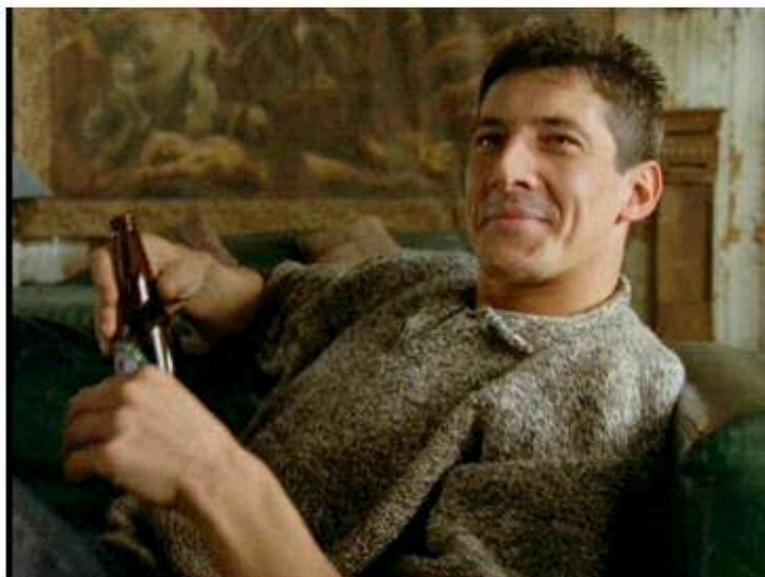


# **Methosian Tales of Amusement**

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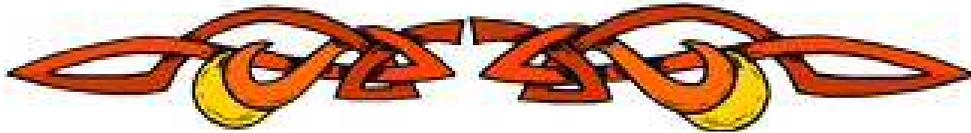


**Lillian L. Wolfe**

# ***Methosian Tales of Amusement***

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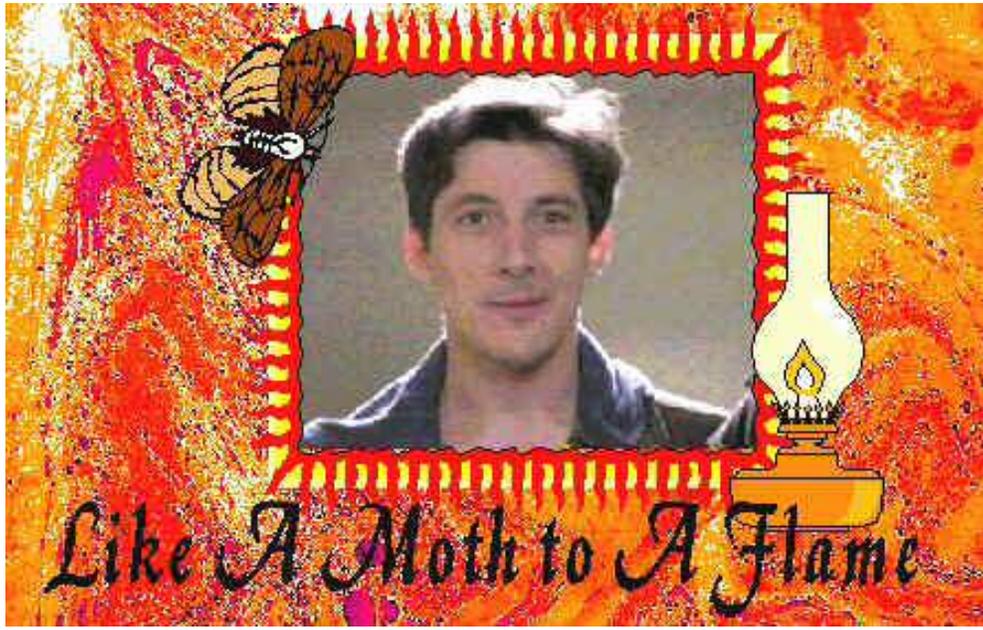
***Short Stories***



***Lillian I. Wolfe***

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By Lillian Wolfe

This vignette is based on the characters in the Davis-Panzer Production, "Highlander The Series". The characters of Methos, Duncan MacLeod, Joe Dawson, Christine Salzer and Sean Burns all slipped away to do a little moonlighting and we beg their bosses to be understanding. None of us are profiting from this, but Methos felt inclined to chat about this period in his life. They are returning to their regular jobs with no permanent damage (except for the dearly departed, of course.)

My thanks to Taselby and Dianne for proofing, critiquing and being great readers/editors. If there are mistakes left, they

are entirely my own. It was originally published in Dianne Smith's 'zine, "Potpourri," but it has been revised and expanded a bit for web publishing.

Please do not copy, publish or post on the Internet without permission from the author. I would prefer to avoid any legal entanglements. Methos tells me stories and I write them down like a good little chronicler to share.

1st Version Completed: 11/29/97 - Revised: 03/08/99

On March 6, 1995, Duncan MacLeod went in search of watcher Adam Pierson and found Methos, who then disappeared. A few weeks later, Methos came back into the Highlander's life. Between these two events was a period of decision for the five thousand year old Immortal.

## *Like A Moth To A Flame*

March 9, 1995

With a screech of noise, a couple of naked tree branches scraped across the window as a nagging breeze touched them. Inside the sparsely furnished hotel room Methos sat, legs crossed Indian style, on the bed and studied the assortment of papers he'd spread across the covers. He'd been shuffling them around for the past hour or so and still hadn't made a decision.

Without much enthusiasm, he picked up one set of documents, read the name at the top - Alain Fouchet, and flipped through the five pages that made up the packet. His face screwed into a disgusted frown. He wasn't crazy about the name nor was he eager to become an x-ray technician, although it certainly paid more money than his last occupation as a graduate student and researcher. Setting that packet down, he selected another. Steven Elliot, this one read, and the credentials stated his profession as a teacher of history, graduate of Oxford University, specializing in medieval studies. Not a bad option. He'd taught a few times

before and it was a pleasant enough experience, especially if your students were interested in the subject. It would mean expounding on the version of history subscribed by whatever institution hired him, not what he knew. An impish grin threatened with the prospect of shedding some heretofore unseen light on a couple of incorrectly recorded events.

Languidly, Methos stretched his arms above his head, lifting his shoulders against the tightness that was setting into them, then reached across the bed for another room temperature beer. Three solitary bottles made him realize he was going for his fourth one in less than -- he glanced at the clock --two hours. Even worse, he hadn't eaten anything since an apple at breakfast. Not good. He rarely let anything worry him this much this long, but the recent change in his situation was definitely gnawing at him.

He knew from the moment that Joe Dawson called "Adam Pierson" to tell him Duncan MacLeod needed to talk to him about Methos that his life would change. He'd accepted it with the same pragmatic attitude he took most things. There had been no question in his mind that once he'd talked to MacLeod, Adam Pierson would have to disappear. He'd planned for it long ago, knowing that sooner or later something would happen to call attention to him. Although he

couldn't hide his Immortality from MacLeod, he could have had someone else meet him instead of doing it himself. But he really wanted to meet the Highlander, judge the stories against the man.

Reading MacLeod's chronicles was like reading about a heroic myth-- the great Highland warrior who stood by his code of honour for four hundred years. His cousin Connor was far less heroic, more bent on winning the game, yet Methos thought that possibly Duncan MacLeod would be one of the last left when -- and if -- the Gathering came. So he figured it was worth the risk to meet the Highlander.

Of course, much to his chagrin, he hadn't expected Kalas to find him quite so easily. He'd slipped up there, left far too much of who he was easily visible in his flat. It had made it too easy for another Immortal to guess that he was more than a Watcher. That was most annoying and certainly made him aware of how sloppy he'd become about his identity. But Kalas was the first Immortal to coming looking for the head of the legendary Methos in over two centuries; the most recent to want to kill him for the power and not for any grudge against him. Not that there weren't some in that second category.

Luckily, MacLeod wasn't in either group. He hadn't expected him to be, but he still questioned his own sanity in provoking the man to take his head. What if he'd guessed wrong? The scary part was, he wasn't sure he could have stopped the Highlander from doing it.

The touch of the steel against his throat had felt so familiar. It had been a long time since he'd even pulled his own sword let alone worked out with it. God knows, that was obvious when he tried to fight Kalas. But when he'd brought MacLeod's katana to his throat, it had sent a spark of electricity down his spine and he remembered what this kind of danger felt like. He'd felt his pulse quicken and the surge of excitement in his body. In some ways, he'd missed it.

Life had been fairly quiet the past century or so and he'd managed to avoid most of the passing Immortals. He'd spent the last decade hiding in the Watchers, which had been an inspiration, the perfect opportunity to get paid to do what he liked and keep himself out of trouble. He hated to let that job go- to let Adam Pierson go. And that's where the difficulty in this decision rested- letting Adam go.

Methos stood up, stretched like a cat, and reached for his coat. Noting that he felt slightly lightheaded, he decided it

was definitely time to find some food. As he stepped out of the entry door to the hotel, he considered the possibility of relocating to Bordeaux. It was a quieter corner of France than Paris, not a place Immortals tended to frequent. On the other hand, he would be limited in work opportunities and would be more likely to run into someone he already knew. His safest option would be to relocate to a different continent. Maybe Australia- if he could get used to the abomination of that accent. On reflection, he thought that wouldn't be too hard; he'd adapted to the Louisiana accent well enough. But he'd have to change his whole look to escape detection from the Watchers.

And that was a big worry. He had no doubt in his mind that MacLeod had told Dawson who he'd found in Adam Pierson's flat. The question was did Dawson share that information with Watcher Headquarters? He wasn't sure and hadn't quite worked up the nerve to find out. His own colleagues could be looking for him even now and they knew what Adam Pierson looked like-thanks to the identification photos they required. That was an unpleasant thought. Would they assign someone to him he could handle? In the past, he'd managed contact with his own Watchers several times; had managed to disappear totally a few times. Most never really knew who their assignment was, accepting him for whatever name he

was using at the time. But it wasn't as easy now -- there were pictures and fax machines and video cameras and computer networks. Not to mention the little nightmare he helped create with Don Salzer -- the Watcher Database. He'd recovered all the copies of it, but it was still worrisome that it could end up in the wrong hands.

Methos found a deli, ordered a chicken sandwich, potato salad, and an espresso and sat down at a small table inside to eat. It was starting to drizzle outside, enough moisture to wet the streets and dampen his mood even more. Maybe he should consider Bora Bora- warm climate, not too heavily populated, well out of the Immortal travel routes. He could try again for that tan he never seemed to manage. He could sit on the beach with his laptop computer desperately trying to keep up with what was happening in the rest of the world. He half-smiled at the thought. No, he wasn't inclined to withdraw that much. He needed to know what was happening in the Game. His mind drifted back to the final events a mere three days earlier.

"Remember, Highlander- live, grow stronger, fight another day." How had he had the nerve to intervene in MacLeod's fight with Kalas? What gave him the right to do it? Hell, he wasn't even sure why he'd decided the Highlander wasn't

ready to face Kalas! But he'd brought the police into it, insuring Kalas was locked away. Then he'd had to face MacLeod and tell him he couldn't take the chance he'd lose. The hair on the back of his neck had stood on end as he'd tried to maintain a steady pace away from MacLeod.

Even then, he had already packed up his belongings and moved them to locked storage south of Paris, knowing he would have to disappear. So he'd caught a cab, had it drop him at Shakespeare & Co., Don Salzer's bookstore, where he'd proceeded to clean Don's computer of any of the database files they'd been working on together. Don hadn't been that knowledgeable with computers, but at least those files had been protected. Methos had seen to that and he knew the passwords to enter and delete the files. He'd almost reformatted the hard disk to be sure, but decided against it at the last moment. He'd taken the CD Don had been working on and left with a sense of closure, an ending of his work with the Watchers and his friendship with Don, the former as dead as the latter. He'd then taken another cab to his Volvo, which was parked at the airport and ended up driving south to Bordeaux to decide his next move.

And here in Bordeaux, where the decision should have been as simple as picking a new identity and moving on, he'd

gotten bogged down in, of all things, regrets. Regret that he wouldn't be able to attend Don Salzer's funeral and offer some comfort to his wife Christine. He'd known the couple for years, had been recruited for the Watchers by Don (with a bit of careful manipulation on his part) and had dinner with them on numerous occasions. Don had been a good friend and deserved his final respects.

Regret that he would be losing another good friend in Joe Dawson. He didn't see Dawson often, but he talked to him regularly, mostly about Watcher business. Like Salzer, Dawson had made Adam Pierson a part of his life, seeing fit to insure the young Welsh researcher got out on the town and had a bit of a social life. Methos really had become a separate entity for a while, as if he honestly was looking for the myth. He was far more Adam Pierson these days and he liked it. He liked the friendships he'd made. Liked to feel he was wanted for the person that he was, not the name he carried, and not what he was. Joe was probably cursing himself now that he hadn't figured out Adam was Methos. But had Joe passed the information along yet? Was there a chance he could talk him out of it?

Then there was Duncan MacLeod. He'd learned more about the Highlander than MacLeod had probably ever heard about

Methos, which was as it should be. He could have denied he was Methos when he'd met MacLeod, let him think he was another Immortal who'd settled into the Watchers, but for some inexplicable reason, he wanted MacLeod to know he existed. He wanted to spend just a little time with Duncan MacLeod of the Clan MacLeod to judge the man for himself. But now, he wanted to know MacLeod better, to perhaps claim a friendship with him.

"You are insane," he told himself as he left the cafe, walking unhurriedly in the light rain. Although a bit depressing, the weather never really bothered him, except when it was really cold. He hated the cold, a few old frozen memories were associated with it. But a little rain was nothing to get excited over. His thoughts went back to MacLeod, back to facing the big Scot with his rusty fighting skills and bringing the katana to his own throat. Back to that moment when there was just a bit of hesitation and he wasn't sure if the Highlander would follow through. In some ways, he'd really meant the offer of his head when he made it and that scared him. He wasn't prone to noble acts of sacrifice, becoming acutely aware as he'd waited for MacLeod to do it that this gamble might be his last. But thankfully, he'd judged the Highlander right and gained a certain amount of trust with the Scot.

"So, now what, old man?" he asked himself for the fifth or sixth time in the past couple of days. Hearing himself called by the name he'd been referring to in the third person for so many years had been strange. For nearly two decades now he'd been Adam Pierson, the reality of Methos neatly submerged in yet another persona he'd adopted until MacLeod had stepped through his door. So now, he either disappeared again or resumed the game. No matter how he looked at it, Methos had ceased to be a myth. At least he'd gotten all his journals and all the Watcher references to Methos away with him.

As darkness descended, his footsteps carried him to a bar a few blocks from the hotel. A few more drinks wouldn't clear his head any, but maybe it would help him to not think about it for a while. He found a seat at the bar, ordered a dark ale and settled back to listen to the jazz trio that was just getting started. Quite a few couples huddled together near the corners or on the small dance floor. Friends joined other friends, formed groups of twos, threes and fours. A pretty young woman stood next to him at the bar, flashed a brief smile his way, then left to join her boyfriend.

Methos was fully cognizant of what he was losing by giving up Adam. He had a few friends, or at least they were Adam's

friends-- people he sometimes went with to a movie or to dinner or a friendly poker game. He sighed, chewed at his lower lip, then glanced at his watch. Nine hours time difference to Seacouver-- it would be two in the afternoon there.

Without thinking too deeply about it, Methos located a phone booth and dialed the number for Joe's bar. As he waited for an answer, he told himself that if Joe wasn't there he was going to forget this whole idea and run as far as he could. And if he was there, well, he might have to run even faster. His hand shook a little as he waited to the fourth ring. He was almost ready to hang up when the phone was picked up at the other end. The voice that answered wasn't Dawson. His own voice sounded rough to himself as Methos asked for him.

"Dawson here," the familiar American accent said. It sounded so normal, so safe.

"Hello, Joe. It's Adam Pierson," he managed. He felt like his throat was closing up.

"Adam! Are you all right? Where the hell are you?" Joe's voice sounded concerned, but not threatening. In fact, Methos could

almost picture the relief on the Watcher's face. Maybe there was a chance...

"Not in Paris, Joe. I felt I had to leave-at least for a while. Did MacLeod tell you...?" His voice trailed off, uncertain how to continue, how much to say.

"That he found an interesting surprise at your place? Yeah, he did." Joe's chuckle carried easily over the line.

"And the Watchers? Did you tell them?"

"I told 'em you had a family emergency and had contacted me. You better get in touch with them and arrange for a leave of absence, Adam. Unless you're planning to quit the Watchers?"

"Joe, I- I need time to think about this. Why haven't you told them?" Methos was unsure, not certain he could trust Joe on this.

"Because Methos is a myth and Adam Pierson is a friend. We need to talk, Adam- soon."

"Give me a little time. I'll call you, Joe."

"It's okay," Joe's voice was reassuring. "You do that."

Methos hung up, leaned against the wall next to the telephone feeling like a ton of bricks had been lifted off his shoulders. If he could trust Dawson and MacLeod on this... if they didn't tell anyone, Watcher or Immortal... then he just might be able to resume Adam's life. And with at least two people, he could be himself as well- or at least a little of who he was.

Methos ambled casually back to the bar, splurged for a scotch and contemplated the possibilities. A little vacation to give him a chance to be certain no one was looking for Methos, then he'd call Joe again. Then he'd find a reason to see MacLeod. Because no matter what the risk, he had to somehow build a bridge with the Highlander, had to become a part of that circle the Scot called friends. A small smile touched his lips. Yes, it would be worth it.

March 11, 1995

Christine Salzer stood ramrod straight at the edge of the open grave, the severe black clothing making her complexion seem even more sallow than it had been the past few days. As he stood next to her, ready to offer a helping hand or a comforting word if she needed it, Adam thought she was holding up well. Then he decided he'd concluded that too soon as he saw the tears on her cheeks begin while the old priest offered a final prayer. As Don's coffin was lowered into the ground, the sobs began. Adam bit at his lip, feeling a good portion of the same grief that Don's wife felt and sympathizing fully with her.

Sensitively, he laid his hand on her arm, wanting to give her a little of his strength and a bit of comfort. Christine had often fed him and conversed with him when Don had invited him over. He wasn't prepared for the woman to jerk away from his touch and the angry glance she cast at him warned him away from any other attempt to show his sympathy. He didn't take it personally- she was angry with the situation that had taken her husband. He understood that, but he wished he could somehow convey that he shared that anger with her.

In some ways, it was worse for him. Don had lost his life because of him- not just because Don was a Watcher, but

because he was Adam's boss and Adam was researching Methos. Kalas had ruthlessly killed Salzer just to get a hint of where Methos was. Like MacLeod, he hadn't expected to find Methos at Adam Pierson's flat, but he had carelessly left his identity all over and his journals too readily available. So Don was dead because of this slight link.

No, he amended silently. Don was dead because Roger wasn't cautious enough around Kalas and let himself be caught. Don was dead because Roger broke under the torture. I will not bear the responsibility for this. Easy to say, but not as easy to banish the pain.

