



A Faerie Tale

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The Faerie Book Of The Symmetry

Chapter 27

The Birth Of Four

“And when Hadrea was cast aside by the Faerie King Lucraxious VII and he entered into holy union with her fair sister Amara, Hadrea sought reprisal. Lucraxious, having learned of Hadrea’s plan for vengeance, put to death the dark beauty Hadrea and ordered her remains be sent to the four corners of the governed world below, Earthatopia. Before Hadrea could be abolished, she sold her faerie essence to the Ogre King Eskimond in barter for her rebirth two faerie decades or twenty-eight years from the time of her demise. Eskimond soon prophesied of Hadrea’s second coming and with it the imbalance of the governed world and, in turn, the end of Earthatopia and all that inhabit the planet.

“And so, having heard this, the Faerie King vowed to protect his people and the symmetry of the governed world below, and Lucraxious too bartered with the ogre king. But Eskimond would only accept an exchange from Lucraxious of the most precious kind—that of his soon-born girl child’s hand in marriage on the day of her twenty-eighth birthday. Aware he had no alternatives were he to continue to reside over and keep in balance the world below, Lucraxious agreed to these terms. But then his fair wife Amara gave birth to not one, but four lovely daughters and the king grew to love them all at first sighting. Lucraxious could not give away even one of the adored princesses to the ogre king and so he entered into a new agreement with Eskimond.

“At the time the double suns of Faeridae reach their highest point on the twenty-seventh birthday of the faerie princesses, each will be cast to one of the four corners of Earthatopia and will have one year to join in holy union with an Earthatopian male, who must love and believe in her faerie essence. If, when the double suns of Faeridae reach their highest point on the twenty-eighth birthday of the faerie princesses all four have not entered into holy union, each daughter will be given to the Ogre King Eskimond and Queen Amara will be extricated to fulfill Hadrea’s demise while Hadrea becomes the new queen and Earthatopia and all its inhabitants are annihilated forever.”

RING OF FIRE

Paige Burns

Dedication

In memory of my mother, Arless Anne Ehmke. Thanks Mom for teaching me to chase my dreams.

Special thanks to JLC, for your friendship and encouragement. Sue, Tracey and the ladies of RTR for bringing me into the fold. Linda, for taking a chance on me. My sister Tesha, for reading things you wouldn't normally give a second look. And most important, my family, for their patience, encouragement, and undying love.

Chapter One

Damia's idea of a good time included a pint or two of popka, the preferred alcohol of the fae, and a naked male body or two combined for a good eight hours of kinky faerie sex. Actually, it had only been six hours this last time—they'd gotten a late start. A good time did not include her father storming in and waking her up from her sex-induced sleep, yelling about responsibility then locking her in her room.

She knew she was in deep *cac* for two reasons. One, she was seriously locked in her room. Sure, her parents had tried in the past to lock her door, but this time, they obviously meant it. No amount of magic could unlock the door, or the window for that matter. And, two, her father had demanded she change into something "proper" within the hour or there would be "dire consequences." His words, not hers.

"Illuminate," she said to the mirror. Nothing. She'd been trying to get her magic to work in the Earthatopia language but so far, no go.

"Well, *cac*. *Soilsigh*," she commanded again. The mirror was suddenly backlit with a green glow. She looked at herself in the reflection and pouted. She didn't know what was wrong with her outfit. She'd had to bribe Felix the Spider to get genuine Earth leather. It hadn't been much of a bribe, though. One hand job was all it took and she'd had a yard of the black, supple material to design her latest fashion creation.

Damia ran her hands down the length of her body, following the long, slender strips of leather that clung to her from shoulder to hip, barely covering her nipples as they passed over her breasts. Sterling silver chain connected each strip, wrapping around her back to front to and meeting just under her breasts at a large ruby pendant. Another chain dangled from the ruby and attached to the leather thong that barely covered her labia.

She spun around, giving a critical eye to the back of the outfit. The back of the thong was made of more silver chain. Felix had complained about how much silver she'd used, but she loved the feel of it gliding over her body. And the thong, well, she'd had lots of fun with the silver attached to the thong.

Her iridescent wings flashed green rainbows in the candlelight. She was the first in many generations of fae to have single-color wings that matched her skin. That was the other reason for the black and silver attire, both colors showed off her pale green luminance to perfection.

"Proper, hmmmph!" Damia stalked to the chest that held her ceremonial robes. "Albin and Aleron didn't complain about my outfit last night." The twin faeries had, in fact, shown her a new thing or two to use the chain for.

"Princess Damia?" a voice called from the door. She didn't recognize who it was, so it was probably one of her father's lackeys. She didn't respond.

"Princess? I'm to tell you your father expects you in five minutes."

"Thanks," Damia replied. She wasn't normally so polite, but she was still sleepy from being up all night with the twins and, she had to admit, a little worried about the meeting with her father. She'd never been called to a meeting before, never. If only she hadn't walked by her father's office yesterday on her way to meet the twins. All she had heard was something about the balance between the worlds coming to an end before her father realized his office door was open and ordered his secretary to shut it. She hoped

the session today with her father wasn't about what she'd overheard.

As quickly as she could, Damia untangled herself from the leather and chain outfit, unlaced her thigh-high boots, and slipped on her pale lavender gossamer robe. It certainly wasn't to her taste—it actually covered everything—but it was form fitting so tolerable.

Another knock sounded at the door.

“Damia?” It was her mother. “Come, daughter, father is waiting.”

Damia took one last look around her room before she walked to the door her mother had opened. She had a sinking feeling this was going to be the last time she saw her room for a long time.

* * * *

“No ... please, no.” They weren't listening to her. The circle of goblins was closing in on her. Their stench made her nauseous. One of them snaked a long, hairy finger around her ankle, another grabbed her hair and pulled. Damia screamed into the night. Fear overwhelmed her until the starry night sky faded to black.

Damia woke with a start. Panic skittered through her when she realized she couldn't move. Her leg was caught in something and she couldn't lift her head more than a few inches. Willing her racing heart to slow, she closed her eyes and took a deep calming breath. It wasn't the first time she'd woken up in a strange place, but it was the first time she felt trapped.

She took a moment to listen to her surroundings. Wind rustled and she could hear birds in the distance. She was outside, but not on Faeridae. There was a different current flowing through the ground and her surroundings. Damia opened her eyes, letting them slowly adjust to the breaking light of dawn, but the trees were so thick, the light was dim. Her arms were free and she began to feel around, trying to discover why her head wouldn't move.

Her hair was tangled in vines. That was probably what had her foot, as well. Damia sighed in relief, plants were her forte. What kind of plants was the question. Was she on Dundroc, the ogre kingdom? She wondered for a moment if the nightmare of the goblins attacking her had really been a dream. She concentrated on her life essence. Other than feeling a little stiff and still immobile, she was fine. If she had really been with the goblins ... well, she'd be lucky to be alive. Even though she knew there was more at stake here than being given over to the goblins, it was still something she didn't want, for her or her sisters.

So, not on Faeridae, not on Dundroc, then she must be on Earth. She laughed at that. Her powers were heightened on Earth, so getting out of these vines and finding out where she was would be simple.

“*Saor.*” The vines slowly retreated, almost caressing her scalp and legs as they released her. When the last of the vines fell away, she stood and assessed her surroundings.

The light of day grew stronger and she could see she was in a forest, dense with lush green vines and ferns. The trees were tall and more vines hung from their tops. Damia sensed a bird flying toward her and looked behind her in time to catch a glimpse of a bright red and blue macaw as it flew overhead into the trees.

“*Tar ar ais,*” Damia called to the bird. “Come back little one.”

Damia waited patiently as the macaw flew back out of the trees and landed

gracefully on a low branch nearby. She called her magic, melding it with her words so she could communicate with the bird.

“Greetings, beautiful one,” she said, her voice soft with the song of the bird. “I am Damia, Daughter of Lucraxious VII and Third Princess of Faeridae.” She bowed slightly in reverence to the majestic macaw.

“*Hola*, to you *Niña*. I am Aletta.” More graceful than any faerie in court, Aletta expanded her wings and dipped her head, returning Damia’s bow. “I sensed you here in *el bosque*, the forest. How can I help you?”

“I would ask a question of you, Aletta.”

“*Si?*”

“Can you tell me where I am?”

“Why, in the forest, *Niña*.”

“Yes, Aletta, I see that.” Damia held back a sigh of impatience, sometimes dealing with Earth animals was not easy. “What forest? Do you know what part of Earth this forest is in?”

Aletta made what sounded like a laugh. “Of, course, Damia of Faeridae. It is...”

She stopped talking and sat still, bright blue head cocked to the side. Damia followed suit, reaching out with her magic to sense what Aletta was listening for.

Suddenly, the bird lifted into the air. “He comes, *Niña*. You must not show yourself to him as you are.” She flew into the trees, away from the audible sound of someone approaching the small clearing. “*Rapido*,” Aletta called from a distance.

“*Duathnigh*,” Damia whispered to the wind just as the intruder broke into the clearing. Her skin, hair and wings instantly camouflaged with the trees behind her. The vines responded to her magic and reached out, entwining with her arms and legs, just as they had the trees. She drew in a silent gasp as the leaves caressed her breasts through the gauzy dress she still wore, causing her nipples to bead.

Great, just what I needed, horny plants. She focused on the man who’d stopped in the middle of the clearing. The first thing she noticed was his disheveled state. His tan pants and black shirt held a thick layer of reddish dirt. His backpack bulged, and it too was covered in umber soil. He swiveled toward her, as if sensing her, but she knew she was invisible to the human eye. For a moment, though, she wasn’t sure her magic was working. He looked straight at her. Pale sapphire eyes, in direct contrast with his black unkempt hair, held her captivated.

She’d seen some strange things in her lifetime that had stopped her in her tracks—hell, her tailor was a man-spider—but never before had anyone unwittingly entrapped her with just his gaze.

“Hello?”

His voice resonated in the small clearing. Its sexy timber sent shivers cascading down Damia’s spine, straight to her heated core. The vines that held her tightened and moved, caressing their way up her thigh as if in search of her scented juices.

“Is anyone there?” he called again.

Damia silently willed the vines to stop moving, but her magic was verbal, and with out speaking the command, the vines would continue their trek upward. She was bombarded by sensations, the vines, his voice, his eyes. She’d never experienced the magnitude of passion that was coursing through her now. There was obviously something about this man that set her on fire, and if her father’s threats were real, this man could be

the answer to her problems. But she knew she could not allow him to see her natural state until he fell in love with her.

“Huh,” he said, continuing through the clearing. “I must be hearing things.”

Damia waited until she could no longer hear his footsteps before she commanded the vines to release her. She was gonna have to watch out for the local vegetation. It seemed to be infatuated with her.

“Now, I can’t be seen like this.” She looked down at her gown and pale green skin. Her wings had been retracted since she’d awoken, and, if she was going to look human for some time, she was going to have to give them a stretch first. Hastily, she shrugged out of her gown and, with a slight bodily shudder, shimmering translucent wings expanded from the juncture of her shoulders.

All faeries had different ways of storing their wings when not in use. Damia hid hers by withdrawing them into her back. The longest they’d been hidden before was forty-eight Earth hours. She’d been in an Earth jail at the time, supposedly “sobering up” but really she’d just spent those two days observing humans and antagonizing the handsome policemen. She’d used her glamour then to look like an ebony supermodel, long legs, lush breasts and long braided hair. When she used that guise she was known as LaDami, but she didn’t think LaDami was the right disguise for this occasion.

“Okay,” She paced the length of the clearing, her wings beating open and closed with each step. “Aletta spoke Spanish. I’m in a hot, muggy jungle so I’m probably somewhere in Latin America.” Damia stopped in the middle of the clearing and looked around, gauging to see if there was room enough for the change.

“Latin beauty it is then.” She began to hum, low but melodious. Damia spread her arms to their fullest extent, her wings beat slowly and powerfully, stirring the air around her. Okay, so she was being a little dramatic. Glamour didn’t really take that much effort, but she was never one to pass up an opportunity to show off, even if it was to herself.

She pulled her magic from deep within her and from the surrounding land. She felt heat, fire, and once again wondered where she was.

“All right, enough flash,” she huffed. “According to Dad I don’t have all the time in the world to find a man.”

“*Draiocht*,” she whispered, closing her eyes.

The air around her suddenly quickened, moving until it was a mini tornado, yet she stood there, unaffected by its intensity. Then, just as suddenly, the air stilled. Damia opened her eyes and was pleased with what she could see of herself.

Long tan legs met curvy hips. She reached up to cup her now voluptuous breasts.

“Very nice,” she said, giving them a small squeeze. “I may have to keep these when I get back.”

Damia grasped a strand of her hair—deep black, just what she’d ordered. She left her gown—it wouldn’t fit on her newly curvy body—and started towards the narrow path the man had taken. But she stopped, just short of the pathway. What was she going to do? Walk right up and introduce herself, explain how she needed to have a man fall in love with her or the world would be destroyed, and would he like to be the one to do so?

Her father had made it very clear that she was to find true love by her twenty-eighth birthday, which was just one short year away. Having landed in the middle of nowhere rainforest, she didn’t have much choice but to pursue the one man she had come across. True love? Damia didn’t know about that, but she’d certainly felt true lust. All she

needed to do was to convince handsome he was in love ... Earth would be saved ...
Damia could go home and back to her old life.

Yeah, and the wood nymphs were real faeries.

Chapter Two

Damia squared her shoulders and stepped onto the path. For a moment she wondered how her sisters were faring, but shook that thought away. Her sisters were strong and would accomplish their goal. Now all Damia needed was a plan.

She spent the next few hours slowly tracking the man. Not that it wasn't easy; he walked through the forest like he was a rhino. Even a monkey could have followed his tracks. But she took her time, pondering the seriousness of her situation and trying to come up with some reason, any reason as to how she ended up naked in the forest and, oh yeah, "you can fall in love with me anytime now" excuse.

She was so wrapped up in her thoughts that it wasn't until she stopped at a stream for a drink that she noticed she'd been followed. Just as she was leaning over the water, she saw a small furry face reflected above her. Slowly, Damia looked up to see the trees filled with monkeys, birds and what she thought might be a sloth. A twig snapped behind her and she turned to see the pathway had closed in on itself, the foliage reaching across the path then towards her, as if it too were following her. Being the Faerie of Nature was one thing, but this sudden animal and plant following was starting to creep her out. A deep rumble came from her left followed by another snap.

"*Recepción, curador,*" a rich voice spoke with a purr. "Welcome, healer."

A gorgeous black jaguar padded onto the path to sit, statuesque and regal a few feet away.

"*Saludos,*" Damia responded. "To what do I owe the honor of such an escort?" she asked, waving her hand to indicate the animals in the trees.

"I am *Oscuridad*, or Darkness in the human tongue," the jaguar said, flicking his tail from side to side. "Many have come to see the one who will heal our lands." He nodded his head upwards, indicating the animals above who, at his attention, began to twitter and screech.

"No disrespect, *Oscur*—can I call you that?" Damia paused until he gestured with one huge paw that she should continue.

"Okay, again, no disrespect, but I'm not a healer. I'm just one little faerie who got caught doing something my father thought was a little overboard, so now I'm here, stuck in this rain jungle or forest or whatever you want to call it, with frisky vines, macaws that speak in riddles and..." Damia paused as she noticed the twittering and screeching had stopped. *Oscur* had toppled over and was shaking.

"Hey," she called out, reaching toward him to see if he was okay.

"You are *perfecto*," *Oscur* said through roaring laughter.

"You're laughing at me?" Damia said indignantly.

"Oh, *sí, señorita*," he replied. "You may not believe it yet, but you are a healer of Earth, and soon you will be a *curador de corazones*, no? A healer of hearts." *Oscur* padded toward her and nuzzled her outstretched hand. "He is not far from here. Go to him and have faith in yourself."

Damia started to protest, but *Oscur* nudged her across the stream.

"Time runs short, *curador*. Go," he called as he stalked back into the forest.

"Well," Damia harrumphed, and continued down the path, this time, she noticed,

without the fan club in the trees. “Healer, love ... maybe this is just too much for me.”

She spent the next few hours communing with the animals and plants and listening to the earth. She found that it was indeed sick. Anger and a great sadness resonated from the earth and trees. Fear from the animals. The further she walked away from the clearing where she’d landed, she felt fire and unrest.

Just as Damia was wondering if she’d misread the man’s tracks, she came to another clearing. A campsite. She could see equipment of some sort and the remains of a campfire, but the man was nowhere to be found. The sound of rushing water came from the opposite side of the camp and a waterfall sparkled through the trees.

She wandered over to a table laden with charts, maps and papers. She started to go through the papers when an envelope fell to the ground. Mateo De’Acosta. So, now the man had a name. The envelope was marked urgent.

“I wonder if this will give me any more information.” Damia took the letter out of the envelope and began to read.

* * * *

“Fuck, I’m tired,” Mateo De’Acosta gathered his seismic equipment and packed his rucksack. He glanced up at the horizon. “Just enough time to make it back to camp and take a dip.” He’d traversed close to twenty miles today, having gone to retrieve mail and paperwork from the closest village, *Santo de Fuego*, then back to the base of the volcano to check his equipment.

He only had a few more weeks to continue his studies before his grant ran out and he would have to go back to the States to drum up more funding. His research on how observing the behavior of local animals and the health of the plants could predict volcanic eruptions was vital for remote villages like *Santo de Fuego* and others around the world that lived close to the volcanoes, yet didn’t have the funding or equipment to scientifically predict eruptions.

The letter he’d gotten from the University today said that the assistant they had lined up for him had a family emergency, so he was going to have to complete his research on his own. Mateo didn’t mind being alone, but having an assistant would have sped things up a bit.

Mateo made his way back toward camp. When he reached the stream on the west edge, he peeled off his dusty clothes and dove in the deep pool formed by the waterfall. The water was cold but refreshing and one of the main reasons he’d chosen this site for his camp. There were locations closer to the volcano, but this one was the only one with water so close.

The pool was large enough, so he swam a few laps then reached for the basket of toiletries he kept in a little alcove on the rocky bank. With soap in hand, he climbed up the rocks to the waterfall and began to scrub away the layers of dirt and lava dust. He’d started to stroke his cock, hoping to release more of the day’s tension away when, for the second time today, he felt like he was being watched.

Mateo stepped back behind the waterfall, willing his racing heart to slow. The first time he’d had this feeling had been on his return from the village. He’d felt eyes on him but hadn’t seen anything but a tree that looked as if the vines had molded into the shape of a woman. He needed to remember to bring his camera with him next time. That would be a picture the guys back home would love to see.

He stepped through his watery curtain, leaned forward and glanced up the trail to where his camp was, but couldn't see anyone. He must be going crazy from lack of human contact. Except for his weekly trek to the village, he'd been by himself in the rainforest for close to two months now. All the same, he was going to skip prolonging his bath and get to settling in for the night. He had an early day tomorrow and a lot of work since he wasn't getting an assistant.

Mateo gathered his clothes and backpack, not bothering to dress since he was clean and his clothes weren't. As soon as he reached the top of the short trail to his campsite, he realized not getting dressed was a mistake.

Bent over his table was the most delectable ass he'd ever seen. The woman had legs that went on for miles and ended at cute but dirty bare feet. Her t-shirt and shorts looked vaguely familiar and were obviously too big since she kept tugging at them to keep them from falling.

Please fall down, please fall down, he chanted in his head for a second before he shook off his lust to wonder who she was and why she was looking at his paperwork.

"Um..." he started.

"Aieeee," the woman yelled, whirling and landing in a fight stance.

"Hey now." Mateo backed up a bit so he was out of range of whatever she was planning. "You're in my camp, babe. Who are you and what are you doing here?"

She stood there silent for a moment, dark green eyes flashing with anger yet still beautiful to behold. Long black hair draped over her shoulders to rest on ample breasts. The strands glinted green in the dying sunlight. It reminded Mateo of the glint one might see off of dragonfly wings.

It took him a second to realize he was openly staring at her luscious body. He glanced up and caught a smirk on her face. Her eyes were no longer angry but hungry, and they were staring at him.

She eased out of her stance and sashayed forward. Mateo braced himself, for what he didn't know. He did know that her getting close would be disastrous. Either she was gonna kick his ass, or he was gonna rip her clothes off and bury himself deep in her.

"Hi," she purred when she'd gotten a breath away from him. She put her hands on his naked shoulders and leaned in to kiss one cheek and then the next. Her musky scent brought chills to his body and his cock to attention.

"I'm Damia and the university sent me for you." She stepped back and looked him up and down. "Mateo, right?"

"Mmmm," he responded, barely able to have a coherent thought other than that he wanted her naked now.

"You might want to put some clothes on," Damia said, gesturing to his clothes that he hadn't realized he dropped. "I'm sure if the girls at the university had known you'd greet them in all your glory you wouldn't have had to wait so long for an assistant."

"Shit," Mateo barked. "Um, if you would excuse me..."

With as much dignity he could muster, he bent to retrieve his clothes and walked calmly to his tent, all the while feeling her gaze on him. He zipped the opening closed and sat heavily on his mattress, taking deep breaths. In. Out. *I will not hyperventilate.*

Women were not his specialty, volcanoes were. He'd had a girlfriend or two in high school and then a short and ill lived relationship in college. His model mother and CEO dad had passed down their beauty and brain genes to him, which made women flock to

him like bees to honey. But the minute one came within five feet of him, he began to sweat and all rational thought left. Most of the time he couldn't even speak coherent sentences. How he'd dated at all was a miracle. Well, he hadn't really done any talking on the dates, mostly fucking.

This wasn't going to be easy. He expressly told the university that he wanted a male assistant. He'd gotten snickers from some of the other students who thought his lack of grace with women and his GQ looks made him gay. The reality of it was that he needed to finish this project for his doctorate, and with a woman here, his concentration would be way off.

You can do this. You're the boss. You're the boss. *I'm the boss.*

"Mateo," Damia called, startling him into finally getting dressed. "It's getting late. Shouldn't you be making something to eat?"

"Shouldn't I be making something to eat?" he repeated, unzipping the tent to stalk over to where she stood leaning against the table.

"Listen here," he said, keeping his voice firm and his eyes averted. If he looked at her, he'd be lost. "First rule to remember is that I'm the boss, you're the assistant." He was pacing now, still keeping his gaze on the ground in front of him.

"Okay."

"Second," he continued, "being an assistant means you do the menial jobs, fetching things, setting up the equipment." He stopped pacing and braved a glance at her. "You do know how to set up the seismic equipment, don't you? You do at least have a degree in geology right?"

Damia blanched, but quickly recovered. "Oh, I have a background in Earth studies, with a strong emphasis on plant and animal life. As far as the equipment, I'm a fast learner."

"Plant and animal, huh? You might be somewhat useful after all."

I can do this. I'm the boss.

"So, first things first, Damia. Where is your gear so we can get your tent set up before all the daylight is gone."

"Oh. Umm. My gear?"

"Yeah, your stuff. Clothes, tent, etcetera. You do have gear, don't you?"

"Well, umm, you see..."

She tugged at the oversized shorts again and Mateo realized where he'd seen them before. They were his. He walked around the back of his tent and, sure enough, the clothes he'd washed and hung to dry yesterday were gone, his khaki shorts and green U of H t-shirt, which is exactly what Damia had on.

"Those are mine," he accused, returning to where she still leaned against the table. Her pose was provocative, his t-shirt clinging to her generous breasts, but her face held a look of uncertainty.

The pose had his cock stirring; the look his heart softening.

"All right," he resigned and moved to get his package of dried soup to heat up for dinner. "It's almost dark. You can tell me the story while we eat. I'm sure it will be an interesting one."

Chapter Three

Damia watched silently as Mateo made their dinner. She'd had all day to come up with a story, but the minute she'd seen him in the water stroking his cock all she could think about was diving in, putting her lips around him and sucking him dry. His body was fantastic, leanly muscular with golden brown skin. He had a few days growth of dark beard that made her crave its rough texture at the juncture of her thighs.

She needed to think about what she was going to tell Mateo, not think about how much she wanted to lick him from head to toe. He poured her a bowl of soup that smelled divine and set it in front of her.

"I hope you like lentils," he said, sitting down opposite her at the table. "The University did tell you that I'm a vegetarian, right?"

"I'm not much of a meat fan, either. This smells fantastic." Damia licked her lips and blew softly to cool the soup on her spoon. A soft gasp made her look up at Mateo, who was frozen mid-bite, watching her. His pupils dilated and a soft sheen of sweat began to bead on his forehead, even though the temperature outside was cooling down.

"Um," he said, clearing his throat. "So, what happened to your stuff?"

"It's really rather complicated..."

"We've got all night."

"Heh, okay, well, Dean Anderson said to pack light and to hurry since they were already late in sending you an assistant." Thank the Goddess she'd read the letter talking about his real assistant.

"Sounds like Dean Anderson, but I don't think by 'light' he meant nothing so you'd have to borrow my clothes."

"Of course not. The airline lost my luggage and I went on ahead, giving them the village information so that they could courier it when they find it."

"Okay, so explain how you came to need my shorts and t-shirt?"

"Well, as you know, the trek here is long and I fell into a mud pit. Lost my shoes and my backpack, and my clothes were beyond cleaning, so I left them in the forest. I cleaned off in the creek on the way, and, well, you know the rest."

"Funny," Mateo said, giving her a look that said he didn't quite believe her. "I don't remember a mud pit on the way from the village."

"Oh, it's not on the trail. I'd wondered off to find a place to ... you know, take care of personal business..." She smiled when he blushed. Her lies were getting easier and easier.

"Well," Mateo said. "Even though it sounds like something that would only happen in a B movie, I'm glad you're here. We've got a lot to accomplish in a short time."

"You're telling me," Damia muttered, thinking about her quest.

"What?"

"Oh, um, yes. I'm sure we do." She studied him as he stood to clear the dishes. The sun had set while they were eating and the campsite was pitched in darkness except for the light flickering from the fire. The light highlighted Mateo's features, his prominent jaw line and sensual lips, reminding her of one of her body's elemental needs—sex. But Damia had more than her carnal needs to satisfy; she had a world to save.

“All right, Damia,” Mateo called from the other side of the campsite. “We’ve got an early morning so we should turn in.”

It was too dark to see him blushing, but the sound of it was in his voice, and he’d not looked directly at her since the spoon incident. Best keep him on his toes, she thought. Damia walked slowly toward him, stopping close enough that she could see his lust-filled eyes.

“Oooh,” she yawned, stretching so that her shirt rode up and his too-large shorts dropped down revealing the top of her neatly trimmed mound. “I am tired. We’ll have to share your bed, er, I mean your tent.”

She held back a smirk when he visibly gulped. His innocence was endearing. He really had no idea how much he turned her on. She was going to have fun getting him to fall in lust.

Damia leaned forward, as if leaning in for a kiss. His eyes widened. She could sense his pulse race and his essence reach out to her, setting her body aflame with desire.

“Mateo,” she whispered.

“Yes,” he whispered back.

“Yes, I’ll share your bed, or, yes, I’ll share your tent?”

“Yes,” Mateo repeated.

Damia giggled and gave him a swift kiss on the lips, just enough to tease them both.

“Tent, it is then. I promise not to bite,” she said, tugging on his shirt and leading him toward the tent.

“What if I want you to?” he squeaked out, head still lowered.

Damia turned, pressing into his muscular chest, and wrapped her arms around his neck. She threaded her fingers in his hair and, with a soft grip, tugged his head back so she could look in his eyes.

She let all he made her feel flow from her to him. “Then I’d have to ask you how hard and where you want it?”

