

# Tempting Gray

*The Untouchables, book 2*

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*Castle Glimmeric, Northern Ireland*

*In many years past*

Of all the things he'd be doing on his mating day, shivering on a balcony in the middle of nowhere was not something that had crossed Grayson Blackmoore's mind.

A puff of white cloud billowed from his cold breath as he sighed with resignation. The cloudy sky looked like a gray mass hovering above. Moonlight lit the sky into a hazy glow. Snow graced the hilly landscape with such suffocating density that Gray couldn't tell what was tree from road anymore. Then again, out here where more vampires lived than humans, at one of the last standing vampire strongholds, maybe Castle Glimmeric was the last sign of life here in the deep wilderness.

The outside air did nothing to alleviate the pressure against his lungs keeping him from sucking in a full breath of air. His heart hammered far too hard and too loud for his liking. A sign of weak nerves. He hated it. He yearned for the day he could keep his chaotic emotions under control. As it was every single day felt like a battle.

There's always been something wrong with him, he suspected. Though he didn't dare speak a word of his suspicions to a living soul, not even his new brothers. Any one of them were liable to slip his secret to his father and then Grayson would never live down the humiliation. Or

worse, the failure to his mother. Besides, how did he try to explain that whenever someone was in trouble he felt compelled to help them? That he cared about people, their interests, their lives, everything in a way that no one else seemed to. All his life he'd felt like he was always seeing people through a different pair of eyes than everyone else did. Even though he knew that couldn't be true. He wasn't different or special. If anything, he was nobody.

A thud not far away sent Grayson spinning around on the balls of his pristine leather boots. They'd been shined, tailored, and created solely for this ceremony. All the time and money spent on the boots alone could have been saved. Grayson would have easily done the ceremony bare foot. The silver sword hanging from his hips swung as he turned around.

*Please be my father.*

The sooner this day was over, the better.

Grayson tugged on the heavy metal ring that served as a doorknob. The castle had seen better years. It looked worn from years of dealing with harsh winds and cold winters—much how the weather was today. In fact, Grayson had seen several pillars holding up the second story of the house which looked in desperate need of repair. It was only a matter of time before those pillars toppled down. It might not kill a vampire, but if it caught an unlucky subject's head in the process—then there was no coming back from that. Even a were couldn't survive decapitation.

The sound came again, this time of someone singing, Grayson pressed his ear to the door to hear better. Even with his vampire hearing, the voice, that of a girl, sounded far down the hall. Her voice. That voice held him spellbound.

*May the wind blow and the trees grow and the wild things grow all around them!*

It sounded like an old folk tune. The voice faded as the girl moved further away. Grayson pushed away from the door to pace. Where was his father anyway? His father had ordered Grayson to stay here until the ceremony was ready, then his father would retrieve him. Not even his brothers were allowed to stay.

His mother words came to him. *You must be strong, my love. You must impress your father, do what he tells you, and you will succeed in ways I never could.* At the time, only years ago, Grayson had raged inwardly at his mother's command. He'd do anything for her. But that had nearly broke him. To leave his mother behind in Turkey and go on to be raised by a man who'd done nothing more than impregnate his mother had changed Grayson. In that time though he'd learned a precarious respect for his father, his new brothers, and even his step-mother. Though every action he made, every choice he decided, was for his mother.

From the hallway, Grayson heard a crash and the sound of a feminine yelp. Grayson only hesitated for a moment before breaking his father's word and leaving the room. He found a girl kneeling on the ground over a broken vase. She was hurriedly trying to clean the mess. Her frantic gaze darted up to meet his.

“Please, could you help me?” The soft, breathless question had Grayson walking down the hallway toward her. A look of such relief swept across her face that Grayson couldn’t help but smile at her. That’s when she smiled back. Her smile packed a punch like a hard right hook. Everything turned upside down. He forgot where he was, why he was there, *who* he was. Her smile dazzled him.

The girl had the prettiest hair Grayson had ever seen. It swept down to her slender waist and hung in curling waves. It wasn’t her hair that he couldn’t tear his gaze away from though—it was her eyes. Grey eyes much like the could sky he’d been looking at.

“Thanks for your help,” she said.

Grayson picked up the pieces and disposed of them in a bin. He felt awkward standing there staring at this beautiful girl. And she kept smiling at him, which only made him smile back, but he had no idea what he was smiling for.

Finally, he snapped the heels of his boots together and remembered to bow as he’d been taught. The girl did not bow back however. Instead, she pressed three fingers over her mouth and giggled, her cheeks turning a pretty red. He’d made her blush. Another strange feeling came, this one warm and pleasurable. “Grayson Blackmoore, at your service, my lady,” he recited as he’d been taught.

