

ART ALIVE



Stranger

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stool, meeting the floor like a butterball that splatters. The lodge was completely silent now.

"You will do no more wrong in this place," rumbled the stranger from his lofty height. Mr. Camplet scurried on all fours to the door, pulled himself upright on the coat stand, shakily snatched his garments, and bowled out into the night. The stranger turned to face the room, his expression growing calmer, and again caught the gaze of Anna Claire, who was frozen kneeled by the hearth. He strode over to her and offered her his hand. She couldn't break their gaze, she was completely engulfed in his warm, kind eyes.

"Allow me to escort you home, gentle lady," he spoke softly as he helped her to her feet. Anna couldn't answer, but simply accompanied him to the door where he held her coat for her and allowed her to pass out onto the porch. They walked in silence down the lane and cut through a meadow towards the Tithers home. The stars glinted like jewels above them in a velvet sky.

A gentle breeze caught Anna's auburn hair and suddenly vaulted her spirits to great heights. Instantly, she was flying

and dancing across the meadow. The stranger halted in surprise at first, but a tender smile lit his face as he watched Anna gambol around the meadow. The laconic man was rarely moved to words, but he felt he could have been the world's best poet as he watched the young woman frolicking. Her diaphanous laugh carried back to him, and his heart leapt as he sprang after her.

He caught her round the waist and spun her around, her childish giggles growing merrier by the instant. As he set her on her feet, he was compelled to have her as his sempiternal love.

"Marry me, sweet Anna Claire," he breathed. Not even time could break the exchange of hearts through that connection of the eyes.

"Your beneficence is great, and your prima facie valor and honor are evident, dear stranger. There is a paucity of men of your kind in the world, and I am completely taken by your proposal, but I know not even your name," Anna gently spoke.

He enfolded her in his arms, and she didn't resist. She already knew his heart and he would honor her for all time.

"Just call me Duncan," and he kissed her hair.