* * * *

Mateo stood dumbfounded as Damia ducked into the tent, leaving the flap open, as if in wait for him. Holy shit. In wait for him. “Fuck,” he whispered, running his shaking fingers through his hair, remembering the feel of Damia as she had done the same. What had come over him? Mr. Hardly-Score himself all of a sudden turned into Casanova? “*What if I want you to?*” Where the hell had that come from?

From the moment he’d first seen Damia bent over that table, something more than just hormones kicked in and left him in a constant state of arousal. It was as if she was the opposite pole to his magnet, and the closer he got to her, the stronger the pull became. His head was filled with thoughts of how he would take her. The first time would be intense, heated—he knew once would never be enough. Then he would take her slow, sliding in and out of her heat, caressing every inch of her smooth tan skin—

“Mateo?” Damia called. “Are you coming?”

Almost, he thought wryly, adjusting his painfully hard cock. “Yeah, um, just making sure camp is put up. Be there in a sex, uh, I mean sec.”

God, back to stumbling over his tongue again. He heard her giggle as he walked the perimeter, making sure everything was locked up tight. The local monkeys liked to think they were master thieves, as he learned the first week he was out here. Okay, he couldn’t

stall much longer. He had an early morning and it wouldn't be a productive day unless he had some sleep.

Mateo walked up to the still open tent flap, took a deep breath and let it whoosh out the second he stepped into the tent. A naked Damia was lying face down on his air mattress.

"I hope you don't mind," she purred. "I can't sleep with clothes on."

Mateo grunted in reply, but couldn't move from his spot at the entrance. The muted camp lantern she'd left on for him highlighted her smooth skin. She had a huge, intricate tattoo of wings that spanned her back and shoulders and trailed off somewhere between her lush ass cheeks. Molten fire spread through Mateo and he could see himself tracing those wings with his tongue. Damia let out a sensual moan and arched her back.

"What the..." Mateo whispered. She'd responded as if he *had* been licking her. "Um, Damia, it's fine, I'll ... uh, stay in my clothes so you'll be more comfortable."

She rolled over slightly and he caught a glimpse of her ample breasts. Another tattoo kissed her right breast, this one in the shape of a tiara. Two sexy tattoos on one woman was almost too much.

"If that's what you want," she said.

"I think it's best."

"Okay," Damia replied, rolling back over and settling in on his side of the bed.

Mateo turned off the lantern, pitching the tent into darkness. But even in the dark he could still see her outline. Sleep was going to be a long time coming.

What had to be an hour later Mateo was still awake. He could hear her gentle breathing and had even caught a light snore here and there. He thought for sure there had been some mutual heat going on between them—his body hadn't calmed down all night. Yet, here she was, naked and next to him and she was snoring. Maybe he'd imagined it.

Lying here trying to sleep wasn't working. What he needed was a good fuck. No, what he needed was to fuck Damia, then he'd be able to sleep like a baby.

Maybe if he envisioned a tryst it would have the same effect. Maybe he could quietly and slowly ease his tension himself. He'd tossed and turned for the last hour and she hadn't moved a muscle. If his luck held, he could find relief and she would never know.

Slowly, he eased his hand into his shorts and gripped his cock. He turned his head to face her and, again, visualized tracing every intricate detail of Damia's tattoo with his tongue. When he got to the base of the tattoo nestled between her ass cheeks, he kissed each cheek gently, then spread her ass, kissing and licking his way down to her puckered hole.

With gentle strokes, he laved her, reveling in her musky scent. She lifted her butt, giving him more access. He moved lower to taste her juices, already dripping from her pussy. Damia spread her legs, pushing back so that her ass was in the air. Mateo caressed her hips and trailed his hands down her legs. Her skin was smooth, yet felt as if it held an electrical current. Mateo could almost hear the sizzle as he moved his hands to her hips and once again pulled her ass to his face.

He nibbled his way from one side to the other, soothing the gentle bites with his warm tongue. Her tattoo began to shimmer, almost glowing in the darkened tent. Her body called to him, the phosphorescence of the tattooed wings pulsed with his heartbeat. He flicked his tongue on its glow and a tangy jolt spread like liquid fire, straight to his already swollen cock.

It was as if he'd put his tongue on a nine-volt battery on steroids, but in a way that made his blood surge and his heart clench with an unknown desire.

Whatever it was, he didn't have time to think about it. That jolt spurred him to do what he'd wanted to do since he first saw Damia bent over his table. In one motion, he straightened and plunged his cock into her warmth.

*

Ohmigod, Damia thought with a silent gasp. Never in her life had she experienced such a vivid dream. It had started out with Mateo placing gentle kisses on her back, then he moved to her ass. Goddess, she loved having her ass licked. She'd raised up, giving him better access, and the next thing she'd known she'd felt a jolt of power surge through her body and Mateo had plunged deep into her pussy.

It wasn't that she hadn't had erotic dreams before, but she'd actually felt everything that Mateo had done to her in the dream. She stretched a bit and rolled over slightly, only to get that zing of power straight to her core again. Maybe she was still dreaming. That must be it, dreaming she was dreaming. Damia ventured opening her eyes, just to be sure that she was really awake.

A green glow filled the tent and an electrical current singed the air. *Cac!* The dream had triggered her power. She had to close it back down before Mateo woke up. She sat up and glanced at Mateo, finding him naked and slowly stroking his wonderfully huge cock, eyes closed, his face held a look of intense pleasure. Watching him rekindled the fire that the dream started in Damia. Her mouth watered at the thought of taking him into her mouth.

Mateo's hips bucked and a low groan escaped his lips. Damia moaned as her pussy contracted against an imaginary cock thrusting into her. She looked in wonderment from her body to his, his slow movements, her green glow ... *cac*, she had felt him plunge into her, and not in her dream. What was happening? Mateo was lying not two feet away from her, yet her pussy could feel the in and out motion of his length. She arched her back as she felt teeth clamp down on her nipple and pull.

As exciting as this was, Damia began to panic a little. She was one of Faeridae's greatest supporters of the kinky stuff, and mind-induced sex surely racked up there on the kinky list. But stuff like this didn't happen. Or at least it wasn't supposed to happen.

She gritted her teeth as she felt another imaginary thrust, his hands caressing her tattooed wings, and the sensation sent another wave of power through her. If she didn't do something fast, she was either going to come out of her skin, literally, and scare the shit out of Mateo, or she was going to take over for his hand and ride him to their completion.

"Damia," Mateo whispered, sending erotic shivers down her spine.

Her body pulsed with power, the green glow in the tent growing brighter. Nothing and no one was going to stop her from getting what she needed, what she craved. And that was Mateo.

Chapter Four

Silently, Damia crawled over to Mateo, greedily taking in the scent of his arousal. The green luminescence was still there, hanging in the air of the tent, but she didn't care. All she could think about was the taste of Mateo's cock. Tentatively, she leaned forward and gave a quick lick to the tip. He moaned and thrust again, a sensation she felt on her lips and within her pussy.

Goddess. If sex with Mateo felt this good and they were barely touching each other, Damia didn't know if she would survive the real thing. But she was about to find out.

She eased Mateo's hand from his thick cock and replaced it with her own. Slowly, stroking up and down, she planted quick kisses and licks along the mushroomed ridge. His taste was invigorating, like water to a parched mouth. She couldn't wait any longer. Without preamble, she took his whole cock into her mouth. With slight suction, she drew her mouth back up to the tip then plunged again, making sure the head of his length hit the back of her throat.

Mateo's hands clenched her hair and pulled her off his cock. Eyes no longer closed, he held her gaze, a little fear and a lot of lust in his eyes. She knew this was the turning point, the moment where she took that fall into ever after. Something about Mateo, his innocence, his innate goodness, his love of the Earth and its creatures touched a spot in Damia's heart that had been hidden for a long time. With Mateo, she no longer wanted to hide it.

"Please," she whispered.

Mateo pulled her up onto him with a groan and met her hungry lips with his. Their tongues dueled for control of the kiss, no one wanting to give, but he drew back and gentled the kiss. He licked along the top of her teeth, then plunged back in to lick along the ridge on the roof of her mouth. Again, he pulled back, leaving her breathless from the sensual intensity of his kisses. She tried to force him to move faster by opening her legs and shifting down until her dripping wet sex nudged the head of his cock.

"No," he commanded, grabbing her ass and pulling her up. "Slow."

His kisses trailed from her swollen lips to her chin then down her neck where he bit hard.

"Oh," she moaned as he soothed the bite with deliberate licks, then bit again, this time on her shoulder as he pushed her off of him and rolled her to her back.

She only had a moment to marvel at his quiet strength before she felt his warm breath on her nipple. Her control, which had been hanging by a thread, fled when he fixed his mouth over her areola and began to suckle.

She felt the light now, her glowing essence pulsating with each pull from Mateo's hot mouth. His right hand kneaded the base of the breast he was attending, the other hand trailed hot caresses down her side. When he reached her wetness, he pierced her with two fingers, thrusting them in and out with each pull on her breast. She was so close, never before had such attentive ministrations brought her to the brink of completion so quickly.

"Mateo ... Mateo," she began to chant, over and over again, timing his name with each thrust of his fingers. Just when she didn't think she could handle any more, Mateo pulled back from her breast to bite her nipple, sending her over the edge with a scream.

Her back arched and she bucked as he continued to push in and out of her sopping core, urging her orgasm on.

As soon as she began to come down and relax, Mateo withdrew his fingers and flipped her over, pulling her back so she knelt on her knees, elbows on the ground. He grasped his cock and gently tapped her sex with it, causing another round of spasms. Her nipples hardened and ached for his touch. As if he knew what she wanted, he leaned forward and pinched her jutting peaks. His shaft rested at the opening of her sex, making Damia wait for what she wanted, but what she couldn't ask for. He'd taken over. His body, his essence, his being, controlled her now.

Mateo leaned back, the head of his cock nudging her opening. He stroked the lines of her tattoo wings, tracing the glowing lines to her crevice. In one swift motion, he simultaneously pushed his thumb into her ass and his cock in her pussy.

"Mine," he growled and began the same slow movement she'd felt in her dream, only this time with his hard sex and thumb. Again, erotic sensations threatened to overwhelm her control and the pulsing light grew. With each push into her body, her wings pressed against her back, desperate to break free. He moved his free hand slowly up and down her back, playing with the pulsing ridges of her tattoo.

"Oh, God," he groaned, and instead of slow and steady, his strokes became frantic with need. The movements sent Damia's control spiraling until her wings shoved from her body and the room filled with bright green light. The tent smelled of sex, damp earth, and spices.

In ... out ... the sound of flesh pounding against wet flesh and the wind created by her wings propelled them to the threshold of abandonment and consumed them.

* * * *

The song of a bird woke Mateo at dawn. Funny, he'd never paid much attention to the sound of the birds in the morning, but this one sounded almost cheerful. He tried to roll over to see if Damia was still asleep ... and naked, but ran into soft, cushy flesh. Then it occurred to him, it was skin against skin. His skin against Damia's. In the full second it took for that thought to register in his muddled brain, he felt Damia wake.

"Shit," he yelled, yanking his body away from hers and moving to stand in the far corner of the tent.

"Mateo?" Her voice rang with the timbre of chimes, sending shards of desire straight to his groin. His penis hardened, then moved and waved with a mind of its own. Even though his cock had one idea in mind, Mateo couldn't wrap his mind around what he was seeing.

"What," he started, but choked on his words. "Why ... why are you," he began again. "Why am I...?"

"Naked?" Damia finished with a seductive smile.

"Oh ... my ... God It wasn't a dream." Mateo stood immobilized in the corner of the tent, oblivious to everything but that his dream of hot, heavy and utterly fulfilling sex with Damia had actually happened.

"Come back to bed, Mateo." Damia stretched out her hand, beckoning him. "I'll remind you that last night was indeed no dream."

Mateo wanted nothing more than to jump right back into bed with Damia and shag like minks all day long. But there was a dark whispering in the back of his head that he

was missing something. That something important had happened and he'd forgotten it. That elusive thought was enough to give him pause.

"Um ... okay."

Damia's eyes lit up, but he wasn't done with his thought.

"Okay, as in I need time to digest what did or did not happen last night, and we have a lot of work today. Volcanoes don't wait for lapses in judgment."

The look on Damia's face was that of confusion and hurt, but Mateo really did need to get away from her. He'd never slept with a woman right after meeting her, which is pretty much what had happened.

Ignoring her protests, he dressed, and unzipped the tent door. "You can borrow whatever clothes you need, but be quick about it. Today's tests are going to take all day."

He ducked and stepped out into the cool dawn. The sun was just peeking through the tall jungle trees.

"Be at the volcano base in twenty minutes or I'm sending you back to Arizona," he yelled as he gathered up his equipment and headed for the volcano.

It was going to be the longest fucking day of his life.

* * * *

A full five minutes passed before Damia could shake off the shock of Mateo's response to their night of lovemaking. And that's what it had been. She didn't know what else to call it. No sex had ever come as close to touching her emotional core as Mateo's lovemaking had. Damia had fallen hard, and for a geek no less.

Though she had a feeling her father had told her more about the true reason for her mission because of her accidental eavesdropping than what most of her sisters knew, each of the four women had to accomplish the same end of love and marriage. Their father had given them a year to complete their missions, and if Damia had had her way, she would have procrastinated until the last day. But she hadn't had her way. She'd been tossed into the middle of nowhere so she couldn't dawdle and play at being human in a civilized city.

She'd had to latch on to the first human she came across. Otherwise she'd have spent a year playing that jungle woman from the book about some guy named Targa or Larzan, or whatever. Sure, she knew her goal. To stay out of the grimy clutches of the ogre king, and to keep the balance of the worlds by getting someone to fall in love with her.

"But, Goddess ... could I be in love?" she called to no one at all. "From Mateo's reaction this morning, not only didn't he fall in love with me, but he hates me."

"Prove yourself worthy," a voice called from outside the tent.

This was one of those moments where Damia wished her powers didn't include talking to animals. She quickly dressed and stepped out of the tent to see Aletta, the macaw she'd spoken with yesterday.

"And what do you know of it?" Damia asked, anger flushing her voice.

Aletta remained perched on a branch for a moment, and then flew off into the forest.

"Prove worthy." The words whispered in the wind, and Damia knew they were from Aletta.

She headed off to the base of the volcano with an unladylike snort. *Prove myself worthy of him. I'm a faerie princess. He should be groveling at my feet.* But even before she'd finished the thought, Damia knew there was some truth to the wise bird's guidance.

* * * *

Finding the volcano base camp proved more difficult than Damia had planned. Almost a full hour after she'd left the campsite, she finally found Mateo adjusting a video camera that faced the forest. She'd cooled off a bit about their confrontation in the tent, and for the first time in her life, she didn't know how to proceed. If things had stayed just about sex, then she would have been in her element. Right now she felt more like a virgin, and she hadn't been that for a long time.

"Well, it's about time," Mateo said, not acknowledging her with even a glance. "Come here and hold this camera."

"Why did you have to camp so far away from the volcano?"

"It's an active volcano," he said simply. "Now come here and hold the camera."

She followed his instructions on how to adjust and loosen or tighten the knobs on the stand, then waited while he sat behind a row of monitors. Pouting wasn't doing her any good and he was more interested in the forest than her. Maybe some conversation would get his mojo running.

"Why are you filming the forest?" she asked. "Aren't you supposed to be studying the volcano?"

Mateo fixed her with an "are you kidding" glare. He ignored her question and gave her directions to move the camera until it was in the perfect position. At least according to him. Damia didn't understand why you'd want to film the bottom of the trees, but she'd already been shut down when she started to ask questions.

Aletta's words whispered in her head. *Prove worthy.*

"Look," Damia said once Mateo had dismissed her from the camera. "I know you don't want to talk about last night, and that's okay, but I am here to help you. As I said before, my specialty *is* in Earth studies. You just need to tell me what you're doing here so I can help."

Damia watched him as he finished tabulating something in his workbook. His intensity was one of the things that she loved about him. If he was going to do anything, it would be done right and with gusto, as he'd proved last night. Her nipples beaded as she remembered how he'd squeezed, pinched and sucked on them. She'd wanted to do the same with him, to tease his small nipples to hard peaks then nip and lick them until he was moaning her name and begging her to use her mouth other places.

A low moan escaped Mateo. She caught his eyes and almost reeled from the passion in them. His breath had become shallow, as had hers. She knew instinctively that her thoughts had ignited that response from Mateo. Inwardly, Damia smiled. She should only be able to make him respond that way if they had a true bond, so she knew it was only a matter of time before he got over himself and realized that with her he had found the passion of a lifetime.

"Damia," he croaked.

She started to stalk toward him, but he put out his hand to stay her.

"Please, just sit and watch what I'm doing." Mateo motioned to the chair next to him. "I'll try to explain what we're trying to accomplish here and see if we can't make any progress today. I don't have much longer to complete this before I have to get back to the States."

Damia sat in the chair next to him, confused at how he could ignore her pull. She was going to have to turn up her seductress dial, or end up alone in the forest.

Chapter Five

“Basically, in layman’s terms,” Mateo began, still adjusting screens and making notations in his notebook, “what I’m trying to do is to help countries, like Costa Rica, who have little or no funding to have early warning systems for volcanic eruptions.

“My theory is that if people observed the behaviors of the forest or jungle animals and birds, they’d know that the volcano is in the beginning stages of eruption and either call in the proper scientists to monitor it, or uproot their villages and move to a safer distance.”

That was putting what he was doing in the simplest terms. Mateo had thought that even that short explanation would bore Damia, but when he looked at her she had a look of expectancy on her face. Waiting to hear more? Maybe she had more layers than he’d given her credit for. It was just so hard for him to get past the Latin goddess outside layer to even imagine there might be a brain in there.

He got up and walked over to the seismograph. “Come here and look at this.” She rose and stood across from him. “This is a seismograph. It’s used to record and measure earthquakes.”

She looked up at him, confusion where interest had been before. “If you’re studying volcanoes, why do you need an instrument for earthquakes? I do know that those are two different disasters.” She’d cocked her hip, placing her hand on it in a stance of defiance.

“Well, you’re right,” Mateo said. He held back a smirk knowing what reaction his next statement would bring. “And you’re wrong.”

“Hummmph.” The hand-hip-I’m-not-stupid stance turned into arms-crossed-I’m-not-wrong stance. God, how her anger enflamed his desire. If they were ever to engage in a serious relationship, he could imagine all the make-up sex they would have after every argument, and there would be many.

“Explain,” Damia said, interrupting his reverie.

What the hell? He was thinking long-term after only one night with her. That was not a good sign; it was best to keep things on a professional level.

“Okay, yes volcanoes and earthquakes are two different disasters, but before volcanoes erupt, the magma, that’s lava before it comes out of the volcano, begins to come to the surface, causing small earthquakes. The seismograph reads those quakes and then the scientists can go from there to determine how much longer until the volcano erupts.”

“Has anyone ever told you how sexy you are when you speak scientific?”

“Um.” Mateo cleared his throat and was thankful that he was behind the seismograph so his instant erection was hidden from Damia’s view.

“No, I can’t say that anyone has.”

“Well, all I know is that I want to jump over this table, rip your clothes off, take your wonderful cock in my mouth and suck you dry.” Damia’s eyes changed color, widening in passion. If it hadn’t been for her eyes, Mateo would have shoved the seismograph off the table with no thought to its cost and taken her there on the table. But her eyes stopped him short.

They had always been an odd shade of dark green. Now the pupils were pinpricks,

and the irises had a shimmering glow to them; that sort of deer-in-headlight glow. His skin grew hot with desire mixed with a little fear. As her hungry opalescent gaze traveled over his body, he could feel hands stroking his shoulders, down his arms and back up, over his chest, stopping at his tight nipples.

But that was impossible, Damia was still across the table from him.

Any logic or reason he'd been clinging to fled as he suddenly felt the tight wet moistness of a mouth surrounding his cock. He looked into her eyes again. They still had that unnatural glow and her gaze was concentrated on his groin area.

"Hmmmmm," Damia hummed.

Mateo jumped; he'd felt that vibration all the way down to his balls.

"What are you doing, Damia?"

"Hmm?" This time she looked at his face. "What I want."

Mateo had to brace himself on the table as he felt the imaginary mouth moving back and forth on his rigid shaft.

"Oh, God," he groaned. Unable to resist the pull of the mouth and the heat overwhelming his body, he gave in to the feeling. Her hands, for somehow he knew it was her doing this to him and not his imagination, caressed his balls, lightly squeezing and rolling them.

Her mouth sucked and pulled, tightening around his hardness with each lunge. As she pulled away, her tongue lifted up and pressed the length of him. She kept up a constant steady pleasurable torture until he could no longer retain control.

"I'm ... oh ... yeah." Unable to make a coherent thought, he stumbled over his words. He must have said something right because Damia picked up the pace and her hand moved from his balls to his ass. As the tip of her finger worked into his hole, orgasm rocked through him. He cried out and shook with such intensity he felt the earth move under him.

As Mateo began to relax, he expected the shaking to subside, but it only intensified. It wasn't until the alarm went off on the seismograph that he realized it was a real earthquake.

"Holy shit," he yelled, instantly going into scientist mode. Regardless of the wet state of his pants, he checked all the instruments and gauges, ignoring Damia. Pushing her aside, he returned to the seismograph table to verify the intensity of the quake.

"Wow," he said, watching fascinated as the sensitive needle slowed then evened out to its normal pace of tiny jumps. "That was a 3.5 on the Richter Scale. The biggest I've had yet."

*

Damia couldn't believe her ears.

"I just gave you the biggest orgasm of your life and you're 'wowing' a fucking earthquake?" She pushed him to get his attention from the damned machine he was practically having sex with. "I'm the biggest you've had yet."

"Damia, you're the biggest pain I've had yet," he said softly, but the fury mounting in his eyes conflicted with the sound of his voice. "I told you I wasn't interested in talking about last night or even having any sort of sexual contact with you and, what do you do, but pull some sort of voodoo mind trick with me and force me to..." He grabbed her by the shoulders and moved her away from him. "Just leave me alone. Quit throwing your 'princess' pity party and just go."

Damia gasped at the “princess” comment but stood firm. Twice now he’d denied her satisfaction—not that she hadn’t come just as hard as he had with her mental blowjob. But he’d denied her the satisfaction of knowing he felt the same. Her heart was full to bursting for the infernal man and all he cared about was a stupid earthquake. An earthquake she knew that he had caused.

I wonder what Mr. Science Boy would say if he found out that he’d caused the earthquake, or rather they had, together.

“Fine,” she huffed. “I’ll go back to camp and make sure nothing is broken.”

Damia waited a full minute before she realized he wasn’t going to say anything else. How hard was it to make the man admit to his feelings? Mental stimulation only occurred with true mates, and no matter what Mateo thought, he was hers. What else could the man want other than mind blowing sex?

She fumed the entire trip back to camp. The tent was a little askew and the chairs had fallen over, but other than that, not much harm had been done to the campsite at all. She straightened up, hot and sticky from sweat and her own release. She decided to take a dip in the cool pool and think about how she was going to get Mateo to confess his undying love.

The water was crisp, but Damia was used to cooler water, the lakes and streams in Faeridea were just a touch chillier than this and she swam in them all the time. She missed home. She missed her sisters. She missed uncomplicated liaisons. Why couldn’t she have been born a simple sprite or even a lesser fae? But no, she had to be a princess and save fucking worlds.

She rested against the bank of the pool, contemplating the events of the last few days until she drifted off into a fitful sleep.

People screaming. Buildings and homes in ruin, children dirty and crying for their lost, dead mothers. Animals scared, burned. Birds flightless from the thick, cloying smoke that permeated the air. She ran, screaming for Mateo, trying without success to aid anyone she came across. But they all shunned her. They would all rather die than be touched by her.

Mateo. Where was Mateo? She called his name until her voice was gone. She sent out a pulse of power, searching. Nothing. Mateo. Dead. Gone. Mateo.

* * * *

Nothing he’d ever studied had prepared Mateo for dealing with oversexed females. Namely Damia. And he didn’t even want to try to wrap his head around the fantastic blowjob she’d given him with her mind. He was a scientist; things like that just didn’t happen. After taking down and cataloging all the information from the quake, though, he couldn’t help but dwell on Damia.

Mateo felt bad at how he’d brushed her off. He was at a loss as to how to handle her other than actually manhandling her. That he wanted to do day and night, but for some reason, the way she was treating him made him feel more like a favorite candy bar than a respected lover. She’d fooled him into thinking she was actually interested in his work until she’d made the sexy scientist comment.

At this point he was very confused. Puzzled by Damia, and puzzled by the earthquake. He’d even double-checked his equipment to make sure the information was right. Other than the seismograph, none of the instruments had registered anything. It was

almost as if the quake had been pinpointed where he and Damia stood. Which didn't happen; there was no way a quake could be that focused.

Mateo checked the trackers and monitors he'd attached to the local wildlife when he'd first arrived and they too showed nothing. Normal heart rates, normal activity. Volcanoes he understood, and even this weird quake had an explanation, he just had to find it, but Damia, she was another matter.

Yes, he wanted her, with a passion he couldn't understand. It was almost as if he needed her to survive, but couldn't that just be lust? She acted like he should be courting her or something. She was the one who'd pushed him into everything they'd done so far. Even with the intensity of his lustful feelings toward her, he never would have acted on them if she hadn't taken the initiative.

The afternoon heat was starting to get to him, so he grabbed his laptop and the folding chair and moved to the edge of the forest. He wasn't surprised in the least when, shortly after he sat down, he heard the rustle of wings behind him. From the moment he'd entered the forest a beautiful macaw had followed him around. What he found curious was that even though the bird's bright color showed her as a male, he knew instinctively that she was female. He'd spent many an afternoon with no company but the macaw and had gotten in the habit of speaking to her. Who knew? Maybe she had some parrot-genes in her family and would say something back to him one day.

"So," he began, turning to look at the bird. "Any suggestions for dealing with a stubborn, overbearing, but damned sexy woman?"

"Listen to your heart."

"God," Mateo moaned, putting his head in his hands. "I am going insane. I just thought I heard you talk."

The bird looked at him, and with a wink flew away.

"Come." Mateo heard the words whispered on the wind and, no matter how crazy he knew it to be, followed the bird into the forest.

Now he had three things to freak out over. Why couldn't he have followed in his father's footsteps and been a boring, normal computer programmer or something? No, he had to go out into the world and try to save it. *Fat lot of good that's doing me now.* Following a talking bird to who knows where in the middle of a rainforest, a hot chick with glowing eyes and a huge tattoo, and hyper-focused earthquakes. What would be next, faeries and goblins?

Chapter Six

“Mateo!”

Mateo stopped in his tracks. He’d followed the macaw for about thirty minutes before he realized she was taking him toward the campsite. And just now he thought he’d heard his name. He listened for a minute then continued on. Damia was at the campsite and he didn’t know if he wanted to see her just yet or not, but the bird seemed to have other ideas.

“No, Mateo!”

There, this time it was louder. He had heard his name.

“Damia?” he called. “Where are you?” Mateo started running toward where her voice had come from.

An earsplitting scream made him change direction toward the shallow pool below the campsite and he burst through the trees to see Damia, naked and partially in the water, lying on the bank screaming.

“Damia.” Mindless of the water, he plunged in and grabbed her, carrying her from the water before she drowned and laid her down on the ground. “Wake up, honey. Damia ... I’ve got you.”

Her scream slowly faded and she began to weep, her body going from rigid to shaking. She still hadn’t opened her eyes. He scooped her up again and hiked the short trail up to the camp, whispering soothing words, trying to get her to wake up and calm down. He wondered what sort of dream or trance she’d had to affect such a response in her.

When he got her to the tent he laid her on the mattress and covered her with the blanket, but she still shook.

“Damia, please, wake up, honey. I need you to wake up.”

“I’m sorry, Father,” she muttered through chattering teeth. “I failed, he’s dead. Mateo’s dead.”