Another giggle, this one softer but lasted much longer. “Grayson Blackmoore, impossible.” The smile she gave him dazed him. “You’re far too nice to be a stuck up Blackmoore.”

She was teasing him. A girl hadn’t teased him since... Grayson struggled to think of a single time. No matter how hard he tried to recall a name, a face of any girl who’d flirted with him, had smiled at him like this girl did, but not one had since coming to live with his father. He was the Blackmoore son no one wanted to talk about. He came from the womb of a mistress whose blood was not wealthy.

“In that case,” the girl said, bringing him back to reality, “I’m Anita of Redenver.”

It was on the tip of his tongue to admonish her—*impossible!* She was not his bruid, the woman who would become his mate on this day—when the floor dropped beneath their feet. One moment Grayson stood before the beautiful girl, and in the next he had pulled her close as the floor gave way.

The floor caved in an explosion that surely shook the entire castle. Rock rained down upon Grayson’s back, cutting his jacket and scraping skin, but he did what he was always good at—protecting people. With the girl in his arms, he used his speed to land on the ground only seconds before rocks pummeled all around them. Grayson leapt out of the way. No sooner than he’d made clear of the wreckage, the whole ceiling collapsed in.

He took in his surroundings. They were now one floor below where they’d been. The door to this room was caved in by the tons of stone, debris, and dirt now filling the space. He didn’t

see any way out without removing the heavy rock encasing them inside what looked like a small storage room. There were crates of vegetables and fruits, barrels of wine, blood, and beer stacked to the ceiling. Some had been crushed when the floor gave and now the scent of alcohol permeated the room with its bittersweet scent.

“My father’s going to kill me!” The girl pulled at her hair. “I wasn’t supposed to go off wondering by myself, and now look at this mess.”

“I think we have bigger things to worry about,” Grayson said. He started lifting away rocks, trying to make his way toward the door. Only, for every rock he moved, more came falling down from above. Beneath the rubble was crushed, heavy boulders. Those would be impossible for him to try to lift. Maybe one day he’d be strong enough but not now.

The girl smiled. “It looks as if we have time to spare until we’re rescued. Why don’t tell me who you really are?”

One eyebrow went up. “I’ve already told you.”

The girl narrowed her eyes on him, assessing. After a minute, she smiled and batted her lashes. “If you’re Grayson Blackmoore, then I’m Anita of Redenver house. At your service, my lord.” She performed a grandiose bow.

“I really am Grayson Blackmoore.” He felt this need to make her understand. He really was who he was, but who was she? Somewhere deep inside him he knew she couldn’t be Anita of Redenver, the woman he was to meet for the very first time tonight. He had yet to see Anita’s face, had only heard whispers of her appearance from others. The whispers he’d heard spoke of dark brown hues in her hair, eyes the color of oak. This girl couldn’t be her. She had hair men fought wars over; it was the color of a glowing candle. For a brief moment, Grayson realized how stunning her golden blonde hair must look in the sunlight. Not that he could ever see her thusly. This girl had cloudy gray eyes not ones like oak. Surely it couldn’t be her, and yet, a part of him so strongly wished it’d be her that his heart nearly felt like it’d doubled in size. The new size of his heart added pressure to his lungs, making it difficult to breathe and speak at the same time.

Grayson cleared his throat then snapped a pose—cocking one hand out to her, the other forming a gentle fist at his hip as his feet once again snapped together. The beginning dance move was something else he’d been taught since coming to live with his father. “Seeing as it may take some time for us to be rescued, may I ask you for this dance?”

Her reply might have made scared him if she hadn’t taken his hand as she said it. “But there is no music playing!”

Grayson swept her into a traditional dance, one where music wasn’t necessary. The beats of the music played silently in his mind as their bodies swayed in a counted rhythm.

“What if I am really Grayson Blackmoore and you really are Anita Redenver,” Grayson asked suddenly. He hadn’t even meant to ask, yet, he was dying to know the answer.

“Well I know I’m really Anita Redenver,” she said, smiling like she knew a secret.

“And I’m really Grayson Blackmoore,” he said, somewhat forcefully.

She looked contemplative. “If you’re Grayson then why do you speak with that heavy accent? The rest of the Blackmoore’s don’t sound that way.”

“Dominic, the eldest, also speaks with an accent,” he told her. He did not explain why only he and Dominic had accents while the rest of his family did not. She did not need to hear about his father’s multiple bastard sons.

His hand resting over hers, his arm around the middle of her small back, her white-gloved hand holding up the poufy top of her ball gown as they stepped in time together. She made him feel so big to her small, feminine size. Simply feeling her dancing in his arms gave him a renewed strength. Surely he could toss all those boulders away from the door one-handed now.

