

The Red Mist

of

Endenmore



by

Danie Powers

The Red Mist of Endermore

**Copyright ©2008 Danie Powers/Powers Court
All Rights Reserved**

This book is protected under the copyright laws of the United States of America.

No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical including photocopying, recording or by any information storage and retrieval system without the express written consent of Danie Powers/Powers Court.

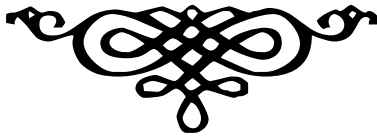
**Cover Art by: Thomas Stark ©2008 Powers Court
Cover Design by: Steve Murray
First printing: May, 2008
Printed in the United States of America**

All characters in this book are fictitious. Any resemblance to persons living or dead is purely coincidental.

**Danie Powers
c/o Powers Court
P.O. Box 465
East Alton, IL 62024
U.S.A.**



*Dedicated with love
to all of my loyal
and amazing fans.*



Merrick.....Lord Endenmore/Husband of Elsbeth

Elsbeth.....Lady Endenmore/Wife of Merrick

Ivar..... Lover of Elsbeth

Gunnora.....Wife of Cormac/Mother of Elsbeth and Dagmar

Cormac Village Chieftain.....Husband of Gunnora/Father of
Elsbeth and Dagmar

Cedric The Black.....Father of Merrick

Dagmar.....Son of Cormac and
Gunnora/Brother of Elsbeth

The Seer.....The Tarot Reader/Soothsayer

Mikela.....Head Maidservant

Shaysa.....Maidservant

Evanie.....Maidservant

Chapter I

The waves crash hypnotically on the eroding cliffs of his self-imposed immortality. Stoic and stony, he sits at the edge of the lush greenery of the all-encompassing forest. He sits and he waits for the end of an eternity of longing and regret. He sits and he waits for the return of his beloved Elsbeth, the only one who can ultimately free his spirit from this mournful and tempestuous spot. Elsbeth, the only one who may grant him pardon for his savage transgressions...

“Know you this, young one, certain things are not spoken of in polite society. However, since you so fervently this day have asked me to recount this legend and the hellish tragedy that befell Endenmore, I suppose I cannot in good conscience turn away your request. It is after all in the interest of history and since history does tend to repeat itself, especially when not studied consummately from generation to generation, I suppose it is my duty to relate to you this caustic tale of sorrow, this woeful legend that is The Red Mist of Endenmore. My only request is that you listen well and learn from it...”



“But we cannot just hand Elsbeth over to that man! He’s a beast below contempt!” It seemed as though Merrick, Lord of Endenmore, had taken a fancy to their youngest child, Elsbeth. Elsbeth’s parents were the elders of their clan, the warrior Chieftain known as Cormac and his cherished soul mate, Gunnora who was affectionately referred to as, ‘The Iron Rose’. Together they ruled side by side with compassion, wisdom and humility. Gunnora was strong willed, a weaver of spells and the keeper of the oracle. She could feel in her bones that this match would spell disaster and she sought to keep her daughter from a loveless, unhappy union.

“My love, I fear we have no choice.” Her father was a proud but aging warrior whose blue eyes had once shone with delight watching his people grow strong and stalwart. Now that twinkle had begun to diminish. Cormac’s blue eyes had faded to a more haggard gray of late, worrying when the next intrusion of Merrick’s men might escalate into a full-scale invasion. He’d grown weary of the disputes and fruitless uprisings against Merrick that had only resulted in bloodshed and heartache for what seemed like an endless eternity. Just once in his lifetime, he wished to see peace and contentment.

“She’ll be well cared for and he’s assured me she’ll be allowed to visit us as she pleases, I have his word.” Though the argument continued and though deep in both their hearts they had serious trepidations regarding the coupling, the end result was the same. Elsbeth was betrothed to Merrick to secure both her future and that of their clan.

Some called Elsbeth lucky to have won the favor of such an important and wealthy landowner, while others still called her ‘the virgin sacrifice’.