Father? Failed? Mateo didn’t know what that was supposed to be about but he knew two things. He wasn’t dead, and Damia was going to go into shock if he couldn’t get her to warm up and stop shaking. Quickly, he stripped down to nothing and scooted under the blanket, enveloping her in his arms. His body instantly responded, every muscle attuned to Damia’s soft curves and spicy scent, but he willed the reaction away. This was not about him, this was about Damia, and the last thing she needed was Mr. Randy-Pants.

Gradually, Damia’s tremors ceased and she settled with a sigh into his embrace. Just before he drifted off to sleep himself, Mateo thought he could get used to having her in his arms.

* * * *

Damia awoke with a sense of security that she hadn’t felt since she was a child. Maybe she was still dreaming. At first the dream had been frightening; Earth was devastated. People and animals everywhere dead, homes destroyed. She’d gone searching for Mateo, hoping against all odds that, like her, he had survived the destruction. But as

she found his dead, lifeless body she'd heard an evil, maniacal laugh in her head, "*You've lost. He can't help you anymore.*"

That was when she'd realized that it was a foreshadowing of what would happen if she failed at her task and Hadrea's evil was allowed to permeate the Earth. The dream and fear had slowly faded to nothing but a dark, warm peace and then nothing.

Damia took a deep cleansing breath and her senses were overwhelmed with the masculine scent of Mateo. She had a fleeting thought of turning his calming embrace into hot, animal sex but remembered his words from earlier. He was right. She had forced herself on him. She'd never had to justify her actions before, they had always either been right enough to her that she didn't care, or her peers had chalked her actions up to her being a princess.

She shook her head and Mateo tightened his hold before settling back into a relaxed sleep. She'd acted like a spoiled brat, throwing a hissy fit because Mateo hadn't fallen head-over-heels for her the instant he'd seen her. So she'd tried to force the issue, thinking that Mateo was like any other man, human or faerie, and sex would be the cure all. But Mateo wasn't like any other man.

He was genuinely concerned with the quality of life and the future of the people of this rain forest and others like it. His sense of right and wrong was dead on, and he held his honor like a shield. A shield that she'd decimated with her conceit and disrespect.

Goddess, she was such an idiot. Aletta had been right when she'd said Damia had to prove her worth. No sane man would want a spoiled princess. Fortunately, she knew her worth was more than surface. Before she'd gotten caught up with defying who she was and her role as a daughter of the Faerie King, she'd had purpose, goals. Her father had given that back to her, but she'd been too arrogant to see it.

Damia snuggled closer to Mateo with renewed faith in herself and that she could do as Aletta charged her to do, prove herself worthy of Mateo's love.

* * * *

Night had fallen by the time Mateo awoke. His encounter with Damia at the base of the volcano and rescuing her from her nightmare had taken its toll and he'd slept like the dead. She wasn't lying next to him, but a muffled curse let him know she was in camp.

"Son of a succubus," he heard her say.

Mateo chuckled. Despite his reservations regarding Damia, she was entertaining. He unzipped the tent door and saw her struggling with the camp stove. The gas lantern was on its side, unlit, and she was trying to light the stove with a flashlight in one hand and an almost burnt out match in the other.

"What are you trying to do, Damia?" he asked, taking the match from her. "Blow us up now?" He knew he'd deliberately goaded her, but he was still a little mad at her. Expecting a rant about how he'd slept the day away and she was hungry, he was mildly surprised when she let him light both the lantern and stove without comment.

"I was trying to make us dinner, but I've never used that kind of stove before." Damia scuttled over to the cooler and pulled out two huge fish. "I caught these and thought they would be good for dinner."

Mateo started to protest when she interrupted him.

"That was until I remembered you're a vegetarian, so I gathered some plants and herbs for a salad and figured I could eat the fish while you ate the salad."

For a moment Mateo thought he might be sleeping still. If he thought he had trouble digesting a domineering Damia, this contrite one was almost too much.

“How did you ... never mind, I’ll eat the fish.” He smiled when she visibly relaxed and looked obviously relieved. “I only became a vegetarian because I knew that in some of the places I needed to go for my research, meat would be a hard commodity to find.” He moved to help her clean the fish. “Fish would be a welcome addition to my diet. Thanks.”

They worked silently for the next hour, cleaning and cooking the fish and making a salad. It wasn’t until they’d both finished eating and the dishes were clean that Damia spoke.

“I’m sorry.”

“Sorry? For what? You didn’t do anything and that dream must have been a doozy. I couldn’t wake you for the life of me.” Mateo reached out to tuck a wavy tendril of her ebony hair behind her ear. “You really had me worried there for a bit.”

“It was a frightening dream, but that’s not what I’m sorry about.” She took a visible breath, girding herself for what she had to say. “I’ve pushed you to do things you didn’t want to, taken away your choice in the matter, and for that I truly am sorry. No one should have their right to choose taken away.”

Mateo didn’t want to make light of her apology, but he couldn’t let her think that their encounters had been entirely one sided.

“I accept your apology,” he said, taking his finger and lifting her chin up so that she had to look him in the eyes. “But I wouldn’t have made love to you if it was really something I hadn’t wanted to do. I might have taken a bit longer to get around to it, but don’t ever think that I didn’t want to be with you, Damia.”

A single tear rolled down her cheek and he kissed it away. When she didn’t attempt to make a move and wrestle him to the ground to have her way with him, he kissed her again. On her nose. Her chin. Her forehead. He gently took her head in his hands, and softly laid his lips on each of her closed eyes. Finally, he placed a lingering kiss on her lush lips. She trembled from his gentle ministrations and he pulled back to look at her.

“Look at me, Damia.”

She blinked her eyes open, her eyes still shimmering with unshed tears. He could see hesitation in them, almost as if she didn’t know how to respond. He imagined she’d never given up control before.

“I wanted to kiss you. Never doubt that.”

Damia moved into him and he held her while she silently cried. When she finally broke away, Mateo felt like a piece of him was broken away, that with her close to him he was more of a whole than he had been before. She smiled sweetly up at him and wiped away her tears.

“Thank you,” she said, brushing at his shirt where her head had been. “Goddess, I’ve ruined your shirt. I’m such a stupid girl, blubbering all over you.”

“Blubber away, Damia. I’m here if you need me.” She smiled at that then kissed him lightly on the lips before turning around to finish drying the dishes.

Mateo wondered if he should be concerned that his heart had yelled “forever” after he’d offered to be there for Damia. Funny how the word “forever” had never been in the same thought with a woman before. There was always a first time for everything, right?

* * * *

The next few days passed without incident. Damia and Mateo settled into a routine of sorts. After breakfast they would go to the volcano, check the equipment and monitor any activity. Mateo talked of his family, his school, his goals in life. They laughed over his failed attempts at previous relationships with girls.

Damia told him of her life as much as she could, not trying to fill in any blanks with lies, though that would have been the easy route. She'd promised herself she would be worthy and she meant it. Each day her love for Mateo grew and at times it pained her to go against her nature and not rip his clothes off and indulge in his yummy body. But the more she understood Mateo and who he was, the more she respected his choices in life and realized that he truly was the one for her; she just had to be patient and let the Goddess control fate, versus Damia forcing fate to her will.

The dawning of her third week on Earth she knew something was wrong. She could sense a faint trace of evil floating in the wind and as soon as her feet touched the ground she felt the shock of it run through her body.

"Mateo," she called back to him in the tent. "Something is wrong."

Mateo raced out of the tent, almost falling as he pulled his shorts on. "What? Where?" he asked, still groggy and disoriented from sleep. "Is it those infernal monkeys again?"

"No. Can you feel it?"

"Feel what? It's barely dawn, Damia, and you're asking me to 'feel' something."

"I'm sorry for waking you, but something bad is going to happen today."

"Yeah? Please don't break anything again. It's going to cost me a fortune to replace the equipment you've messed up." He moved to go back into the tent but she raced over to him and stopped him. Because she'd been trying to refrain from accosting Mateo sexually it was the first time in a week they'd so much as touched. Liquid fire boiled through her veins. *The volcano!* By closing herself off to the intensity of her feelings for Mateo she'd lost touch with the earth as well.

"We need to go check the equipment, Mateo." She pushed him into the tent and urged him to finish dressing. "I can feel the volcano's unrest."

Mateo sat for a moment where she'd pushed him. "You can feel the volcano?"

"Yes, I don't have time to explain, but if we don't go now, it may be too late to stop it."

Mateo gave a frustrated sigh. "If the volcano is going to erupt, there isn't much we can do to stop it, Damia. Haven't you been listening to me while I explained how volcanoes work?"

"Yes, I've listened," she snapped. "But I'm telling the truth. This is not a natural unrest. Evil is feeding it and we can stop it if we hurry."

Damia rushed out of the tent, not caring if Mateo believed her or not. She sent out a power pulse looking for Aletta, who flew into the campsite within moments.

"We must hurry," she said to Aletta. "Find Oscur and bring him to the base of the volcano." She watched as Aletta flew into the forest and Mateo finally emerged from the tent.

"Am I crazy or were you just talking to that bird?"

"Ugh," Damia growled. "Hurry."

She raced down the hill and into the forest on the trail toward the volcano, hoping against hope that she would not be too late.

*

Mateo wondered if Damia had had one of those nightmares again. He couldn't think of anything else that would prompt her to turn into a crazy voodoo chick. Okay, so she already was crazy, but in a good way that made his heart beat faster and his cock twitch every time he looked at her. He didn't know what had come over her the last week or so, but she hadn't so much as given him a saucy look and he was beginning to wonder if he'd turned her off completely.

Truthfully, the change had been welcome. He'd taken the time to try and get to know her, but found she'd rather talk about him than herself. Every time he asked about her family, she changed the subject. Once she'd spoken so wistfully, though vaguely, about her sisters that if he'd had the means, he would have called each of them up then and there so she could speak with them. But being in the middle of the rain forest did have its disadvantages—no phone lines.

He stooped to gather up his backpack when he felt the first of the tremors.

“Shit.”

If he could feel the quake then at the volcano it would be much worse and Damia was headed straight for it. He bolted down the hill, running full throttle by the time he hit the trail through the forest. He came upon fallen trees and fleeing animals but didn't stop to consider the consequences of those things. Damia was his focus.

What if he didn't make it in time? He didn't want to think about it, but as the ground lurched under him, making him stumble, he had to wonder. When he finally found his footing he knew. That pull, the stomachache he felt when he thought of Damia, his desire, his restraint, all of it, it was love. He loved her!

“Fuck!” He ran with everything he had. There was no other choice.

Chapter Seven

As he surged through the trees, Mateo saw Damia kneeling in the center of the clearing. He plunged ahead into the clearing and ran into a solid invisible wall. He ended up flat on his back, with the wind knocked out of him. The ground surged beneath him, and he got up painfully. What had he run into? He couldn't see anything, yet as he stretched his hand out, he felt the jolt of an electrical current run up his arm.

If he didn't know any better, he would have thought he was in some sort of science fiction horror movie, but this was real life, and Damia was in real danger. Still a little shaky, he stood and took a step forward, only to land flat on his ass again.

"Damia," he yelled. "You have to get out of here."

She gazed back at him with such a look of sorrow and love he knew that whatever she was doing, he wasn't going to like it.

"Move your ass woman! Now!" He searched for something to use against the invisible force field, but found nothing. The earthquake was getting worse, and Mateo could see the beginnings of steam and smoke coming from the top of the volcano. He ran to the edge of the clearing, testing to see if there was a spot he could penetrate and each time was thrown back.

Damia silently watched him. Each time he failed he heard her cry out, telling him to stop, that she wasn't worth the pain he was causing himself, but he didn't listen. His last attempt threw him back against a tree. Before he blacked out, he saw Damia spread her arms wide and the air around her began to shimmer, then he was thrust into blackness.

He was roused by something wet and scratchy. Mateo opened his eyes to see that the wet and scratchy object was the tongue of a black panther. Fear froze him. The panther sat back on its haunches and regarded Mateo. He was afraid to do anything but breathe until he heard a low voice speaking in his head.

Do not be afraid, but you must hurry. The princess is in danger and you are the only one who has the power to save her.

Somehow Mateo knew it was the panther communicating with him and dread spread over him as he realized who the princess was the panther spoke of ... Damia.

He got up and looked into the clearing, expecting to see Damia trapped inside the clearing, just as he had been trapped out of it, but it wasn't Damia that he saw. In her place was a being of such intensity and beauty that Mateo fell to his knees. She knelt with her arms outstretched and chanted in a language he didn't recognize.

Her skin was the lush green of the rainforest, her hair long tendrils that looked like thick vines. They reminded him of dreadlocks, only they were a deep emerald and each strand had a lifelike movement to it. Her body was long and willowy, her arms muscular yet graceful.

He'd begun to wonder if he was still unconscious when movement behind her made him gasp. Unfurling behind Damia were the largest pair of butterfly shaped wings he'd ever seen. They shimmered in the sunlight with a myriad of iridescent greens much like a dragonfly's wings. He knew those wings. He'd made love to those wings.

"Damia?" he called softly.

The creature opened her eyes and he knew without a doubt that it was Damia. Her

eyes were glowing the same opalescent green they had when she'd given him the mental blowjob.

"Damia? What's happening? What are you doing?"

"I'm sorry, Mateo." Her voice strummed over him in a wave of pleasure. "I must do this. I'm sorry for what is going to happen. I tried my best."

"Tried your best? What are you talking about? What is going to happen?" Mateo was beginning to panic. Too many things were happening at once. The volcano, Damia's change, his heart clenching from the knowledge that something horrible was about to occur. "Look," he said. "I don't care about what's going to happen. I only care about you."

The minute he said it, he realized it was true. He didn't care what she was or who she was, he only knew that without her his life would be worse than living in hell.

"Damia, please."

"Mateo, I..." She stopped as the ground beneath her began to boil and roll. Mateo watched in horror as she started to sink into the dry earth.

"God. No." He ran forward, this time whatever had been holding him back was no longer there.

"Here, take my hand." He reached and caught her hand and tried in vain to pull her from the earth that was slowly swallowing her.

"It is as it must be," Damia said, tears streaming down her beautiful face. "I love you, Mateo, with all of my being."

"You are not leaving me! You can't!" The ground had her to just below her breasts. "I won't let you go."

Mateo dove to the ground, trying to hold her up, but nothing he did seemed capable of saving her from the force that pulled her under.

"Mateo," she whispered. He looked into her eyes, caught between rage and love.

"Kiss me," she pleaded.

The ground was at her shoulders now. There was no saving her.

"Damia," he began. "I love you. I will always love you." He continued to tell her over and over as he bent to kiss her one last time. The joy in her eyes at his confession tore at his heart. He kissed her with all the tenderness he could muster, despite his fear and anger at the unjustness of the situation.

"Forever," she said as the earth consumed her.

Mateo roared in anguish.

"Why?" Mateo yelled to the heavens. "Why," he repeated in a whisper.

The ground where Damia had disappeared was solid, as if it had never melted and taken the woman he loved. He lay down, covering the spot with his body.

"I will always love you." He cried, and his tears wet the earth.

*

Damia, it is not your time. You have triumphed. Your power and Mateo's love have pushed the evil back. You have much more life to live. Your sacrifice has proven you worthy.

Damia felt the earth pulse around her. She hadn't really been afraid of the ground as it swallowed her. She was as much a part of the earth as the plants or animals, so it almost felt like she'd returned home. But her heart was with Mateo and she rejoiced as she felt herself rise to the surface.

*

“God, not again.” Mateo barely had time to register that the earthquake was gone and the volcano wasn’t erupting when the ground beneath him began to buckle again. Only this time it was growing into a mound. He scrambled to his feet and watched as the mound changed shape and elongated into an almost six-foot tower of earth. After what he’d witnessed today, nothing fazed him.

It wasn’t until the tower began to mold into the shape of a woman that his heart took off. He didn’t want to hope, but as the shape solidified into Damia, hope was exactly the emotion that swept through him, followed quickly by many more: shock, disbelief, and the greatest of all, love.

“Mateo,” she said weakly before her knees gave way. He lunged to catch her and used his body to break her fall.

“How?” he asked. “Never mind, it doesn’t matter.” Mateo kissed her with abandon, letting his wild emotions take over. “I have you and I’m never letting go.”

“Oh, Mateo,” Damia gasped. “I love you so much. I need you.”

“I need you too.”

Mateo gently rolled over and kneeled so that he could lift her into his arms. He didn’t want to risk putting her back on the ground just yet. He still couldn’t believe that she had come back to him.

“We are going back to camp and you’re not going anywhere until you’re stronger. We can talk there about what the hell just happened.”

Damia snuggled into his embrace, her dreads brushing against his neck, sending shards of lust through him. She was still in her winged form, the butterfly wings folded, but with each step they brushed against his arm causing his desire for her to shoot through the roof. *Get a grip, man.* Her breathing was still shallow and her skin was a paler green than when he’d seen her in the meadow after she’d changed. This was no time to think about sex.

“It’s a perfect time,” Damia whispered. “I will come back into my full power when we truly join our bodies in love.”

“Did you just read my mind?” he asked her, although he didn’t know why he was surprised.

“Well, in a way. I can feel your thoughts, um, especially intimate ones, so I knew what you were thinking, then felt you close it off.”

“So that’s what you were doing that day.” Mateo stopped and set Damia on the ground. “Now, don’t you go anywhere.”

They’d made it to the pool where he planned to wash away the dirt that covered them. He stripped down and gently picked Damia up again, walking slowly into the water so they both could get used to the temperature.

“You’ve done it to me, you know,” Damia said as he let the lower half of her body slide into the water. She could barely stand. He held her fast to his chest and with slow, delicate movements smoothed water over her soft skin, cleansing away the dirt.

“I have?” he asked, unsure of what she referred to.

“Yes, the first night. I woke feeling you move inside me. I felt you bite my nipples. Your soft caresses all over my body.” She ground her mound into his already aching cock. “Like now, only it’s so much better for real.”

“Damia,” Mateo groaned. “I didn’t know.”

“Now you do.” She reached up and brought his mouth to hers. “Make love to me. I need you inside me.”

“You’re still weak. As much as I want to, I don’t want to hurt you.”

“Is it me? The way I look? Does my skin turn you away?”

“No. God no.” He kissed her, demonstrating the passion he felt. “You are magnificent. More than I could ever imagine. I love you, Damia. It doesn’t matter what you look like.”

“I’m glad to hear it,” she replied, returning his kiss.

“But,” he said, pushing her away from him so that he could look her in the eyes.

“What exactly are you? Something like a were-wolf? A were-butterfly?”

Damia laughed and kissed him. “A faerie princess, my love. The Faerie of Nature to be exact.”

“Faerie?” He returned the kiss, his hands caressing up and down her back. “I should have known; you’re pure magic.”

A moan of pleasure escaped her lips.

“No, Mateo, together we are pure magic. Now shut up and make love to me so I can show you just how magic we can be.”

He stopped then, grasped her face in his hands and brought her gaze to his.

“How? How did a geeky volcanologist end up with such a hot faerie?”

“Fate. Destiny. I don’t know, Mateo, I just know we are two parts of a whole and without you I’m only half formed.”

Mateo stroked his hands down her shoulders to her fingers and brought them to his lips. “You’re magnificently formed. This time will be slow. I want to explore every luscious inch of your body, from the tips of your wings to the bottom of your feet. I will know you.”

He bent and kissed her neck, following the trail his hands had just made. Damia seemed steady enough so he let go of her hands and continued to roam her body with his hands.

“Your skin is soft as silk.” Mateo reached out and grasped a handful of dreads and pulled her closer to him. “You smell of flowers and the light scent of fresh-cut grass.”

Damia laughed. “Great, so now you want a glass of iced tea?” Her laughter turned to moans as he caressed down her back and touched the base of her wings.

“No, you smell of spring and summer combined, but I do want to drink you down. Taste your essence. Live in your arms.”

He gently pinched the juncture where her wings sprouted from her back, eliciting more moans from her.

“Please,” she whispered. “Again.”

“You like that?” Mateo slid down her body until his mouth was level with her taut nipples. Their dusk green color beckoned to him. “What about this?”

He pinched the juncture as he bit down on a nipple and began to suckle.

“Mateo,” she screamed, her body shaking with orgasm.

“God, Damia,” he gasped. “I can’t do slow now.”

“I don’t want you to. Make love to me.”

He wrapped her legs around his waist and walked to the side of the waterfall to a small rock shelf that was just the right height. His cock protested as he hesitated before plunging into Damia’s warm depths.

“I don’t want to hurt your wings.”

“You won’t, you could never hurt me,” Damia said as she folded her wings into her body. “Come to me, Mateo.”

He didn’t need another invitation. The moment he thrust into her they both cried out in ecstasy. This was right. This was meant to be. Mateo pinched and rolled her nipples and kept a steady pace as he built her up to orgasm again.

*

“Your turn,” Damia growled as she pushed Mateo back enough for her wings to unfold. With one beat of her wings she turned them around, Mateo’s hard cock still plunged deep, and set Mateo on the rock shelf where she’d been sitting. Using her wings for added thrust, she rode Mateo with abandon.

His hands were everywhere; his mouth on her breasts, her neck, then back to her breasts. She felt her power grow with each push and pull of her body on Mateo’s. His hands moved to grab her ass and quickened their pace.

“I can feel your power,” Mateo gasped through clenched teeth. “I can’t hold back much longer.”

“Then don’t.”

With one last beat of her wings, Damia gathered up her power and thrust it into Mateo as she came down on his cock. Their mutual screams of release resounded off the walls of the pool and echoed into the forest. Damia’s power pulsed through the land, healing where evil had touched it. She smiled as she felt the Earth sigh in peace.

“Did you feel that?” Mateo asked in wonder.

Damia laughed and kissed him deeply.

“Yes, my love, the whole Earth felt that.”

The End

About the Author:

Paige spends her days contemplating the complexities of romance and passion. She puts pen to paper, scribing elaborate stories for her many fans in her lush secluded office at her beach cottage. *snort*

In reality, Paige tries to convince her two growing boys that her space at the dining room table is an invisibility capsule, and she’s not really there writing stories laced with humor and passion. Her husband of ten years looks on in devotion and love, encouraging her to write her little heart out. Oh, wait—reality. He wants her to be the next Rowling so he doesn’t have to work anymore and can play more golf.

Paige is a master juggler of many personas—mom, wife, granddaughter, sister, jewelry designer, and coffee maker. Her family is her passion, and writing is the perfect outlet.

For romantic comedy that sizzles, come and visit Paige’s fantasy world.
www.paigeburns.com

INTO THE ARCTIC

Jodi Lynn Copeland

Chapter One

Snowbound.

Albinia had read a lot about it, but she'd never experienced it firsthand. Good thing she couldn't feel the iciness of the snow beneath her feet or the biting nip of the wind hitting her naked body. Well, her wings could feel the nip, but she'd ordered them away, along with her true hair and skin colors, the moment she'd realized she wasn't on Faeridae anymore.

She was in the one place that had always fascinated her. The place she had spent the better part of her twenty-seven years reading about, regardless of her sisters many taunts that she would turn into the first faerie nerd if she kept it up. Albinia was in the arctic tundra. And, if the blanket of winter white snow that covered the ground and lifted into the heavy gray horizon as far as eye could see were a sign, she was alone.

Unlike the tundra and its frequently changing nature, solitude did not fascinate Albinia. Before today, she had never been alone for more than a few moments at a time. Despite her sisters' teasing, she shared everything with the three, including men.

She hadn't been sharing when her father had summoned her to his office. No, she'd been lying naked on a bed of lush valley moss with her legs twined around Trimán's neck. The dark, handsome faerie had always been the favorite of her lovers. The way his strong arms held her captive while his wickedly clever lips parted her labia and his tongue sank deep into her folds, feasting on her juices...

Albinia shivered as a fiery tingle licked through her body and brought wetness gushing between her thighs. Memories of Trimán fucking her were delightful, but not what she needed to concentrate on.

She had to remember her father's, King Lucraxious VII, words and the stern look on his typically smiling face when she'd entered his office smelling of sex and still quivering with climax. The almost callous way he'd told her—the most logically balanced of his daughters—that he was through with her folly. She wasn't a child anymore, free to spend her days cavorting with her sisters and the many faerie men eager to see to every carnal wish of the king's quadruplet daughters. The time had come, her father had said, for true love and marriage. And if Albinia chose not to find a mate on her own by her twenty-eighth birthday, then he would do so for her. He had a candidate already in mind. Eskimond.

The heat building in her core died at the thought of the ogre king. Not only was his planet, Dundroc, suns away from Faeridae, but the ogre was garish and old. And those were his good qualities. Among his worst was cruelty. The stories she'd heard of him...

Albinia suppressed another shiver. She wasn't marrying Eskimond. She would rather not be tied down with any male, be he fae, ogre, or of another race altogether. Only it seemed her father was serious with his threat. He was the reason she was here. Alone. Without her sisters. Without anyone or anything, including her much prized books or even much needed food.

As the Faerie of Symmetry, she could control the balance of many things and the way they affected her body, including shutting out the extreme temperature as she traipsed over the snow-laden landscape in her bare skin. That ability wouldn't help her

when it came to sustenance, however, or in finding appropriate attire—she'd attempted using glamour to produce clothing, but apparently that bit of faerie magic didn't work in this cold environment. For some foolish reason, most mortals feared being seen in their common form. Albinia delighted in her naked self, in each jiggle of her full breasts, the roundness of her belly, the muff of nearly white hair at her mound and the lovely blue cast to her—

The electric roar of a mossmaker cut through her thoughts. She shook her head. That wasn't right. Mossmakers were used back on Faeridae. She was on Earthatopia, what humans referred to as Earth. The knowledge she had no idea what kind of mortal creation could make the hellish sound sent panic careening through her typically calm mind. Suddenly, food and attire were the least of her concerns and being alone didn't sound so bad at all.

Chapter Two

3 Weeks Later

Against the gusting wind and fast-falling snow, Flinn Gregory closed the door of the small cabin that served as the Region Two outpost building and stomped his boots on the entrance mat. Snow fell from his coat as he slid it off and hung it on the rack near the wood stove. The hearth doors lay open to emit the crackle of logs and the snaps of a high flaming fire.

His thought to retreat outside, into an environment he was far more comfortable in, was cut short by the lusty laughter of Erin Campbell. The bleached blonde—her waist-length hair had to be bleached because he'd never seen a natural blonde with hair so fair—sat at a picnic table with the two men camped at the outpost until the storm passed. She'd ridden in with the men, but from what Flinn had gathered from the bits of conversation he'd overhead, she had no plans to ride back out. Only she *would* be riding back out. As much as visitors to the outpost were a nice distraction at times, he didn't want anyone around here full-time. Certainly not a woman who from first sighting had had him feeling things he'd never felt before, at least with a human.

One look at her full red lips and pale oval face, accentuated by a cleft in her chin, and he'd been hard. She'd worn men's clothing when the trio had arrived early this morning on snowmobiles. Until that moment when she'd taken off her coat and stocking hat to reveal lustrous hair that's length ran a good six inches below her waist, and swiveled around to greet him, he hadn't even realized she was a woman. She still wore the men's clothing this afternoon. The coat and hat, however, were nowhere in sight, and the oversized layers of jeans and fleece plaid shirt somehow managed to emphasize her curvy figure.

Erin's hair color might be bogus, but the rest of her was all natural. Not to mention voluptuous in a way that had him waking up this morning to find his erotic dream of claiming her on all fours had his bed wet and his body aching for the real thing.

Flinn didn't have wet dreams any more than he took a woman on all fours. He also didn't have time to stand around and listen to Erin's sexy-as-hell laugh. His colony was in serious trouble, and it was up to him to figure out how to fix it.