“Hmm. I’ve never met Dominic, I’ll have to be honest. Where are you from then?”

“Turkey. I was raised by my mother in Turkey.” No one had asked him about his past. Not since coming to live with his father in this new world. His brothers had and of course his father knew, but no one else had asked him. No one else had cared. This was the first he’d heard about his ‘heavy accent’.

She smiled and held his hand a little tighter where their hands joined, energy swirled. He couldn’t see it but he could feel the presence of something special in her. Maybe she really was his bruid. A flicker of hope sprung. That could explain why she made him feel so strange...so good.

“My mother’s not around. My father’s always traveling so I go with him. He’s really good at finding people.”

“My father is Argonzo Blackmoore, president of the were and vampire council.”

Her fingers flexed at the name. Everyone knew the name of his father. He was one of the most powerful people in the world. “That’s *if* you’re really that awful Grayson.”

“Awful?” Surprise got the better of him.

A playful look crossed her face. “I hear Grayson is a stalwart hero who’s as impenetrable as rock in a fight.”

That almost made him laugh. “No one says anything so poetic about me.”

“True. I believe what they really said was that you were a quiet vampire with a temper.” She threw her head back and laughed, revealing the smooth length of her neck, and the thumping pulse beating beneath the skin. Gray had to force his gaze away from her vein.

*Too late!*

He saw the throbbing vein. The muscles in his neck locked tight in a painful knot as he straightened his spine. His fangs distended. Only weak, or young, vampires couldn't control their compulsion to feed at the sight of a vein. Panic grabbed at him. How shameful to reveal his fangs to her, to show weakness to this woman. *No!* Grayson's heart beat frantically, sweat slicked the back of his neck, he wouldn't do it. Even if he had to kiss her to keep her from seeing those vile teeth. Wait. His mind slowed. *Kiss her?* Grayson froze, his wayward thought garnering far too much consideration.

“Are you feeling well?” Concern pulled the girl's eyebrows into a furrow that still made her look impossibly sweet.

His eyes locked on her mouth. All he could manage in answer was a brisk shake of his head—no.

“Is there anything I can do?” she asked.

Again, he shook his head. How was it he knew he needed to open his mouth and speak to her, yet he couldn't think of a single thing to say?

He was nearly hugging her. They'd long stopped dancing. They merely stood there touching each other. Suddenly words he hadn't known he wanted to say burst from him. “Please tell me if you are her!” He shook her with the question. “I must know.”

The smile on her face faded. Sadness transformed her face into something beautifully bad. The look made his own heart break into pieces at the sight. “Are you truly Grayson Blackmoore or are you funning me, my lord?”

Just then the sound of rocks being removed began. They'd been found. People on the other side of the rubble started clearing it out. The crashing of stone made it difficult to answer her without yelling. Grayson grabbed the girl's hand and pulled her further back into the room as dust and small rocks trickled down from the pile.

When he had her attention he told her, “I am.”

She blinked as if she'd forgotten what he was talking about. Then she remembered. Grayson must admit he wasn't prepared for the impact her stricken face had on him. He nearly took back his words—however stupid that'd be. He nearly denied truly being Grayson, he'd do *anything*, to remove that expression from her face. Anything.

The rocks were being pulled away faster. They didn't have much time. Grayson felt like he held a delicate kite in his hands on a thin string and the wind was whipping by trying to tear the kite from him.

Leaning close he asked, "Are you her?"

Her lips parted before she fixed her expression into an unreadable mask. He hated the look; she was hiding something. That secret look made his stomach plummet. But her next move caught him completely by surprise. The beautiful blonde were, not the dark-haired vampire who he'd be mating with tonight, stepped up on the tips of her toes and pressed her lips to his.

It was Grayson Blackmoore's first real kiss.

Grayson jerked in surprise, but didn't sever their tentative connection. Their breaths stirred, mingled. Eyes stayed locked in a warm embrace. Gently, he pressed his lips more firmly against hers. Their lips touched completely now. He yearned to close his eyes and kiss her properly how he'd really like to, but he could hear voices now. The wall was nearly torn down.

Grayson stepped back from temptation, feeling as dazed as the girl looked. The stones were removed moments later and a flood of faces swept into the small room. His father was before him, angry. Not that anyone but close family could see that the president of the were and vampire community was anything more than mildly annoyed. No, Grayson had been around his father long enough to recognize the stiff upper lip and quickened steps.

He was dragged to a room the size of an area. It was packed full of unfamiliar faces, both were and vampire. The room smelled of expensive cologne, blood that filled glasses, and sweetness from poppy flowers used to decorate the occasion.