He glanced around the cemetery, spotted at least thirty people he knew were in the Paris office of the Watchers. Another dozen had been to the mortuary earlier- he'd recognized their names on the visitors' book. But Joe Dawson wasn't among the mourners. Methos was a bit disappointed at that, but Joe had called his condolences and apologies to Christine. He had business he couldn't put off and Methos could guess it had to do with the Watchers more than the little bar Dawson owned.

Methos hated this ritual of standing at the graveside while the coffin was interred. He'd been glad when most services

eliminated this painful process, but, as the priest had informed him shortly before the services began, Christine had insisted. She'd wanted this closure, needed the final bleak image. He'd seen enough of this in his very long life, seen it in more brutal forms than the tall woman near him could possibly understand. He'd watched dirt cover the faces of the dead without benefit of a coffin or even a rug to protect them. And he'd felt what it was like to be on the other side, in a grave with the silt feel of earth filling in the openings and crevices in your face. Or even worse, sharing the grave with the truly dead while you're the only one who is alive. Clawing the clay to escape before you suffocate, feeling the stiff, icy limbs of others against you... Methos shuddered at the suddenly sharp memory and closed his eyes. Even so, he still heard the thud of the clods against the coffin.

He cast his mind to happier times, remembering Salzer alive and laughing, gleefully sharing a long-searched-for piece of information with him. They'd spent long hours working on the database, scanning pictures into the computer to be added to the files, painstakingly building a history of all the known Immortals, alive or dead, and matching them to their Watchers. Methos had been careful with his entry, making sure that Adam Pierson didn't reveal too much about the myth, suggesting enough to sound plausible, but giving no

real information. Don had grumbled about the computer, complaining about the lack of real feel to it. It wasn't like picking up a book, but telling Don that one little CD held more information and photos than a score of books didn't make an impression.

After they'd finished for the night, they'd frequently stop by a quiet corner bar for a beer or a glass of wine and talk about philosophy or history or even the latest Clancy novel. He would miss those conversations, would miss Don in even more ways. He recalled a few fishing trips with the Watcher, just the two of them at a calm lake and their lines cast into the water purely for the fun of it, not caring if they snagged any fish or not. In some ways, Don had seemed like a father to him, as if he could remember what that was like- or maybe because he couldn't ever recall a father. He glanced at Christine again, took in the watery eyes behind the handkerchief she held to her face, and assigned her the role of reserved old aunt. She was never overly affectionate toward Adam, but treated him with consideration and a touch of fondness. He realized the woman was jealous of the time Don had spent with him, but she also knew that Don had valued him. He gnawed at his lip a few moments. Maybe there was some resentment there...

The services ended and a few of the Watchers he knew came his way. None approached Christine except for Barbara Chagall who had been a friend of Don's wife before she became a Watcher. Methos moved away from Don's widow where anything that was said to him wouldn't be overheard. Mostly there were condolences about Don, questions about his family emergency and an invitation or two to lunch. Then everyone dispersed and Christine left with a tall, gray-haired gentleman who might have been a family friend, but it wasn't anyone Methos knew.

Alone now, Methos stood next to the grave and gazed at the fresh mound of dirt. "I'm sorry, Don. I wouldn't have wished this on you for anything. At least your murderer is in prison. And sooner or later, I promise you, he will lose his head." He pivoted slowly and walked toward his car, the sole occupant of the narrow road that circled the cemetery.

Well, he was back in Paris and it seemed his secret was safe, thanks to Dawson and MacLeod. He wasn't officially due back at work for another week, so, time to find a new place and get settled in. He'd already made a list of flats to let and had focused on an area of Paris near the Seine and Notre Dame-near MacLeod's barge. That was where he pointed his car.

Four unsuitable flats later, Methos finally stepped into one that looked like it would fit the bill. It was a little smaller than the last place he'd had, yet it was within ten blocks of the river, had a nice little kitchen and breakfast nook and, best of all, was within the budget of a researcher. The landlord was willing to let it on a month to month basis and he could move in immediately. Methos checked the fire escape, the access to the roof and the main stairwell one more time and decided this one had adequate escape routes and struck an agreement. He paused one more time to look around, decided some of his furniture wouldn't fit, but the main items would be okay. There was a suitably cheery area next to a window for his computer. Yes, things were looking up already.

As he stood on the sidewalk outside the flat, Methos gazed toward the river and debated whether he should go for a stroll that direction. After all, he reasoned, he needed to check out the area around his new place. And if he ran into MacLeod?

*Well, that was the idea, wasn't it?* he asked himself. He couldn't even explain to himself what the fascination with Duncan MacLeod was. He only knew that from the moment he met him, he was caught by the powerful magnetism of the Scot. Oh, he was aware of where MacLeod stood in the

parameters of the game, that he was a top contender for the prize, but he wasn't the only one. No, this was something more. When they'd talked together, he'd found an easy comfort with the Highlander, felt almost like he could trust him, would have to trust him. In reality, MacLeod had met Adam Pierson even though he called him Methos, but he was willing to protect Adam, to put his life on the line for him, not knowing who or what Methos was. It was incredibly noble or incredibly stupid, depending on your point of view.

In truth, he felt like a moth attracted to a bright flame, darting in to bask a moment in the warmth and brilliance, willing to risk destruction for those precious moments of pure incandescent light. He knew he would be risking a great deal if he pursued the friendship of the Highlander, possibly finding that destruction simply by being too close to the beacon MacLeod was, yet he felt compelled to be there. He needed to be there-- and that both excited and terrified him. Need, like friendship, was not a frequent visitor to Methos' life.

His sense of caution won out over desire and he turned away from the river and walked a few blocks to the east, then turned right to discover what was in his new neighborhood. Finding a cafe, he stopped for coffee and enjoyed the fairly

mild day. If it hadn't been for Salzer's funeral, he might have called it perfect.

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March 14, 1995

With furniture in it, the flat was even smaller than it had appeared when Methos first looked at it. His bed alone took up nearly one third of the combined living and bed rooms. But the computer settled in neatly and he had a decent view of a small green park from the window. As he dragged himself up the stairs to the third floor for the eighth time that day, Methos decided, yet again, that he really hated moving. He didn't even have that much to move and it was still a pain. He set the boxes down and reached for an open can of beer sitting on the computer table.

His hand didn't quite touch the can when his skin fairly crawled with the awareness of another Immortal. Instead of the beer, his hand flew to the sword that was lying on the small sofa and he turned toward the door to greet his visitor.

"Put it down, Adam. It's a friend," the smooth, unworried voice said as the red-haired man stepped into the open

doorway. "I thought I saw your car out front, but I only got a glimpse of the person carrying the boxes."

Methos let his breath out. "Hello, Sean." He dropped the sword back on the sofa, grabbed his beer and offered another to Sean Burns. "Haven't seen you in a while. What brings you by?"

"Visiting a patient in the area. Seriously, I just accidentally spotted your car. I'd heard you'd moved. Is everything okay, Adam?" Sean asked sincerely. Methos had known Sean a few centuries under a few names, but they rarely saw each other. Burns probably best remembered him as the moody medical student he'd first met in Heidelberg. They'd never been close, but there was a calm friendship between them. Burns lived outside of Paris and rarely came into the city, which made this visit even more unexpected.

"Yeah, it's great. I had a few problems, but I think they're settled now. Unfortunately, I lost a good friend in the process." He motioned Burns to the sofa as he picked his sword up and put it back into his coat. "Speaking of friends, I met one of yours- Duncan MacLeod."

Methos watched as the fond smile touched the red-haired man's lips. "Ah, Duncan. He's a good man and a good friend. I trust it was a quiet meeting?"

A flash of images crossed the old Immortal's mind, from the very amiable walk he'd taken with Mac, to flying off the bridge to escape Kalas, to the tense moments with MacLeod's steel to his throat. "Absolutely. I like him. Actually, he'd come to do me a favour."

"And that was why you moved?"

"A consequence, yeah. But it's settled now."

"Someday, Adam, you will learn there are people you can trust." Burns cast an affectionate gaze on the young-looking man before him. "Duncan MacLeod is one of those people. I would trust him with my life."

"You have a lot of faith." Already done that, he thought to himself and wondered again that he'd done it. Maybe it hadn't been such a risk after all. But he didn't need Sean Burns to tell him what he already knew. Yes, he could trust MacLeod with his life, but how far would that trust go? There was only

one way to find out and that was why he was here now instead of Australia.

Sean grinned at him, rising to go. "And \*you\* have hope, Adam. Well, I must go- my patient waits. You take care, old friend."

Methos saw him to the door. "I always do." He leaned against the wall after the other man had left and considered the situation. In a city the size of Paris, Sean happened to spot him moving into his new flat and stopped in to bring him a message of hope. It seemed that fate was definitely moving around him and this quiet period of his life was coming to an end.

---

July 7, 1995

Life had settled into a more or less routine pattern again. Adam Pierson was back doing research on Methos and checking in periodically at Watcher Headquarters to see if any new documents had turned up. He had access to any reports that were filed and in spite of his confidence that Joe would keep his identity secret, Methos was on the alert to any

mention of his name. There was one other who knew who he was besides Dawson and MacLeod and that one he could not be sure about. He judged that Kalas would not, even if he had the chance, tell another Immortal that the legendary Methos was alive and well and living in Paris. No, he expected that Kalas still coveted that Quickening for himself. Still, he was a little more nervous than was usual and tended to glance back over his shoulder a bit more often.

As for MacLeod, he hadn't seen the Highlander since that last meeting. He'd stayed away from the river in his rambles around his neighborhood- it would be too obvious to just happen to walk up, but he was still looking for a decent excuse to see him. So far, he was uninspired and even if he did accidentally run into him, he wasn't sure what he would say.

He stretched his long frame out on the floor by his bed, back propped against it, popped open a beer and flipped his book open to the marker with a practiced move. He hadn't even turned the first page when the phone rang. He cast an annoyed look at the instrument, almost decided he would let the machine get it, then changed his mind and lunged onto one knee to grab it.

He barely got "hello" out before Christine Salzer's voice burst through. She was obviously upset. "Adam, I've made a decision. It has to do with that little organization that you and Don worked for... I think it serves an evil purpose and I intend to do something about it."

"Christine, what are you talking about?" Methos felt a knot tighten in his stomach.

"You know very well what I'm talking about. Did you think Don didn't tell me all about it? I'm only calling you to give you a warning." Her voice definitely had an hysterical edge to it.

"Wait a minute," he said calmly. "Let's talk about this. I think you've got a wrong impression-"

"No. I don't need to talk-"

"Please, Christine. Just give me a chance to come over and discuss this with you. Don wouldn't want you to do anything-"

"That would hurt you?" she interrupted. "No, I don't imagine he would. But this evil killed him. All right, Adam, I'll talk to you. Monday evening, seven-thirty. But you're wasting your time. I won't change my mind."

As she hung up, Methos sat back, stunned by the burst of emotion. What the hell had set that off? He hadn't heard anything from Christine in the past few weeks, now this almost hysterical phone call. He glanced at the clock, calculated quickly- 10:30 a.m. in Seacouver. Dawson probably wasn't at the club yet. He'd give him a couple of hours before he called, but he definitely needed to speak with the Watcher.

Feeling too edgy to go back to his book, he sauntered to the computer instead and flopped in front of it. He logged onto his bank account and resigned himself to addressing the small pile of bills he'd let accumulate. Adam Pierson's bank account looked fairly pathetic and the last move hadn't helped. "Well, it looks like my rich uncle will have to give me a little gift," he murmured as he opened a different account in Switzerland. A satisfied grin stretched his face as he studied the current balance, then he transferred a modest amount to Adam's Paris account. This Swiss account easily provided an annual interest return to allow him to live in whatever style he chose. Right now, Adam suited him fine although he could wish for a little more income. But too many "gifts" added to Adam's account would call unwanted attention to the researcher.

Flipping a bill over, he noticed another envelope caught in the flap of it, pulled it loose and glanced at the return address.

Abruptly, he sat up straight and quickly tore the envelope open, his hazel eyes scanning the letter. It was from Don Salzer's lawyer- a notice about the reading of Don's will and he was invited to attend. Don had a stipulation that his will not be processed until at least three months after his death. A cooling off period, he had called it. The reading had been at two that day. The old Immortal's expressive eyes reflected his thoughts as he considered the implications. Don had joked a few times about leaving him the book store, but Methos didn't think he would do it. Legally, it belonged to Don, but technically, the Watchers had expected him to leave it to them. Yet he had the suspicion that Don had done something that had upset Christine.

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It was nearly one in Paris before Dawson finally called Methos back. He had thought quite a bit about the situation and what to tell Joe, but it didn't make it any easier to start.

"We've got a problem," he stated bluntly after the usual greetings. "It's Don's wife, Christine. Something's happened to upset her. She called me this evening and was making a few threats. I think it has to do with Don's will."

"Wait a minute," Joe interrupted. "She threatened you?"

"Not exactly." He took a deep breath, plunged in. "She's threatening to reveal the existence of Immortals."

"What?! Oh, dammit! Don't tell me Don told her about them?"

"Fraid so. And the Watchers."

"Oh, this is just great!" Joe muttered. "I suppose he thought the oath meant he couldn't tell anyone except his wife. Did he tell her about you?"

"Yeah, I think she knows I'm a Watcher- or she figured it out herself. Joe, I've talked her into seeing me on Monday. Maybe I can convince her that Don wouldn't want her to say anything. I think she's just upset. Do you have any idea what was in Don's will?"

"No. He never mentioned it," Joe replied thoughtfully. "What makes you think that's it, Adam?"

"Because the reading was today. I didn't see the notice from the lawyer until this evening, but it seems Don left me

something. I suspect he might have left something to the Watchers as well."

There was a long silence as Joe digested this. Methos let it go on for a couple of minutes, growing a little more nervous with each passing second. Finally he broke it. "Joe? Are you all right?"

"Yeah. I was just doing some fast planning here. I'm coming over, Adam. I know Christine pretty well and maybe I can help. I'll be there as soon as I can get a flight out. I'll call you back with the information. Meantime, you try to find out anything you can about the will."

"Right. Let me know which flight to meet and I'll be there." As Methos set the phone back in its cradle, he felt a twinge of excitement. Ready or not, it looked like he would be having a conversation with Joe soon.

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April 9, 1995

Methos eased his tall, lanky frame into one of the lounge chairs at Orly airport to wait for Joe's plane. Although he

appeared relaxed, he was decidedly nervous. He hadn't seen Joe since the Watcher had learned his true identity and this situation was not the best circumstance to have this meeting. Add to that the information regarding Don's will and he felt a bit shaky. True to his promise, Don had sort of left the book store to him, yet there were stipulations. But there were bigger issues with the will. And there was the database. Sooner or later, he'd probably have to tell Joe about it.

Some of his fears vanished the moment Dawson spotted him and a big grin crossed the Watcher's face. Methos reached to take his carry-on only to find Joe's strong grasp on his wrist, pulling him into an affectionate one-armed hug. "It's good to see you, Adam. I was a little worried about you for a while there."

"Joe, about that- I don't think I ever-"

"We'll talk about it later. We have bigger concerns right now." Joe set the pace through the airport with Methos following closely. The Immortal's emotions skittered like a nervous bird- grateful for Joe's acceptance, suspicious of Joe's acceptance, worried about the situation with Christine, and about as frightened as any man could get that everything was going to come crashing down around him.

Once they were in the Volvo and moving, Joe asked, "So, what have you found out?"

"Don's will was very interesting. He left almost everything to Christine- with a few stipulations. After her death, the house and property are to go to the Watchers- he named one of the cover philanthropic organizations as the recipient. Shakespeare & Co. is mine, but while Christine is alive, all profits from the shop go to her. I get a regular wage for managing the store whether I'm actually there or not. Apparently, Christine has challenged the will."

Joe let out a long whistle. "I can see why. What was Don thinking?"

Methos shrugged. He understood why Don left him the book store. It was his pride and joy and he knew Adam would take care of it, appreciate it as much as he had. Christine didn't have any interest in the shop. If she resented Don leaving it to him, it was probably in light of the greater endowment. That he couldn't explain.

"Well, we'd better come up with a game plan," Joe continued. "Tell me exactly what Christine said."

Methos pulled the car into a parking area near a quiet park. He didn't want to be driving when he told Joe the next bit of his confession. "There's more, Joe. Don and I had put most of his files on the computer. We were compiling information on all the Immortals..." His voice trailed off. Joe was staring at him in disbelief. Not the time to tell Dawson it was actually a database and It included Watchers as well as Immortals.

"Did you clear this with anyone?"

Methos dropped his eyes to the floor and shook his head. He looked for all the world like a child who'd gotten caught with his hand in the cookie jar. He and Don had thought it would be an easier sell once everyone saw how beneficial it would be.

Joe's voice was surprisingly calm. "You are one clever Immortal, aren't you, Methos?" He paused, waited until Adam looked at him. "You really are Methos? Five thousand years old and all?"

The Immortal gave a half-laugh. "Hard to accept, huh? Would I claim to be Methos if I wasn't, Joe? Would that be a wise thing to do? Making myself a target for any power hungry Immortal who comes along?"

"What was the world like when you were born?" Joe asked, suddenly overwhelmed by the concept.

Methos' eyes took on a distant look as if he was trying to recall images from that past. "It was-- Everything was very different. I can't recall a lot of the years I lived before I took my first head. But I remember that survival was the only priority for anyone. Every new discovery, every invention, every innovation seemed like a luxury. And there were always those who wanted to destroy, wanted to possess, wanted to conquer. Life was tough."

Joe shifted uncomfortably. "Okay. Now, suppose you tell me why. Your reason?"

Methos stared at the steering wheel, gathering his thoughts. Here it was and he had to give Dawson an answer he could understand. The truth? No, at least, not all of it. He forced himself to look at Joe, answered the unasked question first. "It wasn't intentional, Joe. Becoming a Watcher was an opportunity that presented itself and I took it. The Watchers weren't exactly a revelation- I've known about them for centuries. I haven't been in the Game for a long time now and my only agenda here is keeping Methos safe. I figured if I was

in a position to keep track of the others, it made that a little easier."

"And was compiling a list of all the Immortals your idea?"

"It was just a tool. Don and thought that if we had a list, it would be more efficient to keep track, to cross-reference."

"And your interest in it?"

Methos sighed. This was a tough one to answer without sounding trite. "I just wanted the information in one central location. I wanted to be able to know what was happening in the Game. I wasn't going to give it to any others."

Joe nodded slowly, thinking about it. Finally, he motioned to Methos to drive. "Let's get dinner and a few brews. I can't deal with this on an empty stomach."

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Over a well-prepared meal in a quiet little restaurant that Adam knew, the two Watchers discussed the situation with Christine and how they would approach it. The list of Immortals on Don's computer was forgotten for the moment

although if that got out, Joe knew there would be some repercussions on that one and "Adam" would have some explaining to do to people higher up the chain than he was.