"Hey, Flinn," Rusty, the bigger of Erin's two companions and the one who seemed to regard her as a sibling, called from the picnic table, "come join us for a drink. You have to be freezing after being out there all morning."

"Yeah, man," Lance, who, from the leering looks he sent her way, considered Erin to be much more than a sibling type, said, "it's gotta be like, what, all of five out?"

"Closer to negative thirty-five in the wind chill," Flinn corrected. But then cold always had been his friend.

Since these people didn't know that and he had no intention of sharing his personal life with them, he nodded at the men. Nodding at Erin wasn't an option. And not because she wasn't facing him, either—she was sitting on the side of the table that would normally have her back to him, but she'd turned around the moment he'd entered the cabin. No, the problem was that nodding at Erin would mean meeting her eyes. As

tempting as her mouth and body were, those eyes were pure trouble. Sparkling, wide and azure, they had a way of looking at him like he didn't need to share his personal information, because she already knew it all.

Of course, that was impossible. She didn't know who, or rather what he was, and could never guess. To her, he was just a regular guy. A regular guy who developed an erection every time he glanced her way.

Ignoring the building bulge of his cock, Flinn started toward the table. Leaving was still damned tempting, but since he was their host in a roundabout way, he would stay and visit awhile. "What the hell. With the storm that's kicking through, I doubt I'll be getting any calls for scouting help yet today. Might as well relax for once."

The two men sat across from Erin. A second picnic table was situated directly to the right. Flinn intended to slide onto one of the empty bench seats, when Erin scooted over, clearing a spot for him on hers. Lance sent him a look that spoke loudly of possession—or more pointedly that he believed Erin was one of his.

Just fine by Flinn. Erin might have his heart rate up and his cock throbbing, but that's all she was going to be doing to him.

Taking the offered plastic bottle of whiskey from Rusty, Flinn slid onto the seat. He settled several inches from Erin, and yet somehow still found her thigh plastered up against his. Her thigh, that even in men's thermal-lined jeans, felt sizzling hot. That sizzle wasn't about her, though. It was about the fact that, with the wood stove blazing, it was close to sixty-five in here, and that was too damned hot for Flinn.

Regardless, he jerked his leg away.

"Nervous?" Amusement filled Erin's words.

Against every screaming thought not to, he met her eyes. And felt a hard kick of longing in his groin. Tossing back the whiskey, he curbed that kick. She was a woman; he wasn't a man. As such, he shouldn't be having a physical response to her.

He set the bottle on the table and gave her what he hoped was an impassive look. "Right. I live in the middle of the tundra with polar bears and wolves for neighbors and penguins for family. What about you should make me nervous?"

Her lips pulled into a thoughtful pout. "I didn't think penguins lived in the northern hemisphere?"

And he didn't think he'd ever want to kiss a human, let alone kiss one so damned badly his fingers itched to haul her up against him and show Lance exactly what claiming one's possessions was all about.

Flinn forced himself to concentrate on Erin's question. It wasn't the first time he'd heard it. Those other times he'd been quick to provide a false answer. This time he had the crazy temptation to explain exactly what type of penguin called the tundra home. Only doing that would be idiotic. More so than kissing her delectable mouth in mixed company. "They don't. That was sarcasm."

Uncertainty passed through her eyes for a few seconds. Seconds that felt like an eternity and once again had Flinn thinking of the danger of her eyes. Then her grin returned. "I said you were nervous because I have no plans to leave when this storm clears. From the looks of this place, you don't have many long-term visitors."

Damn. His concern had been right on.

He looked away. Making her believe he was serious when he told her no would be a hell of a lot easier if he wasn't looking at her. "I don't, but I also don't live here. And

neither can you. The outpost has beds, yeah, but they're for the hikers or sledders that get stuck out this way during bad weather. They're not for semi-permanent visitors."

"Erin's finishing her masters in geophysics." Rusty's proud smile made it seem as though the two really were family. "Said this here's the perfect place to conduct research and test her theories for her final thesis."

Flinn's gaze jetted back to Erin. Attractive and intelligent, too. He couldn't blame Lance for wanting to hold on to a woman like that.

As if the man could read his mind, Lance reached for her hand across the table. Erin pulled it back before he could make contact. Anger darkened his expression, then quickly faded as he said, "I told ya we're continuing up the north passage, baby. Rusty and me don't mind taking extra time for ya to study up on the snow and stuff."

"You're sweet, Lance, but I really don't want to be a bother any longer. Besides, it's not the snow that interests me." Her gaze shifted from Lance to Flinn, her voice moving from gentle let down to avid interest. "It's the glacial drifting at the lakes we passed by not far from here and..." A sensual husk flowed into her words and those dangerous eyes twinkled, "—other stuff I can only find right here."

Flinn grabbed the whiskey and took a long drink, the idea he was the "other stuff" in question nearly as hard to resist as it was disturbing. The same could be said of the way Erin's foot snagged the back of his leg and proceeded to rub the length of his calf. His cock leapt as eagerly as if it was the body part she stroked.

The image of her doing just that began to form in his mind. He forced it aside with a low grunt. "No" was the only answer here. "I appreciate your commitment to education, but it doesn't change anything. I'm not sanctioned to let anyway stay here for more than a few days."

"What about at your house?" She forged on, with both her attempt at securing a yes and the sinfully distracting foot-play. "You must have one, since no one can live here."

He should lie and tell her he was an exception and both could and did live here. He should, because with every teasing rub of her foot the image that it was actually her small palm wrapped around his shaft threatened to return a little more graphically. Yeah, he should. But for some stupid reason, Flinn didn't. "I do. But it's small. One bedroom. One bed. No place for company."

"Looks like yer stuck with Rusty and me, baby," Lance interjected, the relief in his tone palpable.

"I don't take up much space," Erin continued as if Lance hadn't spoken. "Besides..." Her gaze flitted to Flinn's mouth, "—I'd make it worth your trouble."

He didn't doubt that for a minute. For the first time in his life, he also didn't doubt that a human woman's lips would taste as sweet as the snow after an early morning dusting.

Shit, he had to stop having thoughts like that. Erin wouldn't taste good, end of story. "Sorry, but the answer's still no. You really want to be out here that bad, I suggest you have these guys drive you up to the next outpost. It's a couple hours from here, but has plenty of big lakes around it. I'm sure old Vern—the scout who keeps the place up—will be more than happy to help you out with that, um, other stuff."

There were two things to be said about old Vern. One, he wasn't really old, and two, he'd talked more than one female guest out of her pants. Flinn knew because Vern made it a point to recount his latest score via the two-way radios that connected the outpost

stations. He didn't leave anything out, either—from the size of the woman's breasts to the moans she made right before she came, Vern told all.

Fury dashed through Flinn with the idea he could be hearing all about Erin one day soon. Sending her to Vern was a bad idea. She was better off biding her time with Possessive Lance.

Erin's lips pushed back into the pout, while sorrow filled her eyes. "That's okay. I'll find something else. Somehow."

Ah, hell. She had to go and get sulky. He was a sucker for sulk. Typically it was the young of the colony using it in the hopes of changing his mind on a rule, or a female of his kind employing it in the hopes of snagging some alone time with the leader. Never had it been a human to use it on him. The affect was still the same.

"I have a couch," Flinn said before he could stop himself.

Sorrow was replaced with joy. Erin hopped from the bench and twined her arms around his neck in an excited hug. She returned to her seat with a wide grin. "I'll take it!"

And he should take it right back. It, that is, as in his offer. Her breasts had felt way too good brushing up against his chest. He'd never been much of a breast guy—often the females he slept with didn't even have them—but with Erin he seemed to be a breast, mouth, face, thigh, whole-entire-package kind of guy. And that's exactly why he had to do some fast backpedaling. "My place doesn't have much heat."

Her grin only grew wider. "Perfect."

"I don't have a woodstove or any lanterns."

And wider still. "Even better. I love the cold."

Damn. So much for backpedaling. "You sure about this?"

"Am I sure?" Erin's lips curved in a smile just this side of carnal. "I can hardly wait."

Grabbing the whiskey bottle, she downed a long swallow. Flinn could only imagine the heat chasing down her throat and through her body from the alcohol that had to be nearly as potent as that chasing through his own from thoughts of spending the night alone with her.

As he'd said, his place was small. And cold. And he had the sinking feeling the moment that cold permeated her clothing, Erin would be bartering for a spot in his bed.

He wasn't even a man, so how could he be man enough to tell her no?

Chapter Three

As she traipsed over the thinly cut path behind Flinn, Albinia breathed in the crisp arctic air, unable to contain her smile. When she'd first arrived on Earth, she had only been able to think of finding food and attire, and then a mate to placate her father and allow her access back to Faeridae and her sisters—presuming Damia, Norty and Alida succeeded at their own missions. But then she'd learned the true source of the hellishly loud noise she'd forever associate with mossmakers. Mortal-made machines that Rusty and Lance called snowmobiles, or sleds for short. Quickly following that discovery, she'd realized Lance's infatuation with her nude body.

Being a near-faerie nerd had its finer points. It hadn't taken much thought at all to realize she could give Lance what he desired and herself the same in return. For him, it meant sex. For her, it meant traveling time with the pair to explore the tundra at her will—her father had given her until her birthday to find her mate and that was an entire year away. So she'd made up a false name and used her years of studying to come up with a suitable reason for being alone and naked in the arctic.

She'd been riding with the men for a few weeks now, taking in their surroundings with an awe that made her feel like a little faerie again. Though the rumors she'd heard, about mortal men's skills as lovers being weaker and their cocks far smaller than faerie men's proved true, Albinia had planned to continue traveling with them and sleeping with Lance as long as she was allowed.

But then two days ago they'd happened by Flinn's outpost in the midst of the most stunning land she'd seen since leaving the lush forests of Faeridae—not even the blowing wind and driving snow of an oncoming blizzard could hide its ethereal beauty. Then she'd happened upon the man himself.

Tall, built and astonishingly appealing with a full red beard and mustache and shoulder-length hair to match, the lust Flinn stirred in her had come as a shock. He was a human and, as such, would be lacking in sexual talent and anatomical girth, as Lance had. He shouldn't affect her so. Yet, he did. Even now, taking in the snug fit of his jeans over his taut ass, wetness gathered between Albinia's thighs.

The thought of grasping his fine ass in her hands and plunging his stiff cock into her slick folds made the wearisome chore of getting Lance to leave her behind seem nearly worthwhile. The only reason he finally had gone was because she'd agreed to a ride back home when they passed through this area again in a couple weeks.

Home. Melancholy filled her with the word. Lance and Rusty wouldn't be taking her home, because no sled or any other mortal-made invention could reach Faeridae.

"Well, this is it. Home."

Albinia's breath caught with the similarity of Flinn's words to her thoughts. Then caught once more as she took in his dwelling. It was small, yes, but spectacular. She'd read of igloos on several occasions and it seemed his home was as close to one as she would ever come. Walls made completely of ice and snow gleamed a near translucent blue in the faint overhead sun. As Flinn pulled open the wooden front door and gestured her inside, Albinia noted that while some wood made up the interior, the bulk of the furnishings were comprised of the same ice and snow blend as the walls. He'd said his

place was cold and had no light or warmth, and now she could see why.

She spun back to find Flinn standing in the open doorway, staring at her, his expression aloof. “It’s...” she began, unable to keep the wonder from her voice.

“Cold,” he finished, reading her reaction entirely wrong. “I warned you. Like I said, there’s no light or heat, either.” Disappointment seemed to cling to his words as he turned back. “Hurry up, and we’ll see if it’s not too late to catch Rusty and Lance.”

Albinia was a balanced soul by nature, never once accused of flightiness, but the speed with which Flinn was heading back to the outpost barred time for either thought or sanity. Letting her wings free just far enough to give her an added boost forward, she flung herself out the door and at Flinn’s back. He was much bigger than her, and yet they went down easily.

He pushed from the ground, spitting out snow. “What the hell?!”

Before she could move, Albinia found herself off his back and on her own. The igloo was stunning, but it had no match for the burning heat in Flinn’s amber eyes or the wild way the ends of his thick red hair teased along his neck as he bracketed her head with his hands and covered her body with his own.

Lust, desire, reckless need all chased through her. Want unfurled in her belly and licked like a wild fire from her fingertips to her pinky toes. Her clit quivered with the anticipation his nearness brought forth, while her pussy seeped with juice.

A stable faerie who enjoyed her studies she was, but fae blood still pumped through her body. Fae lust and the ceaseless need for sensual satisfaction—a trait which marked her kind—still had her restless to taste this man, to take him.

“Flinn.” His name rolled off her tongue as a whisper.

Desire that matched her own shone in his eyes for an instant, then was replaced with temper. Lips half hidden by his beard and yet entirely tasty looking firmed into a smirk. “Sorry if this scares you, but I don’t take to people knocking me on my ass.”

Scared? He thought she was scared. Oh, but how easily confused humans were.

Albinia lifted her hips from the snow as far as his weight would allow, and shifted them against his own, grinding with purpose. Desire returned to his eyes, scaled into passion. She shifted a second time and was rewarded with the lengthening press of his shaft against her pelvis. She grinned with the knowledge his want was indeed nearly as great as her own. “Not scared, Flinn. Hot. Hungry. For you.”

In his eyes, the passion flamed higher still. He looked away. “It’s freezing out here, and you don’t even know me.”

“I don’t feel the cold, and I know that you want me.” Intent on finding skin hidden beneath the layers of his clothing, she moved the arm that had become trapped between their bodies when he came over her.

Flinn’s attention jerked back to her face. He reached between them and caught her hand in his. “I can’t.” He shook his head. “I mean, I don’t. I don’t want you.”

“Prove it...” With her free hand, Albinia began her search anew. This time she called on just a touch of the accelerated speed she’d been born with, and before he could stop her, snaked her hand into his pants and around his cock. “...because to me it feels like you do.”

And, oh, Goddess, did it ever!

Flinn’s erection felt nothing like Lance’s had. No small mortal here. He was long and thick and throbbing within her fist.

A growl burst from his throat. "Damn it. I want..."

"I know you do." He wanted her and she wanted him so badly her nipples ached with it. And her lips ... as she lifted her head and slanted her mouth over his in a hard, needy kiss, her lips ached with a hunger of their own.

* * * *

Flinn had been about to say he wanted to go inside and forget Erin had ever knocked him on his ass, let alone made it clear how badly she wanted him. Only he hadn't managed to get the words out. As her tongue pushed into his mouth, tangling with his own, and her small hand stroked the hard length of his erection with a skill he'd never before experienced, he realized he was glad for the omission. An instant later, he realized he was glad for her baggy clothing, as well.

Pulling his weight from her body far enough to unzip her jacket, he parted the sides of the coat then pushed beneath the hem of her flannel shirt. Silky smooth skin met with his hands. Skin neither warm nor cold. Skin that felt right in a way that shot straight to his groin. Hunger burned through his blood while his heart stampeded in his chest. The need to lead the kiss she'd begun swamped him.

Moving his hands higher, he palmed her full, naked breasts and took possession of her mouth in a demanding kiss. Hot. Wet. Deep. Yet not hot, wet or deep enough. He wanted to bury himself in her, embed himself so completely the lines of separation from one to the other would be indefinable.

Flinn caressed her nipples with one firm stroke each and then moved his attention to her lower half. The waist of her jeans was big enough to allow his hand easy access without need for unzipping. He took advantage, slipping it beneath the denim until his knuckles brushed the soft flannel that lined the material and his palms met with bare feminine flesh. Need pumped through him all that much harder with the realization she wore no panties. The press of his lips became all that much fiercer as he found the damp nest of curls that covered her mound.

Against his lips, Erin moaned her bliss. The hand in his jeans continued to stroke and fondle, while her free one moved beneath his own coat and shirt. Her fingernails scored lightly into his flesh and the primal need to possess stole over all other thought. Releasing her mouth, Flinn latched onto her neck and dipped a finger into her body.

Wet heat surrounded him, followed quickly by spasms of impending climax as he added a second finger and milked her body. Erin's hold on his shaft loosened. She bowed against him, arching her hips to take him in further yet.

"Oh, yes, Flinn! Right there!" she cried near his ear. "So quick, and yet I'm already so close..."

Both the franticness of her words and the continual trembling of her core guaranteed her words. Flinn's inability to hold onto her neck with his mouth any longer guaranteed how close he himself was to going over the edge.

He had to taste her, suck her. Consume her whole.

Fingering her slick sheath with long, even strokes, he lapped at her neck, savoring the saltiness of her skin, and then returned to her lush lips. One dip of his tongue between her sweetly parted lips, just one single dip is all it took. Erin came apart around his fingers. The muscles of her sex clamped tightly and then exploded in a series of trembles.

"Yes! Oh, yes, yes, yes!" Her shouts of rapture died away as she nibbled at his

mouth with erratic little nips and suckles.

Her grip on his cock intensified once more, telling him she was back from the limits of ecstasy and now planned to return the favor. And Flinn wanted to let her. Only with the end of her climax came the return of sanity. The reality of what he was and what she was and that while the two of them might be able to pleasure each other this way, they could never be fully compatible when it came to sex or any other aspect of life.

And still...

Flinn pulled from her mouth with a last lingering kiss to find those amazing azure eyes twinkling up at him. She pumped his shaft and an impish smile settled on her lips. Damn, but how she made him want to smile back. Made him want to believe he could find true pleasure in fucking a mortal woman, in making one his mate. She made him want to forget everything and everyone, but here and now and the two of them.

No, he reminded himself forcefully, pulling from her pants and rolling away to lie in the snow beside her. The loss of her hand on his shaft filled him with remorse, as did the fit of her body to his. But it didn't matter. Nothing mattered but his duty as the leader of his colony. A colony in serious jeopardy.

The fluctuating temperate and weather conditions were no different from any other late January Flinn could recall. The recent series of quakes and the resulting shifting of the lakes and cracking of the foundation upon which his colony had built their homes was a new thing. A new and scary thing. Erin was a new thing, as well, and quite possibly scary in her own right, because of the way she affected his logic. Unlike the seismic activity, however, Erin was an easy problem to fix.

Rusty and Lance would be coming back through this way in two weeks time. All Flinn had to do was avoid her for fourteen days, allow her to focus on the thesis that had brought her here and force himself to focus on his colony. He could do that.

Erin came up on an elbow. She reached for his chest with her free hand, stroking him through his shirt. Her lips were swollen from his kisses and pushed out into the pout that had made him agree to her staying with him in the first place. "Flinn? Did I do something wrong? If I did, I promise to make it up to you."

Groaning, he looked away, at the lightly falling snow overhead, at the cool smooth lines of his home that had always relaxed him in the past, at the land he loved more than anything else. And still, all he could see was Erin's face and all he could hear was the concern in her voice that had him aching to offer reassurance.

Yeah, he could ignore her for fourteen days. Somehow.

Chapter Four

He was ignoring her.

Albinia tossed on the wooden-framed, snow mattress couch, struggling for sleep but only able to think of the man in the bedroom several feet away. Flinn offered her a good morning each day and food at each meal, but other than that from the moment he'd climbed from the snow and told her she hadn't done anything wrong, he'd merely made a mistake, he had been ignoring her.

Three days had passed since that time. Three days where Albinia explored the beauty of the land Flinn called home with wonder but also dismay. If what she'd learned in her many years of reading about the tundra was accurate, then something was amiss. The glacial drifting had been the first thing she'd noticed almost a month ago, when she'd still been riding with Rusty and Lance, but there was much more to it than that. The very ground seemed to be splitting into a hundred different pieces, massive fissures pushing through the ice and snow. And then there were the vibrations.

She doubted that Flinn, or any other mortal, could even feel the shockwaves that shook upward from the Earth's core several times a day. Albinia's faerie senses were strongly attuned, and she could feel the waves and feared they had something to do with the fissures. She longed to speak of it to Flinn and express her concern that his home was in jeopardy of being swallowed up by one of the crevices. Only how could she explain her knowledge of the shockwaves?

Then again she had claimed to be a geophysics student on her way to achieving her master's degree. Perhaps that would be enough of a reason.

Before her better sense could tell her the reason wasn't enough, Albinia climbed from the couch and headed for Flinn's room. She pushed the door open quickly and the breath snagged in her throat. She had not been in here before. Like so much of his home, the bed was made of ice and snow. A window took up most of one wall and moonlight pooled in, bathing Flinn in a delicious glow.

Albinia wet her lips, aware the glow was only delicious because it illuminated Flinn's strong, naked frame. A dusting of fine red hair covered his body. A denser path led downward from his navel to end in a thatch of thick, nearly dark brown pubic hair. His penis jutted from that length, neither hard nor flaccid, but in a state of semi-erectness that had her aching to reach out and stroke.

Ignoring that urge and the dampness that gathered between her thighs, moistening the crotch of her jeans, Albinia reached for the hem of her shirt. On Faeridae she rarely wore attire. For Flinn's sake, she had worn it night and day since arriving at his home. Now she quickly stripped. If she was to have a serious discussion with him, then she needed to meet him on even ground.

She started toward his bed. "Fli..."

"What is it, Erin?"

His eyes remained closed, but his voice was deep and scratchy in a way that spoke directly to her libido. Her nipples beaded into tight points while the dampness returned between her thighs as a rush of wetness. Her clit quivered with anticipation as her attention once more fell on his shaft. He was no longer semi-erect, but swollen and large.

Oh, but how she longed to take him into her mouth and taste him.

Concentrate. She had to concentrate on the reason she was here. Remember the sensibly balanced faerie she was. "I have something important to discuss with you."

Flinn's eyes flickered wide and he cast his gaze the length of her. "Wearing that?"

Frowning at his disapproval, she glanced down at her body. "I don't understand. I'm down to my common form."

"Whatever you want to call it, the question's why?"

"I saw you're naked, and thought it would make you more comfortable if I was, too."

With a snort, he looked at his erection. "Do I look comfortable?"

He looked impossibly masculine and virile. The urge to taste him returned to burn through Albinia as the wildest need. She licked her too-dry lips, barely able to stop herself from launching onto his bed. "You look very proud. Your cock is much larger than other human's."

"Other human's?"

Hearing the confusion in his tone, she forced her gaze from his shaft to his face. Had she truly said other human's? "Men's," she lied. "I said other men's."

"Oh," Flinn said, but his expression remained uncertain. He sobered after a few seconds to ask, "You came in here to discuss my anatomy? That's the important issue?"

As if it knew they spoke of it, his cock twitched. Albinia's pussy pulsed in response. She took a step toward the bed, unable to remove her focus from his member. How hungry he made her. How painfully hungry to be in his arms, to feel his hard staff buried deeply within her. "No, it isn't the reason, but it is quite distracting when it's bobbing at me that way. I would like to taste it."

"Erin."

The note of warning in Flinn's voice couldn't be missed, but she still chose to ignore it. Denying their want for each other was a pointless waste of energy.

She reached the side of the bed. "I know you said it was a mistake allowing me to touch you the other day, but I don't agree. It felt right. I want to touch you now, Flinn. You have to see how badly I ache for you. My nipples hurt with their hardness. My pussy is a flood with wetness. Do you really think my sucking you would cause harm?"

A guttural groan escaped his lips, and his penis leapt once more. "I think ... I think that it isn't an option. If it was you'd be in my bed right now. We aren't meant to be together, Erin, not even once. Now whatever it was you came in here to say, say it."

She should. Albinia's sensible mind said to listen to him. But a blood lust stirred in her veins and pumped heat to her belly so strong and undeniable she couldn't listen to her mind. Instead, she called forth just a dash of added speed and flung herself onto Flinn's bed. Taking his shaft in her hand, she wrapped her lips around the shimmering head and murmured her bliss.

Ah, heaven! His taste was sheer nirvana. Even better than Triman.

Albinia sucked at the pre-cum that coated the head of his cock, and then stroked her tongue the impressive length of his sex.

"Erin!"

Flinn's shout was powered more by pleasure than disapproval. The greedy way he sank his hands in her hair and held tight spoke of his desire to hold her closer, not push her away. He wanted this. He wanted this badly.

She kissed the length of him, then parted her lips and lapped at him once more. More

silky fluid had gathered on the head of his shaft, and she greedily licked it up. “You taste clean. Like a cool breeze. Like freshness. I can’t explain it. But I don’t want to stop licking you. I want to suck you until you’re coming in my mouth.”

“This is wrong,” he growled, but made no attempt to remove her.

And, of course, he would not. Not when... “It’s so right.”

“We can’t ever have more than this. It can’t go any farther.”

Of course, it could! She, one of the most logical faeries in all of Faeridae, could see the truth of that. There was something about the two of them, something that happened when they touched. It was like magic. Only it was no magic she conjured and she’d never heard of a human with true magical powers.

Aware Flinn would order her out of his room if she attempted to disagree, Albinia didn’t respond, but aligned the head of his shaft with her lips and took his length into her mouth. His taste exploded on her tongue, over her senses. So different than anything she’d ever known, so much better. She suckled at him with a force she couldn’t contain, needing to have more of him, wanting to feel his cum sliding down her throat.

The grip on her hair intensified, his fists winding in its length. “Jesus, you have a strong mouth.”

Hearing his appreciation of the powerful way she ate at him, she increased the pressure, licking over the veins that corded his sensitive skin. ‘Come for me’, she silently chanted, refusing to employ magic or a spell, and yet wanting his seed so badly.

His erection pulsated in her mouth, and she quickly moved a hand to his balls, cupping and squeezing the sensitive sac that held them. Yes, he was close now.

“Erin,” he growled, “If you don’t stop, I’m not going to be able to, either.”

Yes. That’s exactly what she wanted. ‘Come for me’, she chanted again, sliding one finger back to the spot near his anus guaranteed to obliterate his thoughts and applying pressure.

“Oh, fuck, Erin!” Flinn’s words were accentuated with a harsh groan.

His hips juttled toward her face, his cock pressing ever farther into her mouth, until the head tickled the back of her throat. Then his cum was emptying into her mouth, cold and clean a combination so odd and yet so good.

Hungrily, desperately, Albinia swallowed the seed, wanting so much more. Needing it in a way that defied reasoning. Finally, when it was clear she’d lapped up every last drop, she pulled away. His hands were still tangled in her hair. It was a possessive action in many ways. Had Lance tried it, she would have ordered him to stop. But with Flinn ... with Flinn, like so many other things, it felt right.

Equally confused and pleased by the thought, she sat back and grinned up at him. “That felt right to me. It felt incredibly right.”

Every other male, fae or otherwise, that she had pleased with her mouth wore a smile afterward. Flinn wasn’t smiling. He looked ... mystified.

“Who are you?” he asked quietly.

Albinia’s grin fell. Had he somehow uncovered her secret? “Wh-what do you mean? I’m Erin Campbell, remember? I’m a graduate student working on my thesis.”

Heavy lidded, he considered her. “Are you? Are you really?”

“Of course, I am!”

Several seconds of silence passed and then a half smile claimed Flinn’s lips. “Yeah, of course you are.” He released her hair. “Now that you’ve taken care of my distracting

friend, what was this important thing you wanted to discuss with me?"

Disbelief filled Albinia. It was all she could do to keep her gasp in. What about her? Not that she didn't owe him for the way he'd pleased her three days ago, but still she had hoped he would give her another orgasm before moving on to important talk.

The half smile disappeared and Flinn bit out, "Don't sulk!"

She forced her lips to flatten. "I wasn't trying to, it's just that..."

"God, you're still doing it." With a groan, he reached toward her mouth, running his finger over her lips. "What do you want? What will it take to get this look off your face? Not sex," he quickly added.

She wanted to whine with his words. How could he continue to deny them the one thing they both craved? "Not even finger play?"

He chuckled and pulled his hand from her mouth. "I should have guessed. You want an orgasm. If I give you one, will you leave me alone?"

