roar of a motorcycle increased in pitch.

“Get behind me.” Without waiting for an answer, he shoved her behind him.

She dropped the bags again and concentrated on creating fireballs in her hands.

While she appreciated his protectiveness, she was a witch who knew how to fight.

A fireball slid free and impacted the back of his jeans.

He yelped and pushed forward. “Hey.”

She bit her lip. “Sorry. Just can’t control it with the pregnancy.”

His jeans continued to smolder, and he shot both hands back to pat out the flames, leaving his ass bare.

“Oops. Got your boxers, too.” She leaned around him to see the same rider on the bike. “He’s the guy.”

“I know.” Jase bunched his legs, ready to lunge.

She centered herself, pivoted, and aimed a curve ball around him. The plasma, morphing purple, flew through the air and smacked the driver right in the head. The force propelled the guy off the bike, and he spun end-over-end down the road.

“Nice.” Jase ran the several yards and lifted the witch by the neck. The crack echoed down the almost quiet street.

Brenna winced. Sure, the witch would recuperate, but it was much tougher to rebuild a broken neck than people thought. It could take months. “Now can we head back?” she asked, quite pleased with her accurate aim. Finally.

Without a whisper of sound, a body moved behind her from the shop, dart gun to her throat. “I don’t think so.” The voice was male and the body hard. A witch.

She stilled. Her stomach dropped, and she lost any inkling of the adventurousness she’d been feeling. Planekite had almost killed her once, and who knew what it would do to the baby. She had to get free.

Jase tossed the motorcycle rider to the opposite side of the street like a ragdoll and turned, his chin down, his shoulders back, and stalked within three feet of her. “Let her go.” Death, the definite promise of it, glowed in his now pure green eyes. His enjoyment had ended, too.

The male holding her chuckled. “Do you really think we only sent two attackers?”

“No. I think those two were a diversion.” Jase crossed his arms. “You shoot that dart, and it’ll be the last thing you ever do.”

“Right. She’s coming with me.” The guy pressed harder.

Brenna winced. “Let me go, and I won’t let him kill you.”

The guy stiffened. “Think you could stop him?”

Jase angled closer. “Listen. Everything I care about is in your hands right now, and if anything happens to her, I’ll make sure you beg for death.” He spoke calmly, almost too much so, his gaze remaining on the guy’s face.

Brenna shuddered. “He’s not kidding.”

“Oh, I know all about Jase Kayrs,” the guy murmured, tugging Brenna toward the shop. “Which is why I’m not letting go.”

Fire danced down Brenna’s arms.

“Stop,” the guy said.

“Can’t. Pregnant,” she muttered, trying to douse the flames. If she burned him, he might accidentally shoot a dart into her neck, damn it. Sparks fizzled onto the ground.

Jase took another step closer.

“Stop it.” The guy wrapped an arm around Brenna’s waist and pulled her back into him. “I will shoot her.”

Jase tilted his head.

Brenna stilled, waiting for the signal.

He lowered his chin. “Now.”

She instantly pressed both burning hands back into the guy’s thighs, dropped with all her weight, and jerked her head away from the dart.

Fire blew out the second her palms impacted, and the guy screamed.

Jase jumped forward, shot a hand between the gun and her neck, and pivoted, hitting her with his hip.

She flew to the side and fell, rolling and coming right back up.

Jase punched the witch in the face, several times, and threw the gun up on the roof. Then he kept on hitting.

And hitting.

They dropped to the ground, and blood sprayed.

Several cars roared into view and then skidded to a stop so the elite Coven Guard could jump out, guns and knives already in position. Two of them grabbed Jase to try and pull him off the witch, but he didn't stop.

Two more guards joined in, and then another one.

Brenna shook her head. "Jase? The guy is done."

Her voice, and that alone, made him stop punching. He glanced to the side. "You okay?"

"Aye." She jerked her head toward all the guards. "They're on our side."

He lifted an eyebrow and slowly stood up, shrugging off the guards. They quickly moved into action to grab the fallen attackers and load them in the cars.

Brenna rubbed her aching neck.

Jase yanked off his shirt and wiped his face and hands clean.

She chuckled. With his burned jeans looking like homemade chaps, and his hard cut chest bare, he looked like a sexy alcohol advertisement.

He reached her in two strides, his mouth instantly taking hers.

Heat and male took her under, slamming something much stronger than desire right into her center. Everything. She kissed him back, giving all she had, taking what she needed.

Finally, he lifted his head, his eyes back to copper and blazing. He grinned. "Now I'm having fun."