As they sipped an after-dinner scotch, Joe studied the youthful-looking man across the table from him. Seeing Immortals who have hundreds of years on them looking like college students or even teen-agers was always a bit of a shock, but to look at Adam and try to attach five thousand years to his age was nearly impossible. He was walking proof of the incredible constitution and healing ability of an Immortal that the centuries of life didn't seem to touch him in any way. Except the eyes, Joe amended, as he caught a glance from Adam and saw something in the depths that said the man inside had seen more life than he could possibly conceive. Then that look was gone and Joe wondered if he'd just imagined it.

But he saw something else as well. Adam was a person he'd known for nearly ten years now, had gone drinking with on more than a few occasions and had genuinely liked. It was difficult to reconcile some of that past with the new knowledge of his identity as the world's oldest living Immortal. Yet it was the person he knew that had kept him from immediately reporting the identity and whereabouts of

Methos. This "kid" was a gentle person, not a threat to anyone. He was obviously very intelligent and he'd managed to survive for over five thousand years. There was just no need to make him a target- and that's what would happen. Adam was right. If other Immortals knew he was more than a myth and found out his identity, they'd track him down. He'd be dead within a few months. And as much as Joe hated to admit it, he didn't trust the Watcher organization to keep Adam's identity a secret. He chuckled as he thought about the strain this was putting on his Watcher oath. And \*he\* was annoyed that Salzer had told his wife about the Watchers?

Adam shot him a confused look. "What?"

Joe pursed his lips into a tight smile that broke into a grin. "I was just thinking about the ramifications this will have on our oaths."

"How do you mean?" Adam asked curiously.

"Watchers and Immortals-never the twain shall meet, let alone be friends. And you, pal, are in a real pickle. You can't tell yourself about you!"

Adam laughed, a soft relieved sound that came from his heart. Joe realized then how tense Adam had been and he understood, at least a little, that the old Immortal had taken a risk in not disappearing.

"So, have you seen MacLeod lately?" Joe asked.

Adam shook his head. "No. Not since Kalas."

In the span of a few heartbeats, Dawson made up his mind. He knew Mac wanted to talk to Methos again and had almost expected the Scot to have made contact with Adam. He hadn't told Mac he was coming to Paris, but what kind of visit would it be if he didn't see his friend again? "Well, unless you want to just drop me off, then you most likely will see him tonight. I gotta stop by and say hi."

Adam hesitated and stared uncertainly at Joe. His hazel eyes were almost growing greener with his thoughts. "Are you sure it would be all right? I mean, I don't want to- uh, be too much of a surprise."

Joe leaned across, grasped his arm to reassure him. "You'll be welcome. Highland tradition and all that- he's a good host."

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Methos felt like he was going to choke as he guided the Volvo toward the river. In some ways he'd hoped that Joe would want to see MacLeod, but now that they were nearly there, he wanted to bolt- put the whole thing off and do it some other day. If he'd have known they were going to this, he wouldn't have had that second scotch after dinner. Shit! What if MacLeod didn't want to see him? After all, he'd interfered with the Highlander's fight with Kalas. He had every right to be annoyed with him for that. Why was this so damned important to him anyway? What did it matter whether MacLeod liked him or not?

Nervously, he recalled a few other occasions when he'd felt like this about someone- felt like he had to be a friend, not just an occasional visitor to their sphere. In some ways it scared him because he knew what he could become if he couldn't hold his own in the friendship and he knew how much he could be hurt if he was rejected.

He pulled the car alongside the river and parked it a few yards from the undistinguished barge that was MacLeod's. As Joe got out, Methos took a deep breath, stared at the glowing

lights along the river. Was it too late to go to Australia? Joe tapped on the window, indicated he should get out.

For better or worse, Methos thought, opened the door and followed Joe to the barge. Another quick gulp of air as he sternly told himself to get this under control. He would \*not\* look like a nervous kid in front of the Highlander. He stepped into the barge behind Dawson who wore a pleased smirk, like he'd brought the dynamic Scot a prize, then Methos put a shy smile on his face.

"Methos!"

He heard a touch of surprise and some pleasure in MacLeod's voice. His smile became genuine. This was going to be all right.

The End

There are dark seductions  
in the candle's flame,  
and, helpless as any moth,  
I am drawn to your fiery embrace  
again and again.

t.a. selby

# ***Testing the Bond***

***By Lillian Wolfe***

This tale is based on the characters in the Davis-Panzer Production, "Highlander The Series". The characters of Methos, Joe Dawson and Duncan MacLeod slipped away to do a little moonlighting and I still beg their bosses to be understanding. They weren't really busy right now. None of us are profiting from this, but Methos felt inclined to tell me yet another story. When D-P have work for them, they will return happily to their regular jobs.

I actually started recording this tale quite some time ago, but never got it finished. It speculates on the time between "Finale" and "Chivalry" and what brought Methos to Seacouver to warn MacLeod about Kristin. While I realize some other stories of this nature have been written, I have not read those and if there is any similarity between the

narrations, you must blame Methos for telling us the same story. <g>

L.W. September. 2004

Time: Between "Finale" and "Chivalry"

The days were just beginning to cool down after a warmer than usual summer. While Adam Pierson usually enjoyed Paris in the autumn, he was feeling restless and dissatisfied. And this morning, he was downright short-tempered as he stalked into the Watcher research library.

All these years off and on, living in Paris, and some of the arrogant bastards still treat me like a foreigner...in spite of a flawless Parisian accent! He fumed, his annoyance manifesting itself in a childish slamming of a stack of books on a table, then the loud scraping as he jerked the heavy wooden chair across the floor rather than quietly lifting it.

Even admitting that the problem was a direct result of a slight altercation with a gendarme over where he'd parked his car did nothing to alter his agitation. It was the man's bloody

superior attitude and his pretended failure to comprehend his explanation that really rankled.

Dr. Zoll frowned at him, displeased to have the normal calm of her world disrupted. He ignored her, turned his back in her direction and opened the top book, a worn manuscript from the eighth century. The handwriting was spidery and cramped, faded enough that he had to squint to read it, which only contributed to his bad mood. He wouldn't find anything on Methos in this—he'd been nowhere near Corsica at the time this was written. A waste of time, he grouched, barely recognizing that thought as an oddity. He paused in flipping through the pages as he realized he was taking no pleasure from this. He loved books, often liked to browse through them for hours, but lately he'd been plagued with an undefined restlessness.

*No. Not unidentified*, he admitted reluctantly. MacLeod had returned to Seacouver at the beginning of August. It was a pattern with the Highlander — one Methos already knew — late summer and fall in the States and late winter through early summer in Paris. He hadn't expected the months to seem so long or the intervening days to be so dull and routine. He'd enjoyed MacLeod's company, had found himself visiting

the barge a couple of times a week, basking in the warm welcome and friendship he was developing with the Scot.

Hell, he even enjoyed Amanda's company, not that he'd let her know it. But he was discovering that there were more facets to the charming thief than he'd recalled. Perhaps she'd gained some wisdom along the way, even though she wasn't the quickest learner he'd ever known. If Rebecca hadn't cared so much for the girl, he wouldn't have given her more than a cursory glance. *But people change*, he reminded himself, *even slow ones like Amanda*.

And just as MacLeod had fled Paris with the summer heat, so had Amanda vanished from the fashionable shops and tempting tourists – along with a few precious jewels that had gone missing from a couple of careless travelers' hotel rooms. Leopards may hide their spots but they can't really change them.

So Methos had been left with a dull, quiet summer just like most of the past ten years – ten years, hell! Most of the damn century! – had been. Apart from a bit of excitement during the wars and a very wild time in the late sixties and early seventies, he'd been living a relatively quiet life that bordered on the edge of normal human existence. He'd wanted to lay

low, not draw attention to himself and he'd succeeded admirably.

Until Duncan MacLeod walked through his door. He'd forgotten what it was like to be around Immortals, to feel the thrill of the identifying presence, to feel the touch of danger. To just want to be around a dynamic person like Duncan MacLeod. He sighed. So that was the root of the unrest. He'd gotten to know MacLeod, become a friend. He still recalled that warm sensation when the Highlander had included him in the toast Amanda had voiced after Kalas' death..." to olds friends...and to new."

"Poker at my place tonight, Adam," Dr. Zoll said as she passed him, interrupting his train of thoughts. "Are you up to it?"

He glanced up, smiled. "Can't wait. I need to supplement my income a little."

*Oh, joy... A poker game tonight. That would be exciting, just like it was every Tuesday night.* Methos turned back to his book, trying to bring his mind to the task at hand. Unable to concentrate on the scratchy words on the browned page, he

shoved the chair back, replaced the book on the shelf and checked out.

He paused for a few moments as he passed a mirror on the way. *Who are you?* he asked the image, studying the tall, lean boyish-looking man in the glass. He brought his hand up to shove the long waves of hair back from his face. *Adam Pierson. Researcher.*

That was the shell. That was who he was *now*. Somewhere, deep inside, he was Methos but he'd done a topnotch job of suppressing his true self. Did he still have the sharp edge of his own personality? Until Kalas had come for him, he hadn't needed to test it. Then he'd failed miserably. Out of practice, awkward – not blazing with the fierce desire he'd once known, he'd nearly lost it all on that bridge.

Annoyed, he turned away, setting a quick pace out the door and to his car.

The Adam Pierson that showed up at Dr. Amy Zoll's doorstep that evening was not the same person who'd left the Watcher Headquarters library that afternoon. A haircut and a change

of clothing gave Pierson a different look, a slightly harder edge. Dr. Zoll paused uncertainly before she stepped back to let him in.

"I'm not sure if I like it, Adam. I was rather used to your longer hair, but it does seem to suit you."

"Yeah," Louis Bonet agreed. "About time you got a haircut, Pierson. You were looking like the shaggy dog. And you finally forked out some francs for new clothes, I see." He wrinkled his nose in distaste. "Can't say much for your choice though. Where did you shop - a second hand store?"

Adam quirked his mouth into an indulgent smile, then handed the package he'd brought to the dark-haired woman. "Chips and white wine, as designated."

"You make it sound like a chore," Dr. Zoll complained as she took the items to her kitchen - if you could call it that. It was almost smaller than the one on MacLeod's barge. MacLeod - there he was, back in his thoughts again, repeating like a scratch in a record.

As was typical of any card session Adam got into with people he'd known more than a couple of days, he had an advantage.

He quickly learned the little traits that made them predictable. Amy rubbed her nose when she had a bad hand. Louis tapped his forefinger on the edge of the table when he was excited and Constantine always tried for a poker face when he had a good hand instead of looking natural. Not that Adam won all the time, but he was seldom the overall loser.

Tonight he had other things on his mind and his attention wandered from the cards. He had plenty of holiday time. He'd barely taken more than a few weeks off in the entire ten years he'd been with the Watchers and most of that had been when he'd fled out of town with the intent of relocating just after MacLeod had found him. Or, he thought deviously, *I could create a need to go to the States - a strong trail leading to Methos in the northwest...Canada, maybe.*

"You lose!" Amy crowed as he let her bluff go. "You're drifting in space tonight, Pierson."

"Off night," he answered softly, laid his cards on top of the deck and started shuffling.

"Where is Claude tonight?" Constantine asked. The rough-looking Watcher had been a sailor and an artist before joining

the ranks. He still painted and sold a few paintings a year to earn extra money.

"Running late as usual," Louis muttered. "It's part of his plan to cut down on his losses. If he's not here, he can't lose."

"That may not be a bad idea," Adam said as he studied his cards. They weren't bad but they needed a little help. He was just raising the stakes when Claude arrived out of breath and filled with apology.

"Sorry. My woman is on the move. She's heading for America tonight. Saw her get on the plane."

Adam looked up curiously. "That would be –"

"Kristin Gilles. She's opening a branch of her modeling agency in Washington. Already has the place ready to go."

"Thought she already had a branch in D.C." Dr. Zoll commented.

"The other Washington. The state. Seacouver, in fact. Apparently she wanted to be near Seattle, but not quite in it. With my luck they'll probably put an American-based

Watcher on her rather than let me go over. Not everyone is like Dawson who rates a trip wherever MacLeod goes."

"He doesn't always go," Amy Zoll defended. "Only if it seems something might happen. Your clothes horse opening a new agency doesn't sound like a critical item. Unless you expect her to be beheaded by a carelessly hung clothesline." She laughed at the thought and Constantine soon joined in.

Adam merely smiled, an automatic slight turn up of his lips. His mind had already moved ahead, thoughts churning with implications. *Kristin... in Seacouver. Near MacLeod.* This was bad, Very bad. Scratch the thoughts about going to Canada. He needed to go to Seacouver.

After he lost the next three hands in a row, he forced himself to concentrate on the game. No point in letting anyone know he was disturbed by this turn. He quickly regained control, winning the next two hands, losing one then picking up another two.

Claude tossed his cards on the table in disgust. "Do you have a crystal ball, Adam? It's unnatural for anyone to have that kind of luck!"

"Yeah, the exact opposite of my luck," Louis complained. "That's it for me tonight I'm out of cash and I have a train to catch in the morning."

"You're getting a trip out of town?" Constantine spoke up  
"How do you rate?"

"All the way to Cherbourg. Conference of archeologists and my guy is a speaker. Nothing as exciting as your fashion diva off to America, Claude."

"I've gotta get going as well," Adam said, reaching for his lightweight raincoat. After the quick goodnights, he and Louis left together, and Louis, as was his habit, bummed a ride home from Adam. He lamented most of his way on the sad state of his finances that Adam could afford a decent car while his own Pugeot was in the shop again.

"Your Pugeot lives in that shop, Louis. For what you're putting out to keep it running, you could buy a new one."

"You're without a heart, Adam! How could I get rid of a classic car like mine?"

Adam laughed, even though they'd had this same conversation numerous times before. The beat up old car was the true love of the middle-aged Watcher's life – especially since his wife of fourteen years had left him. It was sad, he reflected, that when people were disappointed by other people that they tended to focus on objects or animals that couldn't hurt them – cars, computers, horses, dogs. It was something he knew well. He'd had a favorite horse once himself, spent all his time and energy on the animal. He'd been devastated when the animal had died, almost as broken as when he'd lost a wife or a friend.

*A friend.* The thought lingered, waiting for him to devote the time to it. *Soon,* he promised that insistent little voice.

By the time Methos reached his own flat, he was on edge. He burst through the door like a hard winter wind that refused to be stopped by anything as insubstantial as wood. The anger was unexpected. He'd thought he'd gotten past it. Shrugging off his coat, he tossed it over a chair, then headed straight for his computer where he popped in a CD and called up his own copy of the Watcher's database.

He searched for Kristin first, scanned quickly through the database information on her. Incomplete. Very incomplete.

His eyes caught MacLeod's name and he read the entry in its entirety. Sketchy, missing a lot of detail. He paused at the reference to the unfortunate drowning, a beautiful artist that Mlle. Kristin had hired to paint a portrait of her handsome Scottish lover.

"Accident, my ass," he murmured. He knew enough about Kristin to know the woman would eliminate anyone who got in her way. He typed in the next name. Tapping his fingers, he waited impatiently for an entry to come up. A brief blurb on the screen told the whole story simply. "Ambrose Withey. Born in Holland in 1309. First death around 1326. Died 1578 in Paris. Details unknown. No Watcher assigned."

Methos took a deep breath, his eyes growing slightly misty as he recalled the boyish face of his young friend.

Paris - 1577 24th September

"You would not believe this woman, Marc. She is the most beautiful, most divine creature I have ever met. You should see her... tall, willowy... an absolute goddess."

"You're besotted," Methos replied sharply. "No woman is that perfect."

Ambrose lifted his stein of ale, took a big drink that left a little mustache of foam on his upper lip. It was the closest the kid was going to get to a real mustache, Methos thought and was captivated in spite of himself. The lad was handsome, charming, and forever young. Golden blonde curls escaped from under the midnight blue cap and enhanced the blue-green of his eyes.

"And you, my friend, are jaded," the young man admonished. "Just because you have been around a few hundred years doesn't mean you know everything there is to know about women. Sometimes you meet the perfect one and you know it."  
"

"And does this paragon of virtue have a name?" Amusement still shaded his voice even though he yielded a little to his companion's enthusiasm.

"Kristin... Kristin... Is her name not like a bell?" Ambrose's eyes seemed to grow misty as he spoke the name reverently.

Methos barked out a laugh. "You are hopeless. So you are meeting the lady tonight then?"

Ambrose paused mid-sip, looking a bit sheepish. "Actually, she is meeting me. Here. Very soon now."

"Here?! A lady of such beauty and breeding is coming here? Are you out of your head?" This inn wasn't exactly a place one met well-bred ladies. Then he felt it, the distinct touch of another Immortal.

Grinning, Ambrose nodded and looked beyond Methos. "She is indeed. No, stay--" This as Methos started to his feet. "I want you to meet her, Marc."

Mildly annoyed, Methos shook his head and gulped down the last of his ale. "No, I have to leave. You enjoy yourself."

He disappeared into the darkness of the tavern's back exit. Just out of view of Ambrose and the approaching woman, he paused, looking back to get a view of the lady. Older than he expected, he thought immediately, probably in her thirties, and definitely Immortal. He should have felt that tingle sooner.

But beautiful? Oh, yes, she was that. Honey-colored hair and eyes like mist on the water. Incredibly sensuous.. and

dangerous. He couldn't put a finger to it, but the hair on the back of his neck waved an alarm.

She glanced his way, aware of another Immortal, but she couldn't really see him in the dark recesses. He quickly slipped outside, moving away from the tavern until he could no longer feel her presence. Perhaps he should have stayed, he thought, but with his companion so taken with the lady, it would be unfair to take any of the time they had together. Besides, if the woman could make Ambrose that happy, then who was he to say she wasn't the answer to the lad's dreams?

Over the next few weeks, Methos saw precious little of Ambrose. When he did, the boy was insufferable, waxing poetic about Kristin's beauty and how she had been educating him in the finer things in life. It was almost impossible to talk about anything else with the man and all the while those alarm bells in the back of his brain that made him so distrustful continued to chime. The woman was too perfect, especially for an Immortal.

It was toward the end of winter when Kristin had taken Ambrose to a ball, her young lover on display for polite society to view. Ambrose met a young woman there, a mortal, and was utterly charmed by her, showing far more interest in her

than Kristin would tolerate. The row as they returned to Kristin's townhouse was fierce, Ambrose told Methos the next day.

"She was unlike I had ever seen her before, Marc/ Screaming and calling us vile names. He called Bernadette a cheap little harlot! Can you imagine? Bernadette is from a good family, a lady. And all we did was talk!"

Nodding sagely, Methos mumbled, "Sounds like Kristin is given to jealousy. Be cautious around her, my friend."

Ambrose laughed at that. "What? Do you think she will hurt me?"

"Possibly. Jealousy is a strange malady and one never knows what turn it will take. Just take care. I wouldn't want to see you to lose your head for such a frivolous reason."

Giving his words thought, Ambrose nodded slowly. "I don't see Kristin going that crazy, but I will be careful. If only to avoid a lecture from you." He laughed as he raised his mug to his face.

Methos smiled indulgently, even though his uneasiness didn't lighten a bit.

A few days later, Methos left Paris for Lyon and business that would take him even further south. He didn't think more on his friend until several months later when he returned to Paris and met with Darius to catch up on the news. Darius told him that Ambrose had been killed, taken in a lover's spat, it seemed, shortly after Methos had left for Lyon.