No, but that answer would get her nowhere. "Yes." For a short while.

"Fine." Flinn shifted on the bed, pulling his legs from between her own. He came up on his knees and took hold of her hips, sliding her onto her back. "I'll only agree to do this if you tell me about this important thing that brought you in here."

Gladly. "I came to..." The words stilled on Albinia's tongue as his hands wrapped around her thighs and his face buried between her legs. His tongue darted inside her sheath; so far inside it was as though he hit upon her womb. Stars danced before her eyes and her pussy swelled with desire and gushed with juice as he worked his tongue in and out, in and out. "Holy *cac!*"

Flinn's tongue pulled from her mouth. "What does that mean?"

She whimpered at the loss, but then answered. "It's another word for shit, and you have the most amazing tongue. It feels so ... so long and firm. It's not like other hum-other men's. I mean, I've never felt anything like it."

His tongue returned to her hole, licking and sucking at the interior, then quickly pulling back to suckle at her folds. In his hands, Albinia fought the urge to squirm.

The sucking stopped. He looked up from the valley of her thighs to say in a gruff voice, "About this important thing you had to tell me...?"

She blinked at his words, her mind as far from balanced as it had ever been. He couldn't honestly expect her to think while he was doing that?

His head went down again, his tongue once more fondling her folds. "This important thing?" he prompted between licks.

Albinia struggled to think through the sensual haze consuming her. This important thing... "Um, it's ... oh, yes ... it's about the lakes and ... so wet." Unable to still her hips any longer, they bucked against his mouth. His tongue moved deep with the action, once more deeper than anything she'd ever experienced. "I'm so wet, Flinn," she moaned. "I feel like I could come already."

"The lakes."

The lakes. How could he still be on the lakes? "They're moving, shifting. And the land it's ... *cac!*" Liquid desire shot from her belly to her limbs. The stars returned before her eyes in a dizzying array of color. She felt like molten lava. "It's volcanic!"

"We're in the tundra. It's not volcanic."

"No. I meant me. I meant ... you make me want to erupt. I want to come around your tongue. Oh ... I want that so bad, and you haven't even..." She'd been about to say

touched her clit, but then he did just that.

Flinn circled the inflamed pearl with the pad of one thumb and then brushed over its center with just enough pressure to have her ready to explode. The stars were gone now. Everything was gone but feeling, exquisite feeling.

Albinia searched frantically for something to dig her nails into, sheets, grass, anything. All she encountered was the hard, coldness of Flinn's bed. She turned her hands on him, on the wide spread of his beautiful bare shoulders. She tried not to push her nails too deep, tried not to break his skin, but it was a futile attempt. The moment the rough scrape of his beard joined in, brushing over her clit with a teasing playfulness that sent her mind swirling once again, she was a lost cause.

Digging her nails into his flesh, she came with the force of a hurricane. As Flinn's tongue lapped at her juices, she couldn't seem to stop coming or digging her nails deeper still. Finally, long boneless seconds, or maybe it was minutes, later, the tremors passed. Lifting her hands from his shoulders, she smiled contritely. "Sorry. I didn't mean to brand you."

He sat back and lifted one shoulder, his beard unable to stop the full and wonderful smile that took over his mouth. "No more sulking?"

"Not even possible," she returned, unable to stop her own smile from becoming a grin. Oh, Goddess, but the way he made her come undone.

Flinn's smile vanished. "Then finish telling me what you came here to say."

Albinia knew a moment's dismay, but quickly ordered it away. This was an important matter and it needed to be spoken of immediately. "I feel shockwaves, Flinn. I've noticed during my walks the last few days the ice flow at the lakes is growing worse. And the ground ... it's breaking apart. I'm afraid it's going to swallow your home."

He didn't look at her as if she was losing her mind, the way she'd half expected. Instead, he asked calmly, "How can you feel shockwaves, Erin? If they were strong I would understand, but I haven't felt anything."

"I'm sensitive to them, because of all my training and studying on seismic activity."

A frown creased a line between his eyes. "Would that really make a person sensitive?"

It wasn't a question, but a speculation that coupled with Flinn's puzzled look had her nerves on end. It still didn't sound as if he thought she was losing her mind. It sounded as if he was onto her lie of being a geophysics student.

He couldn't find out her secret now. Not when she finally had him where she wanted him—nearly to the point where he would admit how badly he needed her beyond a few passing moments of oral sex. No, if he found out the truth of her faerie essence now, he surely would freak.

Silence descended, long seconds where they only stared at one another, then Flinn said, "I'll look into these supposed quakes, but I'm sure it's nothing. Now if that's all, I need sleep."

Albinia let out a long breath of relief. He wasn't onto her. In her logical mind she should have known better than to even assume such a thing. Her smile returned as she thought of spending the night curled up with Flinn. "Yeah, I should get some, too."

"Erin?" he questioned roughly as she stretched out on the bed.

She looked up at him. Coldness filled his eyes now, and brought a shiver chasing along her spine. Though she knew she would regret it, she asked, "Yeah?"

“I sleep alone.”

She felt the pout form, but couldn't stop it as she climbed from his bed and started for the door. “Oh, yeah. Right. Sorry.” She stopped to gather her clothes, and then cast a last look at him, wishing he could look like the Ogre King Eskimond instead of the magnificent human he was. “Sleep well,” she said sadly, fighting off sorrow. She would never sleep tonight. She'd be lucky to sleep again, so long as she resided in his house, so close to his delightfully naked body.

Chapter Five

Shit. It wasn't bad enough that Erin was aware of the quakes and questioning their resulting affect on the lakes and land, but she was really beginning to mess with Flinn's head. How could a mortal woman affect him so completely? Was she mortal?

That was a stupid question. Of course she was.

But how could a mortal woman endure the cold the way she did? His home was barely above the freezing mark and yet she didn't even request a cover at night. She rarely wore her coat and stocking hat when she went outside, where the temperatures had been dipping into the negative thirties the last two days. The low temperatures, combined with the wind chill, should freeze her. But she never came back frozen, or even suffering from frostbite. She came back looking refreshed and sexy as hell.

Flinn groaned as he continued his northwestern trek through the uncut snow.

Damn it, he never should have given in to Erin last night. Not even for oral sex. Looking upon her generous body naked and aroused for him, he hadn't been able to say no. Just as he hadn't been able to stop from providing her with the same pleasure she'd given him the moment she started in with the sulking. The sulking had returned when he'd more or less ordered her out of his bedroom.

He'd had to be strong that time, had to keep firm on his statement he slept alone. If he'd allowed her to stay in his bed with him things would never have ended with oral sex. He'd have taken Erin in every way he could think of, and then he'd never have been able to keep his dominant side at bay. Keeping that side a secret the few hours a day he spent around Erin was difficult enough. Now Flinn didn't bother to keep it a secret. Now, as he made his way to the colony that lived a half mile from his home, he sighed in relief as his body easily slipped into its penguin form.

Even moving at a brisk trot it would take longer to make the trip in this form, but it would be worth it on the off chance he was spotted by a human. They would question the existence of a penguin in the northern hemisphere, particularly one that stood well over four foot tall. Still, the questions would be far less than if he were caught in his human form, conversing with a bunch of animals that were thought not to exist.

Animals was the wrong word, Flinn corrected, as he entered the massive circle of towering ice and snow that resembled a frozen volcano and hid the homes and the people of his colony. Were-penguins were closer to humans than animals. Still, if his kind were ever found, they would be treated as animals, probed and studied and locked in some building that was meant to make them feel safe, but in reality would only feel like a jail cell.

"Giganta. Saremb." Sighting the elders of the colony, Flinn acknowledged them in the ancient tongue spoken only by his people. These two were like his parents, his own having perished during the journey that first brought his kind to live here. They had also been the ones to pass leadership of the colony down to him several years ago.

Giganta, the largest of all the were-penguins at nearly five feet, greeted Flinn with a flapping of blue-black wings. The blue tufts of long, hair-like feathers that began between his beak and eyes twitched, reflecting his gladness in seeing Flinn.

Or was that relief? Flinn questioned as he noted the sorrow in Saremb's pale eyes.

He went to the penguin that had always been like his mother and gathered her close in a hug. “What is it, Mama?”

“The fractures grow worse,” Giganta supplied. “They’ve started to turn. To head toward our homes.”

Damn. This was not the news he needed to hear. Not when he had no idea how to fix the problem. He released Saremb, and with a quick peck on her cheek, nodded at Giganta. “Show me.”

A few other males joined in as Giganta led Flinn to the most recent disturbances. The trip was short. Giganta was correct. The fissures would soon be within the circle of the colony. How soon was the question. There was no other place nearby that would hold the entire rookery. Moving wasn’t an option, only finding the source.

“I do not know what to do, Son. This is something we have never encountered.”

“I know. I’m trying to find its source,” Flinn said glumly. Every day he spent hours traversing the miles of land that surrounded the colony circle, and every day he returned home with no more knowledge than the day before. “But so far...” He shook his head. “I won’t give up, Father. We’ll figure this out it before it’s too late.”

He should return to his hunt for answers immediately. He should, but Flinn needed a few minutes of simple pleasure first—pleasure that didn’t involve the delectable Erin. With a last word to Giganta, he returned to the center of the great circle, where the young of the colony played in the lake kept from freezing by the natural hot springs at its service. Laughter came automatically as he watched the antics of the young. Momentary happiness followed as Flinn fell to his stomach and tobogganed his way into the lake, landing with a great splash that had cackles of amusement erupting from all.

* * * *

A faerie could only appreciate the wonder of the tundra for so long. If Albinia had someone to partake of its beauty with, the situation would be entirely different.

Oh, who was she kidding? She didn’t want just someone. And while she did miss her sisters and it would be grand to have them here alongside her now, they weren’t the ones on Albinia’s mind. Just one man filled her thoughts. Just Flinn.

Where did he spend all of his day? That first morning after he’d fed her a breakfast of dried toast and raw shrimp-like creatures he called krill, she’d guessed that he would return to the outpost for his duty. Judging by the high flaming fire in the wood stove, he had for a short while, but by the time she’d arrived at the cabin the man himself was nowhere in sight. The place was deserted. For the first time since meeting Rusty and Lance, Albinia had felt dreadfully alone.

Walking along the edge of a large gaping fissure that ran several hundred yards from Flinn’s igloo-style home, Albinia felt alone again. Not even the idea of an aerial view of the majestic land around her brought happiness. Her wings probably still hadn’t adapted to the cold anyway. She was liable to get a quarter mile up, have her wings freeze, and plummet back to the ground. As much as she longed to share her faerie essence and so much more with Flinn, finding her lying with her face smashed into the snow and her wings broken over her back from the fall was likely not the best way. And besides, there was a much more important matter at hand.

Albinia prayed that matter—the reoccurring seismic activity—was the reason for Flinn’s long absence today. It was well past the time they normally took lunch and he had

yet to return home. What if something had happened to him? She couldn't stand the thought of being alone again permanently. Worse, though, was the thought of not seeing his face. Whether it be set with resolve or grinning with laughter, just looking upon him brought joy to her heart.

Was this what love felt like?

Her sensibly balanced mind suggested it was far too soon for love to have overtaken her—really, very few fairies even found true and lasting love. But maybe she was in the process of falling. Maybe that was why the idea he might not return had her ready to weep. Sulking, she would admit to, but Albinia rarely wasted tears. Yes, this had to be love that was happening to her.

“Albinia.”

She spun around at the unexpected screeching of her name. No one was in sight. She had to have imagined it. Maybe the cold was too much for her, after all.

“Albinia.”

No. She wasn't imagining it. Someone was calling her name. Placing a hand to her forehead, she squinted against the sun that bled down from overhead and made it seem as though the horizon was one with the snow. “Where are you?”

“Albinia.”

Something moved up ahead, a flurry of dark color. Letting her wings out just slightly, she pushed forward and darted toward it, heart pounding in her throat for a reason she couldn't explain.

Albinia had nearly reached the dark figure before she realized what it was—a large penguin, which seemed to be flagging her down with its short wings. But how could that be? Penguins didn't live in the northern hemisphere and they certainly didn't talk, let alone know her name.

The bird's beak opened to emit a keening, “Albinia.”

She gave her head a shake, but the penguin was still there. Sleek blue-black with tufts of blue feathers above its eyes, the bird was nearly as tall as her. And, if the sound of its cry were to be believed, it was in trouble. “What's the matter?”

“Come.”

The penguin turned, hopping in the other direction at a speed that shocked her. In order to keep up, she had to let free her wings again and use them for added speed. Whenever the animal looked back, she was careful to quickly conceal them. It was a silly effort, she supposed. A talking penguin would certainly have more to fear in sharing her, and therefore its own, existence with humans than it would to gain.

Questions spun through her head as they covered a half-mile of rolling snowy hillside and ice covered valleys. Those questions died the moment Albinia was led into a great circle of ice and snow, and hundreds of penguins turned anxious eyes on her.

Where had they all come from, and how had she missed them during her many walks these past days?

“Come,” the penguin that had led her to the circle ordered, and moved quickly to a large lake. Another penguin lay near the bank, a penguin with large red tufts of feathers over its eyes. Amber eyes, Albinia thought, and then shook the idea away. The bird's eyes were closed, and so she could have no idea of the color. And yet, somehow, she felt so certain they were amber. She felt as though ... as though she knew this penguin.

“Help,” the tall bird next to her screeched.

Help? But how? "I don't understand."

"Help," it repeated, turning its focus on the bird at their feet.

The penguin had yet to move or open its eyes, and she could only guess that it was ill or had been harmed in some way. "He's hurt?"

The bird beside her nodded and emitted another keening, "Help."

Back on Faeridae, Albinia had powers of healing, but, like her inability to use glamour in this cold environment, she doubted it would work here. She had never felt so powerless. She couldn't even try natural healing techniques; not when she knew nothing of their kind. "How?" she asked, straining to keep the whine of desperation from her voice.

"Home."

She frowned. "This is your home?"

"Home." The penguin raised its short wing and pointed toward the opening of the large enclosure. "Home."

She looked back in the direction they had come from, then back at the bird. "You want me to take him home?"

He nodded. "Home."

But how would that help? And what would Flinn say if she returned with a sick bird that shouldn't even exist on this part of the Earth? "I don't live here. I'm just visiting."

The penguin pointed toward the circle's opening once more, ordering in a shrill voice, "Go. Home. Now."

"Flinn won't like it if I just bring some strange penguin into his home."

"Flinn." The penguin wings flapped wildly and the blue tufts danced over his eyes as he looked upon the bird at his feet. "Flinn. Home."

A dosage of relief settled in. "You know Flinn?"

Once more the bird nodded and pointed at the opening. "Go. Home."

"Okay. Okay. I'll take him home." She squatted to the snowy ground and lifted the large sick bird into her arms, not bothering to explain her excessive strength. These creatures had to know little of humans, just as she knew little, or rather nothing, of them. "I don't know what's wrong with him, but maybe Flinn will."

"Flinn." Another penguin joined the one who had led Albinia to the great circle, tucking its wing around the larger bird. She turned sad, pale eyes on the penguin in Albinia's arms. "Flinn. Help."

Albinia's heart ached with the bird's sadness. She couldn't begin to understand who the fallen penguin was that he affected so many with such complete sorrow. But he had to be important, to both these birds and to Flinn, and so she risked removing her clothing and baring her wings to their fullest extent. "I'll do everything I can," she promised, and then lifted into the air and flew toward Flinn's home, praying her wings wouldn't freeze up or give out against their combined weight.

Chapter Six

Flinn's head throbbed fiercely as he opened his eyes and looked around. He was in his home, his bed, but why? He couldn't recall how he'd gotten here. The last thing he'd known he'd been playing with the young of the colony in the lake at the great circle and then... Then he couldn't remember.

A gentle purring sound had Flinn looking to his right. Erin was there, her head buried in a tangle of pale blonde hair where it was cradled on her crooked arms on the edge of his icy mattress. The rest of her was propped against the side of his bed, her legs snaking onto the floor in a position that looked entirely uncomfortable. She wasn't purring, he realized, but snoring.

"Erin?" he cackled, and shut his mouth around the word. Why did he sound like he was in his penguin form? A glimpse at his body revealed why, because he was. At least, partially. His body had begun to transform.

Shit, Erin couldn't see him like this. Unless she already had. But no. No human who had seen him in his penguin form would still be at his bedside, holding vigilance.

"Flinn?"

The word was barely a whisper. He feared looking back at Erin, at finding her staring at him in horror. Maybe she hadn't been awake enough before to realize what he was. Now she sounded both awake and scared, and for good reason. It would be foolish to think she could look upon him in this semi-altered state and not be stricken.

"Flinn, are you..." Her soft voice came again. "Flinn, please talk to me."

God, he had to look. He couldn't leave her hanging on the edge like this.

The moment he met her eyes, those amazing azure pools that had concerned him from day one, and saw the sulky set of her lips, he knew he was in trouble. Erin didn't attempt to run. She didn't look upon him in stark horror. She smiled at him, taking his hand in hers to squeeze it as if she was thankful he was alive.

"What happened?" Flinn asked, relieved this time when his voice sounded almost human.

Her smile weakened and tears gathered in her eyes. "You were injured, unconscious. I brought you back here and tried to help you. You slept for a long time. You were dreaming, bad dreams from the sounds of things. I couldn't heal you, and I thought..." Her voice cracked and her lower lip pushed into a full pout. "Oh, Flinn, I thought you weren't going to wake up."

The pout became a tremble. The urge to take her into his arms and soothe her hit Flinn hard. Only it wasn't Flinn who moved, it was Erin.

Her hold on his hand let up and she was on his bed in an instant, her body covering his, her mouth fusing with his own. She kissed him with passion, with desperation. With a soul-deep hunger he shared without even understanding how or why such a thing was possible. He kissed her back, mindful of the continual transformation of his body, the shifting of his tongue to its normal size and color, and the replacement of his webbed feet with human ones. He was also mindful of the salty tang of her tears—tears she had cried over him—and broke from her mouth to kiss them away.

With that first kiss, Erin pulled back, grinning. "You're okay. Oh, Goddess, you're

okay.”

He was it seemed, but was she? Or was she in a state of shock not to be questioning the transformation that had just happened before her eyes? “Yes, I’m okay. But…”

She swallowed his words with the return of her mouth, with the plunge of her tongue past his lips to tangle with his own. Damn, she tasted sweet. Sweeter than anything or anyone he could remember. And the way she felt…

As his body completed its shifting, he became aware of the fact that Erin was as naked as he. Naked and, if the heat that drifted from her sex and the hard brush of her nipples against his chest were a sign, fully aroused. Flinn became more and more aroused himself by the second.

Cupping his face in her hands, she lifted from his mouth and shifted her hips against his. Her eyes held a wealth of emotion—feelings he didn’t even want to consider. “Make love with me, Flinn. Please. I know you want me as badly as I want you. Need me even. This is need, Flinn, and it’s right. Don’t question it, just love me.”

“Yes.” What else could he say? She was acting rational, like the Erin he’d known from day one. The Erin who knew his secret and, yet, here she was, still accepting him, still wanting him. Still needing him. He could never deny that. “Yes, Erin. I want that.”

With a triumphant squeal, she reclined against him once more, her heavy breasts rubbing his chest enticingly while her lips latched onto his neck. Kissing and licking at his skin, she moved one hand between their bodies and took his shaft in her hand, guiding him to her opening. Fluid seeped at the head of his cock with his anticipation of finally sinking into her welcoming heat. She used the moisture from his sex, brushing the tip against her pussy lips until it mingled with the cream from her own body.

Erin licked his neck a last time, and then sat back and sank onto his shaft, taking him to the hilt. “Oh, yes!” she cried, as passion rounded her eyes.

Flinn’s own cry of pleasure at the feel of her slick sheath taking him in was low and guttural. The way he reached for and palmed her breasts in his hands, needy. The rocking of his hips as he thrust in and out of her body erratic. He knew all this, and yet he couldn’t control it. He’d only known Erin for days now, and yet he felt as though he’d been waiting for her, wanting her a lifetime.

Bracing one hand on his chest for support, she reached between their joined bodies with her other. Her long hair moved wildly with their actions, brushing over the backs of his hands as he massaged her breasts and tickled her erect nipples. The ends of the long strands caressed her far more intimately, as she grabbed a handful of locks and brought them to the muff of damp, near white hair that covered her mound. The long ends speared through her pubic curls to brush against the tender pearl partially exposed between her spread thighs.

“Oh, my!” she shouted, with that first touch against her clit.

Flinn’s cock throbbed in response to the open way she touched herself. He released one breast and, slowing the rhythm of his thrusts, parted her labia wide. Her clit wasn’t the deep red inflamed shade he’d expected but a pale bluish-white and shuddering under his attention. She didn’t seem concerned with the odd color and so he didn’t question it. “You’re beautiful down here,” he said instead, stroking his thumb over the exposed pearl and reveling in her answering mewls. “Pleasure yourself more, Erin. I want to watch you come.”

She brought the tips of her hair to her opening once more and brushed them over her

clit. Her hips arched forward, her sex clamping down around his, and he thrust up into her automatically. “Oh, yes ... like that,” she panted.

“Like that,” he agreed, trembling with the mass of pleasure her actions brought forth. “Just like that.”

With a temptress’s smile, Erin brought her hair back to her clit again and again, each time rearing a little harder with the gentle scrape of fine hair, each time making Flinn plunge up a bit more intensely into her sheath. Cream dripped from her body now and the hand that guided her hair to tease along her clit was as unsteady as the one he used to splay her sex wide. They were both nearing the point of being unable to continue this way a moment longer. Before that moment could come, he released her lips, grabbed her around the waist, and spun them on the bed.

Claiming her mouth with the demanding pressure of his own, he slammed into her wet body, groaning into her mouth with each spasm of her muscles around his sex. Groaning was no longer enough when the greatest of those spasms came and Erin’s climax erupted around his cock. Flinn’s own orgasm pounded through him, along with the need to shout out her name loud enough for all in the tundra to hear.

He collapsed onto her body moments later, still weak from whatever had been wrong with him and the force of his climax. At the sound of her squeak, he quickly rolled over, taking her along with him. He wasn’t ready to lose the connection of their joined bodies just yet. Hell, maybe he never would.

A full minute of silence ensued, time for Flinn to think about what it was that Erin had become to him and, painfully, what she could never be.

Tipping her face back, so that her chin with that sexy little cleft down the center dug lightly into his chest, she broke the silence. “Flinn, you aren’t human.”

The observation came so late, he couldn’t stop his hearty chuckle. When the laughter faded, concern emerged. What if he’d been wrong? What if she hadn’t been her sane self until right this minute? “No,” he said, cautious to keep his arms around her so that she couldn’t bolt, “but that didn’t seem to bother you a minute ago.”

A slow grin spread over her face, and a block of ice seemed to be removed from his chest. “Of course, it didn’t. How could it when I’m not human, either.”

Awe took over Flinn’s relief. He sputtered out, “You’re not?”

“No. But I thought you might have already guessed that.”

For a few minutes he had considered it, but never seriously. And if she wasn’t human, then what? “What are you, Erin? Not were-penguin. I would have been able to sense that.”

“Were-penguin. We have shifters on my planet, Faeridae, but not of your kind.” She nipped a kiss at his chest. “I like it, though. It sounds mythological. As for me, I am a faerie.” She lifted from his body and sat back to straddle him, pointing out a tiara tattoo on her right breast, which hadn’t been there in her altered form. “The Faerie Princess of Symmetry, second daughter of King Lucraxious VII and Queen Amara, and my name isn’t really Erin, but Albinia.”

And she called him mythological. He gave his head a shake. “That’s not possible. Faeries aren’t real. They’re creatures made up in nursery rhymes.”

A pale eyebrow slanted up. “Yes, as are were-penguins.” She pushed from the bed, coming to stand beside it. “Faeries are real, Flinn. Let me show you.”

Half afraid of what he was about to see, yet not about to admit that after the way

she'd so easily accepted what he was, Flinn came up on his elbow. Albinia moved to the center of his bedroom. Before his eyes, her skin changed from pale cream to vivid white. Her lips, nipples and genitals took on a bluish cast, and something appeared at her back. Wings, he realized with held breath seconds later.

Stunning white opalescent wings spread out from her back. Wings nearly as wide as she was tall and tipped in a shimmering blue the same mesmerizing shade as her eyes.

He came to his feet without thought. When he was standing next to her, he reached out to trail a finger along the edge of a wing. She giggled in response, and the breath snagged in his throat. "God, you're so beautiful. I've always thought so, but seeing you this way ... you're incredible. But why are you here, in my home?"

Her smile dimmed a bit and uncertainty passed through her eyes. "My father sent me to Earth to find a mate, a man to love and marry."

"I'm not that man." His heart squeezed with the truth in the words. Damn it, he couldn't. "I care about you, Albinia, very much, but I can't take a mate outside of my species. It isn't done. A princess faerie must need to abide by similar rules."

"No. Daddy said he would marry me to the ogre king, so we must not have those rules. I can marry who I want, love who I want, so long as I do it by my next birthday." She blinked, but not soon enough to hide the trickle of a lone tear down her cheek. "I love you, Flinn. I thought I might be falling before, but seeing you so sick..."

A low rumbling silenced her, followed by the quaking of the snow-packed floor beneath their feet. "The shockwaves," Flinn blurted.

"You feel them, too?"

He nodded absently, the bulk of his thoughts on the unexplainable source of the quakes. "I'm sensitive to them, as well, and not because of my studies."

"That was a lie. I had no choice but to say it. I'm sor..."

A second wave came, nearly knocking Flinn from his feet. He reached out to stabilize Albinia, releasing her when the tremors passed. "They're getting worse. Closer." He moved to a wooden dresser and yanked out a pair of jeans. "I have to go..."

"I'm going with you."

Tugging the jeans on one leg, he spun back, not about to risk putting her in harm's way. "No, you aren't. There's no point. You can't help. You don't even know anything about what's happening. You're not a geophysics student, remember?"

"Maybe not, but I've studied this land. I *am* going with you."

Shit. The tip of her chin was thrust forward, stubbornness alive in every angle of her body, shining in her eyes. He didn't have time to argue. "Fine." He returned to the dresser, yanked out a second pair of jeans and a flannel shirt, and tossed them to her. "But put these on first. I won't have you parading around my people with your wings hanging out and nothing on. They aren't ready for your kind."

Albinia's gasp was audible. It occurred to him that he'd wounded her with the way he'd labeled her. Instead of lashing out at him, though, calmness overtook her. Casually, she said, "They've already seen me this way, and they were fully accepting."

Flinn's gut tightened with the thought of so many males looking upon her the way only he should see her. But, no. She wasn't to be his. He had no right to look upon her in all her naked splendor a moment longer.

He opened his mouth to order her to get dressed, but all that came out was a jealous sounding, "When?"

“When I came to your rescue at the...”

Once more a rumbling silenced her, this one far louder than the last. “Tell me later,” he shouted, as he grabbed a shirt for himself and started for the door. “Now, we have to go.”

Chapter Seven

Albinia had prided herself on her logic for over twenty-seven years now. It was common sense that had her understanding the way Flinn labeled her. Common sense that allowed her to curb her initial hurt and respond in a calm, leisurely manner. It likely was not common sense working, however, when she pointedly ignored his command to get dressed and, tossing aside the clothes he'd given her, lifted into the air and flew past him out the door and in the direction the shockwaves came from.

Behind her she was aware of Flinn's outraged shouts, but she was on a mission. If she was to track down the source of the tremors, it had to be now, when they were still happening. And she had every intention of tracking down and ending whatever it was that caused them. This place was to become her home and, regardless of the nonsense he spoke about rules, Flinn her mate. She would not have the beautiful tundra being torn apart by some unseen and angry force.

