

Mira's Gift
By Regan Black

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Leavenworth Federal Prison, 2096

Prison sirens wailed and the emergency lights splashed bloody red and sterile white over the infirmary. Mira Luther twitched curtains into place to protect her two patients from the obnoxious light show. Hearing boots thunder through the hallway, she followed protocol and retreated to her office to wait out the security breach.

She was ready when angry voices and sounds of fighting were punctuated by a body clad in stealth gear stumbling into her infirmary. Men and weapons would forever equal casualties.

She touched the new arrival – a woman – and knew immediately this wasn't a simple prison break. She could feel the dark pull of the old blood of the guardians pulsing in the woman's veins. Interesting. It meant there was a higher purpose behind the uproar.

Bound by her own blood and vows to help those in need, Mira had been prepared to sedate the intruder and put an end to the crisis. Now, her thoughts turned to healing and assisting the guardian who'd crashed into her domain. She let her power flow toward the bullet wound in the guardian's leg. A few moments of concentration and the woman was safely away; the bleeding stopped and her leg healed.

Moments only, that left her feeling like she'd been in an operating room for hours.

She embraced the exhaustion as it assisted her portrayal of a fearful, overwhelmed nurse when the intimidating crisis task force team burst in.

She winced as her patients were exposed to rough questions and jostled during a cursory search.

"Did you see anyone?" The team leader loomed over her. "Anything?"

"No." Her useless answers put a tic in his jaw. While he scowled at her, she pointed out his wounded leg.

"It'll wait," he snapped, glancing at a device clipped to his vest. Most likely thermal imaging, but the guardian's stealth suit would defeat it.

He looked to his second who was favoring a knee. "Can you stand guard?"

The other man nodded.

"See to him," the leader ordered Mira. Turning to his second, he said, "Get patched up. Stay here, stay alert."

Mira managed not to wince at the announcement. She didn't need a trigger happy soldier in her ward, but the leader was already heading out with the rest of his men.

As the infirmary quieted, she settled her patients once more before addressing the soldier. "Where are you hurt?"

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"Left knee. It's not bad," he protested when she pointed to an exam table.

"Let me decide."

He scowled, shot a look toward the other patients, then hitched himself up on the table.

"What's your name?" She waved her hands under the sterilizer as he set the gun aside long enough to unlace his boot and roll up his pant leg.

"Jameson."

"I'm Mira." She eyed his knee. No blood, no swelling. She asked the standard questions, heard the standard replies and put him through the standard exam.

It was no small relief, as depleted as she felt, that he was faking his injury. The bigger question now was why? Did the crisis team suspect her of assisting the intruder?

"I can do a scan, or just tape it for now."

"Tape it. It's not too painful."

True enough, she knew.

"That's good," he said when she finished and he was back on patrol. "You're pale," he commented from his post near the door.

"I'm fine." She turned away and rolled her eyes. Men didn't seem to change, always underestimating women. He had no idea how capable she was, or how desperately she wanted to get out of this concrete monstrosity. But it wasn't quite time for her to leave. "I'm really fine here. You can join your team."

"I follow orders."

"Yes. I can see that." She understood it as well. "Water?" She offered him a cold bottle. "Would you like a chair?" To help with the knee they both knew didn't bother him.

He shook his head, continuing his protocol as instructed. "The tape is helping."

She watched him, trying to admire his apparent dedication to the job more than his prime physique. He had a small scratch at his throat she knew would heal within days, but she found herself tempted to touch – and not just to heal.

With an effort, she shook it off. He had a reason for faking the knee injury. "So what's really happening out there?"

"She said it was a drill. A test."

Mira cleared her throat, remembering she wasn't supposed to know anything. "She?"

"Yeah." He pointed to the annoying lights. "A woman set this in motion."

"You don't believe her?"

"I do. She had opportunities to kill, she didn't. She declared herself when cornered. All standard for a drill."

Mira knew a guardian wouldn't take a life unnecessarily. "And yet you won't relax?"

He spared her a glance with an arching eyebrow. "You met my C.O."

Fair enough. She let him pace, whisked away the headache getting ahead of one of her patients, and prayed the alarms would quit soon. "Drill over," she said with sincere relief when the emergency lights went still and the normal overhead lights came on.

Jameson groaned and leaned against the wall. "The C.O. will be pissed they kept him out of the loop on this one. Training will be a b-" He cleared his throat. "It'll be tough."

Her instincts had her sympathizing immediately. It was a struggle, but she suppressed the urge to offer assistance if Jameson suffered a real injury.

He wasn't precisely her enemy, but she didn't trust him and she'd learned the hard way it was better to keep a low profile.

They both jumped when a new alarm sounded and Mira raced to the patient in distress. He'd

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been shanked a couple days ago during breakfast and had been stabilized quickly enough when nothing important had been nicked by the prisoner's handmade weapon.

She hadn't needed to call in a physician, but she'd used the possibility of infection to keep the man in the infirmary and away from whoever wanted to kill him. Looking at the patient's flushed cheeks and pained grimace, she knew there was more going on here than the original injury.