Methos had asked one question. "Kristin?"

Darius nodded. "She's dangerous, that one, Methos. Give her a wide berth."

Methos closed the window on his computer and leaned back. He should have gone after her then. But it wasn't his fight, Darius had said. It was a fight between lovers, nothing he needed to be involved with. He'd let Darius reason him out of any revenge and he'd lost two other friends over the years to the woman. One had been a mortal lady he'd care about deeply. Her only crime had been falling in love with Duncan MacLeod. And Mac had not made Kristin pay for Louise Barton's death. Not then. And he wasn't about to lose any more to the bitch, he vowed silently.

The commuter plane landed at Seacouver airport at 01:28 am, the final leg of a long day's journey that had carried Methos from Paris to New York, then to Seattle before catching the last commuter flight north. Traveling as Adam Pierson had some definite drawbacks, one of which was economy class. He'd shared the Paris to New York flight with a family with a two-year old child just behind him and the New York flight had featured a chatty young woman who evidentially thought he was cute. Between his own thoughts and the general unrest, he'd not slept much, barely dozing on the long flights.

It was one thing to decide in Paris that you're going to just pack up and take a holiday across the globe, but quite another to arrive unannounced in the city of someone who had only recently become a friend. The truth was that Methos wasn't quite sure how MacLeod would welcome him. He'd always been receptive on the barge, but this was a different place. A place he hadn't exactly been invited and was certainly not expected.

As he flagged down a cab, he thought that MacLeod probably wouldn't welcome him unannounced at 2 am and might very well greet him with a sword rather than a handshake. Instead

of the dojo address, he gave the driver the address for Joe's Bar and hoped that Dawson's place would still be open or that Joe would be awake.

When the cab pulled to a stop in front of the darkened building, Methos felt a moment of uncertainty. The building lights were off, closed for the night. But then he saw the glow of light from a window near the back and decided it would be okay. Paying the cabbie, he went around back, finding the back door to Joe's and knocked. The face that greeted him went from curious annoyance to surprise and a smile.

"Hey, Joe. Too late for a drink?" he asked simply.

"Adam! What brings you here?" He motioned the traveler inside.

"A beer?" Then at Joe's look, "A little holiday and a warning, I guess." He stepped into the small living quarters. "Cozy..."

"It's a place to sleep," Joe answered shortly. "What kind of a warning?"

Methos hesitated, waiting as Joe pulled out a couple of beers and motioned to him to sit. "For MacLeod, really. It's about Kristin . She's here."

Joe chuckled darkly, "Yep. She certainly is. She met Richie today."

The old Immortal caught the look and the implication immediately. "MacLeod's student? And he's--"

Joe nodded. "In bed with her tonight."

"Shit! She didn't waste any time," he muttered. Richie would be just her type, he thought grimly. Young, vigorous and eager, no doubt. This complicated things a little... Or not. Maybe it would be the incentive MacLeod needed to handle the problem this time instead of letting her walk away.

"So you'll tell him about it, eh?" Joe asked as he sipped at his beer.

"I have to, Joe. She's the worst kind of predator."

"Not a problem. Saves me the trouble of delivering bad news and keeps my oath clean." He paused and cocked an eyebrow

at the other man. "What'd she do to you? Suggest that haircut?"

Methos glared at him. "Very funny. I just needed a change."

"Oh, it's a change," Joe agreed. He waited for a few moments. "So answer the question."

Swigging down half the bottle, Methos finally met Joe's eyes directly. "She killed a couple of friends. No remorse, no regrets."

"You're right. Kristin's a bad one, but do you think MacLeod will stop her?"

Methos looked thoughtful, then shrugged his shoulders. "I hope..."

"Maybe. Richie's a good kid. I'd hate to see him end at her hands." Joe pointed to a cupboard. "Extra blankets and a pillow are in there. You can sleep on the floor in the club, Adam."

Taking the hint, Methos pulled out the offered bed clothes and made his way to the darkened club, called back. "Thanks, Joe."

"Yeah, yeah," Joe responded. "Just don't drink up my stock."

"Not even one night cap? A little brandy?" Methos teased.

"No!"

Methos grinned, then kicked off his shoes and snuggled down under the blanket on the floor. More comfortable than some surfaces he'd slept on, it was still a far cry from a nice comfy bed. In spite of the fact he was tired, it was still almost day break before his restless mind allowed him to sleep.

It was still fairly early in the morning as Methos stepped away from the cab, shouldered his bag and gazed at the red brick building that housed the dojo and MacLeod's flat. Unpretentious, quiet neighborhood it seemed. He approved. Not, he reflected, that the Highlander would care whether he did or not. Any second thoughts he had were about the method of this visit rather than the reason for it. He had a plan... and a backup plan. And yet another beyond that if

either of those failed. But so much depended on this initial contact with MacLeod here and on how much the Highlander trusted him.

He walked around to the back, electing to take the outside stairs over entering through the dojo. He was nervous, more than he thought he would be. What the hell was it with Duncan MacLeod that made him feel this way? Gods, he hadn't had these kinds of jitters in centuries.

Picking up MacLeod's vibration half-way up the stairs, Methos paused for a deep breath and steeled himself to brazen this out. Before he even knocked, the door opened and MacLeod was there, staring at him in surprise. "Candygram," he managed to say and winced inwardly at the lame greeting, but Mac gave him a small smile and he felt all his concerns melt away. At least this was going to be okay.

End of the prologue to "Chivalry."

## ***For Friendship's Sake***

By Lillian Wolfe

Disclaimer: This vignette is based on the characters in the Davis-Panzer Production, "Highlander The Series". The characters of Methos, Duncan MacLeod, and Amanda all slipped away to do a little moonlighting and we beg their bosses to be understanding. None of us are profiting from this, but Methos felt inclined to chat about this recent holiday. They are returning to their regular jobs with no permanent damage.

My thanks to Taselby and Dianne for proofing, critiquing and being great readers/editors. If there are mistakes left, they are entirely my own.

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LW

Time: Christmas Eve, 1996

Between "The Messenger" and "The Valkyrie"

A soft crunch accompanied each step as Methos' boots touched the frozen grass. A "crisp" day, MacLeod would call it, a day when frost covered everything and gave it a sugar-coated appearance. Bloody cold was how Methos regarded it, with the damp chill of the Paris winter seeping into your bones. Most times, it really didn't bother him much. He would just hunch a little snugger into his coat and continue about his business.

But here, in the solemn quiet of the Paris graveyard, the icy fingers reached further than usual, chilling part of his soul along with the sedentary stones that told their own stories in grim words and numbers on their faces. He gazed at the still new-looking stone that marked Alexa's grave and thought the fir wreath accentuated with red velvet bows did little to

alleviate the starkness of the grave. He would have piled flowers on it, but they wouldn't survive even an afternoon at this time of year.

Christmas Eve. A year ago he and Alexa were in the snow of the Adirondacks, enjoying the warmth of a ski lodge and the companionship of several vacationing couples who found the mountains the perfect getaway from New York. For him, anywhere Alexa wanted to be was fine. They'd been going across the United States, seeing and doing anything she wanted and he'd been falling more and more in love with her along the way. He'd almost convinced himself that everything was perfect.

This Christmas, Alexa was in her "perfect" grave in the ground, her bright spirit extinguished by a ruthless disease that took its toll on mortals. And he was unchanged, still young in body if not spirit. Still holding on to life with the same fierce grip that had dominated his long existence. Still trying to fully understand the "game" and its purpose, as unsure now as he was at the beginning of how it was defined.

And still alone as he was at many human celebrations, whether they called it Christmas, Yule, Solstice, or Chanukah. *Gods, I'm getting morose*, he thought suddenly.

He reached out to touch the headstone, letting his fingers trace Alexa's name in the carvings. "Happy Christmas, Alexa," he said softly. "Maybe you're somewhere near and can hear me. I'd like to think so. I wish I could talk to you and know you're happy now. I miss you."

He swallowed the lump trying to form in his throat and turned away to make his way back through the archway to his car. Given what they were and what they did, it was almost amusing that Immortals found sanctuary on holy ground. But even an Immortal needed some form of spirituality in his life. Needed to feel there was a greater purpose to life and an order of some sort in the Universe. Right now, he wasn't in tune to any of it.

Paris was lonely at this time of year—part of it self-imposed, he admitted. A couple of "friends" from the Watchers had invited him to dinner, yet another had asked him to the country with her. He'd declined all invitations. He needed to be with his own kind right now, to be Methos, not Adam Pierson. Unfortunately, none of those invitations had come from one of the three Immortals who knew who he was.

Duncan MacLeod had gathered his "clan" in Seacouver. It was a clan that Methos was not totally a part of, whether that was

MacLeod's choice or his own. While he often inserted himself into Mac's life, it wasn't often the Highlander took the initiative and he didn't feel inclined to invite himself this time. So here he was in a self-imposed exile and feeling sorry for himself. "Doddering old fool," he murmured as he pulled the Volvo into traffic.

As he drove toward the central district, he thought about how much had changed in his life since he'd met MacLeod. He'd been content as Adam Pierson. Safe. Then he found himself caught up in events that affected Joe Dawson and MacLeod that had put his life in jeopardy more than once and, damn, if he hadn't willingly gone along. He'd pretty much left the Watchers, only a formal resignation remained, but he knew he would be tracked by that organization until "Adam Pierson" died.

And he'd forged a more or less comfortable friendship with MacLeod. Granted, it was a friendship that continually tested the Highlander, forced him to reexamine his thinking about many issues and to constantly look at Methos anew as little facets of his own personality transformed him from Adam to Methos gradually. In some ways, it was like he was rediscovering himself. He'd been Adam so long that he'd lost touch with the core of who he was, the other planes of

personality and thought that made up the oldest living Immortal. Although it wasn't the first time he'd experienced this, it was a little disconcerting to rebuild your own personality. And sometimes, it wasn't pleasant.

It was late afternoon when Methos returned to his flat. He'd picked up a few things — a steak and vegetables for dinner, wine, that kind of stuff — and he was fully prepared to settle in for a long read of a recent bestseller. He'd selected three and hadn't decided where to start. *Should make for a great Christmas*, he thought sourly as he set the food in the kitchen. He wasn't sure why he was so depressed. It wasn't the first Christmas he'd spent alone; there'd been hundreds along the way and some spent in very uncomfortable situations. And for the majority—still—of his life, the damn holiday hadn't even existed. At least he was warm, had decent food and a book to read.

As he returned to his living room, he automatically glanced at the answering machine, unconsciously registered the three blinking lights that indicated messages. Probably someone wanting a donation. Those calls increased this time of year. He ignored the machine, popped on the latest "U2" CD and

poured a large scotch onto a single rock. As he flipped through his mail, he noticed a card from Joe Dawson and plucked it out.

*At least Joe remembered.* The thought slipped in unbidden. In annoyance, he gulped down half the drink without a pause. He finished the rest while opening the other few pieces of mail, then refilled the glass — minus the cube this time.

He'd just recapped the bottle when the phone rang. *Let the answering machine get it,* he thought as he sipped at the scotch. Drunk seemed like a good option but he wanted to work at it slowly and he definitely didn't feel like being nice to anyone right now. His hand froze as a familiar voice came on the machine.

“Methos, where the hell are you? I've been calling all day. Well, I hope you're having a good time wherever you are. Listen, if I don't —”

Methos had practically dived for the phone, snatched it up. “Mac, hello. I just got in. How are things in Seacouver?”

“Fine when I left. How are you doing?”

“When you left?” Methos echoed, confused.

“Yeah. I’m in Paris. Amanda and I decided to spend Christmas here,” Mac announced happily. “Richie’s off to visit Maria and Joe’s with his family, so we decided Paris would be a nice change. We got in this morning.”

“I see,” Methos said softly. Mac and Amanda — sounded like a nice, intimate holiday for them. “That’s great, MacLeod.”

“Why don’t you meet us in an hour at the Montmartre Station?”

“The Montmartre? What--?”

“There’s a nice little restaurant nearby,” Mac interrupted. “Nothing fancy, but good food.”

“I dunno, Mac. You and Amanda —”

“Want you to join us. Both of us do. Come on. Unless you have other plans?” Mac’s voice had that pleading tone he used when he really wanted something.

He could make up an excuse — prior commitment, hot date, three's a crowd. Methos glanced at the stack of books. Plenty of reading to be done here. "Okay. I'll see you there."

He set the phone back in the cradle, reflecting on this sudden change in plans. He wouldn't deny that he was glad the Highlander had returned to Paris, that he'd included him in his holiday plans. He did doubt that Amanda would be that enthused about it, but he could ignore her irritation for an evening in exchange for MacLeod's company. Sipping steadily at his drink, he did pause to wonder why he reacted the way he did to Duncan MacLeod. Why it made him feel so good that MacLeod had chosen to include him in his plans for the evening. He didn't bother to answer. He knew he valued MacLeod's friendship too highly for it to be healthy for him. Sooner or later it would all come crashing down, but for the moment, he didn't care.

Duncan MacLeod winked at Amanda as he set the phone down. "He'll meet us there."

The dark-haired beauty grinned back. "Great. This will be so much fun, Duncan. And it will be good for Methos."

Duncan shook his head uncertainly. “I don’t know Amanda. He might not find this such a great plan.”

She slinked next to him, sat down on the back of the sofa and wrapped her arms affectionately around his neck. “Don’t be such a worrier. You said you wanted to do something special this Christmas — something that included Methos. Well, this is something he would never expect.”

“That’s for sure,” Mac muttered.

Methos was running late. He’d planned to drive his car down, but the suddenly cantankerous vehicle wouldn’t start and he’d ended up taking the Metro instead. As he bounded up the stairs, he spotted MacLeod immediately; the tall Scot stood out like a beacon in the dark mass of people milling around. Add the luminescent beauty of Amanda next to him and you couldn’t miss them if you tried. A genuine smile appeared on his face as he came up to them. He felt ridiculously happy.

“Sorry,” he blurted out by way of greeting. “I had car problems.”

Unexpectedly, Amanda hugged him, planting a sisterly kiss on his cheek. “It’s okay. We have someone we want you to meet.”

As Amanda turned her head, he noticed the small brunette woman who was standing next to MacLeod. She was about five-four and looked like an athlete, filled out in that lean, yet muscular way. She was pretty although not spectacular, but there was a healthy glow to her complexion.

“Adam, this is Angelique Modene,” Amanda said. “She’s a friend of mine who is in Paris for the week. This is my only chance to see her, so I hope you don’t mind that we invited her to join us?”

Methos shook his head. “No, not at all.” He offered his hand and a warm smile although he really would have preferred to not have a mortal along this evening. This meant being Adam, not Methos. He could have done that with people he already knew. In his gut, Methos was uncertain about this arrangement. A blind date? What the hell were MacLeod and Amanda thinking? This was not how he wanted to spend Christmas Eve.

Mac sidled close to him as they walked to the “quaint” Italian restaurant the Highlander had chosen and touched his arm lightly. “Relax, old man. Try to enjoy yourself for once.”

Methos frowned. What did he mean “for once?” He often enjoyed himself — usually at Mac’s expense. A sudden thought occurred. That’s what this was all about—Mac was getting even. On Christmas Eve? That wasn’t very considerate. But if it was a game... His spirits started rising with the challenge. All right. So he was on a date with a mortal. At least the girl was cute and he was with MacLeod and Amanda.

Over a salad accompanied by a rich Bordeaux wine Mac had ordered, Methos discovered that the girl could also carry on a decent conversation, so long as they stuck to French. And she also had the good sense to keep her mouth shut when he and Mac got into a “discussion” of seventeenth century armour, European versus Asian. Amanda; however, looked bored mid-way through and gave him a “who the hell cares” look which he ignored for another ten minutes.

That was when she popped in with, “You know, Angelique is a champion figure skater. She’s won several medals.” She dug her fork into the plate of lasagna that had just arrived.

Methos stared at her as if she'd suddenly started speaking Swahili and raised an inquisitive eyebrow. Across from him, Mac took the pause to order another bottle of wine, then smiled ingratiatingly. "I believe Amanda is trying to tell us something."

"Okay. Figure skating—that's a *nice* art form. But it involves frozen water."

Angelique cast an indulgent smile his way. "You're not a fan, I can tell."

"Actually, I don't know much about it."

"It uses *blades*, Adam," Amanda supplied, her tone of voice like that of a mother explaining a basic fact to a child. "Maybe you should learn more." At Angelique's puzzled look, she added, "Adam is fond of swords and other blades. He should consider the merits of ice skates."

His eyes narrowed at her and he began to feel very uneasy about this whole situation. "I suppose they could hold a pretty sharp edge."

“Oh, yes,” Angelique agreed, happy to have something in the conversation she could speak knowledgeably about. “The edges can be ground quite sharp. Most skating is done on an edge, so you want it to cut the ice and hold.”

“You know what I think?” Amanda said with contrived spontaneity.

Here it comes, Methos noted.

“I think we should all go ice skating. Wouldn’t that be fun, Duncan?” Her eyes sparkled as she gazed at the tall Scot. “The Palais de Glace is only a few blocks from here and it would really make this whole night feel Christmasy. “

Before Mac could answer, Methos interjected. “You can count me out. I am definitely not getting on slippery ice on a narrow piece of metal.”

“Oh, Adam, please,” Amanda whined — yes, that was an actual whine — at him. Mac raised an eyebrow as if asking him to reconsider.

“No. I like my bones in one piece,” he objected.

“Come on, Adam,” Mac intervened. “A little healthy exercise wouldn’t hurt you. Besides, Angelique teaches skating so she can give you a hand.” There was an amused smile across the Highlander’s face.

He was enjoying this a little too much, Methos thought with annoyance. He watched as MacLeod refilled his wine glass. “Won’t work, MacLeod. You’re not going to get me drunk enough to go along with this crazy plan. I — I have weak ankles.”

Angelique shook her head at that objection. “There’s no such thing as weak ankles, Adam. I’ll make sure your boots are laced properly. They will give you enough support. Come on. It will be fun. Please?” She cast wide pleading eyes at him.

*I am not giving in to an entreating look from a female,* he decided and sipped at the wine. He glanced back at Amanda who wore a similar look. Shit! Even MacLeod had that puppy expression on his face. He concentrated on his wine glass and repeated firmly, “No. N. O. I am not ice skating.”

Mac sighed and leaned back, defeat written all over his slouch. “I told you, Amanda. He hasn’t got the nerve to even try it. In fact... I would bet you he couldn’t even make it

around the rink, on his own, once in the whole evening without falling.”

“I guess we won’t find out,” Amanda replied.

On one level he knew what they were doing, but somehow his mouth didn’t seem to be connected to his brain. Mac’s challenge had gotten to him. Once around the rink indeed. He could do that. “What are you willing to bet, MacLeod?”

The Scot held his smile in check, not allowing it to alter his poker face as only a twinge tugged at the corners of his mouth. “Let’s make it interesting—say a coveted bottle of Napoleon brandy—the real stuff. And if you lose, you carve the turkey tomorrow—with a penknife.”

“Deal,” Methos replied, not realizing until after that Mac had just invited him for Christmas dinner. He brought his eyes up to meet the Highlander’s as it dawned on him and he saw the smile spreading across his face. Amanda’s grin was even bigger. “You could have just asked instead of going through this charade.”