She'd flown for nearly a mile, the sound of Flinn's shouts barely a whisper on the wind, when she reached the point at where the tremors were the greatest—an enormous lake, no longer frozen over, but cracked down the middle and drifting with bergs.

“Albinia!”

Flinn's shout grew louder, closer. Soon he would reach her. Once that happened he would never allow her to continue. She had a single chance to uncover this mystery. She took that chance and barreled forward, full speed ahead, into the water and straight to the deepest, darkest depths.

She couldn't feel if the water was icy, and realized that she couldn't breathe under water. Had she been thinking at all, she would have known that before diving in. She hadn't been thinking, not beyond ending the destruction of the arctic and the havoc the shockwaves wrought on Flinn and his kind and all that called the tundra home.

Albinia spun in the water, angling her arms above her head, in the direction of the surface. Panic threatened when a kick of her legs only managed to bring her farther down into the haunting darkness.

Her wings. They were too wet. Too cold. They weren't yet acclimated to this extreme of temperature. She tried to order her wings away, but they wouldn't budge. Panic did come now, stealing priceless breath from her lungs. She tried to slow the erratic speed of her heart, the hasty intakes of her nose and mouth. But they wouldn't listen. No part of her would listen. She was going to die. Alone. She hated being alone.

“Albinia.”

Yes, she was already dying, but not alone as she'd feared. Flinn had come in the form of her angel. His reassuring voice stole through her mind, while his beak grabbed hold of a wing, tugging her upward, toward Heaven.

“Albinia, can you hear me? Just nod if you can.”

Smiling, she nodded. He had such a nice voice, deep and grouchy at times, but still so warm and masculine. “I love you,” she gurgled.

“Stop taking in water!”

She frowned. Angels weren't supposed to shout, were they? And why did it feel like her entire body was made of lead. Death was supposed to be peaceful, not painful.

The darkness turned to light. She sighed. Now would come the good parts, the choir playing its welcoming chorus and her Flinn angel telling her she was finally home, to live amongst all those who had passed before her, including the great Goddess herself.

“This is going to hurt.”

In the next second, pain erupted through Albinia’s body. Her eyes snapped shut as her wings hit something rock hard. Fuck, Heaven was not like she’d expected at all! Unless she hadn’t made it to Heaven. “Am I in Hell?”

Somewhere above her, Flinn cackled a curt laugh. “You deserve to be for taking off that way and risking your damned life. Open your eyes, Albinia. Tell me you’re okay.”

Okay? How could she be okay? She was dead.

She opened her eyes to explain that if she was okay, she wouldn’t be in heaven, or hell, as the case might be. No words made it out of her mouth before her surroundings caught up with her. Ice and snow as far as eye could see, an unbroken section of the lake at her back and Flinn standing over her in his penguin form.

“I’m alive?” She just felt like death, and sounded it as well. Her voice seemed as though it came from a frog’s throat.

Relief passed through his eyes, quickly fading to an unnamable emotion. For a long moment he only stared at her, as if unsure what to say, then he glanced back at the open section of lake. “You’re alive. Now unless you need medical attention right this second, I need to go back in the water. I saw something when we were down there.”

Finally regaining her symmetry, Albinia sat. Ache rioted through her body with the effort. “The tremors are coming from down there.” She indicated the open water she had dove into. “That’s why I went in.”

“Yes, they are. You were brave, but stupid, too, since it seems faeries can’t breathe water. I can, and I need to go back under.” Flinn looked back, his expression again unreadable. The quaver in his scratchy voice, however, suggested how afraid he had been for her. Maybe as afraid as she had been for him two days ago, when she’d first realized the identity of the were-penguin she was trying to help regain consciousness. Maybe after this he would be ready to admit that they were meant to be, that their love was strong enough to overthrow any illogical ruling set forth by his kind.

“Go. I’ll be okay. I promise.”

With a last look, he trotted back to the open section of lake and dove in. Albinia watched his webbed feet disappear, her heart in her throat. Man or bird, she loved him with every ounce of her faerie essence, and prayed for his safe return.

* * * *

Flinn strode toward the great circle of ice and snow that harbored his colony. Albinia flew behind him. He was too angry to yell at her for not finding clothes, and too happy she was alive and feeling better to not order her to stop following him. He should have at least changed from the human form and clothing he’d donned the moment he’d emerged from the lake to his penguin form, but he didn’t want to waste the time. He had something important to say, more specifically a serious scolding to give to the young of the colony.

The young were to blame for the shockwaves. Time and again, they attempted to get him to change the longstanding rules of the colony. In some cases, he would give in. On one, Flinn would never even budge—that of technology. The young pestered him daily to

allow human technology into their colony. They were penguins, yes, but also somewhat mortal, and they wanted the same luxuries as human kids. They wanted to listen to blaring music with lyrics that were either vulgar or made no sense. It was those lyrics that had nearly destroyed the colony.

One or more of the young had ignored Flinn's ruling of no human technology and brought an all weather radio onto their land. A radio that had been set to the highest volume and dropped into the lake. More than likely the dropping had been accidental, but the result had been the same. The radio had landed against a major terrain support shaft at the lake bottom. The deafening sounds of the ceaseless music had likely been eroding at the land mass for months now. If they hadn't found it when they had...

"Flinn?" Giganta questioned when he paced, hands fisted, into the center of the great circle and straight for the lake, where the young played. "Albinia?" the penguin asked next. "What is the matter? Is Flinn still not well?"

Albinia didn't respond outside of hovering closer to the ground and looking at Giganta. Flinn understood her silence. She couldn't understand their language, and out of all the were-penguins, only Flinn knew more than a handful of human words. She couldn't breathe water, either. For all he knew, she couldn't even swim—the most important ability of his kind: for sustenance, for procreation, for play.

Damn it, she wasn't one of them. She shouldn't be here!

He spun on her, growling with his increasing anger. "You don't belong here! These aren't your people. I'm not. Go, Albinia. Go home. And not my home, either. You can go back there for some of my clothes, but that's it. When I return, I want you gone."

The elated look she had worn since he'd emerged from the lake with the radio in tow fell from her face. Tears filled her sparkling azure eyes. She opened her mouth to speak, but all that came out was a gasp. She shook her head and tried again. This time the words were even and, amazingly, the tears were gone. "I won't go, Flinn, I love..."

"No! I don't want to hear it. It doesn't matter. You don't belong here and that's all that matters. Leave. Now. Or as leader of this colony I'll have you thrown out."

Flinn expected more of a fight. More words of affection, or perhaps those of rage—sooner or later her carefully composed shell had to break. Instead, Albinia sniffed and lifted higher into the air, making her way back to the circle opening.

"Son, you would be foolish not to make her yours. She loves you. If you cannot see that, then you are blind."

It was Saremb's gentle voice. Flinn turned to the penguin that had always been like his mother, struck that she would say such words. She, one of the original were-penguins. A founder of this colony. "She does not belong here, Mama. She can't even breathe water. If it hadn't been for my being near her today, she would have drowned."

Saremb's pale eyes misted. "Then it is fortunate that you were there, because it would be truly sorrowful for you to lose your mate before you've even admitted she is yours. You love her, Son. You know that in here." She reached up to tap his chest with her short wing. "You feel it, Son."

He cared for Albinia deeply, maybe even loved her. The idea she could have died earlier had been too much to bear. But still it didn't change what he was, and what she could never be. They were just too different. "She's not of our kind."

"You could create a wonderful new species of flying were-penguins together," Giganta spoke up loudly from behind Flinn and Saremb.

Flinn snorted. Even his father, the co-founder of this colony and a penguin that had always lived stringently by the rules, seemed intent on him being with Albinia. “I don’t know...”

Giganta moved closer, signifying the importance of his next words by raising the blue tufts of feathers above his eyes. “It was she you asked for when you were ill, Son. You were swimming with the young when a tremor hit and shook an icicle loose from the circle ceiling. It hit you, knocking you unconscious. Your last words were for us to retrieve Albinia from your home. You only wanted her.”

Flinn reached a hand to his head, rubbing the spot that had felt increasingly sore since he’d awoken to find Albinia at his bedside. An icicle had caused the pain. And Albinia... Why would he have asked for her? Did he truly love her so much that he wanted only her at his side while mending?

A cacophony of squawks filled the great circle, echoing off its icy walls. Saremb looked past Flinn and gestured with her wing. “You’re too late, Son. She’s gone.”

He turned to find Albinia had reached the circle entrance. Just a few more seconds and she would indeed be gone, forever. Flinn’s heart gave a restless thump. Blood exploded in a harsh pumping between his ears. Forever was an eternity. Forever was too long to even bear thinking of without Albinia near his side.

Damn it. When had he become this weak-hearted man? The answer was not important, he knew, as she passed the final threshold of the entrance. All that mattered was getting his faerie back. “Albinia!”

With a flurry of wings, she turned around. A faint smile curved lips he’d once sworn not to kiss. He had kissed them, and now he ached to kiss them again and again and again, along with all of her stunningly beautiful body. Hell, his cock stirred to life at the mere thought. “Good bye, Flinn,” she said sadly. “Good luck.”

He started toward her, determined not to run like a fool. “Don’t go.”

Her lips twitched, and he saw the tears forming in her eyes. “I can’t stay. I have to find true love with a man who returns that love enough to want to marry me.” She turned back and once more started on her journey away from the colony circle.

Making himself look like a fool was no longer a concern. Flinn dashed over the snow, not stopping until he reached the circle entrance, and there he shouted, “I am that man, Albinia. I love you. I want to marry you. To hell with the rules. I’m the leader of this colony, I hold the power to change them.”

As if frozen in time, Albinia stopped and hovered in mid-air. Slowly, she turned back. The tears he’d witnessed emerging back in the circle now trickled freely over her smooth white cheeks. And her smile—her smile was no longer weak, but wide and shimmering. “Do you mean that, Flinn? Truly?”

He nodded, unable to contain his grin. “I mean that. I want to marry you and have lots of little were-penguins with their mother’s beautiful wings.” Flinn couldn’t remember smiling this broadly in years, in experiencing such intense happiness. It felt incredible. As did Albinia as she coasted to the ground and straight into his arms.

Those lovely azure eyes he had allowed to capture him despite his best efforts to evade them twinkled. “Oh, Flinn. I love you so very much.”

At the circle entrance, the colony appeared, chanting a single word, “Home.”

With a grin, Albinia fused her mouth with Flinn’s, kissing him long and hard and deep. Every inch of his body hummed with desire, and by the way her blue nipples turned

hard to scrape against his chest, he knew hers was alive with it, as well.

With a last kiss, she took his hand and turned to smile at his people, soon to be both of theirs. “Yes, home. That’s right where I am. Right where I always wanted to be.”

Flinn’s happiness came to a standstill as her words from back in his bedroom returned. “What about your duties as a princess? Your family back on Faeridae?”

As if she heard words from above, Albinia tipped her face skyward, appearing to listen intently. A good fifteen seconds had passed when she looked back at him. Her grin became wider, setting his concern to rest. “It would seem I have completed my mission and, as such, my duties are with you now. As for my family, we’ll visit them and have them visit here as often as possible. Have I told you I’m a quadruplet?”

“Three more faeries as stunning and intelligent as you?”

“As stunning anyway—my intelligence is mostly learned from books.” Her lips pushed into a pout. “We aren’t identical, either, so don’t get any ideas about accidentally kissing or sleeping with the wrong sister. I find when it comes to you, Flinn, I have no longing to share.”

As he feared would forever be the case, he caved to her sulky expression, tugging her firmly to him once more and kissing her deeply. She rocked her hips against his, rubbing along the bulge of his swollen cock. Flinn grunted as he thought of the wonderful years of lovemaking to come. And they would be wonderful; with the two of them together there was no other option.

“Never, Albinia,” he swore, as he picked her up, and hastily made his way to his home, their home now. “You’re the only woman, faerie or any kind, I’ll ever want, from here until eternity.” He sealed that promise with a kiss that went on and on, until they were lying together on the bed, naked and joined as one.

The End

About the Author:

Jodi Lynn Copeland discovered her love for writing at an early age and soon after that came an even greater love for the hot, steamy romance—some riddled with humor and fun, others shock full of enough dark and emotional baggage to sink a ship. Jodi is married to her real life hero and has more than a dozen children, though only one of them is human and two-legged.

Jodi is an all around tomboy at heart, which you can often see shades of in her writing. When she isn’t writing, or spending time at the day job she likes to pretend she really doesn’t have, Jodi can be found in the great outdoors, scrapbooking, watching the discovery channel, CSI or 24, or on any given Sunday, sacked out on the couch with her husband and stepson, taking in the latest NASCAR race.

You can visit Jodi online and learn more about her and her novels at:
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LUCK OF THE DRAW

Rae Monet

Dedication

To my own Knight in Shining Armor, my husband and my yahoo group for your support.

Chapter One

She needed money. It was as simple as that, Nortia thought as she slipped on her pink stiletto heels. She was going to have to use her gift. She leaned forward and checked her appearance in the mirror. Her rosy pink hue was subtle yet sexy. On Faeridae, her color and iridescent wings really shone. Here on Earth, what her people called Earthatopia, she appeared as if she was glowing with the aftermath of a particularly satisfying sexual experience.

Nortia huffed out an annoyed breath. She hadn't had sex since she left Faeridae and was starving for the touch of a man. Her father had split her and her four sisters up, then plunked her down on this small coastal town in France with a hideous threat: find a man to love her for her faerie essence by her twenty-eighth birthday, January first of the New Year, or face the consequences—marriage to the Ogre King Eskimond. And it was April already.

She certainly wasn't getting anywhere near that old troll, Eskimond. He was disgusting.

Unfortunately, the only men in this quiet little town were the mail carrier, who was about thirty-five with a nasty overbite, and the town baker, who was sixty and incredibly large.

Not many choices.

What was she going to do, walk up to them and say, *hey could you love me for my faerie essence before I'm twenty-eight?* Yeah right, they would head for the hills, or worse, they *would* marry her. She wanted love, not lust. She wanted her mate in life to love her for *who* she was, not because she could make them feel that way. Besides all that, she dearly missed her sisters; they had never been apart like this.

Nortia groaned as she tucked a long blonde curl behind her ear and applied a light shade of sparkling eye shadow. After she coated each eye a lovely muted shade of pink, she picked up her dark fuchsia lip liner and applied it. Then she filled her lips in with a light pink lipstick and followed up with a sparkling clear lip-gloss. She fingered the black mole above her lip; she was the only one of the four sisters who carried the royal beauty mark, and the thought of it sent a pang of homesickness through her.

She shook her head. Now was not the time to think of it.

Piling the entire mass of blonde hair on the top of her head, she stuck a few pins in it, letting a few wisps fall down.

There. She patted her cheeks. *Sexy.*

The ritual of making herself ready for the night ahead soothed her. She was going to a huge, glitzy casino in the largest town up the coast. The only place the locals went to have fun, the casino sat upon a hill and overlooked one of the most beautiful beaches the Southern Coast of France had to offer. The place was full of money and sparkle and, on top of that, the neon sign announcing its name, *Ranger's Palace*, was pink! *Perfect.*

Exactly what she needed.

Nortia had to increase her funds so that she could afford a few trips to the more affluent play spots around France and search for her ultimate man. If she had to stay in this small, cozy little baker's town one more day, she would go mad. Crap, she had

already gained ten lovely pounds out of sheer boredom. Rubenesque was how she would now describe herself.

She cupped her breasts and rearranged them in her pink sequined dress. They were huge. Ten pounds had added just the right amount of weight to give her smashing cleavage. She could drop crumbs into the gap and never find them.

Sliding her finger down the vee of her top, she ran her finger slowly along the side of her right breast, caressing her small, pink tiara royal tattoo in the process. She shivered in arousal. She was pent up like a faerie water cannon, waiting to explode. At this rate, if she didn't find the right man, she was afraid she would jump the first attractive *faerie*, in Earth language man, she saw. *Sex was sex, right?* She wasn't asking for much. It's not like it was going to lead to any long-term relationships. She shrugged. She needed to round the edge off a bit, take her first taste of Earth male skin, see what she wanted in a mate. Sample the merchandise, if you will.

Young faeries such as she needed their arousal curbed on a regular basis or they were liable to leak their power. Her power was luck. She could manipulate it any way she wanted and if she wasn't sexually satisfied ... well, then someone around her got really lucky. She chuckled to herself.

Doing a last fluff of her hair, she gave herself a final peek and nodded in satisfaction. *Ready to go have fun.*

She stood and clicked her way out of her one-bedroom apartment the town baker had gifted to her. It had been pure luck his renter had up and left after paying three months in advance. Nortia had come along and appealed to the baker. She had moved in the next day.

The honk of a horn let her know her timing was perfect. *How lucky.* She grabbed her fuchsia-dyed fur wrap and ran her hand down the slimming lines of her dress. Thank the Goddess the dress was part spandex, she thought as she wiggled.

Well, of course, she was lucky, she reflected as she glided out the door and toward the car that held several locals making a run to the casino. She smiled as the mail carrier scrambled out his side of the car and opened her car door. She nodded to the laundry girl and seamstress in the back.

"*Allons'z, Let's go,*" she purred in French. The mail carrier smiled and jammed his baby Peugeot into first gear.

As they drove out of town Nortia grinned.

Luck nothing. She made her own luck.

Chapter Two

His casino, his glitz, his money; he smiled. Today was going to be a good day in his world, he thought as he rode the elevator from his penthouse to the security floor. Exiting the elevator, Brice Ranger paused as he headed toward his office. There was a huge crowd around the surveillance monitors. He could swear all of his male security officers were now congregated in one location. He slowly approached the group. He didn't take business lightly and his men well knew it.

"Gentleman, considering near a dozen of you are supposed to be on the floor right now, whatever you're watching better be worth your jobs."

It was almost amusing to see nearly a dozen former law enforcement and military officers jump with guilt. All of a sudden, the group dispersed with a murmur of "sorry sir, yes sir, right away sir". He was left with his two primary surveillance officers, Frederick and Jonathan, both former British intelligence officers. They were glued to the surveillance monitor as if their lives depended on it.

"What's up, guys?" he moved closer to the monitor.

"Well, not sure Boss, there's this woman..." Fred stopped talking and slowly drew in a breath. Brice could see sweat beading on his brow.

Brice rolled his eyes.

"Put it up on the main screen," he ordered. He had to see what they were talking about. With a flick of the monitor, the most beautiful woman he had every seen appeared on the large flat screen. He sucked in a sharp breath.

She's yours something whispered. He shook his head to try and clear the murmuring.

She was poured into all pink sequins, her blond hair piled on top of her head with wisps falling down into her face. She had an incredible body that went on for miles, giving her a sensual, Marilyn Monroe appearance. One of his floor security officers, Jeff, was holding what appeared to be a pink fur and he seemed totally enthralled.

The woman screamed and jumped, which only forced her strained cleavage further out the vee of her dress, exposing a small pink tattoo. *Very alluring*. Then she threw herself into Jeff's arms. Brice could feel himself harden just watching her. He seriously wanted to change places with his security guard right now. He strode closer to the screen to get a better look at her. She stepped back, gave Jeff a little peck on the cheek, leaving a smear of pink lipstick, and turned back to the slot machine. As she pivoted, Brice got a glimpse of her face, all sparkle and feminine beauty. She had pouting pink lips, little pert nose, and high, regal cheekbones; like a pixie princess without the wings.

"Man, she is..." his voice trailed off. He was nearly stunned stupid.

Keep her. Make her yours.

"Pink," Fred supplied.

"Ummm, yes pink," he agreed, trying to get past the screams in his head, but he couldn't.

"Why is Jeff trailing her like a puppy?"

Usually his customer service representatives lurked outside the action. They were there to provide for high rollers. Not single players on the coin machines.

"I'm not sure," Jon answered. He seemed mesmerized by the screen.

Not taking his eyes from the woman, Brice tried to tamp down annoyance that his men weren't on top of the situation. It wasn't like them or him to be entranced by a simple woman. "Have you asked him?" he demanded as he watched the screen, which had some weird hold on him.

Delicately, she placed each individual coin into the machine. Even the movement of her hand seemed graceful. Everything about her leaked sensuality.

Fred answered after a long pause. "Ummm, no, sorry, Boss, not yet."

Brice broke away from the spell the woman was casting on him. He turned toward his men. This was his casino, his security department, and his world. It was time to take back control from this obviously striking distraction.

"Do it, now. No wait..." He turned back toward the screen. "I'll do it myself." He spun toward the elevator, which led to the casino floor.

"Sure, Boss..." Jon's voice trailed off.

Outside the view of his men, Brice's lips quirked in humor. This woman could be cheating them blind and his men were awestruck with noticeable lust. It was almost comical. Those two were disciplined, organized, never sidetracked from their duty. The security of his floor their top priority. They were the closest thing to a British FBI agent he could get. He was glad he wasn't sitting in their chairs right now, because he might be in the same position—thinking with his cock.

Chapter Three

Nortia screamed when she hit another set of triple sevens on the slot machine. She was trying to keep her wins small, but sometimes she couldn't resist. She was up to thirty thousand dollars. If she stayed off the tables, she usually wasn't noticed.

She glanced at Jeff and winked. He smiled back. He was clearly taken with her, and he was cute. Maybe she would keep him, she thought, as she waited for the coins to continue clinking out her winnings. Shifting, she slipped a coin into the machine next to her while releasing a tiny amount of her power. It also hit triple sevens. Trying not to giggle in excitement, she suppressed her emotions and reflected on how well she was doing tonight. Gently clapping her hands together, she slipped in three more coins.

"Another win, Ms. Faerie, congratulations!"

Jeff's excited voice penetrated her consciousness. Nortia slid a sideways glance his way. Although he was attractive, she just couldn't seem to make a connection with him. She sighed. She supposed she should release him from her glamour spell. "*Saor Draiocht,*" she whispered as she slowly let her hold go. He blinked as if he was coming out from a long nap.

If someone was attracted to her, she could usually enhance their affection for a short time. It came in handy if she was trying to muddle their brain. She was certain Jeff had been sent to see if she was cheating. He, without a doubt, worked for the casino. She had won too much money in a short period to think he had been following her for any other reason. She'd had to distract him. Really, no harm came of her glamour spells—the person blinked out of her enthrallment as if they had been daydreaming, never really understanding what had happened.

Jeff gradually handed her jacket over. He took one step back, then another, and one more. A perplexed expression blanketed his face. Out of the blue, a man's hand fell to Jeff's shoulder.

Now here is a man worth taking home.

Nortia licked her lips as she took in the newcomer. He was dressed in an expensive Armani suit—faeries always kept abreast of the latest Earthatopia high-priced fashions. He was young and strikingly attractive. There was a powerful persona around him, making it clear he was a man who enjoyed taking charge. Because faeries had an enhanced sense of smell, his scent wafted over to her. Spicy aftershave and all sexy male beat at her mind. Her nipples peaked along with her interest. She could feel herself creaming for this man.

He leaned over and whispered something into Jeff's ear. Jeff nodded, gave her one final bemused look, then walked off.

"How are you this evening, Mademoiselle?" he asked in French, but he didn't sound native.

"*Parlez-vous Anglais?*" she asked as she tilted her head to study him. He had a modern haircut, blond and sort of mussed, as if he had just woken up. The most incredible ice blue eyes studied her. The deep timbre of his voice sent a shiver down her spine. She could feel her face flushing, and knowing her color, it would be a lovely shade of pink. If she hadn't hidden her wings, they would be fluttering about now, signaling her

sexual awareness.

“Yes, I speak English,” he responded as he stepped closer. His smell was arousing to the point she was getting light headed.

“Brice Ranger, the owner of the casino,” he said as he slid his hand toward hers in a traditional Earth greeting. She reached out her hand and clasped his. Suddenly, all motion ceased, noise stopped. As she made eye contact with Brice Ranger, her focus sharpened, her breathing stopped, and with the touch of his skin to hers, need became her number one companion. His hand was warm, almost hot, and her corresponding emotions were just as hot, flaming. No one had ever told her a handshake could be this arousing.

She forgot what she was going to say.

“Your name?” he asked and smiled. The tilt of his lips nearly knocked her out, it was so sexy; the dimple on the bottom of his chin only accented his attractiveness.

“Are you well?” he asked as he extracted his hand from hers. Oh, she had forgotten to release his hand.

The goddess of logic would be shaking her head right now, how stupid can I be? He must think she was a complete idiot. She was a princess, for the Goddess’s sake; she needed to pull herself together and act like the royalty she was.

“Nortia Faerie,” she answered, finally taking a breath as she tried to reduce the rapid beating of her heart.

He contemplated her response before he answered. His eyes strayed down her body and back up. “Nortia Faerie, that’s a very interesting name.”

His gaze seemed to stop and drop to the front of her dress. She was almost embarrassed she hadn’t come up with something better than Faerie, but she hadn’t thought she would need to make up a surname when she started on this escapade. Heck, everyone in Faeridae knew who she was. The quadruplets of King Lucraxius VII and Queen Amara never needed an introduction.

“I wonder if you might accompany me to my office, Ms. Faerie?”

“Pardon?” Nortia was confused. She’d like to accompany him anywhere he asked her to go, but right now she wasn’t sure exactly what he was talking about.

“So I may pay you for your third win.” He pointed and nodded at the machine.

“Oh.” She turned and checked the machine she had just placed coins into. It had won a second time. It was lighting up, screaming and nearly doing a jig in its excitement to please her. *Uh oh*, she might have released a little *too* much of her power.

“You just won the progressive jackpot, Ms. Faerie, and with the other machine there, you won seventy thousand dollars.”

Damn, she’d overdone it this time.

She stared at both machines.

“Well, I’ll be.” She tried to act surprised. It was difficult. As the faerie of luck, it didn’t take much for her to beat a slot machine.

“If you’ll come with me, I’ll generate a check for you, unless you prefer cash.”

“Oh, cash is fine.”

“Fine. I’ll have someone collect these winnings and bring them up.” Brice stepped aside and indicated that she should precede him.

Hugging her pink fur to her chest, she began walking. She felt as if she was stepping up to the firing squad wall. This man was up to something; she could feel it to the tips of her carefully concealed faerie wings. As he led her to an elevator, she hesitated. Slowly,

as if herding a skittish kitten, he placed his hand at the small of her back and gently guided her into the elevator. The heat of his hand nearly burned a hole in her back. She peeped in surprise.

He glanced at her strangely and withdrew a set of keys from his pocket. Inserting them into a slot next to the regular floor buttons, he turned it, then punched a blank button. As the elevator doors slipped shut, he leaned against the wall, crossed his arms, and stared at her. If she had been a mouse, she'd feel like a cat was sizing her up for dinner.

"Where are you from, Ms. Faerie, or should I call you Nortia, which, if I'm not mistaken, is the Latin word for luck?"

Nortia's heart began a rapid thumping in her chest. He was onto her. Wouldn't you know he'd understand her ancient universal language.

"Very astute, Mr. Ranger. You may call me Nortia."

He gave her a single nod. "And you may call me Brice."

The elevator made a "ding" noise indicating they had reached their destination. Brice led the way into the foyer of a great room. She followed him into the sunken living room and glanced around. Had she been on Faeridae, she would suspect she had just stepped into the home of a Calronian Faerie crown prince. The surroundings were ... *lush* ... was the first word that came to mind.

The leather couch was a subtle shade of taupe. Designer knickknacks littered the space in an eclectic manner. A woven Peruvian basket filled with dried flowers adorned an ornate sideboard and complemented the huge multi-colored tapestry with a rendering of medieval France on the wall behind it. Matching art deco candlesticks sat on each corner of a glass table, and a decorative earthenware vase sat on its own pedestal between the glass windowpanes. None of the items appeared any less than the best, and had been clearly handpicked by someone who loved to travel. Brice's tastes were so perceptibly unique and cultured, his personal space warmed her. She liked the feeling being here brought forth.