"We do not have time to idle, son. The Redenver father has it in his head this is a poor sign of tidings to come. Hurry, we must begin the ceremony before he reneges on his deal." Argonzo Blackmoore was a tall, slender figure with the nose of a hawk, and the complexion of an Italian.

"Now?"

His father cast him a spared glance, watchful. "Yes, now. Are you ready?"

It was time. He would meet and mate with his one and only now. How strange that a cool stillness crept over him, bracing him, in that moment. Those unfamiliar faces turned to watch him and his father as they made their way to the center of the room to the dais on which stood the awaiting Blackmoore and Redenver family.

It wasn't her.

Tongue dry as parchment, Grayson licked his lips. It couldn't be her. The possibility of it was next to nothing. Yet, as his father released him and Grayson marched up the dais to meet his

bruid, he yearned for that familiar face to stare up at him from beneath the veil. One that could dazzle him with a smile.

His father announced the families to the quieting crowd. Grayson stood tall next to a girl wearing a loose white gown with a veil obscuring her face from view. Grayson would soon pull that veil up to reveal her. And so it began.

He and the quiet girl who had yet to speak a word were positioned to face one another.

Grayson swore everyone could see the sweat dripping down his temples. He was sure of it. Everyone knew he didn't want to be here right now. They had to see it in the strain on his face.

His hands managed not to tremble as he took his bruid's slender hands in his own. For a second he found himself trying to learn if this girl's hands were the same as the girl he'd danced with. The girl had been wearing gloves so he didn't have any clue how her hands looked. Were they slender fingered with long nails like the girl next to him had?

The moment came crashing over Grayson with staggering finality. A priest spoke vows before them, his words sounding as if they came from far away. On a final word, the bruid before him slowly pulled back the veil.

It felt like someone was skinning him alive, such was the agony of waiting to see.

*Was it her?*

He didn't think he'd ever wanted anything so badly in his life as he wanted this.

The first strands of hair came into view. The very world rolled before him making the room spin in a whirlwind of motion. Grayson rocked on the heel of his boots nearly losing his balance before he caught himself. Did anyone see him losing control right now? Did anyone even care that his world was completely upside down?

Across the room stood a girl. In front of him, a lovely girl with eyes the color of coal and hair dark as night looked up at him with calm acceptance. Across the room, his eyes stayed locked on a girl with the wildest blonde hair he'd ever seen. She stared at him with an expression Grayson knew he'd never be able to forget. For her look showed exactly how he felt right now—ravaged. Like he'd found something precious and perfect for a few minutes but now had to put the gift down and walk away from it.

She shook her head as if to clear her head from what she was seeing. His body nearly surged towards her, wanting, no, needing to go to her and comfort her.

Then Anita of Redenver spoke, and in a strong voice vowed to stay beside Grayson for eternity.

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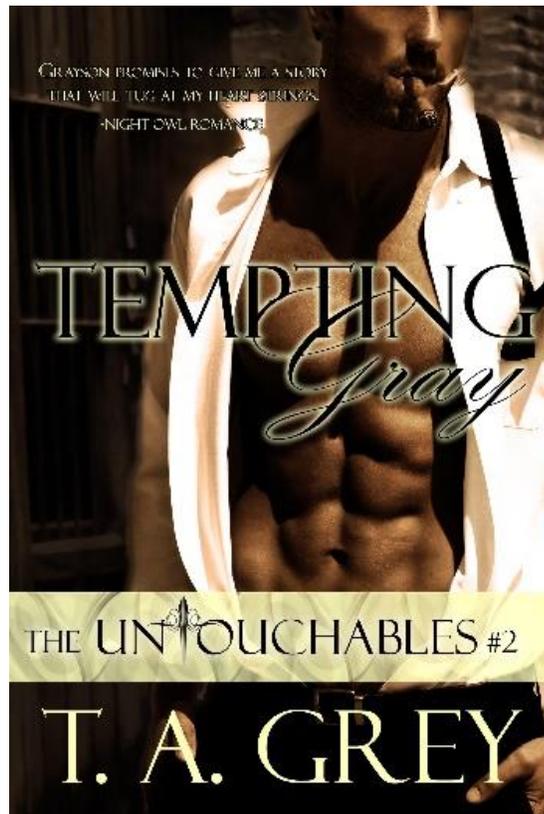
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It was his turn. His role had already been cast. His mother, his family, were more important than him.

Grayson Blackmoore delivered his vows as succinctly as Anita had.

Applause broke out as Argonzo presented Grayson and Anita to the crowd. Shiny teeth flashed in forced, over-bright smiles from the faces below. But across the room, the face he sought to look upon one final time was gone. And he realized, it would never be there again.



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