“Oh, no. The bet is real.” MacLeod replied as he emptied the rest of the bottle of Bordeaux into his friend’s glass. “I wouldn’t miss this for anything.”

Methos definitely wished he’d missed this particular bit of recreation. His feet felt like they were crammed into the boots and the laces nearly cut the circulation off at his ankles. He leaned against the barrier around the Olympic-sized patch of ice, watching even two-year-olds managing to maneuver their way over the slick surface. It was a short fall for those little legs, he reasoned. A lot further down for his long limbs. So far, he’d managed to make it about twenty feet around and that only by clinging to the barrier and taking very cautious steps.

He must have been temporarily insane to agree to this — Napoleon brandy or no. He glanced across the rink where MacLeod and Amanda were gliding smoothly along. Damn the Scot and his easy athletic ability. Even Amanda was enjoying it. Angelique was showing off in the center of the ice with a spin.

All you have to do to end this torture is get off the ice and take the skates off, a small part of his mind told him logically. And it was tempting — but the greater part of him, the survivor, said, No! I'm not going to carve a turkey with a pen knife! Besides, I want the brandy... and I want that smug smirk off MacLeod's face!

Sheer determination could carry a man a long way. For Methos, it was another ten feet without touching the barrier before his legs got ahead of his torso and he landed hard—and painfully—on his bum.

Within moments, Angelique crossed the ice and stopped beside him, offering a hand up. Pride hurting more than anything else, Methos reluctantly took the extended hand and struggled to his feet.

How much did he want that brandy?

Angelique's arm slid around his waist to help support him as he edged back towards the barrier, but she wouldn't let him off the hook that easily.

“No, no, Adam. You're fighting the ice.”

“Yeah, we’re long-time adversaries,” he muttered. He’d never found any particular pleasure in dealing with frozen water except as ice cubes in drinks. Most of his encounters had been cold and hostile.

The girl turned neatly around to face him, skating backwards now, caught his hands in hers and steadied him. “You’re too tense. Try to relax a little and lean into the movement. Look—I will teach you ‘fishes.’”

Obediently, he watched her wiggle her feet in and out to create “fish” shapes on the ice and he tried to duplicate the movement. “Push with your thighs,” she said and ran a hand against his right inside thigh to enforce the instruction. “Have you ever skied, Adam?”

He nodded. “A long time ago.” No need to tell her it was long before even her grandparents were born and it was a matter of survival.

“Then it’s similar. You have edges on skis and you have edges on skates.” As they made their slow progress around the rink she explained how skating on the edges produced the side to side glide and made it easier to maintain balance. Gradually, he began to get the hang of it, matching his slow strokes to

hers as she continued to skate backward. At the corner, she guided him around it in an easy curve.

He was beginning to think this wasn't so bad, when MacLeod and Amanda skated past. "Remember, you have to do it without help," Mac teased. "One time around — no grabbing the railing, no supporting hands."

Distracted, Methos sent him a piercing glare that proved disastrous as Methos crashed into Angelique, sending them both sprawling to the ice in a tangle of arms and legs. Chagrined, Methos sat up slowly and managed the Adam Pierson apologetic look for the figure skater, who was untangling herself from his legs. "Sorry. Are you okay?"

She took one look at that contrite expression and found a wry grin for him. "I'm fine. Are you all right?"

"Yeah," he said slowly, feeling the wet ice through the back of his jeans and his sweater. "Just wet."

As Angelique started giggling, he, too, realized the silliness of the situation and found himself chuckling as well. The girl regained her feet and once again helped the old Immortal up. Suddenly it didn't matter anymore whether the little kids

could outskate him. As absurd as it seemed, Methos was having fun.

From the other side of the rink, MacLeod had watched Methos crash into his teacher and had winced when they both hit the ice. As he watched the two of them get back up, laughing as they did so, he relaxed. “I think this may be working, Amanda.”

She shifted her gaze to look at the Scot and smiled. “I told you it would, o ye of little faith.”

“Okay. I admit it. I doubted we would even get him on skates.” In fact, the plan had seemed preposterous when Amanda had suggested it. His own thought had been to simply get Methos drunk — a difficult and lengthy process — to get the old guy’s mind off Alexa. When Joe had discovered Methos was isolating himself for Christmas, it didn’t take an MIT grad to figure out what would be occupying the old Immortal’s holiday. Even if he had to sacrifice a bottle of the brandy, it was worth it to see his friend laughing.

“Well, I confess that was the tricky part. I wasn’t sure we could get him to accept the challenge. But Angelique can be persuasive, too,” Amanda added, as she interpreted the look on MacLeod’s face. “You’re a good friend, Duncan.”

“So’s he,” the Scot answered softly. “A very good friend.” A little over two years ago, he didn’t even know Methos as anything more than an old story told among Immortals, like the stories of ancient gods and mythical dragons. Now, there was a very real person who went with that name — someone who’d come to mean quite a bit to him. Every now and then, he wondered if the old man was really as old as he claimed, but it didn’t really matter. He was his trusted friend and that was all that was important.

Then he smiled and caught Amanda’s arm to spin her around on the ice. “And you are a very special lady. Thank you. I owe you.”

“And I will collect,” she assured him. But her eyes were filled with merriment.

Within another half hour, Methos pretty well had the hang of skating. He was relaxed and easily gliding along with Angelique. “You are a natural,” the girl assured him. “You just needed to understand the nature of the ice and how to make it work with your blades.”

He wasn't too sure about that, but it had become much easier. He glanced across at MacLeod, who was spinning slowly. “Can you show me how to do that?”

“Spin? Are you sure?”

He nodded. She shrugged and explained the dynamics of a spin to him, showing him how to start the rotation and how to stop it. “The tighter you can pull your body in, the faster you spin. But be careful. You will get dizzy.”

Determined, he practiced the two foot spin, learning the feel of the rocker and adapting to the slight dizziness. Gradually, he added speed, pulling his arms toward his chest to increase the rotations. As he pulled out of his best spin so far, he found MacLeod watching from a few feet away. Mac grinned, a twinkle in his eyes. “Nice. But you still have to get around the rink on your own.”

With a smirk that set his eyes dancing, Methos retorted, “When I’m ready, MacLeod. You just make sure you have that brandy.”

“I’ll have the penknife sharpened,” he answered and glided off to join Amanda again.

Methos was actually debating whether to go through with the bet or not. He realized Mac and Amanda had gone to a bit of trouble to set this up and he *was* enjoying himself more than he ever thought he would. But the idea of taking a small knife to a hot, large bird didn’t appeal to him and if he backed out, Mac would make sure he had to carry through on his part. Nope, he’d have to do it.

But he waited until practically the last minute. He hadn’t really gone around even half the rink on his own. He’d spent most of the time hanging around a corner with Angelique learning to spin and stop.

It was a scant ten minutes before closing time when he skated over to the Highlander. “All right, MacLeod. This is it. If I make it around the rink one time without falling, I win, right?”

Mac nodded.

No one said how fast he had to go or what style he had to use. Methos took his time, used fishtails to get started, switched to slow, steady strokes and used a glide around the curves. As careful as he was, there were still a few uncertain moments when he wasn't sure if he was going to lose his balance or not. As he came out of the last curve, he gained a little more speed and snowplowed directly into MacLeod to stop.

The Highlander hadn't expected that, had thought Methos was going to pass him, and was caught off guard—and off balance. He went down, taking Amanda with him and Methos, somewhat deliberately, landed on top of them. He felt enormously pleased to see Mac sprawled on the ice. Mac sat up, sputtering incoherently as Methos offered Amanda a hand untangling her legs from his.

“Hey! I made it around,” Methos stated emphatically. “You didn't say anything about stopping.”

“That was a fall at the end!” Mac countered.

“But I'd already gone past my starting point. I win, fair and square.”

“Me –”

“He’s right, Duncan,” Amanda interjected, before Mac blurted the name out. “He made it all the way around without falling.”

Mac glared for a moment, then a broad smile split his face. He grabbed Methos in an affectionate embrace and dumped a handful of ice shavings down the back of his sweater. As Methos caught his breath in a sharp reaction to the icy cold melting its way down his back, MacLeod got to his feet, pulled Amanda up, then hesitantly offered a hand to his friend.

An hour later, Methos sprawled happily on the sofa at Mac’s barge and sipped at a glass of *his* brandy. He’d shared the bottle with Mac and Amanda. Outside the streets of Paris were chilly and a fog had settled on the river area. Angelique had gone on to her own plans after the skating and it was just the three of them now. Amanda snuggled on Mac’s lap and he was beginning to feel a bit like the odd man out again.

He finished the drink and got to his feet. “I’d better get going. I’ll see you two tomorrow.”

“Hold up!” Mac said, lifting his wrist to see his watch. “It’s only five minutes to Christmas. Pour another round and we’ll toast the holiday.”

Methos sighed. “Mac, I’ve got to get a taxi —”

“No, you don’t. You can sleep here tonight. It won’t be the first night you’ve spent on the sofa. Now, come on. Share a little more of that bottle.”

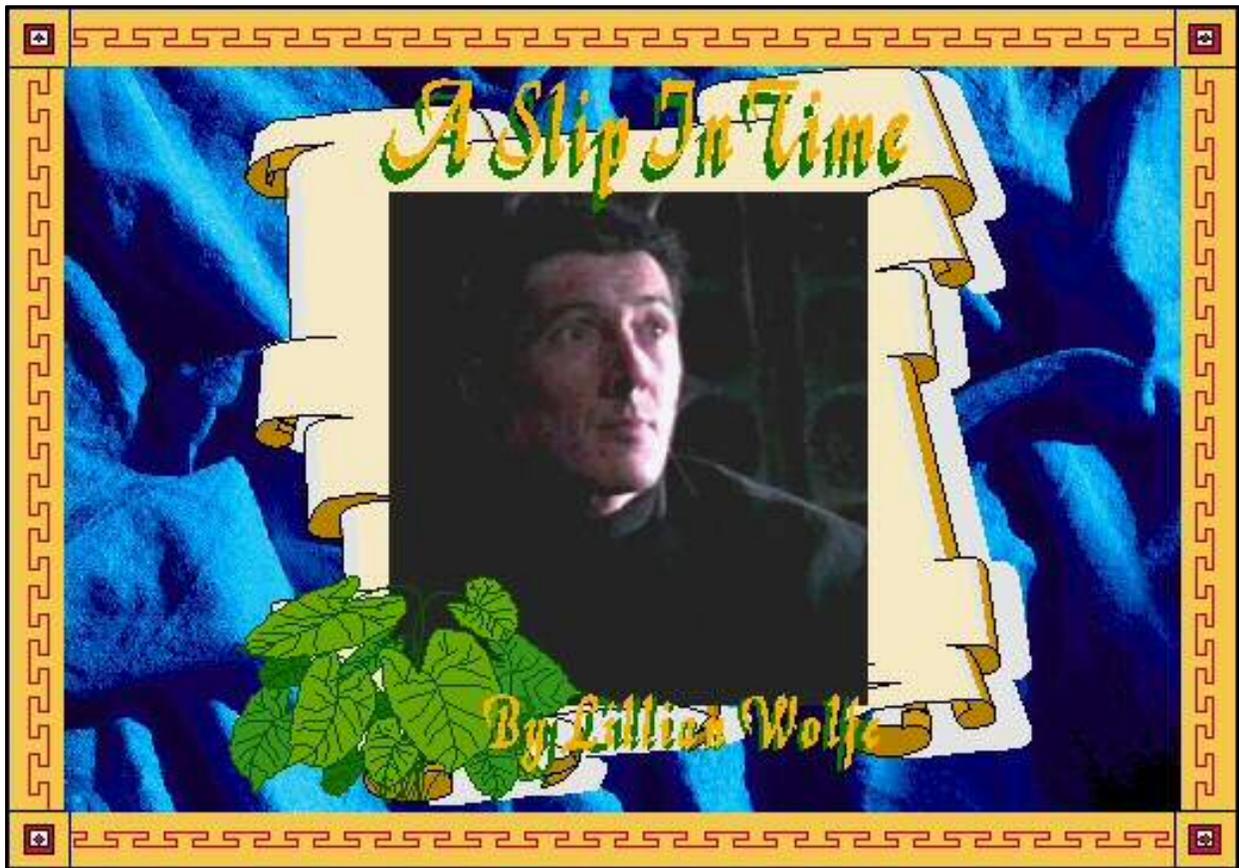
Methos hesitated. “You’re sure?”

“Positive,” he replied, and held out his glass for a refill.

“Thank you,” Methos said softly. “For the whole evening.”

At midnight, MacLeod offered the toast. “A very Merry Christmas to all and especially to my special lady and my good friend. Slainte’.” Three glasses clinked in a merry tingle of union.

C'est Finis



This vignette is based on the characters in the Davis-Panzer Production, "Highlander the Series". The characters of Methos and Duncan MacLeod slipped away to do a little moonlighting and we beg their bosses to be understanding. They weren't really busy right now. None of us are profiting from this, but Methos felt inclined to tell me a little story. When D-P have work for them, they will return happily to their regular jobs.

My special thanks to my wonderful beta readers, Juanita and Cheryl, who give me feedback, encouragement and correct the stupid mistakes! I'm very grateful.

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# *A Slip In Time*

*By Lillian Wolfe*

Abstract thinking had a tendency to make Duncan MacLeod's mind ache. He was a very basic man really, grounded in what was tangible and easily comprehended. When he started trying to comprehend theory and obscure stuff, he had trouble following. All of which impressed the Highlander more when he considered that Methos, an Immortal born when theoretical thinking wasn't even conceived, seemed to follow even the most obtuse concepts with little trouble.

"**B**rilliant concepts and genius set aside for the moment, Methos. If time travel were really possible, why hasn't one of these masterful scientists done it already?" He asked it with complete sincerity even if there was a touch of frustration in his voice.

"**C**oncept and the development of that concept don't always coincide, Mac," Methos explained patiently. He reached for his beer, savoring the exquisite chill of the bottle on this sunny August day in Nice. Where had the last six days gone? He and Mac had thought they had plenty of time to enjoy the warmth and sunshine of the French coast before Mac had to fly off to the damp, misty moors of Scotland on some family business. Personally, Methos wondered if that business didn't include seeing Rachel MacLeod, even though Mac didn't mention it. He knew Mac was fond of his kinswoman, but the Scot wasn't forthcoming about many of the details of the pending trip, nor was he anxious for any company. Not that Methos had asked in so many words.

**D**ense frown lines etched burrows in Mac's forehead. "I still don't see how it could possibly work. I understand, kind of, that light is traveling through space at a certain speed and that it takes a long time to reach Earth so the light we see from a distant star is quite possibly thousands of years old, but I still don't see how we can overtake it. A time machine seems like an impossible invention."

"**E**ven some of daVinci's designs were considered impossible at the time. A helicopter? Who in the sixteenth century would have ever believed a helicopter would be possible? Yet there it

was in his sketches... a flying machine. H.G. Wells wasn't the first to conceive of a time machine, you know. And scientific study proves it can be done. It's just a matter of figuring out how to do it." Methos laughed and his hazel eyes gleamed as a thought appeared to strike him. "Hell, with enough alcohol in me, I could probably take you back to a time within the last five thousand years with so many vividly recalled details that you would believe you were there."

"Flights of fantasy don't count, Methos. I'm talking about really traveling through time. Although I will admit that the idea of being transported by your memories to... say, ancient Persia would be intriguing." Mac leaned back, poured a large gulp of beer into his mouth and squinted at Methos. He was looking lightly tanned, like just barely browned toast. That was a direct result of the past few days on the beach. And his hair was longer than he'd been wearing it over the past few years, not quite as long as when he'd first meet him, but enough that the front locks slipped into a wave across his forehead so that his face had a fuller, less gaunt look. Mac admitted he liked that healthy look on his friend.

Grinning broadly at the Highlander, a mischievous twinkle sparkling in his eyes, the old Immortal offered the seemingly impossible treat. "Would you like to try it, Mac?"

**H**alcyon mood shifting seductively with the intrigue of the suggestion, MacLeod rocked forward. "You're serious?" Methos nodded. "You really think you can make me feel like I'm in Persia?" Again, Methos nodded. "All right, then. I'll bet you the finest dinner in Nice that you can't do it."

**I**mpishly, the older man shifted his body to sit upright, reached across and laid his hand on top of MacLeod's. "Deal, Highlander, but this needs a special setting and something stronger than beer. It's also going to take a little bit of cooperation on your part." Methos' eyes grew thoughtful and he said nothing for a minute or two, then glanced at his watch. "All right. Give me a couple of hours to round up a few things. Meet me on the beach below the hotel at five."



**J**ingling sounds greeted MacLeod as he drew near the striped cabana on the beach. He soon spotted the metal tube wind chime that was attached to a pole outside the canvas structure. He almost laughed out loud. If Methos thought a blue and white tent coupled with the tinkling of chimes was going to be a time machine, the old Immortal had truly lost his mind. *Oh, yes. I'm going to have a fine dinner on the old man tonight,* he thought happily.

"Kindly indulge me, MacLeod," Methos said, stepping out of the tent and bowing toward Mac, arms gesturing for him to enter. He wore a woven robe of colored stripes and a band of multi-colored fabric was tied around his head. A small chill tickled the base of MacLeod's spine as he realized how completely natural Methos looked in this garb.

Luminescent light greeted Mac as he stepped inside. Fully a dozen candles in pierced metal holders burned within the surprisingly spacious tent. The diffused light gave a surrealistic impression to the unexpected furnishings within. The ground was completely covered in a red, yellow and blue designed carpet while several spreads were draped over the interior poles. He sniffed. The scent of oranges, peaches, cinnamon and something exotic he couldn't identify touched delicately at his nose. A small wooden table, surrounded by plush, tasseled pillows, sat squarely in the center. The drape over it looked to be silk. Two goblets sat on either side of a bronze fruit bowl, which was filled with apricots, dates, nuts, peaches and melons. Methos had definitely gone to some trouble and a bit of expense to create this illusion.

Moving silently behind him, Methos picked up something in the corner then offered the bundle of cloth to the Highlander.

"You might want to slip into this, Mac. It's more comfortable and will help with the *fantasy*."

"Nice robe," Mac commented dryly. It was almost as colorful as the one Methos wore. But he slipped his shirt off and pulled the garment over his head. As Methos pointed to his own bare feet, Mac slipped the loafers off, then the socks. He had agreed to play along with this game.

Obviously enthused about this experiment, Methos encouraged Mac to sit on the cushions before the table. He folded himself on a cushion across from the Scot and gazed intently at him. "Now, MacLeod, this is where I will need your cooperation. I want you to relax, sip at the fruit wine and apply a little imagination. I'm going to begin describing a place that once existed. You try to picture it in your mind." Mac nodded.

"Persepolis is a bustling place, filled with markets, people, animals and the richly wonderful scent of fresh fruit and sweets. The wine is light and fruity, a product of the variety of mixed fruits in the orchards. You can smell the ripening fruit on the limbs in the garden just outside the window. Orange and peach scents slip in on a delicate breeze..." MacLeod felt himself relaxing, rolling gently with the rhythm

of Methos' voice. He was only peripherally aware of the gentle movement of the long, slender fingers against the rose-colored silk cloth.