Merrick was a cold and emotionless man known for his ferocity in dealing with his foes and sometimes those thought to be his friends as well. His eyes were as piercing and black as that moment just before the dawn. Dark brown hair adorned with the warrior’s braid cascaded just past his broad shoulders. A light scar marred his left cheek where once he had faltered momentarily in battle, thus adding to his somewhat sinister appearance. He had a good solid build that bespoke of good breeding. Most of the ladies would refer to him as ‘ruggedly handsome’, but generally his disposition overrode that assessment very quickly. An impatient and oftentimes abusive man, both verbally and physically, Merrick was more feared than respected. His was a presence that could not and would not be ignored.

Elsbeth was young, strong and fiery with hair the color of an autumn sunset, a dark rich red that smoldered with golden highlights. She was voluptuous and curvy, yet firm and strong from the swordplay and other strenuous activities she and her older brother had engaged in. A bevy of freckles danced across the bridge of her nose where the sun had

repeatedly caressed her skin and her eyes were the color of two brilliant emeralds.

Merrick had first laid eyes upon her when she was but eight years old and he fifteen. His father, Cedric The Black, had occasion to bring him along on a routine inspection of his land and its borders. Elsbeth and her older brother, Dagmar, had wandered from their father's side during a hunting expedition. Cedric, his son Merrick, and their party stopped momentarily to watch the ragtag pair try their hand at falconry in a section of land deemed illegal for hunting by the common folk. The boy's falcon was nervous and restless. Dagmar fought to keep a steady grip on its talons, scolding it as it nervously flapped its wings, which occasionally struck Dagmar's face.

The girl however seemed to have a special rapport with the bird. Gently stroking the feathers of its breast, she seemed to coo reassuring words of praise and courage to the bird. In one swift motion she loosed the peregrine from her gloved fist. Out he soared with majestic beauty and grace. He flew briefly and spotting his prey, descended as rapidly as an arrow plummeting towards the earth. Elsbeth sprinted eagerly to the spot where her falcon now sat perched upon the stilled rabbit. He patiently awaited his mistress' command. Gingerly she replaced the falcon's hood, pulled something from her pocket as a reward for the raptor, picked up the rabbit by its ears and returned to the spot where she had left her brother.

"They're hunting on restricted land M'Lord," Cedric's headman was heard to say. "Yes, indeed, well...if such a spirited young creature as that should find herself at my very gates I doubt that I would quell her for killing a deer. Leave them be, there's no harm in a rabbit or two. A spirit such as hers need not be crushed over so small an infringement." At that he turned his horse and his men followed him in silent obedience.

What's this? His father turning a blind eye to a common girl's plundering? He'd seen his father stake men in the burning sun for pilfering apples off the trees on the fringe of their property several times in the past. This was a side of his father he'd never experienced before. Merrick turned to

view the pair one last time. He could have sworn he saw the girl raise her hand as a gesture of greeting. Her brother knowingly pulled her behind some thickened brush in a feeble attempt to conceal them both from view.

Merrick relived that same scene in his mind over and over for years to come. The young girl who behaved as what would have been appropriate for only males in his culture, somehow finding favor in the leaden heart of his surly father. Surely she must be someone extraordinary. After many times blissfully reliving the moment, the girl became his hopeless obsession.

Their paths had crossed again unexpectedly when Cedric and Cormac had met to discuss conditions after an uprising by his clan. Merrick had never understood why his father did not crush these rebellions once and for all, but these people seemed some necessary evil, especially at tax collection.

The dwelling of Cormac and Gunnora was crude by the standards that Merrick was accustomed to, but it was cozy, clean and very pleasant and inviting. A special warmth permeated the room. Logically it seemed to come from the glow of the fervent embers of the hearth, but it was more than that. He was convinced it was something magical that radiated between Cormac and his wife. She sat by his side with a steely gaze and there was an energy that seemed to flow back and forth between them, she spoke freely with a commanding presence. The women of his experience were never so bold as this. She spoke intelligently and didn't seem at all frivolous or preoccupied with her hair or clothing as the women he was accustomed to were. She had a certain loveliness about her, yet she didn't seem to feel the need to draw attention to it. Cormac would speak and she would finish his sentences and vice versa. Their interaction fascinated him. He longed to be a part of something so strong as their union.

Merrick's attention was soon disrupted by the arrival of two rambunctious youths. Elsbeth and her brother tore around the table, her infectious giggle adding to the warmth in the room. She quickly reached between her father and Lord Cedric and snatched an apple out of a wooden bowl