As she went through the expected motions, studying the information pouring out of the bio scanner, Jameson's gaze was hot on her back.

If he would leave or even look away, she could simply touch the patient, find the problem, and heal it.

Jameson's presence wasn't the only trouble. After healing the guardian, she wasn't sure she could heal a major problem so soon. She turned to Jameson, who'd left his post at the door to hover at the foot of the patient's bed.

The patient was too fevered to care, but she used his right to privacy as her excuse. "You'll have to leave." But Jameson continued to stare at her patient. "Patient privacy." No reaction. "Your orders?"

He glanced up, then looked back at her and used his hands.

Sign Language?

She made a fist, signed *yes*.

He's my brother.

A fitting explanation for the raw pain and worry in his eyes.

Can you help him?

Sure. If she hadn't knitted a shredded calf back together twenty minutes ago. She nodded despite her doubts. It just wasn't in her to let people suffer.

"Close the curtain on your way out," she said for the sake of Jameson's mic.

This situation was exactly what she hadn't mastered before she'd set out to save the world, one person at a time.

His name? She knew the patient only by his inmate number.

Jeff.

She wouldn't risk speaking it but she felt better knowing who she was overextending for.

"Shh. Be still now." She laid a hand lightly on his brow. Her knees buckled just from lifting his fever but she had to get through the symptoms to the real problem.

"I'll call the doctor," Jameson said.

"No," she whispered. A hologram wouldn't be much use to Jeff and the doctor monitoring the feed might realize what she was. Mystical healers weren't welcome in the current health care system.

She reached toward Jeff's wound, fighting to keep herself open when her self-preservation instincts screamed to shut down her power.

A murky cloud of greenish black – her perception of the infection – pulsed in Jeff's side, confirming the machine's report.

But Mira saw what machines couldn't. It wasn't the wound. Jeff's appendix was about to burst. A surgeon would never arrive in time. Her gift was Jeff's only chance.

Drawing out the infection would be agonizing and she knew she'd be shattered and vulnerable when she finished. If she finished.

To Jameson, she signed, *Trust me*. Then she programmed a hypo-spray with a double dose of antibiotics and pressed it to Jeff's side. She needed every available help.

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Grabbing a chair, she sat and then lowered the bed rail. *Whatever happens, do not interrupt me.* Jameson's eyes went wide, but he nodded.

Cupping her hands, she closed her eyes and drew on her power, envisioning her palms full of warm, orange light. She put her hands on Jeff and pulsed that light, her healing power into him, burning away the infection, cauterizing unhealthy tissue.

It was a battle, one she'd win easily if she'd been at her best. The infection was a greedy tide, pushing and pulling at her pitiful efforts.

Mira felt herself losing ground, losing control of her power. Soon, she knew she'd lose herself and still she hung on, praying her choice wasn't folly.

She fought that murky green twining through his gut, focusing her power like sun through a magnifying glass. Then she recoiled as she jerked the infection free and it landed with the force of a heavyweight's punch under her ribs.

"What the hell were you thinking?"

She blinked up at the bleak view of the infirmary ceiling, slowly taking stock. She felt like hell, but Jeff's bio-alarm was silent. She was alive, supported by a strong, warm body. A more alert woman would snuggle and take comfort. Mira couldn't find the energy. Her loss.

Did he make it?

"You don't have to sign. I disabled the damn com gear. Just rest."

"Did he –"

"Yes." Jameson nudged her head back into the cradle of his arm. "Jeff's fine. Good as new. You I'm not so sure about."

"Men underestimate..." The words proved too much.

"Or not."

She felt the laughter rumble through his chest and his touch was warm and soothing on her face, her shoulder, down her arm until his fingers laced with hers.

"You saved his life."

"Mmm." His lips brushed her forehead and the soft contrast to his tough muscled body sent a little shiver over her skin.

"Cold?"

"No." She was getting warmer by the minute. Definitely no remnant of Jeff's fever, this wanting, so clearly sparked by Jameson, was ill advised. But oh, so sweet, she hesitated to end it.

Healing Jeff meant leaving and finding a new place to settle. Soon. Right now. Yet she didn't move, staring up at the man who supported her. Renewed by his strength, dazzled by his wide smile, she reached up to trace his lower lip with her finger. For the first time in her life she wasn't eager to run away.

"Thank you, Mira."

She smiled, her spirit buoyed by his easy acceptance of her talent.

His lips were warm on hers and the kiss ignited her like nothing she'd ever felt. Oh, *yes*. She gave herself up to the luscious sensations, savoring the desire burning between them. She knew she would leave, immediately. Anything else was suicide. But oh, she would treasure this timeless moment with Jameson, for the rest of her days.

The End

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About the author:

Regan Black writes action-packed stories with a paranormal twist so readers can savor a fantastic escape from the daily routine. If you're looking for an author who can deliver stories from the heart, full of unforgettable characters willing to risk it all to reach the goal, you've come to the right place!

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