Quiescent words fell on him, patient little architects constructing a long-forgotten world— a place both so distantly removed and foreign to his experience that it could have been an alien civilization. He felt Methos' fingers touch his hand, pressing gently against his palm, lifting it to touch the trunk of an old olive tree, its trunk twisted and wound with age. Around him was a splendidly verdant garden, brilliantly blooming plants and fruit-laden trees. Over the low walls, he could see the desert lands beyond the garden, but preferred instead to bask in the coolness of this haven.

Revolving to gaze behind him, he saw a huge palace resting on solid foundations of limestone. Great stone pillars rose from bell-shaped bases to form the supports for lintels that crossed them and exquisite wooden beams covered them. With just a thought, he was walking through the entrance into the palace, and he was filled with astonishment at the magnitude of the structure. At least a hundred columns formed the hall where he stood. He was dazzled by the beauty of it and delighted with the magnificence and luxury. A man walked toward him— no, this was a man of authority, the king. He

was black-haired and dark-eyed, a strong man. And, he could tell by the stern expression, a willful man.

Shuddering slightly, he looked away from the king, seeking instead something menial to do. As he started away, he *heard* the king call him, beckoning him forward. Unresisting, he approached him, held out his hands and realized he bore a bowl of fruit. The king selected a fresh peach and dismissed him after giving him a curious look bordering on desire. He turned, moving swiftly from the hall, seeking the quiet of the garden.

Taking a sudden deep breath, MacLeod gasped and jerked back. "What the hell happened? What was in the wine?!"

Unmoving, Methos gazed steadily into his eyes, the green-gold flashing with the true memories of what he'd just created. Mac swallowed nervously, keenly aware of the intensity of the illusion and the extremely personal moments Methos had just given him. He had *lived* that moment as vividly as the old Immortal had actually known it. "Were you there, Mac?" he asked softly.



"Virtual reality had nothing on that experience, Methos," MacLeod said as the waiter poured the exquisite burgundy. "How did you do it? And who was the king? What was your relationship to him"

Waiting patiently for the waiter to finish his chore and move away, Methos considered how much to tell MacLeod about what had happened. Actually, it hadn't gone quite the way he'd intended, but he had been very successful in achieving his objective. Mac had indeed experienced the Persia he once knew. The waiter moved away and he raised his glass in a mock toast before replying.

"Xerxes, Mac. He was the King of Persia in ... 462 BC, I believe we now call it. Then it was simply the time of Xerxes the first. As to how I did it, that was a simple technique called hypnosis. Create the atmosphere, provide for the senses and guide the psyche down the garden path. Nothing more magical than that." Methos sipped at the wine, savoring this victory although it had cost a little more in emotional expense than he had expected.

"Yesterday as close as that," Mac said softly, noting that Methos had not answered the third question. *Why can't I let it sit?* he wondered. Perhaps because of the intimacy of the experience, the fact that Methos had put him into his own memories and opened up the small peep hole on his past. For whatever reason, the Scot had to ask. "Were you a servant to Xerxes?"

"Zoroaster," Methos answered with a slight shake of his head. "Not the one who lent his name to the religious cult, but one who was a counselor to Xerxes. And I wasn't a servant. But that's in the past, Mac — the long past. Let's leave it there."

As if on cue, the waiter set a platter of food before him and Methos cheerfully stuck his fork into the lobster thermidor, savoring every moment of the expensive and elegant dinner MacLeod was buying.

Finis

## **Old Acquaintance**

**By Lillian Wolfe**

With a mixture of anger and worry, Methos stared at the top of the mountain slope where dark clouds were moving in quickly. Most of the skiers had already vacated the slopes, only a few coming down now. The lift was getting ready to close down soon, but no one was looking to go up the mountain anyway... except maybe a five thousand year old man who hated being stuck in snow.

Damn MacLeod, anyway! Where the hell was he?

Methos' eyes scanned the various surfaces of the four runs that were open looking for the familiar form that was the Highlander. *Not there. Where was that girl he was with... Sophia?*

He turned to look at the faces of the skiers that had already come down. Maybe he could spot one of the trio of Italian girls they had been talking with the night before. Possibly they knew where Mac was.

There... that woman looked like Marcella. He pushed his way in that direction and was surprised to see Sophia standing next to her. "Hello, girls. Remember me?" he called as he was almost on them.

Marcella grinned at him, "Of course, we remember, Adam. You didn't join us today."

He looked apologetic. "Other plans. Hey, I'm looking for MacLeod. Have you seen him?"

Sophia nodded. "Yes, we all went up for one last run. But just as we were ready to start down, he suddenly looked around and there was someone he knew. He told us to go ahead and he would be down later. He needed to go see an old acquaintance. Wasn't that how he put it, Marcella?"

"Yes. Just that way. An old 'acquaintance.'"

"So he didn't come down?" Methos was more worried now. An old acquaintance was not necessarily good news.

Both girls shook their heads as Sophia added, "No, he went off, away from the course."

"Thanks," Methos mumbled, then set off to find a ski rental. Within fifteen minutes, he was ready and was busy bribing the lift operator to let him go up before he shut the machine down. As the contraption began making the trip to the summit of this peak, Methos cursed silently and wondered how the heck he'd gotten into this situation.

Paris - Dec. 29th, 1999 - 10:08 a.m.

Frowning, Duncan MacLeod pressed the end button on his phone and leaned back against the outside wall of the barge. From here, he had a much-envied view of Notre Dame de Paris and on this unseasonably fine winter morning, with just a hint of fog from the river, it was an extraordinary sight. Horrible storms had battered the region over the past few days, so the gentleness of the day was a welcome break. He would have been more appreciative if the phone call hadn't been the fourth, "Sorry, no" response he'd gotten to his invitation. He'd pretty much run out of ladies he knew well enough to invite for a weekend of skiing and a millennium celebration.

"Damn!" he cursed softly under his breath. Rachel MacLeod had been his original date but a family emergency had led to her canceling no less than two hours earlier. Since then, he'd

been on the phone trying to reach someone as a last minute fill-in. Not an easy task the day before New Year's Eve.

He sighed, sifting through all the lovely women in his recent past, trying to think of one who might be free to run away for a holiday in the Swiss Alps. Even Amanda had plans already, not that he'd seen much of the now white blonde thief. She was spending most of her time in North America these days and had barely spoken to MacLeod more than a couple of times in the past few months.

Mac's eyes suddenly shifted to a focused look as he detected another Immortal and he turned to see who was approaching. Instantly, he relaxed. Methos.

For a five-thousand-year-old man, there was definitely still a spring in his step this morning. He waved at Mac and picked up his pace a bit. Looking at the tall, lean man who walked like he just won the lottery, Mac could barely recall the person he'd first met. Adam Pierson had slouched a lot, especially as matters had become more tense and dangerous within the Watchers. Now, Methos acted as if he owned the world - and maybe he did. He certainly knew a lot more about its history than anyone else alive.

"Morning," Mac called. "Coffee's still fresh."

Methos bounded up the gangplank. "Is it real coffee or one of those flavored concoctions you've been brewing lately?"

"Colombian roast."

"Good. After that peppermint one at Christmas, I was afraid to think what you'd inflict on me next." His voice was light, teasing, and his eyes twinkled as he spoke.

"As I recall, Mr. Picky, you really liked the chocolate macadamia and the hazelnut," Mac retorted, shoving the door open ahead of his guest.

"So, who were you calling?" Methos asked, pointing to the phone as he slipped past him.

"None of your business," Mac replied with an indignant frown. Methos glanced back at him, shrugged it off as not important anyway. "What brings you by?" Mac added.

The old Immortal smiled smugly, "Coffee."

Mac laughed. It was good to enjoy a little of the old relationship with Methos, to see him relaxed and at ease again. Most especially, it was good to have him "drop" in at the barge. For a while, he'd barely come by at all and then only if Mac had invited him.

As he poured coffee and handed it to Methos, Mac considered his dilemma for a moment. Tentatively, he asked, "Methos, how would you like to spend the weekend in the mountains with me? You know, just take off for a ski weekend at a lodge?"

Methos had just settled on the futon sofa with the coffee mug held in his hands, ready to be sipped. His head jerked up sharply. "What?!" he questioned as if he couldn't believe what he'd just heard.

"I have reservations at a fantastic ski lodge in the Swiss Alps, train tickets bought... the whole weekend's paid. It'd be a great chance to spend some time together."

Methos sipped the coffee, his eyes narrowing suspiciously. "Date stand you up?"

"Family emergency."

Nodding, Methos speculated, "And you can't find another who's free for the weekend?"

Mac lips pressed together puffing his cheeks up as his eyebrows rose into a "that about sums it up look." Methos laughed. "So you want me to be your 'date'?"

"Well, not date," Mac said. "I just figured we could have some fun, do some skiing. There's bound to be some single ladies."

Methos regarded him thoughtfully. "Let me get this straight, MacLeod. Mountains... snow... pieces of fiberglass strapped to my feet as I hurtle down hills? No!"

"C'mon. Methos. There's also a warm lodge, hot buttered rums, fireplace, nice scenery, room service," Mac countered, sounding like he was trying to seduce his guest. "It's the perfect place to celebrate the new millennium."

"Are you kidding? The perfect place is Tahiti or Bora Bora. And the new millennium? Ha! What a bunch of hype! The whole calendar thing is wrong anyway, you know," Methos groused. "No one has really gotten the dates straight. Might as well draw the start date out of bucket!"

"Never mind," Mac interrupted. "We'll celebrate the new century, then. Just come with me."

Methos halted his tirade and peered at MacLeod. "Really can't get a date, huh?"

"Methos –?"

"MacLeod, I'm not crazy about skiing down mountains. Even if one of us breaks a leg, it still hurts until it heals! It's not my idea of fun."

"You don't have to ski. Just come along. I don't want to waste the tickets and the room. Besides, we haven't done anything together in a while. I promise you'll have a good time."

Methos sighed, thought about it. "No skiing?"

Mac shook his head.

"When do we leave?" The resignation in Methos' voice sounded exaggerated.

Mac grinned, pleased with the way this was going. "Tonight, the 8:35 train."

"I've got some things to do, then. I'll meet you at the station."  
He finished his coffee in one gulp, got to his feet and started for the door.

"Methos?" Mac waited until he turned back. "I'm glad you said yes."

December 30th, 1999 - 12:48 p.m.

Methos gazed silently at the vast expanse of white drifts and mountains that completely surrounded them as the jeep trundled up the hillside from the "quaint" little village to the ski lodge. Why had he ever agreed to this? At least it wasn't snowing at the moment. He glanced at his companion. Mac was like a little kid, a happy grin splitting his face as his eyes scanned the glistening landscape. The corners of his eyes crinkled attractively and Methos, once again, found himself wishing for more in this relationship with the Highlander. On the other hand, he probably had more than he ever expected. He was Mac's "date" for a skiing weekend at New Year's. Warmed by the thought, Methos gazed at the snow with younger eyes than a few moments before and conceded it wasn't so bad, really.

As the jeep pulled up to the lodge, Methos definitely felt more positive about this. It was a modern building with all the charm of the old lodges, but the amenities promised to be outstanding. And he wasn't disappointed. Inside, the central area was a big hall with comfortable couches and chairs surrounding a huge central fireplace. Methos easily imagined himself curled up in one of those chairs with a book and a mug of hot cocoa. For a moment, he tried to picture Mac in the chair beside him, but it was easier to see the Scot on the slopes. The huge floor to ceiling windows that faced the mountain would probably allow him to do just that.

Mac touched his arm, "Come on, let's check out our room."

Nodding, Methos followed him up the stairs and down the right wing. Mac stopped at a door on the mountain-facing side and opened it, stepping in ahead of Methos, then motioning for him to follow. A window view of the slopes greeted him as he walked into the luxury suite. A small leather sofa and dinette for two were the sparse furnishings of this main room. To the right was a separate bedroom, with a king-sized bed, Methos noted with a quick glance. On the left was a screen wall and a peek behind it revealed a cozy-sized Jacuzzi. His eyebrows went up a notch and he turned to Mac, "You were going to bring a girl here?"

"I've known her for a while," Mac said defensively.

"Uhhh, I would guess this shortened your possibles list considerably when she canceled," Methos stated, motioning to the Jacuzzi. "Does the sofa make into a bed?"

"It's a king-sized bed, Methos. I think we can share it."

Mac said it so blithely and, of course, he was right. There was plenty of room in the bed and it was only Methos who was thinking of the idea of sharing a bed with the Highlander as being a bit awkward. As Mac began unpacking, Methos followed suit and pulled two sweaters, a pair of nice slacks, four pairs of boxers, socks, and another pair of jeans out of his backpack.

"I thought you'd lost that sweater," Mac commented as Methos pulled out the off-white Aran knit that had been a mainstay of his wardrobe over the past few years.

"My favorite," Methos answered and tucked it into a drawer. "It's perfect for lounging downstairs with a book."

Rolling his eyes as if he considered Methos a hopeless cause, Mac muttered, "I hope you don't plan to spend the whole trip down there."

"Why not?"

"Look around. This is a magnificent place. Incredible scenery, other things to do besides ski—"

"You mean curling?" Methos asked, glancing out the window to a group of boys who were well into a game on a slick ice surface.

"And skating, sleighing and snowboarding."

"Let me make this clear, Mac," Methos interrupted again. "I am not a big fan of snow. Watching all this wonderful, cold activity from the lodge will suit me just fine."

December 30th, 1999 - 9:22 p.m.

Although the lodge was filled for the weekend, the main hall didn't seem too over-packed with bodies as Methos and Mac made their way into the gathered crowd. Many people clustered around the bar area, chatting and drinking. A few

were parked right next to the fireplace, seeking its warmth - especially one young woman who was entirely underdressed for a winter lodge.

Methos nudged Mac, "Looks like she wanted to go to Tahiti as well."

Mac frowned disgustedly at his companion. Was he going to harp about the cold all weekend? And to think he'd actually pleaded with the old man to come... At least he'd been right that there would probably be several unattached ladies staying the weekend. Also a few single men, he added as he noted a pair of college student types working their way toward the skimpily clad woman.

"Find us some seats," Mac instructed, nearly having to shout over the noise. A new selection of music started reminding Mac of the disco era. At Methos' look, he asked, "Beer or wine?"

"Wine — white," his friend answered with a nod and plunged into the room.

By the time Mac had made it to the bar and gotten their drinks, Methos had procured a couple of seats at a circular

couch that included three attractive young women. He was already engaged in a conversation when Mac arrived. The man could be charming when he tried, Mac admitted. They were, Mac noted, even before Methos noticed him, speaking Italian. Was there any language that Methos didn't speak? His Italian, Mac realized with a touch of jealousy, was fluent and current - no archaic idioms showing.

As he noticed MacLeod's arrival, Methos introduced his companions as Marcella, Sophia and Domina, three friends up from Florence for the celebration and a bit of skiing. In just a few minutes it became apparent that Methos had already made inroads with Domina. She was a computer programmer and they were into technical talk. But Sophia was eyeing the Highlander speculatively and Mac had to admit, she was beautiful. Where Domina had short, efficient, dark hair and almost black eyes, Sophia was fair with light brown, almost blonde hair falling in waves of curls to her shoulders. Marcella, another brunette with almost waist-length hair, also looked interested, although her eyes darted to Methos more frequently than to Mac. That decided it for him and as Mac asked Sophia to dance, her face broke into a radiant smile. Luckily his Italian was as good as Methos' and they conversed easily as they danced to a slow tune.

They returned to the sofa after the second dance to find Methos and Domina had vanished somewhere together and Marcella was chatting, in German, with one of the college boys. Slightly amused with the idea of Methos picking up a girl - it was so unlike him - Mac relaxed and paid his full attention to Sophia. She was an executive secretary, she told him, and a top skier. Between the dancing and the drink, Mac found himself agreeing to join her skiing party the next day.

Upstairs, in Domina's room, Methos grunted slightly, murmuring, "This is awkward, Domina. Opening's too small."

"It's standard size," the Italian woman answered knowledgeably.

Methos straightened from where he was hunching down. "My fingers are too big. I can't fit them in. Do you have a pair of tweezers?" He turned the computer around so that he could look at the diskette opening more easily.

She nodded, reaching for her travel kit. As she handed the requested item to him, she leaned down to watch. Carefully, he inserted the tweezers, caught the diskette, working his

way along the edge, squeezing the tweezers gently, then pressed the eject button as he pulled simultaneously. The diskette slipped free, its back metal piece slightly bent.

"I don't think it will work again," he said as he handed the problem diskette to Domina.

"At least it's out of the computer," she answered. "Thank you, Adam. I've never tried that technique for a stuck disk."

"Well, it's pretty unusual for one to stick. You really shouldn't leave it in the computer when you're carrying it."

He handed the laptop to the girl and settled back on the couch as she put it away. He reached for the glass of wine he'd ordered just before they'd come upstairs to check out the computer problem.

"I'm lucky to have found you," the girl said, settling beside him. "I have a task due on Monday and I needed to use the drive." She leaned over and kissed his cheek. It was, Methos decided, a very brotherly kiss.

Finishing his drink, he excused himself, promising the girl he'd see her the next evening and made his way back down the hall to the suite he was sharing with Mac.

Thankfully, the room was empty. No Mac and whichever girl he'd picked up for the evening. Stripping to his shorts, Methos crawled into the huge bed and closed his eyes. He really was tired and he hadn't slept well on the train.

It was nearly two when the presence of another Immortal pulled Methos out of sleep. Mac, he figured, but reached for the sword beneath the bed, just in case. His hand released it a few moments later as Mac whispered loudly, "Methos? Are you alone?"

"I was," Methos mumbled, pulling the covers over his head as MacLeod turned on the light. He'd drifted back to sleep before Mac slipped into the bed, easing as far to the opposite side as he could without being uncomfortable.

December 31st, 1999 - 09:07 a.m.

Morning had more than made an appearance before Mac shifted, rolling his head to escape the light slipping through the crack in the drawn curtains. As he opened a bleary eye, he

became aware of the warm body beside him, curled snugly with his back to him and most of the covers wrapped around him. Methos had moved, Mac thought automatically, then realized it had been he who had shifted across the bed to crowd the older man almost off the bed. Surprised, Mac carefully inched away from Methos, doing his best not to disturb him.

Securely back on his half of the bed, Mac let out his breath. He must have followed the covers as Methos appropriated them, he reasoned, not allowing for a moment that there could be any other explanation. He glanced at the clock, then sat up sharply. After nine?! He was supposed to have met Sophia for breakfast at 08:30. He swung his legs out of the bed and reached for the telephone. That was when he noted the message light on it. Probably his date calling to tell him he was late, he thought sullenly. He hadn't even heard the phone.

As he called the concierge to pick up the message, he began pulling out his ski pants and a heavy sweatshirt. The message brightened his mood as it turned out that the lady had also slept in this morning and would meet him at 09:30 instead, if that would be all right. "Perfect." Mac mumbled into the phone just before he slipped it back into its cradle.