One other facet of the room caught her attention; windows with absolutely no covering. She inhaled and stepped forward, envisioning what the space would be like during day. There was glass everywhere and she immediately wanted to spread her wings and rejoice—even considering the idea made her skin prickle with pleasure. Despite the fact it was night, she could almost feel the sun. She particularly enjoyed the sun; some faeries were drawn to certain earth elements, her sister Albinia, for example, was infatuated with the iciness of the arctic tundra.

Sucking in the heat of the imagined sun like a human did water, she wandered over toward the glass windows and was rewarded by a fantastic view of the other Southern France casinos. Their lights blinked like a Christmas festival. In Faeridae, Christmas was very overdone, meaning everyone decorated to the hilt. It was a fantastic time. In moments like this, she missed her world and her sisters so much it hurt. They had never been separated like this before. What would happen if she wasn't successful in her quest? She shuddered at the thought.

"May I offer you a drink?"

The sound of Brice's low voice startled Nortia, making her whirl around. He held two glasses of what appeared to be wine, and he was so near she could study him without being obvious. He was extremely handsome in an Earthatopia *GQ Magazine* way, but

also rugged. His face showed lines of experience, despite his relative youth. This man knew what he wanted and wasn't afraid to take it. The desire to lean forward and kiss his dimpled chin and work her way up from there, to worship him, was almost overwhelming. She had a feeling every inch of his muscled body would bring her pleasure; she could feel his sensual energy flowing through the pores of his skin. Having him so close nearly made her hum in satisfaction. Her body burned for him, and with that heat, came her natural coloring ... pink.

Slowly, he leaned forward and ran the cool glass over her cheek. In response, she closed her eyes in enjoyment of the momentary relief from warmth.

"Are you hot, Nortia? You seem a bit flushed."

Her eyes popped open at his question. He had an expression on his face she wished she could capture and keep forever. As he licked his lips, his eyes were at half-mast, desire shimmering deep beneath the surface of his gaze. She wasn't using a glamour spell on him, but it seemed as if he was held in a trance. He leaned closer. The wine glass slipped down her cheek as he drew back his hand. It was almost as if he was sucking up her faerie essence with his closeness.

"I'm hot, Brice. Hot for you." She could see by the further narrowing of his eyes that he wasn't surprised by her comment. He couldn't use his hands with the two wine glasses, so Nortia decided to take advantage of the situation.

Rising to her toes, she took his lips with hers. It started as a simple touch of their mouths, but the minute their lips met, fire slid through her like a furnace. She opened her mouth, teased his lips apart and swept her tongue over his. Brice leaned into the kiss, his lips taking as much as hers. The kiss went from a soft touch to a nearly violent mating, their tongues dancing, mouths taking.

Nortia's faerie fragrance of roses floated around them, generated by their mutual arousal. Reaching up, she buried her hands into Brice's hair and tugged him closer. She groaned as the kiss went on and on. The strands of his blond hair were so soft, such a contrast to the hard lines of his body. He tasted incredible, like her favorite Faeridae flavors all wrapped into one. Nortia was lost. If she hadn't applied a spell to her wings earlier that night, they would be fluttering with eager anticipation. He growled when she slowly lowered herself off of her toes and back to the floor, ending their embrace. He appeared stunned.

"Yes. I'd love a drink." Her voice was faint with her arousal. She reached forward, took a glass of wine out of his hand, and sipped it. It had an excellent flavor, tangy yet sweet. She loved it.

"Niceeee," she purred as she raised her eyes to his. The blue of his eyes had gone smoky, dilated by his aroused state. She dropped her gaze down to his pants. They were tented by his hardness. Oh, and what a fine erection it was. She could get lost with that tool, she decided as she licked her lips, then wandered over to the couch and sat down.

His eyes tracked her movements. Finally, he followed and eased onto the chair opposite her. He sipped his wine, then set it on the end table.

"I want to know how you're doing it." There was accusation in his tone.

She immediately felt his anger as emotion literally poured from him and struck her. She tensed and tried not to flinch as she attempted to defend herself, quickly schooling her features.

What in the Goddess' name was that?

She had never felt the emotions of another so strongly. Leaning forward, she placed her wine on the table in front of her and met his accusing glare.

“Do what?” she crossed her arms and leaned back against the couch, making an effort to appear casual, not defensive.

“How you’ve been cheating me,” he clarified.

“Cheating!” His allegation had her immediately on her feet.

He followed her action and stood.

“How dare you... I have never cheated at anything in my life!” She was furious and afraid of what she would do if she didn’t get away. Right now. She tried to compose herself, but it wasn’t working. This man confused her. Out of the blue, she had an incredible urge to flee.

What was happening?

“Nortia, you just won a half of a million dollars from my casino in a matter of hours. No one has ever done that before. No one has that kind of luck. If you tell me how you did it, I’ll consider not prosecuting you.”

“Ughhh! I’m telling you right now I didn’t cheat.” She reached for her coat and pulled it into her arms, then began walking to the elevator. She *had* to get away.

Before she could take more than three steps, Brice grabbed her arm and spun her around. Her coat dropped onto the carpeted floor.

“You’re not going anywhere until we settle this.”

“As far as I’m concerned, Mr. Ranger, this is settled. Do you have any proof I cheated? Any surveillance video showing me using a type of electronic device or calling an accomplice? I don’t even have a cellular phone. Do you have any concrete evidence I was cheating besides telling me that no one can be that lucky?”

He didn’t say anything, only pulled her closer.

“I didn’t think so. You might open your mind, Brice, to the possibility someone might be that lucky.” She shivered as he ran his hands down her arms. He didn’t seem to be listening to her. He appeared spellbound, but Nortia hadn’t cast any spells on him. Right now, more than anything, she was confused.

“You are so beautiful. You just... you glow pink,” he whispered as he crushed her against him. There was an aura around him now she couldn’t ignore. It was a subtle shade of orange, the perfect counterpart to her faerie pink. The smell of roses surrounded them.

He took her lips fast and furious; she squeaked in protest, and then stopped and opened her mouth to his tongue. He lapped at her like she was his, and she accepted his attentions, melting against him as the heat of the two of them coming together penetrated her body. He was yummy, so exciting that her heart pounded furiously, tapping a rhythm against both their chests. There was a spark he fueled between them. The force of it pounded against Nortia’s mating senses, and all of a sudden, she was encircled by an orange glow.

Holy Faeridae.

It finally hit her what was happening. Her body was telling her this was *her* man ... her other half. Her perfect mate. It was a rare occurrence in Faeridae, but this man was hers. She was as sure of it as she was her royal birth.

Now what was she going to do?

He released her lips, but not her body. She was on her toes now, tipped into him, her mouth a hairs-breadth from his. His expression was one of bewilderment, as if he

couldn't believe what was happening. He was a mere Earthatopian; of course he wouldn't know the mating urge when it hit him.

Then he was moving again, taking her lips so fast she gasped and moaned. His mouth opened wide, his tongue dancing with hers. He sealed them together so she couldn't even think of retreating. His hand fisted in her hair as the arm around her waist tightened. She reveled in the feel of him, the hardness of his body under her hands, the thrill of his eroding control, the pounding of his heart against her breasts. She was nearly dripping with arousal, with the need to feel him inside her, buried deep. He growled and released her mouth, but his lips weren't idle as they traveled down her face, trailing to her cheek, then her neck, where he sucked. She arched against him.

"Briceee," she whimpered as his assault on her faerie senses continued.

"I want to show you what pleasure is," he murmured, as if he was talking to himself. He reached down and lifted her into his arms as if she weighed nothing.

"Will you let me show you, Nortia, how I can please you?" he asked as he carried her.

"Yes, show me," she whispered and tucked her chin into the crook of his neck, sucking in his spicy scent. A wealth of feeling shot through her. A sense of faerie nesting buried deep down came to life and exploded. She wanted to keep this man for the rest of her existence.

Brice carried her into the bedroom and gently laid her on the bed.

"I'll show you, Nortia, I'll show you how to fly," he growled as he shrugged off his suit jacket.

Little did he know, she already knew how to fly.

Chapter Four

Brice quickly shucked his jacket; afraid the remarkable woman he had just laid on his bed would come to her senses and voice the words “no” to him. He wasn’t usually into one-night stands, but the minute he first laid eyes on this glowing pink, sparkling, beautiful Nortia Faerie, his gut clenched in need, his heart tapped against his chest so hard he heard it in his ears and he wanted her more than he had ever wanted anything in his life. Earlier, when she had grabbed her jacket and walked toward the door, he thought his head was going to explode. He wasn’t sure what had happened, however, he couldn’t let her leave.

No. No. Stop her. She’s yours. Keep her. Again and again the phantom voice sounded in his head.

It was almost as if his brain was seizing in protest at losing her. He had acted quickly and on pure instinct and didn’t regret it, not for one second.

Brice slowly unbuttoned his shirt and slipped it off. When she lowered her eyes to a sultry half-mast, he felt the punch straight to his gut. She was exquisite.

No, he didn’t regret stopping her from leaving the penthouse. Never mind the fact that he thought she’d somehow rigged the machines.

He dropped his shirt and held out his hand. She placed her small fingers in his; she was so delicate compared to him. He felt an insane protective urge swell inside of him. He would guard her until his dying day. He didn’t know where it came from, but it was there, a strange Neanderthal urging.

He gently pulled her up, turned her around, and slipped down the zipper of her sequined dress. It glided off her body, falling easily to the floor. The curve of her back was perfect. She stood before him, her back to his front, braless, in a G-string, thigh-high stockings and stiletto heels. His cock bumped against the front of his pants in protest to its confinement. It wanted to slip into her heat in the worst way.

He moved forward. Ever so slightly, he pressed his chest against her back, leaned her body back against his, and reached around to slide his hands over her pert breasts. He touched his lips to her shoulder, then kissed the indentation between her sloping shoulder and neck. He fingered the small tattoo of a tiara on the slope of her right tit.

“Ahhhh,” she moaned as her head tilted to the side and fell against his shoulder. He fondled her nipples, rounding the areola with his index finger, then he lightly pinched. His cock automatically thrust forward against the small of her back. God, her skin was so soft, so smooth, like velvet. The pleasure of touching her pounded into his consciousness. He would never tire of this, he thought. Loving this woman, touching her, taking in her flowery rose scent, feeling her soft skin under his hands. He spread his fingers and massaged her breasts. She hummed her pleasure.

His need elevated.

Reluctantly, he pulled his hands off her, but only to unbutton his pants. He let them fall and kicked them aside. He never wore underwear and now he was glad. Bringing his arms back up, he encircled her, hugging her close.

“Tell me what turns you on,” he spoke softly in her ear. He felt her shudder in the circle of his arms.

“You turn me on,” she whispered back. He smiled and leaned forward to nuzzle her hair, then reached up and released the pins holding it up. It cascaded, tumbling down her shoulders and to the small of her back. The tresses were wavy, blonde, and had a slight pink tint. He buried his hands in her hair and took a second to let the enjoyment of having her in his arms sink in. He tried not to tremble but didn’t quite succeed—he wasn’t as steady as he wanted to believe. She set him off balance—he, the man used to mastering all who stepped into his world, was rattled by this mere slip of a woman.

Tenderly, he turned her in his arms and walked her back against the bed, lowering her to sit on the edge. He removed her shoes and meticulously rolled each stocking down her leg, letting his fingers trail, linger and worship. Then he raised her hips and removed the insignificant string of underwear. Now he had her the way he wanted, naked and wanting, her legs open to him. He settled himself between her spread legs, moving up to her breasts.

“I’ve wanted to do this from the first second I saw you,” he said.

He leaned forward and began another assault with tongue and mouth. Running his lips down her chest, he took her nipple into his mouth and sucked. She moaned and arched, and a heavy ache grew inside his body.

He released her breast. “I remember thinking how badly I wanted to lay you out on this bed and eat you for dessert,” he whispered as his lips traveled down her body, kissing her stomach.

He separated her legs further and tipped her body up, then dropped down and did just what he’d wanted to, took her heat into his mouth and feasted on her.

“Brice, ahhhh!”

Hearing her enjoyment set his body aflame. He thrust his tongue and sucked, then applied himself to her clit. He could feel her trembling. She tasted so good, like everything he had every wanted in a dessert.

Dropping her head back, she closed her eyes, her breath ragged. He could tell she was close, so close.

Her body tightened, her hands buried in his hair as her hips thrust into his mouth. She bowed up and cried out, then went boneless.

“God, I love watching you come.” He rose, aligned their lips and took. Sharing the taste of her juices, he kissed her, deeply, passionately. She ran her hands down his chest, over his ribs and around to his ass.

“Come into me.”

She was pleading and he loved it. He was so tight with need he thought he would explode right there.

He bent his legs, slipped his hands under her ass, and brought her body up to his. Then he entered her in one motion, driving deep. It seemed their positions enabled him to go deeper than he had ever been in a woman. She was tight and wet and it made him impossibly hotter for her.

He sighed, happy to be seated where he felt he was meant to be, joined together, two halves making one whole.

“Look at me.” His voice was gruff in half demand, half rumble. “I love you this way,” he kissed her again.

She clutched his shoulders, holding on for the ride as he began to move, sliding in and out. The pleasure built; she was going to come again, he could feel her tightening

around him. Making love with this woman, he felt claimed; it was the oddest, most erotic experience of his life.

He followed her lips with his own, tasted her, felt the softness of her skin under his hands. He was so big, and she was so tight, yet they seemed to fit perfectly.

“Am I pleasing you, babe?”

“You please me every second you’re in me.” Her voice came out as a throaty moan.

Nortia’s declaration aroused him all the more. Brice thrust faster, his breath panting out. He dropped his head back in delight. *So close*. His jaw clenched. He’d fight this battle to the very end, prolong their pleasure, have them come together. Sweat dripped down his face, his neck and chest. He was grasping for control when he lost it.

He groaned, tensed and roared out in climax just as she had hers. She held on and let him spill. He dropped his head into the crook of her shoulder as she caressed his ass.

“Did I please you?” she asked with a teasing resonance in her voice.

He laughed. “You will always please me. Consider me your slave.”

“Oh, ho, ho. I like the sound of that. Will you let me tie you to the bed then?” she teased.

He smiled and shifted her into his arms, strangely aroused by her suggestion. He maneuvered them to the center of the bed and draped himself on top of her body.

“I will let you do anything you want to me.” And he meant it.

Chapter Five

Nortia stretched, yawned, and almost leaped out of the bed when she realized she wasn't alone.

Where was she?

Ahhh, *Brice*.

She relaxed. Brice was wrapped around her body, one arm around her waist, the other around her torso with a hand cupped protectively over her breast. He had taken her every way she could remember being taken last night, then some ways she hadn't even imagined. A slow smile made its way to her lips.

Nortia shifted and gently rolled Brice over. She leaned over him and ran her lips over the softness of his neck. He was hard, yet in some places so soft. She licked the curve of his neck where his shoulder sloped to his chest. He groaned, opened his eyes, and removed his hand from her breast, burying it in her hair.

"Morning handsome," she whispered as she leaned forward and sucked on his neck.

"Ahhh." She could feel his hardness respond to her caress, pressing against her stomach.

"I know what we can do to wake you up this morning," Nortia purred.

Her mouth soothed along his neck to his jaw where she nibbled her way to his lips. She took his mouth hard and fast. Forcing his mouth open, she mated her tongue with his. He smelled wonderful, the scent of man mixed with the masculine smell of spice.

Brice responded, fisting his hand in her hair, his other arm anchoring and pressing her body against his. She pushed him back and sprawled on top of him. Releasing his lips, she trailed hers down his body, tasting, touching, enjoying him and the smoothness of his skin.

"I like the way you wake me up." He moaned when she sucked one of his nipples into her mouth.

"Yes, I want to make sure you're very awake," she said against his skin. She licked her way down his chest to his stomach. He tensed against her hands as she trailed her fingers to follow her tongue. His erection was hard and veined against his stomach, standing straight and straining toward her mouth. She slowly ran her tongue down his cock, then back up.

"God, Nortia."

"Do you think you can handle this?" she asked as she worked around his head then took him into her mouth. She sucked, bobbing down and then up. Goddess, she loved this, loved hearing his moan, his pleasure. She raised her head and watched him, poised to take him into her mouth again.

"I can't hear you."

His eyes gleamed with a sexy slumberous look, and she smiled. She ran her tongue over his erection and watched him. His eyes flared, his arousal clear as he moved his cock against her tongue, following her.

"Huh?" she said as she took him in again for a deep suck.

"Yesss." Brice moaned as she pulled him in and out again. She grasped him in her hands and went to work on his hardness, sucking, licking, her hands working with her

mouth. He arched into her.

“Stop. I have another ride in mind.” At his command, she lifted her head. He leaned forward and tugged her up his body. Gently, he rolled her onto her back and settled between her legs.

“Wrap your legs around me,” he ordered as he ran his hands down her sides and back up to her breasts. Softly kneading her, arousing her, he slid into her, slowly, gently; she sucked in air and then gave up breathing.

She was past thinking ... now she could only feel. He filled her so completely, edging into her inch by inch until she was full. He buried his face into her neck and she caressed his hair, enjoying the texture of blond silk.

“I think I could wake up this same way every morning, Nortia.” His voice was low as he sighed out her name. Her heart flew in happiness.

“I could, too,” she pledged.

“Sounds good,” he whispered against her mouth, then he took charge and began moving inside her, his lips nibbling on hers. *Such pleasure.*

“Brice,” she cried out as she climbed close to her release.

He married their palms as they moved together in unison. Their bodies gleamed with sweat; the breath she was holding puffed out and fanned his neck. She leaned forward and licked him there, tasting salt and him. Nothing had ever tasted better. He stayed with her, until she was so close, a whisper away from climax.

“Come with me.” His voice was rough with need.

“Yes.” She arched against him, her body clenching, her heat milking him. He went with her and she took every drop of cum he had to offer. His body strained against hers, his back arching, the veins in his neck pumping in unison to his pounding heart as he emptied himself. She released his hand and ran her fingers up his chest, slid them into his hair.

Cupping the back of his neck, she brought his lips to hers. She took them completely until she couldn't breathe anymore. Lifting her head, she panted against his cheek.

“Every morning, huh?” He smiled. She adored that cute tilt of his mouth with that dimpled chin.

“Yeah, can you handle that?”

He hardened inside of her. She tilted up a single eyebrow.

“I don't know, you tell me.” With a rise of his hips, he started to move again. She bowed into him and ground her teeth in need.

“I'll tell you when we're finished.” She released the sentence on the tail of a whimper. Her heart sped, tapping against her chest. She couldn't believe he could arouse her again so soon, but he could. She wanted to dance like this with him all day. She ran her hands down his body and cupped his ass as he plunged into her.

“You do that, you tell me when we're finished ... tomorrow.” Sweat dripped down his cheek and onto her collarbone.

He grinned as he slid in. Then he flipped them both, laying her on top of him. She laughed.

“I never want to be finished.”

He grinned and squeezed her ass.

She smiled and leaned forward to slowly kiss him.

“Ahhh huh.” That was his only response, as she got serious about riding him. She

kissed his jaw, his cheek, then latched onto his lips. He groaned into her mouth. It didn't take long for both of them to fall, a rotation of her hips, and he thrust off the bed as they climaxed together.

Nortia draped herself over his body and let her heart slow. He ran his hands up and down her back. She enjoyed his touch, the feel of her body touching his.

"Wake me up, later," she said as she nuzzled into his neck.

He chuckled and wrapped his arms around her.

"Okay, babe, later," he promised.

"Oh, one thing," he murmured as he snuggled her body into his.

"No more gambling, promise me," he insisted.

She wanted to be outraged, but her satisfied body and mind wouldn't allow it. She needed to have peace with this man, and she didn't need her luck to do this, or money.

"I promise. No more gambling."

"Thanks." He draped his arms around her.

"You're welcome," she answered, then let sleep claim her.

Chapter Six

For three months, Nortia enjoyed waking up next to Brice. She used the key he had given her to travel in the elevator to his penthouse. Everything had been provided for her—money, clothes, anything she wanted, he'd told her. As the elevator slid open, she dragged her day's shopping excursion with her. Dumping the shopping bags onto the bedroom chair, she made her way into the sunken living room bar and poured a glass of wine. Walking to the windows, she contemplated her situation as she took pleasure in the sun beaming into the room.

Her father had told her she needed to find a man to love her for her, but Brice hadn't breathed one word of love in all their dealings. Sure, she shrugged, the sex was good ... well, okay, the sex was *astonishing*. She knew what was bothering her, and it wasn't her father's threat—he had done that before, although she had to admit separating her from her sisters was a new low for even him. What it boiled down to was that she needed love for her own reasons, not because her father told her to go find a man.

She loved Brice, he was her other half, but how did he feel about her? He obviously enjoyed her; he made love with her every second he could in every place they could. Shoot, she glanced at the elevator and smiled, they had even gotten in a quickie in the elevator. She trembled in sexual arousal. Still ... she turned back toward the windows. He had never told her how he felt about her. It was as if he was afraid to upset their balance. What would he say when she told him she was a princess, a highborn faerie? He would probably send her back down that elevator and escort her right out the casino door.

It was time for her to start showing him the real Nortia. She snatched her handbag off the chair and headed for the elevator.

She was feeling lucky tonight.

*

"Mr. Ranger." Brice glanced toward the intercom on his phone.

"Yes, Fred?"

"Um, sir, well ... you might want to take a look at monitor number five."

Brice's brow furrowed in irritation. He had specifically told the guys not to disturb him. He had an important board meeting in less than five hours and he needed every spare second to prepare.

"Is this critically important, Fred?" He let the clear annoyance show in his voice.

"Yes, sir, I believe it is."

Pulling out his keyboard, Brice punched up monitor number five and glanced toward the multiple flat screen computer screens on the wall.

"Nortia." he stood as watched Nortia place yet another coin into the machine. Handing a bucket of coins to Jeff, she promptly threw up her hands, screamed and began collecting more coins. The sight reminded him of the first time he had laid eyes on her. He'd fallen in love with her then and there. With a simple look at her pink sequined clad body, he had gone over and hard.

"Yes, sir, it's Nortia." Fred's voice confirmed what he was seeing

"How much?" He came around his desk, completely forgetting about his upcoming meeting.

“Close to three hundred thousand dollars in about an hour.”

Brice swore. “Thanks. I’ll take care of it.” He made his way to the elevator. What the hell was she doing? It was almost as if she was deliberately trying to provoke him. She had promised him. Life had been fantastic for him since the moment he had made Nortia his. He was going to find out what she was up to.

* * * *

“Nortia.” With a single nod at Jeff, Brice moved aside and let Jeff exit.

Nortia ignored him. He moved closer, his front against her back, so close she couldn’t help but acknowledge him. She paused, dropping the coin back into her bucket. He sucked in a breath of her scent, pure roses and sex. He felt himself harden, despite the fact he had taken her in the shower three hours before. He wanted her again; his thirst for her was never quenched. He watched a pink flush crawl up her chest. The heat of her body warmed him. She was everything he ever wanted in a woman and more.

“What are you doing, babe?” he asked as he plucked the bucket from her hand and set it next to the machine. He resumed his position. He pushed both of his arms out and caged her against the machine.

“I’m playing. Winning, to be precise,” she answered him without moving.

He was done playing. He lifted his hands, placed them on her shoulders, then pivoted her around to face him.

“Why?” he asked trying to find the answer in her expression.

“Because I can,” insolence laced her tone. Her face didn’t give him a clue to what was going on in her head.

He didn’t say anything. Nodding to Jeff, who stood unobtrusively two machines over, he grabbed her hand and literally dragged her off the casino floor and into the elevator. The ride was silent. She flounced out of the elevator and planted herself on the couch. Sliding his hands into his pockets, he watched her. She glared back at him.

“What’s going on?” he demanded.

She hesitated.

Finally, when he couldn’t stand the silence, he squatted down in front of her and took her hands into his.

“Talk to me,” he asked his tone gentled. “Have I upset you?”

“Brice...” Tears formed in her eyes. It nearly killed him. He reached up and stroked the lovely pink of her cheek.

“Tell me what I’ve done,” he said. He didn’t want to lose her. He would do whatever he needed to keep her.

“You don’t fully understand who I am.” A tear slipped down her cheek.

Brice shook his head.

“I don’t need to cheat, Brice.” She dropped his hands, rose, and walked toward the window. He followed her. “I don’t need to cheat at anything.”

“What are you talking about?” He laid his hands on her shoulders and pulled her body into his. He could tell she was upset and had an instinctive need to fix whatever wrong needed to be righted.

“Talk to me, I can fix it. Trust me.”

She seemed to be fighting an inner battle. Then she turned and stepped away. He mourned the loss of her body heat.

She pointed to him. "Stay. Don't move."

"Nortia, I don't understand." He held up his hands in the universal sign of surrender.

Slowly, she began to remove her clothes. His heart sped up at the sight. There wasn't any part of her body he hadn't explored. Need began to take over his brain as each piece of clothing was dropped to the carpet. He took a step forward.

"Stay." Her voice was firm, her manner serious. He stopped and waited. When she was completely naked, she turned around toward the windows. She was so incredibly beautiful it nearly hurt him to look at her and not touch. He fisted his hands in an effort not to move forward and take her. He valiantly tried to follow her orders.

Suddenly a pink glow exploded around her body. Startled, he took a step back. Then something seemed to grow from her back. She raised her hands, hummed a foreign word, and the growth expanded, unfolded, and ... to his amazement, wings formed.

Wings.

Brice rubbed his eyes. He must be hallucinating. Did the love of his life just grow wings? Then she turned. Tears fell down her face as her wings swayed behind her. She was so stunning, completely pink now, a darker shade than he was used to seeing.

"Oh, my God," he whispered as he took one more step back.

Her face fell, and more tears coursed down her face.

"This is what I am, this is why I can win so easily at your casino. I am a faerie, Brice. The faerie of luck to be precise."

"What?" He knew what his eyes were telling him to be the truth; he wasn't sure his brain had caught up with his vision.

Her wings drooped, along with her chin. She cried in earnest now, small torturous noises coming from her shaking body. He mentally slapped himself out of his stupor and went to her. Wrapping his arms around her body, he tried to avoid crushing her wings, still trying to wrap his mind around both her words and her wings. *Wings!*

"Nortia, I don't understand what you're saying." He tucked her face under his chin and kissed the top of her head.

"See that's the thing, Brice. I don't know how you feel about me. I want you to know everything about me before you decide you want me."

Brice stared at the incredible wings arching out of her back. They were iridescent, airy, webbed with a shiny pink, almost silk looking lining and they sparkled. *Exquisite.* He wanted to touch them, to explore what she was telling him.

"Nortia." He leaned back and tipped her chin up with his finger. Her pink glow surrounded him, along with her rose scent. He loved that smell.

"I love you, babe. I love you so much." He gently kissed her to solidify what he was saying.

"I don't understand what you are, but I don't care. I will always love you. How can you doubt my feelings about you?" He sighed and took her mouth with his. She was his. No matter what she was—she was his.

"I didn't know, you never said."

He groaned and laid his forehead against hers.

"I'm sorry. I'm not very good at expressing my emotions. It's a man thing, you know." She laughed through her tears. He wiped the wetness from her eyes with his thumb. He felt the soft brush of wings against his back as she wrapped the silk around both of them, cuddling them in a protective shell. He kissed her forehead.

“I love you, too.” She smiled and kissed his chin. He could feel the rub of her wings against his shoulders, like she was petting him; it was incredibly arousing.

“Ummm,” he rubbed his chin against her cheek. “Can you fly with those things?” he asked. She giggled and her wings and arms tightened around him.