"What's perfect?" Methos muttered, emerging from the cocoon of blankets. He looked blearily at Mac, then squeezed his eyes shut against the morning sunlight as he sat up, rubbing at his hair.

Mac grinned, pulling on his robe. "I have a breakfast date with Sophia then we're going to do the mountain. Want to come along?"

Methos shook his head, "No, you can 'do' the mountain alone. I'm going to order breakfast in, soak in the Jacuzzi and catch up on my reading." He looked at the mess of the bed covers and frowned.

"Suit yourself," Mac answered. "Is the brunette joining you?" He started toward the bathroom.

"No, actually, I think Domina is part of your ski party today."

Mac hesitated at that. Somehow he hadn't considered that the ski group today would include more than Sophia, but he reasoned it must be all three ladies. He turned. "Sure you don't want to join us, Methos? I mean, if Domina is coming--?"

Methos reached for his robe. "It's okay, Mac. There's nothing between us. I'll be fine here. Go have fun."

While he showered, Mac found himself wishing Methos would join him in the skiing. He didn't like leaving him behind when he'd invited him along. Of course, he'd known that Methos didn't want to play in the snow, but he'd hoped he'd change his mind once he got here.

By the time Mac was showered and dressed, Methos had ordered his breakfast and was settled into the sofa with a book. Shaking his head, Mac tried one more time. "You know some fresh air wouldn't hurt you any, Methos. Look, if you don't know how to ski, there are instructors and you can go down one of the smaller slopes."

Methos looked up, annoyed. "I didn't say I couldn't ski. I said I don't like it. Besides the last ski trip I went on ended in disaster."

"Avalanche?" Mac immediately thought of the worst possibility.

"Close to. It was... 1902, I think. Yes, I'm sure. I'd gone to the Rockies with some friends... the weather was terrible. Turned

into a blizzard that snowed six of us in for eight days in a small cabin with an inadequate supply of food, frozen pipes and not enough heat. It was not something I'd like to repeat."

"You are hopeless," Mac muttered. "At least get out of the room for a bit." Grabbing his ski jacket, he bounded out the door. Methos barely raised his eyes as the Scot left the room.

December 31st , 1999 - 03:30 p.m.

Methos settled back in the comfortable seat of the lodge's shuttle and closed his eyes. He'd spent several hours in the village of Cigny, but it had been tiring shuffling through the snow. At least MacLeod couldn't complain that he didn't get out into the fresh air. He'd had plenty of it for one day and it was all cold.

The outing had been enjoyable enough, even though the snow was nearly knee high in most places. He had enjoyed the quaint look of the town, the centuries past façade that hid the modern stores. Occasionally he'd even stepped into a shop that really was old-fashioned, like the clock shop he'd discovered that featured hand-made wooden clocks, the kind that were getting harder to find. And there was the delightful bakery where he'd had a hot pie for lunch.

He'd also picked up the latest news and weather. The recent storms had dumped nearly ten feet of new snow in the area and there were several areas that could become avalanches. The resort had shut down half of their runs due to dangerous conditions. Worse, the weather predictions were not exactly rosy. More storms could be heading their way before the weekend was over.

As the shuttle crunched along in the snow, his bag shifted against his leg, tipping. Methos leaned forward to adjust it. They were his purchases from the excursion, proof that he hadn't spent the day curled up on a sofa in the lodge. He'd picked up a bottle of Mumm's champagne and some assorted snacks along with a package of the millennium crackers that all the stores were selling for more than they were worth. But they were festive-looking with their silver and gold wrappers and would add a bit to the celebration.

All a bunch of hype, Methos thought a bit sourly. It's not enough to make a big deal of the date change from one year to the next, but people have to go overboard for a calendar event that is essentially inaccurate. He couldn't even distinguish the change over in the first three millennia he'd experienced and the fourth one was filled with doomsayers who were sure the world was about to end. This one had its share of those

types as well and with more fuel to give it credence in the discoveries of the century. Not to mention the addition of television specials trying to scare everyone with the predicted end of the world. In this day and age, any crackpot with a theory could get on the national news.

As Methos glanced ahead, he noted the gathering clouds over the mountain peaks. The sun may be shining on them now, but it didn't look likely to last long. Great, he grouched. With his luck, they'd probably get snowed in or buried in an avalanche. At least they had a comfortable room at the lodge, so long as they had hot and cold running water.

The lodge was dead ahead now and within five more minutes, the shuttle was parked at the front. As he got out, Methos spared a glance toward the ski run. It was still busy with at least a hundred skiers on it at any given moment. But the dark clouds were looming over the taller peaks and he predicted that the storm would be here before the New Year was. He hadn't noticed Mac on the slopes and he hoped that the Highlander had come to his senses and was in their room or the bar in the lodge.

A quick scan of the lounge and bar told Methos that his friend wasn't there. Their own suite was neatly made up with no

indication that anyone had been in it since the maid had left. So, Mac was still on the mountain. Returning downstairs, Methos ordered a hot buttered rum and settled into one of the chairs facing the slopes where he could possibly spot MacLeod.

Time crawled by as he waited but as the day began to fade, Methos' concern grew. Finally, he went back upstairs for his coat and went outside to check the area for Mac. Most of the skiers were down already and there would be no after dark skiing the lift operator informed him when he asked if people were still going up.

December 31st, 1999 - 4:48 p.m.

So, here he was on a lift to the top of the mountain where the only way down would be on skis and it was nearly dark. *MacLeod better be in trouble*, Methos thought angrily.

"You're the last," the resort employee at the top informed him as he climbed awkwardly out of the chair lift, fighting to keep his skis going forward. "You barely have enough light to make the run down. I suggest you take the easy slope. Fewer obstacles on it." He pointed toward the run on the far right.

Methos looked the designated direction, then turned back. "How is that one after dark?"

"None of them are really good unless the lights are on, sir. We have minimal lighting if we're not allowing night runs. But it's unsafe and there's a storm coming. You need to get down."

Nodding, Methos said, "I appreciate that. Unfortunately, I'm looking for someone who hasn't come down yet. So which is the best for after dark?"

"Someone else is up here?" the man questioned. "I haven't seen anyone for a while. What does your friend look like?"

"A little taller than me, dark hair, brown eyes, broad shoulders, movie star looks. He was with several ladies."

"Ah, yes," the operator said, a knowing look on his face. "He had gone down each of the runs at least once today. I saw him with the women, then he left them. I recall him going that way." He pointed toward a group of trees that were nearly buried in the snow. "He went to speak to someone I believe. Now that you mention it, I just assumed he had gone down. Do you think he's in trouble? Should I sound an alarm?"

Methos shook his head. "No, not yet. If I'm not back by morning, then you might start looking for us."

"Morning? That may be too late, sir!" The man almost choked on the words.

"It's okay. I know how to survive and so does my friend. He may just be lost."

With that, Methos adjusted the ski hat over his face and forced the downhill skis to act like cross-country ones as he pushed toward the trees. It took him several minutes to find the tracks of Mac's skis -- or at least what he hoped were Mac's skis. They mingled with another three or four sets in the general area, but then two sets of tracks had moved away from the area, back toward a broad plain of snow before another line of trees and the rise of the mountain to a stark peak.

"Just great," Methos mumbled. He had a really bad feeling about this. If Mac had met someone he knew, why had they taken off to a private area? It seemed more likely that they had gone to settle a challenge, looking for a place away from public eyes.

Resigned to an unpleasant trek, Methos followed the tracks. As it grew darker, he pulled out his electric torch and flashed it over the snow, noting the distinct pattern of the skis in the otherwise unblemished surface. With the dense clouds overhead, he had no help from natural lighting, not that the moon would have helped. It had passed full on the winter solstice and was only a slim crescent now. The trail led, of course, directly to the trees and into them. It became harder to follow as they wove through the forest. The heavy snow made movement a struggle and Methos was breathing hard after the mile or so he'd already trekked.

*What are you going to do?* he asked himself for about the fifth time since he'd started on this journey. Logic told him that if Mac had gone off with this person two hours earlier and it was another Immortal, then the confrontation was over. The Highlander was either alive and heading back or dead. If he was alive, then this whole trip was unnecessary and he'd just dragged himself up a mountain and across a snow-covered meadow for nothing. If Mac was dead -- He didn't want to consider the possibility, but he needed to know. It was also possible Mac was lost or in need of help. *One thing is certain,* he thought. *The bloody Scot had better be in some kind of trouble or I am going to be majorly pissed!*

December 31st, 1999 - 6:50 p.m.

Feeling chilled and more anxious than ever, Methos struggled to continue following the trail through the trees. Visions of Mac without a head kept running through his mind and were entirely too vivid. He felt the other Immortal before he spotted the clearing ahead. An A-framed cabin sat in the middle radiating warmth from the glow in the windows to the smoke coming out of the chimney. Methos paused long enough to pull his sword and ease forward toward the structure. He took hope from the calmness of the area and the lack of damage to the trees or the cabin. If there had been a Quickenings, it wasn't here. Still, his mouth felt a bit dry as he reached the edge of the clearing.

The cabin door opened and a bundled-up person stepped out. A flash of light from the interior glistened off the metal object in the left hand... a sword. *Not MacLeod*, Methos recognized instantly. *Too small to be the Highlander.*

Moving closer, Methos called out, "I'm looking for Duncan MacLeod."

"Who wants him?" a woman's voice yelled back, her sword coming up as if to challenge.

Before Methos could answer, Mac appeared in the door way behind her. He caught her arm, speaking to her, then he stepped through the door and waved Methos forward.

Relief spread through Methos and he let out a breath he hadn't realized he was holding. Mac was safe. "I'm gonna kill him," he mumbled as he secured his sword and made his way to the cabin.

Mac waited, grinning broadly. "Adam! What are you doing here?"

"In case you hadn't noticed, it's after dark, Mac. The lifts are closing... I'm down there not knowing what happened to you and I hear you've gone off with someone. What the hell do you think I'm doing here?!" All the anger and worry burst out at once. "I was afraid someone had challenged you. I thought you might be dead."

Mac's face softened. "Aw, you were worried about me."

Irritably, Methos frowned and shot back, "Hell, yes. I don't want to have to pay the lodge bill!"

Laughing, Mac grabbed his arm. "Come on in and get warm. This is an old friend, Inge. Inge, meet Adam."

The woman smiled, offered her hand. "Sorry about the sword. Can't be too careful, you know."

With effort, Methos put on a cordial face and accepted the woman's hospitality and the hot coffee she thrust into his hands. Glancing around the small cabin, he selected a hardwood chair and sat down. The place was little more than a one room retreat with an over-sized single bed, an old-fashioned wood stove that provided heat as well as cooking, a small table and two hardwood chairs. Methos could only assume the bathroom was outside. Charming.

"So how did you two meet?" he asked his hostess. It seemed the polite thing to do although at the moment, he was more interested in getting back down the mountain.

"The First World War," Mac answered as the woman removed her coat and hat and flopped onto the bed. Her long blonde hair cascaded onto her shoulders and she was very pretty.

An old friend, indeed, Methos thought. Mac seemed to have an unlimited number of old friends. But then, he hadn't lost

most of his past to other Immortal's swords... yet. He listened patiently as Inge and Mac related their history, then glanced at his watch. "This is all very interesting, Mac, but it's almost eight and we've got a hill to get down. I, for one, am kind of hungry."

"You're welcome to stay the night. I can warm up a stew." Inge offered enthusiastically.

Methos pointedly gazed around the room again. *Floor space in a cold cabin? I think not.* Out loud he said, "A very gracious offer, but there's a comfortable, and expensive, bed and a thick steak waiting for me at the lodge. I can find my way back down if you want to stay, Mac."

Mac cast a quick look at Inge, then got to his feet. "No, Adam, you're right. We have plans for the evening... a big party, Inge. Say, why don't you come down with us? It'll be fun and we have plenty of room in our suite."

Methos shot a sharp look his way. He's offering our bed? Oh, great, I'll end up on the sofa! It was a sure bet the woman wouldn't!

"No, thanks, Duncan, but no. I am still the hermit, you know. I prefer to spend the New Year's here in the cabin... away from all the craziness. It was good to see you again. And to meet you, Adam."

Methos breathed a sigh of relief and zipped his jacket up again, ready to head back. Mac motioned for him to go on. "I'll be out in a minute, Adam."

Methos nodded, thanked Inge for the coffee and stepped back out into the winter night. It would be a little more difficult getting back. The air seemed a bit warmer to him, which was not necessarily a good sign. Warming up to snow. He'd heard it before and it did seem to be true. The heavy clouds held heat in, warming the valley. He was anxious to get back before the snow started.

True to his word, Mac joined him a few minutes later and buckled his skis back on. He let Methos take the lead, but followed closely behind.

December 31st, 1999 - 09:21 p.m.

The two men had finally made it through the trees and were almost across the broad meadow before the snow started.

Methos had been keeping a lead of about five yards, but now he halted, waiting for Mac to catch up. He motioned to the run on the far right, a barely visible slope at the moment.

"That one's the easiest way down," he told Mac.

Mac pointed to the nearest one on the left, "But this one is quicker."

"Fine. You would know best, wouldn't you? Just so long as we get down in one piece." Methos' voice carried the annoyance he'd felt for the past few hours.

"We'll be fine," Mac said mildly. "What's bothering you?"

"What do you think? In spite of what I wanted, I ended up on New Year's Eve traipsing across a mountain after you!"

"I didn't ask you to come after me," Mac protested.

"No. Maybe I'm angry with myself for being stupid enough to do this."

Surprised, Mac peered at him. "Methos, I'm glad to know you'd still come if I were in trouble. Thank you."

"Save your thanks, MacLeod. Let's just go. I don't want to be caught in a full storm up here." He worked his way to the slope and gazed down at the barely visible lights of the lodge.

Mac edged past him, then plunged down the slope. Reluctant to let the Scot out of his sight, Methos shoved off behind him. The snow was coming down harder, making it difficult to see. Cursing, Methos, struggled to stay upright and follow Mac. Abruptly, the red of Mac's jacket dipped and went into the snow. Barely managing to stop, he backtracked to the last place he saw Mac.

"MacLeod? You all right? Mac?"

"Over here," Mac's voice came from a little behind him.

Relieved, Methos made his way over to him and began helping him get back to his feet. "Hit a bump and lost it," Mac added. "Think I lost a ski."

They spent the next few minutes looking for the ski, finally found it and Mac got it back on his boot. As they started down again, they took it slower, just concentrating on getting to the bottom with no more mishaps.

December 31st, 1999 - 10:18 p.m.

Bursting through the door of the lodge, Methos and MacLeod looked like a pair of snowmen. Most of the already partying crowd paused and gawked curiously at them, but resumed their festivities, taking the late-arriving pair in stride. Sophia broke away from the party and caught up with them at the staircase.

"Duncan, are you all right? What happened?" She moved to hug him, but stopped as she realized he was completely soaked under the snow cover.

"We had a... little...tr-trouble," Mac answered through chattering teeth. "Ga-go back ...to the p-party. I'll be de-down before mu-midnight."

Methos tugged at his arm. The old man was equally as chilled as Mac, his blue jeans dripping wet, and he just wanted to get warm. Mac nodded and followed him upstairs.

As soon as Methos made it through the door, he headed for the shower, turning it on and savoring the warmth of the room. Mac slammed the door behind him and staggered

toward the bedroom. Turning, Methos caught Mac's puppy-dog look. He looked like he was a touch blue from the cold.

"Get in the shower, Mac," Methos ordered, as he began tugging at the Scot's wet clothes. Mac held his arms out, letting Methos remove his jacket and sweat shirt. Gratefully, he divested himself of the rest of his clothes in the bathroom and stepped into the hot water.

While MacLeod showered, Methos stripped off his own wet clothing, pulling on a heavy robe. He reached for the phone and ordered food, not the steak he'd hoped for, but the sandwiches the lodge offered late night, a bottle of wine and a pot of coffee. "Make sure it's hot," Methos added as he hung up and contemplated the Jacuzzi. By the time Mac emerged from the bathroom, he had almost ceased to shiver. But he hurried into the shower himself, anxious for warmth.

As the water poured over him, Methos felt life return to his nearly frozen body and leaned against the wall to let the heat soak in. Mac had said "thanks" he realized, thinking about it in wonder. After all this time, the Highlander actually acknowledged that he'd done something that deserved the statement. Maybe there was some truth to the end of the world rumors as well.

When Methos emerged from the bathroom, still wrapped in the heavy robe, he found MacLeod already dressed in a pair of off-white slacks and a dark blue shirt. Even better, the food had arrived. Mac poured a coffee for Methos and they sat to enjoy the sandwiches. Though they said little as they ate, there was a warm camaraderie between them.

Dec. 31st, 1999 - 11:07 p.m.

Feeling toasty warm and content, Duncan lounged on the bed and idly gazed through the bathroom door as Methos finished getting ready for the party. As the older Immortal shaved, covering his face in a white beard of foam, MacLeod tried to envision what it would look like in the same dark brown shade as Methos' hair. Would it add an illusion of age to Methos' young face, even hint that he was something more than a mid-twenties kid?

Leaning forward, Methos splashed water on his face, droplets of it clinging to his eyelashes like tiny beads of dew. For a moment, Mac imagined him waking in a green meadow on a fall morning with dew lightly coating his face and hair. Methos reached for his shirt, a dark green silk, and pulled it on, carefully tucking it into the black slacks he wore. His body was nicely balanced, slender and, he had to admit, sexy. At least, girls would think so. Why didn't Methos date more? He hadn't really thought about it until then, but it seemed like Methos didn't often go out. Of course, when he fell for a woman the way he did for Alexa, then maybe it was better he didn't get too involved with the ladies.

"I'd like to undress you," Mac said suddenly, the thought coming from nowhere.

Surprised, Methos turned to face him. "What?"

"You heard me."

"Yes, I heard. I just don't quite believe what I heard. Are you serious?" Methos stepped into the doorway between the bath and the bedroom. With the back lighting, he was outlined in a soft glow that made him incredibly attractive.

Mac wet his lips, suddenly filled with a desire to touch the other man, to feel that ancient skin pressed close to his. "Yes, I'm serious. Is it a displeasing thought?"

Methos moved closer, stopping just before the end of the bed. "Not displeasing. Unexpected."

Mac reached for him, sitting up to take Methos' hand and pull him closer. The older man didn't resist, letting Mac reel him in, a slight smile tugging at his lips. *Inviting lips*, Mac thought, really seeing them for the first time. *Finely shaped and just right to kiss.*

He caught Methos' belt, sliding his fingers behind it and pulled him sharply to him, bringing his body in so he could bury his face against Methos' midriff. He undid the button at his friend's stomach, revealing pale flesh beneath. Shoving the material aside with his tongue, he planted his mouth on the warm flesh. His hand slipped to the belt buckle, working it loose, then he pulled the green shirt free of the slacks and slid his hands up underneath the shirt to roam up the firmly muscled torso.

Mac felt the stomach muscles tense and release under his fingers. Flesh as silky as the shirt. He looked up to see Methos' face. The old Immortal's eyes were closed, dark lashes fluttering lightly against his lower lids and mouth parted so slightly, as if in invitation. Slipping his hands back down to the waistband, Mac caught the belt loops and pulled Methos forward and down, forcing him to bend toward him. As he came within an inch, Mac cupped his hand along the long jaw line, guiding Methos' mouth to his.

The kiss was sweet, more luscious than he could have thought possible. Catching his breath, he urged Methos down beside him as he released the top two buttons and kissed him again. He slid Methos' shirt over his head, letting it drop to the floor. Easing Methos down on the bed next to him, he danced his

fingers lightly up his chest, teasing him with little butterfly touches that tickled slightly. Methos sighed under his touch and Mac breathed a little harder, amazed by all the desire he felt...

"Mac?" Methos' voice was sharp, not the sultry sound it had been. "You awake?"

MacLeod opened his eyes to see Methos standing next to the bed, looking sharp in the dark slacks and silk shirt with a gray v-necked sweater pulled over it.

"What?" Mac asked in surprise, disoriented by the transition. What had just happened?

"Looked like you were dozing. Wine got to you, huh?" Methos said with a grin. "C'mon. We've got less than ten minutes until midnight."

Mac sat up, his head clearing as he realized he'd been dreaming... about Methos... about *wanting* Methos. Where had *that* come from? He grabbed his sweater as he rolled off the bed and caught up with Methos at the door.

As they started out, Mac cupped a hand to his friend's shoulder... "Methos, before we go down... happy New Year, my friend."

Methos glanced back at him, an engaging smile on his face. "Same to you, Duncan."

With that, they started downstairs, together, to celebrate the first hour of the new century.

The End

## ***Flight to Barbados***

***By Lillian Wolfe***

This is in response to Ith's "Dr. Clifford as Methos Challenge." It's been a while since I wrote any tales so this is a bit rough and maybe not 100% accurate on British terms. Dr. Clifford, Camilla and Maddy belong to the BBC, Methos, Joe and Duncan MacLeod belong to Davis-Panzer. This is in fun and not meant to infringe on any copyrights. Not making one thin dime with it, just doing a little speculating.

Rated PG or R for sexual situation.

In November, Daniel Clifford arrived at Holby City, scalpels spinning and raring to go. But we soon learned that there was a woman in his past and being an inquiring mind, I just had to wonder about the almost

Mrs. Clifford and what had happened to cause Daniel to stand her up at the altar.

Hope you enjoy it.

LW – Feb. 28, 2007

**Middlesex                      Hospital,                      October                      2006**

With a quick, precise move, Daniel Clifford whipped out the damaged spleen of a 15 year old patient, a car accident victim who was on the edge. But she'd come through fine, all her vitals were good and it looked like a successful operation. Dan glanced over at Camilla, his surgical nurse and gave her a quick smile. "That's it for this. Another winner and the last one for the next few weeks."

Dark eyes over the surgical mask sparked with a gleam to answer him. "For both of us," the lithe, lovely brunette answered.

Dan turned to his SHO, "She's all yours, Maddy. Talk to

her parents, will you, please?”

The shorter brunette nodded, taking over in the operating room as Dan exited. Out of the corner of his eye, Dan saw Camilla casting a pleased, almost smug look at the SHO. “One more day and Dan and I will be on our way. No hard feelings, Maddy?”

He didn't wait for the response but he knew it was fine. Maddy Young was cool with the upcoming wedding, even if Camilla wasn't her favourite person. He'd never had more than a good friendship with her. Maddy liked to play around too much. He had some paperwork to finish, then he was off for the next four weeks. Life was pretty darn good, he reflected.

Millie caught up with him a few moments later, running her hand along his arm in that possessive way she had and as he turned, her hand moved up to caress his jaw. Just the light contact ignited his desire and he turned into her touch, pulling her face into his hands for a deep, loving kiss. Her response was instantaneous. And just like that, he was burning with his need for this woman who'd fired his life in the last the last few months. He

pulled away, feeling breathless, “It our last day of freedom, Millie. And I want you...” He urged her back toward the wall.

She pushed him back, hissing under her breath, “Daniel... Not now. Not here.”

“Millie...” As his objection started, she slipped under his arm and down the hallway. Sighing, Dan turned and followed her. Might as well get out of the scrubs and get the paperwork done. But Millie made a turn to right to a side hallway and cast a quick glance behind her at Dan, then she slipped into the ladies’ room. Dan paused, waiting, and a few moments later, Millie pushed the door open and peeked out.

Glancing casually around, Dan followed, slipping into the loo behind Millie. In moments, he was wrapping his arms around her and doing his best to examine her tonsils with his tongue. But Millie was just as eager to taste him. Hands slid under his scrubs top, brushing against his bare skin and sliding lightly over his muscles. He pushed her back against the door, his mouth working against her throat as his hands lifted her scrub top. Her hands were in his hair, long fingers rubbing through the silkiness of it

as his fingers pulled at the drawstring on her pants.

Fingers touched, lips touched, eyelashes brushed against cheeks, and the two lovers burned to unite. Clothes falling to the tiled floor, Dan's arms wrapped around Millie and her legs wrapped around him. Panting, gasping, struggling for position as they still shoved against the door, "Now! God, now!" Millie hissed in his ear and that was all he needed, even as he felt an unexpected thrust as someone pushed against the door and Millie tensed. Trying to stifle sound, groans and gasps, they climaxed as a woman's voice on the other side complained loudly to someone else that the door seemed to be stuck.

Dan held Millie tightly, both holding their breath until it sounded like the person had walked away, then they both exhaled and gasped for air. Dan tilted his head back, laughing softly, exhilarated. Pushing them apart, Millie's hands ran down his sweaty chest as she bent to reach her clothes. Reluctantly, he stepped back, finding his own scrubs and began pulling them on. With a tilt of her head and amused eyes, Millie urged him to step further into the bathroom so she could check the hall outside. Within a few minutes, they were on their way to the lockers to

clean up and change clothes.

A few hours later, Daniel shook hands with a cousin of Camilla's and politely thanked her parents for the lovely wedding rehearsal dinner. Her mother hugged him affectionately, clearly pleased to welcome the handsome Dr. Clifford to their family. Such an elegant man, she had commented to her husband a little earlier, charming and with fine taste. Dan had merely given her an almost shy smile, amused in so many ways with that observation.

He smiled now as he waited for Millie to say good night to her bridesmaids. He was driving her to her parents, then he would go on to a bachelor party that the lads at the hospital had insisted on. But his mind was on the development of this persona.

Daniel Clifford was, indeed, an elegant man. He was well educated, well dressed, had impeccable manners, in spite of a somewhat crisp sense of humor. He was charming and ladies found his quick wit and humour fun and sexy. He had developed his sexist attitude during his years as an intern as he discovered that several of his prettier colleagues didn't apply their knowledge and skills to the extent they could and they responded better to

challenging teasing rather than encouraging words. And more than ever he found that people in general needed to be pushed. In fact, he'd complained to Joe Dawson about the lack of motivation in people these days and how they expected everything to be handed to them.

Joe had snorted. “**You** are complaining? One of the laziest Immortals I've ever seen thinks that people aren't motivated. Ain't that a pisser?”

“Yeah, Joe. Very funny, but it's true. And in fact, I am very motivated at the moment and enjoying it.” Methos snarled back. “Where an Immortal can take time off for a decade or so, mortals can't. And if you are going to work at a job, you should do what you're getting paid for.”

While Joe found it amusing, he had agreed with the oldest Immortal. He'd been having troubles with a new barman who seemed to find chatting to customers more fun than other bar duties and in fact had fired the man the night before, so was looking for new help himself. Still, even Joe was a having a little trouble with Methos' enthusiasm for the medical profession again and this sudden overachiever that was Dan Clifford. And he about choked when Methos told him he'd taken to playing golf.

“It’s not like I never picked up a club before, Joe,” Methos had complained.

“Uh-huh. In the last couple of centuries?”

“Well, no,” he’d admitted. “But I used to play quite often when I was in Scotland in the mid-1700’s. The game hasn’t changed that much.”

“Yeah, you’re right. I just never pictured your lazy bones out on a golf course. But then, I never really expected you to work a real job again. Let’s face it, researcher and Watcher was an easy gig compared to medical practice. But I gotta wonder, why England? Why not somewhere in the US, like Hawaii?”

“I think you know, Joe,” Methos had answered softly.

“...darling?” A woman’s voice and a light touch on his arm. Dan blinked and smiled at Camilla. “You were drifting,” she accused.

“A little,” he admitted, “...thinking about the next few weeks together.” He caught her arm and led her down

the path to the car that was already waiting for them.

As they neared Camilla's family home, she reached across and laid her hand first on the top of Dan's as he started to shift, then slid it across to his knee. "You and Barbados for three weeks. I can't believe it's all starting tomorrow."

He pulled the car to the curb at the park near the house. It was an enclosed park, locked now, but it was one he and Camilla had gone to a couple of times for a romantic picnic on a warm day. Her hand moved up his thigh.

"This is our last night as singles, as free wheeling lov--"

Her mouth locked on his in a deep kiss. "Don't say anything else," she whispered. And he didn't. He was much too busy with other things.

Four and a half hours later, Dan pulled the car into the driveway of his middle class house. He sat in the driveway, still buzzed from a late night of drinking with the guys, and reflected on what he was doing in just about twelve hours. Wife number seventy, to be exact. Not that Camilla knew that or even had a clue that he'd ever been married. He hadn't been really seriously involved with

anyone since Alexa ten years earlier, although he'd gotten close twice before. And he wasn't really sure why he'd let Millie maneuver him into marriage this time, except he liked her a lot and she was a terrifically fun sexual partner, something a really old man could appreciate.

Sooner or later, he would have to tell Camilla what he was, but maybe they could divorce before it became really obvious that he wasn't aging and he wouldn't have to tell her anything. He brightened a bit at that thought. And now, he and his new wife would be off on a long honeymoon... Well, not long by the DeValicort's standard, but pretty long for most newlyweds. He opened the car door, reached for his coat and started toward the entrance, thoughts still on the white beaches and silky sheets ahead when he froze in his tracks.

"Shit," he breathed softly as the familiar sensation of another Immortal touched him. He glanced around for anyone, then carefully reached under the driver's seat for the cloth-wrapped shape he kept there. Quickly unwrapping his sword, Methos crouched low and cautiously approached the house.

Disappointment filled him as the sensation increased as

he got closer, confirming what he had hoped wasn't true... that the other Immortal was in his house. This was definitely bad. While he had practiced now and then with his sword, most of his swings lately had been with a golf club. Damn, damn, damn! He shifted to use the bushes for cover and began working his way toward a window. Most of all he wanted to get the solid brick of the house against his back until he knew who he was facing.

He'd just made it to the safety of his garden, slipping back against the trellis, and scrunched down a little lower to ease to the window, when the front door opened, a head popped out and a deep voice stopped him in his tracks. "Methos, it's MacLeod."

He let the sword drop toward the ground as the tension went out of his body. Catching his breath, he straightened. "Forget how to use a phone, MacLeod?"

Mac stood on the porch, staring at him. "I wanted to talk to you in person. You've got a problem." He turned and stepped back inside, expecting Methos to follow.

*I have a problem? Yeah, you,* Methos thought in annoyance. *Why was the man here now? After ten years of practically nothing, he suddenly shows up on the doorstep when you're about to get married? If Joe told him...* Methos bit his lip in anger, then strode through the door with that chip still on his shoulder, set his coat on the chair and turned to face Duncan MacLeod of the Clan MacLeod.

He looked good. Hair still short, still in good shape and as handsome as ever. He sat now, sipping Dan Clifford's brandy and smoking one of the Cuban cigars. Ten years and nothing had changed that much. Not in outward appearance, Methos amended, but a lot had changed in the friendship they'd had. After the near-death situation with O'Roarke, they had all gone their own ways. Too much danger, Mac had said, especially for Joe. He'd come too close to losing both Joe and Amanda and he wasn't going to risk them again. His decision... Wasn't it always his decision? Methos thought bitterly.

For as much as he was looking at Mac, the Highlander was also studying him. What did he see? Longer hair than when he'd last seen him, about the same weight,

better dressed. A whole new me...

“Nice suit,” Mac commented. “Don’t think I’ve ever seen you in one.”

Methos crossed to the sideboard and poured a splash of whiskey into a tumbler, then sat on the sofa at an angle to him. He sipped the amber liquid, replacing the amount that had burned out in that burst of adrenaline.

“So, you’re Dr. Clifford now, eh? Back to being a physician. Why, Methos?”

“Why not? It’s a good profession and I’m good at it. Heaven knows, I’ve got enough degrees in medicine. It wasn’t that hard to catch up on the new stuff and I probably know my way around the insides of people better than anyone else. And it’s a better way to slice them than some of my previous professions.”

Mac nodded. “I have to agree with that.”

“What’s this about, MacLeod? You didn’t cross the Channel just to have a brandy and a cigar. So what’s the

problem?”

“Someone’s hunting you.”

Methos stared. That was it? Just “someone’s hunting you?” After a few moments of silence, he muttered, “That’s it? You came here to tell me that? You could have emailed or phoned that in. Or did you lead him here?” The annoyance was evident in his voice. Crap, he didn’t need to deal with a hunter right now. Too damn many people knew about Methos these days.

“No, I didn’t lead him here!” Mac snapped back. “Actually, I followed him here.”

That got the old man’s attention. His eyes went wide. “Here?! My house?”

“No, not your house. To London. I think someone may have told him you’re in London.”

“Wait a minute,” he protested, shaking his head. “I’m not getting this. How did you know he’d be here? Where did you--?”

“I followed him from Paris. He was looking for you there. Let me start at the beginning.”

“Please do,” he muttered, getting up to refill his glass. On second thought, he carted the whole bottle to the coffee table, and sat down heavily, giving MacLeod his full attention.

“About a month ago, a friend stopped by my place in Brussels. While we were catching up on things, he asked me if I knew anything about Methos. I told him I knew of the legend, but not much else and asked what it was about. He told me there were rumors of the oldest Immortal still being alive and in Europe. Someone in Paris had been looking for him, offering money for information. Good money, fifty thousand Euros if anyone could give him information on where to find Methos.” Mac paused, refilled his glass with whiskey.

“Did you get a name?” Methos asked hoarsely, a foreboding twisting his guts. Life had been quiet, a regular human life with no real worries of someone coming after him. He had a good profession, had worked hard to make it to general surgical consult, and he was a top surgeon, respected by his peers. And he liked it! He’d

gotten complacent, and comfortable, and he wasn't ready to let it go now. Damn! He glared at Mac as if it was his fault that this had happened.

Shaking his head, Mac pulled out his cell phone and said, "No, but I found him in Paris at a club in Pigalle. Do you recognize him?" He flipped open the phone, punched a button and handed it to Methos.

The image was dark, not a lot of light in clubs, but it was clear enough to see the features. A bronzed-looking man with very short black hair and dark eyes, a full beard and moustache,. The face was angular, with a sharp, pointed chin accentuated by the beard. His nose was long and narrow, and tipped with a nose ring.

"Charming," Methos muttered, but he didn't recognize him. Still there was something familiar. He shook his head as he entered his email address and sent the photo to his account.

"Well, if it isn't your past hunting you, it could be a head hunter," Mac said taking the phone back.

"Like that's any more reassuring," Methos grumbled.

“Except that maybe he doesn’t know what I look like.”

“That’s possible. Any photos of you on the Internet? Maybe with the hospital staff... Or with a paper you’ve published. You are publishing, aren’t you?”

“Clifford is, yeah. But I haven’t allowed any photos with the articles and I insist that no photos of me be put on the staff roster at hospital. I’ve been careful, Mac.” And he had been. He wouldn’t even let Camilla add his photo to the wedding announcement on the off chance someone from his past might recognize him.

“Then you’d better be even more careful,” Mac advised, getting to his feet. Methos followed him to the door, ready to lock and bolt it behind him. Mac turned, gave him one of those looks that would have made putty out of him a dozen years ago. “You take it easy, Methos. I don’t want to lose you.”

“Makes two of us,” he answered a bit more glibly than he felt.

“Oh, and someone named Millie called to remind you to bring your passport tomorrow. Maybe you ought to

reconsider that.” On that final piece of advice, Mac stepped outside leaving the oldest Immortal pondering just how much of his business the Highlander did know.

He slammed the bolt on the door, then methodically checked the back door, the garden door and the cellar door. Next he started in on all the windows. Then he sat down at his computer and pulled the photo up again, adjusting the lightness and contrast and staring at it, trying to figure out what it was that made the face seem familiar. If he removed the beard...

He shook his head. No, it wouldn't come. He turned off the computer, and headed for his bed, pausing to set the alarm clock. It was nearly 4:30 and he needed to be up and getting ready by noon. But sleep didn't come easily. Every noise, every tree branch brushing against the window brought him fully awake.

By 10:30, he gave up and headed for the shower. As he finished packing the last few items in his suitcase, he glanced over at his sword. Pack it for his honeymoon? It seemed almost nuts to him. For the past decade he hadn't needed the sword and he'd quit carrying it, putting it in his car. He picked it up, bouncing its weight in his

hand and considering the necessity of carrying it with him. He couldn't take it on the plane; it would need to be checked in luggage and there were explanations that go along with that and how do you explain you need to take a 13th century sword on holiday along with your golf clubs? And what was he going to tell Camilla? Reluctantly, he slipped the sword back into its case and put it in the closet.

As he loaded his suitcase and golf clubs in the car, he hesitated and wondered if a special club could be made with a sharpened edge, one that could take someone's head if necessary. He almost smiled at the image of swinging a golf club like his sword. Actually, he had to break some of the sword swing in his golf game and he was still having little problems with it.

One final check, patting his jacket to make sure he had the plane tickets, his passport, his wallet, and oh, yes, the wedding ring. All set, yet as a car passed, slowing a little as it went by, he found his eyes coming up to watch, trying hard to feel if there was another Immortal. The car turned at the corner and he let out the breath that he hadn't realized he was holding. Then he took a deep breath, put Methos to the back of his mind and let Dan

Clifford get into the car.

It wasn't that easy.

*Maybe you ought to reconsider that.*

MacLeod's voice was there in his mind, forcing him to think about what he didn't want to consider. Someone was hunting him. Maybe someone he knew or maybe not. The fact was that other Immortals knew Methos was no longer a myth and no matter what he called himself, his was still that coveted head. Abruptly, Methos pulled the car to the side of the road and closed his eyes. Damnit, Mac was right. He couldn't do this. He couldn't pull Camilla into this, couldn't subject her to the danger that being his wife could entail.

He pulled out his phone. How could he tell her? What would he tell her? She would be at the church in about 30 minutes, ready to become Mrs. Clifford; the wife of someone who didn't really exist. No, it wasn't fair. If he couldn't tell her the whole truth, it wasn't right to bring her into a lie. He pressed the speed dial number and waited, his mind already making alternate plans to leave town alone. If he could disappear for a few weeks, then

move to another city, it would be likely the head hunter wouldn't find him, or at least he would have bought more time.

The voice that answered wasn't Camilla but her mother. His bride was getting ready and no, he couldn't speak to her. It was bad luck, he could talk to her soon enough, her mother informed him. "Right," he agreed softly, breaking the connection. He turned the car and headed for an internet café near the hospital. He had time enough to start his exit plan before the flight to Barbados...

\*\*\*Finis\*\*\*