“Yes, I can.”

He framed her face between his hands.

“Very cool. I’m assuming as a faerie you can maybe, somehow, manipulate luck?”

He quickly pieced together everything now. It was so obvious; all the facts hit him straight in the forehead. How stupid he had been not to know something supernatural was present in her. She had captured him from the first moment he saw her.

“Yep,” she answered as she began to unbutton his shirt.

“Okay, can we at least agree you won’t gamble in my casino anymore?”

She stopped unbuttoning and gave him a mischievous expression. “Not even on my birthday?”

She released him, letting her wings resume their natural position behind her back. They waved back and forth, touching each other. He shook his head in wonder and took over for her fingers, tearing his shirt off and dropping it into the pile of clothes she had created on the carpet.

“Can you…” he nodded toward her wings, “—put those away for a little while.” He was amazed at his own question. He was asking his girlfriend to tuck away her wings. How crazy was that?

“Sure.” She stepped back, closed her eyes, and with a flash of pink, her wings disappeared, faster than he could blink. Her color returned to its light fleshy tone. He shook his head.

“That’s amazing. You’re amazing. How lucky am I?” He leaned down and lifted his faerie into his arms.

“Very lucky,” she whispered as he made his way to the bedroom.

“Very lucky,” he agreed.

Chapter Seven

You have succeeded, Nortia, in your quest for true love. You have pushed the evil, which threatens Earth and our family, further back.

“Hummm?” Nortia yawned and woke. She could have sworn her father’s voice floated through her dreams. Lightly untangling herself from Brice, she padded naked into the living room. In front of the windows, she took a deep breath, dropped her head and released the spell on her wings, letting them unfold. The sun beat on the glass, warming the space; she sunk to her knees and enjoyed the heat, cooing in ecstasy. Sunning her wings was one of the simple pleasures in a faerie’s life. She stayed that way, letting her wings soak in the morning sun, until a voice interrupted her.

“Incredible.” Brice stood, leaning against the doorjamb, completely naked, his muscles rippled as he crossed his arms. He was so sexy. She was blessed to have found him.

“Morning.” She tucked her wings into her body.

“Morning,” he replied as he pushed away from the wall and joined her. He dropped onto the carpet behind her. Slowly, he reached forward and touched her tucked wing.

“Can I?” he asked, his voice as gentle as his manner.

“Of course.” She unfolded her wings and turned her head to watch him. She smiled as a look of amazement crossed his features.

He stroked gently, lightly down the side of one wing and up the next. She hummed and closed her eyes. A faerie’s wings were particularly sensitive, and hers were a definite erogenous zone.

“Ohhh,” she moaned.

“How does that feel?” he asked as his fingers explored.

“Fantastic,” she whispered as a pink flush covered her entire body. What he was doing was completely sexual and he didn’t even realize it.

“How many faeries are there?” His fingers were never idle, touching, stroking, and learning the curves of her wings.

“Tons,” she shuddered as he reached her wingtip and caressed.

“Where do you live?”

“Ummmm,” she tried to stay focused and answer but he was turning her inside out. She leaned forward and sunk onto the floor; her body had a mind of its own. She rubbed her heat against the rough pattern of the carpet, trying to find some relief. If he didn’t stop, she would climax right there.

“We live in Faeridae, a place you can’t see, only feel, a planet far away from Earth,” she answered as she rubbed her chin against the carpet, wishing it were his body. His body came down on top of hers, the hardness of his erection pressing into her crease.

“Does this turn you on, babe?” He rubbed his hands over her wings while his cock pressed against her from behind. She arched her hips and begged him with her body to take her.

“Goddess, yes, Brice, take me. I need you.”

“That’s what I’m here for, to please you.”

He slowly entered her from behind, his stiffness finally taking away the ache of her

need. She lifted into him as he thrust forward, sending him deep. The feel of his chest touching her wings was unbelievably pleasurable.

“Ahhh, Brice,” she moaned as he moved in and out, taking her up. “Yes,” she cried.

“Yes, yes, I love you,” he groaned out. He grabbed her hips and clutched her ass as he moved his body. She straightened her arms, went to her knees and leaned into his thrusts. Her body was on fire; he was so hard, so right. They were mated, that much was clear, a perfect fit.

“Come for me, babe,” he panted out.

She arched her head back, wings fluttering in pleasure, and did exactly as he asked. She came long and hard, her scream of climax echoing off the walls. He followed her with a final plunge, his grunt and exhaled breath letting her know his pleasure. He wrapped his arms around her, pulling her body and wings against his chest, covering her breasts with his hands.

“I love you, Brice. Thank you. Thank you for accepting me for who I am.”

He chuckled and kissed her shoulder. “That was unbelievable. I don’t think anything will ever compare with the sight of my winged faerie of luck coming apart in my arms, doggy style with me on my living room carpet.”

She laughed, and leaned her head against his shoulder.

“I’m not crushing your wings, am I?” he asked as he hugged her close.

She grinned. He was something, so gentle yet sometimes so commanding. “No, they’re very durable.” She whimpered when he licked along the curve of a wing and felt her heart ramping back up. He was still inside her, hard and ready.

“Don’t do that unless you’re ready to go again,” she said softly.

“Oh, I’m ready to go again,” he growled and pushed forward to show her proof of his hardened cock. She laughed.

“That’s good, because I’m ready, too.”

They didn’t get off the floor for quite a while.

* * * *

“I need to go home.”

Brice stopped drinking his coffee and stared at Nortia. They had finally managed to pull themselves together enough to eat. After he cancelled his Board meeting, Brice called down to room service and had the meal delivered to the breakfast nook, just off the great room.

“When?” he tried to stay calm, but the same Neanderthal man who had stopped her from leaving him that first morning bubbled to the surface. He didn’t want to be apart from her. This need, this all-encompassing want for her was crazy, and he didn’t care.

“Soon, as soon as my father allows it,” she said as she licked jam off her finger. He immediately hardened at the sight of her beautiful pink tongue licking off that purple jam. Her eyes narrowed and she shook her head.

“No, you don’t.” She smiled and picked up her scone.

“What?” He took a bite of his croissant.

“Don’t give me that look,” she warned.

He grinned like a wolf teasing its mate. He knew exactly what she was talking about. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

The low, sexy, laugh she responded with made him want to haul her back to bed.

Maybe he *had* gone insane considering they had just spent the last hour making love on the floor of his living room and now he wanted her again, any way he could have her. He glanced over at the spot on the floor—he could see it from the nook—with fond memories. Now, he was glad he had gotten a shag carpet instead of Berber.

“I’ll leave as soon as I can make contact; it’s been too long. I need to know what’s happening with my family, my sisters. Something isn’t right.” His heart dropped at her words. He rotated his neck to try and release some of the tension.

“I understand. Can I go with you?” He hoped he didn’t sound like the pitiful man in love that he was.

She reached out and ran her hand along his jaw. He captured her hand in his and kissed her fingers. He could see the smoldering of her gaze, her expression going dreamy. There was a certain amount of pride that he could affect her so completely.

“I have to go alone this time. I want to ask my father if I have completed what he has asked me to do. Okay?”

He nodded and released her hand.

“You know...” he adjusted the napkin on his lap and tried to act casual, “we have a chapel. It’s on the twentieth floor.” He raised a single brow to see how she reacted. She paused from adding more grape jelly to her scone.

“Really?” She laid the pastry on her plate and looked at him. “And why would you tell me that?” she asked as she folded her hands in her lap; he could see them trembling.

“Because I want to marry you today, right now if necessary. I don’t want you leaving this casino again without being my wife. You’re mine. That’s why.” He picked up his croissant and bit into it.

“You asking me to marry you, join with you for the rest of our lives as is the Earth custom, right?” She tucked her blonde hair behind an ear and gave him that beautiful smile. God, he loved her.

“Oh, yes, forever,” he confirmed and set his croissant down.

“Well...” She waved her hand back and forth.

Brice had obviously rattled her with his business-like proposal. Maybe he needed to be more romantic. He was such an ass. He dropped his napkin on the table and sunk down to one knee in front of her. He picked up her hand from her lap and kissed her palm.

“Yes, I want you to be my wife, my mate, forever and ever. Here with me. Do you accept?” His heart stalled as he waited for her answer. Then he saw the tears forming in her eyes and she launched herself into his arms, tipping him back onto the carpet with an oomph. Her wings extended and began a rapid jitter behind her. He peered over her shoulder at the display. She went completely pink, all over.

“Does that mean, yes?” Her hurried kissing of his face and rapid chanting of “yes” eased him. He laughed.

“Glad we reached an agreement on th—umm” She cut him off by sealing her mouth over his. He tried not to smile, but wasn’t quite accomplishing his goal. She giggled above him.

“Oh, yes, Brice Ranger, I will certainly join you in your human matrimony.” He shook his head at her sentence.

“I love you, Nortia Faerie,” he murmured as he deepened their kiss.

She broke off. “You know I made that name up to meet your Earth custom of a first

and last name?"

He chuckled. He was so happy. He had never been so happy in his life. He felt like a giddy teenager. "You did? I can't believe that."

She gasped and lightly cuffed him on the shoulder.

"How long before we marry?" she asked the enthusiasm in her voice obvious.

"Whenever you want, babe. I own the chapel."

She smiled and began running little kisses down his jaw to his neck. Slowly, she unbuttoned his shirt.

"A little later, okay?" She began to undress him.

"Fine with me. Just let me know, and I'll set it up."

"I'll let you know." She separated the cloth of his shirt. Pushing it aside, she licked his nipple. He groaned and arched in pleasure. "Later," she said, her tongue against his stomach as she worked her way down.

Always a man of industry, Brice shut up and enjoyed.

The End

About the Author:

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TIGER BY THE TAIL

Tiffany Aaron

Dedication

To Chris, as always my hero. And to all those people who still believe in faerie tales.

Chapter One

“Alida! Alida!”

The thundering chant of the frenzied crowd echoed in Alida’s ears, but it was the quiet ticking of a mental clock that had her full attention. Her deadline was looming fast. She only had a week to find a man and fall in love with him. If she didn’t, by the time her twenty-eighth birthday arrived next Thursday, she would be condemning the world and her sisters to a fate worse than death.

She found herself bristling at the problems her father had created. It was that whole the “sins of the father visited on the sons” shit. Well, daughters actually. Four daughters being forced to change the course of their lives to fulfill a stupid prophecy. A prophecy that she doubted he would have even told her about had she not needed him for a more believable reason to send her and her sisters away than love and marriage.

“Alida! Alida!”

The voices grew louder and the energy rose. She felt her skin start to tingle. Her hair began to ripple and wave as she absorbed the power rolling off the audience. The winged-shape pendant she wore around her neck glowed with purple light and pulsed in time to her heart.

She peeked through the curtains. Her manager, Jason, said it was a packed house. A sold out show was great for her. The more people, the more lust she could feed off of, and if she could make them feel a tenth of what she felt while she sang, she considered it a job well done.

“It’s time, Sheila,” her Aussie manager said as he slid next to her.

She halted the gagging reflex she felt every time he came near her. She couldn’t stand him, even if he was the best manager and agent she could ever have. His whole vibe was off. The first time she met him shortly after arriving in Australia, she had tried to figure out what was wrong.

Baxter, her friend and fellow faerie, had asked her what bothered her the most about Jason. She explained that it felt like there were two personalities battling for control of the man’s body. Baxter had ended up more confused than he usually was by her explanation. Alida figured Baxter’s less than stellar intelligence was why her father had allowed him to accompany her.

“Thanks,” she murmured to Jason as she shifted away. She didn’t want any part of his body touching her. “I need a moment to prepare.”

Her band was used to her ritual, so they took their places without bothering her. She whispered, “Powers of earth, wind, water and fire, protect us tonight. Goddesses of north, south, east and west, hold us in your hands.”

Her pendant glowed and she could feel her power begin to coil through her body. There was no way the audience would forget this night. Her magic and her *draiocht*—glamour—would seduce them. Nodding to the stagehand, she braced herself. The roar of her fans hit her like a wall of noise. She threw back her head and hit her first note. Goddess, she loved to sing.

* * * *

Cyno Wellington couldn't believe he had let his friend talk him into this. A jam packed stadium wasn't where he wanted to spend his first night back in Tasmania. The restless itch he felt came from the almost overwhelming need to run under the moon. He had gone too long without changing and allowing his natural form to take control.

"Isn't this great?" Theo yelled into his ear.

He cringed. His hearing was far superior to that of most humans and the cacophony radiating from the hysterical crowd was making him wish he were deaf. "If I had known this was what you meant by a relaxing evening out, I would have gone croc hunting in the Outback."

Theo laughed and thumped him on the back. "Come on. You can't possibly want to pass up a chance to see Alida perform live."

"Who the hell is Alida?" He couldn't stop the roar of laughter bursting from his mouth at Theo's shocked expression.

"Please tell me you're kidding. You've got to know who she is," Theo begged.

Shaking his head, Cyno held up his hands in apology. "Sorry, friend, I've never heard of her."

"Where have you been the past year? Mars? Alida is the hottest, sexiest singer to hit Australia in years."

"I've been in the Himalayas searching for a new species of snow leopards." He grimaced at the memories of the months he had spent traipsing through the snow and bungling into the superstitions of the mountains. "I'd have had better luck looking for a Yeti."

"You're killing me, man. You never heard of her." Theo looked disgusted.

"I'm sorry. Is she sexier than Olivia Newton John?" He grinned.

"What?"

"You said Alida is the sexiest singer to hit Australia in years. I was just wondering if she's sexier than Olivia Newton John."

The two men shared a smile as they remembered their boyhood crush on the beautiful actress.

"Hell no, she's not, but she's pretty damn close," Theo insisted.

The lights dimmed and Cyno felt a shift in the excitement. The fans had built themselves into an ecstatic trance and the only thing that could bring them out of it was the voice of their idol.

As the curtain lifted and the singer hit her first note, Cyno found himself transfixed and transformed by her voice.

Chapter Two

Alida stumbled off the stage. Tonight had been electric; better than any of her other performances since she'd been banished to this world nearly a year ago. She grabbed the towel one of the roadies threw at her as she made her way down the hall to her dressing room. An uneasy feeling crept down her spine and she looked up to see Jason heading her way. Picking up speed, she wiped the sweat from her face as she bolted through the door of her dressing room.

Leaning against the door, she breathed a sigh of relief. There was no way she wanted to talk to her manager right now. At first, she didn't notice the sinus clogging scent of roses because she was too caught up toying with the idea of firing Jason. When she sneezed three times in a row, she glanced around. Goddess, the room looked like a fucking flower shop had exploded. Roses of all colors were scattered throughout, along with petals.

She whipped open the door and yelled to some of the roadies standing in the hall. "Get these flowers out of here."

She stood out of the way as they trooped out like a living flower garden. One stopped to hand her a small white card that had been tucked into one of the bouquets.

"Thanks, guys," she murmured as she shut the door behind them. Flopping down on the couch, she fingered the white paper. There was a malevolent aura surrounding it. She was reluctant to open it.

Alida stifled a squeak when Baxter popped into the room. He twirled around and laughed.

"You were awesome as usual, lovey," he crowed before he launched himself at her.

She warded him off with a single hand. She bit back a groan when his eyes landed on the envelope. He snatched it from her and leapt to his feet. Dancing around the room, he shouted, "Alida's got a secret admirer."

"Baxter, you're a pain in the ass. Give me that back," she ordered. "When Father allowed you to come with me, I thought he was being nice. Now I see that he did it to punish me." She grabbed the card back. Leaning against the arm of the couch, she studied the envelope. There was nothing written on the outside.

Baxter stopped twirling long enough to notice her pensive look. A frown crossed his face for a second. "Do you think there's something wrong with it? Can you tell anything about it?"

She shook her head. "There's a black feeling to it, but that's all. You know I don't get anything from paper. Now if the person called me, I would be able to tell if he meant to harm me."

"Open it. It's probably just a fan wanting to express his undying love for you." Baxter clasped his hands to his chest and sighed. "What I wouldn't do to have one of my own."

"Remember what happened the last time you got an admirer, he wanted to tie you up and whip you because you were bad." She enjoyed reminding Baxter about one of his more scary lovers.

"Yikes, don't remind me, please. I couldn't sit down for weeks and I still think I

have rope burns on my wrists.” Baxter pouted. “Come on, just open the thing already.”

She took a deep breath and calmed herself. Nothing could happen to her from a piece of paper. Sliding her finger under the flap, she couldn't help feeling that she was about to change her life and she couldn't do that. There were too many people counting on her. The flap pulled free and she swore she heard a hiss as she pulled the card from the envelope.

Black ink slashed the heavy cream cardstock like a knife.

I warned you about allowing people to see what is mine. Your punishment will be swift and harsh.

Dropping the card, she crawled back from it until she wasn't touching it anymore. She consciously slowed her breathing. Now wasn't the time to panic. She needed to control her racing pulse and calm down.

Baxter picked the card up and read it. Wrinkling his nose, he grimaced. “Well, that doesn't sound very romantic. He should have had someone write it for him. Even I could come up with something better than this.”

“Baxter, did you read the thing?” She jumped to her feet and started pacing.

“Yeah ... so what?”

“Do you think it's rather threatening?” She ran her fingers through her hair. “I came into my dressing room and it was filled with roses. I hate roses. I can't even tolerate them when Damia is around and she's part plant, I swear. How did he get those in here?”

“Maybe he had them delivered.” Baxter glanced around the room. “I don't think he's going to be popping out of the corner, Alida. It's just some weirdo, I'm sure.” He stood behind her, cupped her shoulders in his hands, and rubbed the tense muscles. “You really need to loosen up. Maybe get laid or something, because you are too tense.”

“Get laid? Goddess, how I wish it were that easy.” She shrugged off his hands and stalked to her dressing table. Crumbling to the stool, she leaned her elbows on the top of the table and cradled her face in her hands. “You don't understand, Baxter.”

“Then explain to me what's wrong. If I didn't know better, I'd think you were freaking out about your birthday. It's only a week away, you know.”

“I know,” she snapped.

Baxter stepped back and stared at her. “What's got your panties in a twist?”

“Nothing. I'm sorry. I guess I'm more tired than usual from this concert.” She pinched the bridge of her nose.

“I wouldn't doubt that. You haven't taken any time off since we got here. I'll fix that.” Baxter disappeared.

“You do that and I'll worry about saving my sisters and the world from destruction.” It was hard to accept that only she and Damia knew the truth behind their separation. Albinia and Nortia wouldn't have questioned Father's decree of finding true love. Her father understood that she needed more information and her power made it impossible to lie to her.

She scrubbed her make-up off. Pulling the leather halter top and pants from her body, she hummed to herself. The music and sound of her voice soothed her. There had been times during the past year when even her music couldn't make her feel better. She threw raggedy jeans and a t-shirt on and headed out of the stadium, trying not to catch anyone's eye. She didn't want company tonight.

Chapter Three

Cyno settled into the booth with a groan. His ears were still ringing from the concert. Alida sang like an angel and looked like a fallen angel, as well. She had been all lush curves and fiery hair. Closing his eyes, he brought her image up in his mind. She had worn a white leather halter-top. With every sway and turn, her breasts threatened to fall out. It was abundantly clear she wasn't lacking in that department.

Her white pants made a passing acquaintance with her waist. They cupped the curves of her hips and ass with loving attention. He had wondered if she wore anything under them. Her voice had enthralled him, taking him on a journey from sadness to ecstasy. He had never allowed someone to take control of his emotions, but she had grabbed them and forced him to feel. His erection was just now subsiding and the beast inside him calming. Maybe he would be able to sleep tonight.

* * * *

Alida had grabbed a cab back to the hotel. Staring out the window, she watched the city of Hobart and thought about the past year. Since the day her father, King of Faeridae, banished her and her sisters to the four corners of the world known as Earth, she had been struggling.

For twenty-seven years, it had been the four princesses against the world. She and her sisters had run wild through their father's kingdom breaking hearts, causing mischief and doing whatever they pleased. Her parents had tried to control her, but what control could there be when they knew their parents would never punish them? Imagine her shock and horror when she learned her punishment had been decided before she was even born.

The sudden stop of the cab brought her back to herself. She paid the driver and stepped out in front of the hotel. It was nice to be alone with no manager or groupie demanding her time or conversation. The bellhops barely glanced her way as she entered the lobby. Spotting the neon sign for the bar, she decided to go for a drink. While mortal alcohol wouldn't make her drunk, it gave her a small buzz and maybe it would help her relax.

Walking in, she looked around. Her eyes were drawn to a dark corner booth where a man sat with his eyes closed. A tug around her heart caused her to gasp. That had never happened before. Something pushed her to talk to him.

Glancing behind her, she half expected to see Baxter standing there, shoving her towards the stranger, proving how strong the urge was. She shrugged. *Why not?* It had been a long tour and Hobart was her last concert, though no one knew it. She doubted the ogre king would allow one of his wives to perform in front of humans.

She headed towards him. When she approached, his eyes didn't open. Maybe she shouldn't bother him. Since he wasn't aware of her, she studied him. His face was chiseled and weathered as if he spent a lot of time in the sun. His dark hair was cut short. His lips were thin and she had the feeling he wasn't inclined to laugh much. His shirt was a plain white button-down with the sleeves rolled up to display darkly tanned forearms

and large hands. She figured he would tower over her when he stood since he was as tall as she was when he sat.

“Is anyone sitting with you?” she asked him.

* * * *

Opening his eyes, Cyno was surprised to see the very object of his lustful thoughts standing beside his booth. Her purple streaked burgundy hair was pulled up in a ponytail. She had on a pair of rimless sunglasses. He figured she was trying to ensure no one noticed her. Nodding, he gestured to the seat across from him.

“Sure.” He waved to the waitress. “What would you like to drink?”

“Whatever you’re drinking.” She slid on the cushion with a sigh. Taking her glasses off, she pinned him with brilliant amethyst eyes.

He looked at the straight whiskey tall he was sipping. Smiling, he nodded to the waitress. “One for the lady and another for me.”

Theo would kill him when he found out Cyno had a drink with Theo’s latest crush. When her eyes met his, it felt like he had been struck by lightning. The beast inside raised its head and howled. His cock hardened again and he shifted uncomfortably.

The waitress set the drinks down along with a bottle of whiskey.

“That way I don’t have to keep running back and forth,” she replied to his unspoken question.

He didn’t argue. If the bottle wasn’t empty when he left the bar, he’d finish it off in his room. In stunned silence, he watched Alida toss back her full glass and pour another.

“Slow down. You’ll make yourself sick if you drink too fast,” he warned.

She reached for the bottle and tipped it so she could read the label. Her scorn was evident when she laughed. “This stuff won’t even make a dent.”

“A tough one, huh?” He figured she was just putting on an act.

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Alida could tell he didn’t believe her. Giving a mental shrug, she figured it didn’t matter. If she told him the liquor on Faeridae was far more potent than anything a mortal could brew, he wouldn’t believe that either.

Toying with her glass, she leaned her chin on her hand and asked, “What’s your name?”

His slow blink told her he thought her question came out sounding rude. She smiled an apology at him. It had been so much easier in her world. There men would have been falling over each other to sleep with her. A lot of that came from being the daughter of the king and all those faeries wanted her to put in a good word for them. They had never understood that her father thought she was a complete airhead with only sex and fun on her mind.

“Cyno Wellington,” he stated in a low voice. Shivering, she felt like she’d been licked by a cat’s rough tongue.

“Cyno? That’s an unusual name.” She was trying, and failing, to distract herself from the fact her pants were becoming soaked from her pussy juices. There was something wild about him.

“It’s a family name. I must say Alida isn’t a name one hears very often, either.” He leaned forward and smiled at her.

There went her hope that he didn’t have any idea who she was. “I never fooled you,

did I?”

He traced the swell of her breasts with his eyes and laughed. “I came here to regain my hearing after your concert. I spent the whole night memorizing your body and your voice. So, no, you didn’t fool me.”

“Why would you do that?”

He leaned closer to her and whispered, “When I get back to my room, I plan on having several wet dreams with you in a starring role.”

Usually if a man told her that, she’d be grossed out and think he was crazy, but the combination of his lust laden voice and the fire burning in his unusual amber eyes made her moan and her nipples harden. Pouring another drink, she gulped it down without taking her eyes off him.

A slight smile played around his lips. He knew what he was doing to her, she could tell, but she wasn’t prepared for the lust flaring inside her.

“I bet you say that to every girl,” she muttered.

A feral gleam came into his eyes. “Not every girl, love, only those who can make my cock stand at attention with just the sound of her voice.” He shifted again and grimaced.

“My voice, huh? I must be doing something right.” She let a smile grace her lips.

His voice dropped even lower. “You can do me right any time you want, and since I just got back in the country after a long time without a woman, it would be fast and hard the first time. Then it would last all night the second time.”

“If I’m in your dreams, what would I be doing?”

“Close your eyes and imagine.” She did what he ordered and he said, “You’d be spread out on my bed. I’d be leaning over you with my lips on your nipples and my hand on your clit. I would start out slow with one of your ballads playing on the stereo. My fingers would stroke that throbbing button, gently teasing you with the calluses on my skin.”

Her cheeks flushed and she pressed her thighs together. It felt like he was touching her. She moaned softly.

“Then I’d switch the song to something hard and fast. My tempo would speed up and I’d press your clit harder and be a little rougher with you.” His voice came closer. At some point, he had moved to sit next to her in the booth. He pressed against her side and she went up in flames.

“While my thumb continues to pleasure you, I’d slide the rest of my fingers down to where those wonderful juices drip from you. Before I thrust my fingers in, I’ll lean down and taste you.”

She leaned back in the booth. She couldn’t have opened her eyes if she had tried, but she could feel his eyes on her. She felt him press his face to the crook of her neck and breathe deep.

“You’re aroused, aren’t you, Alida? If I slid my hand in your jeans, you’d be drenched. I can smell your desire.”

She didn’t want to think of that. She wanted him to finish. “What would you do next?” she begged.

“I’d lick you from the front of your pussy to the back, and you’d groan because you like the feel of my tongue on you.”

She couldn’t help herself. She started to slide her hand between her legs. If he wasn’t going to do anything to her except with his voice, she would get her pleasure for herself.

He caught her wrist and pinned it against his hard thigh. “No, this is my wet dream and you aren’t touching yourself in it. Just feel.”

She didn’t fight him because she didn’t want to lose out on the orgasm building in her.

“How many fingers should I fuck you with, love?”

Even his crude language wasn’t enough to pull her from the illusion he built for her. “Three,” she answered.

“Mmm ... you like them thick. I can accommodate you. I thrust three fingers inside and scrape the tips across the sweet spot you love so much.” A rumbling started in his chest. She couldn’t tell if he was laughing or growling.

Her hips arched and his hand covered her mouth before her groan came out. He pressed his lips to her ear and bathed it with his warm, moist breath.

“They move in and out, faster and harder. Your hips move in time with my thrusts. I can feel the pleasure growing and your orgasm building. The muscles in your sheath close around my fingers as if they don’t want me to leave. Right as you reach the peak, I lean over and nibble on your clit.”

That did it. Throughout his narrative, she could’ve sworn he was touching her and doing all those things to her with just the sound of his voice. She could feel his teeth teasing her. Just the littlest twinge of a bite and she went over. Her legs fell open and her head went back.

The scent of her orgasm filled the booth. As the explosions slowed down, she became conscious of him whispering soothing words. She didn’t have the strength to sit up straight, so she rolled her head to the side and stared at him.

* * * *

Cyno knew his eyes were glowing by the way her gaze widened when she looked at him. His beast tended to come out when he was aroused and, right at the moment, he was hard and aching. God, he had never brought a woman to climax with just his voice. She was so passionate, and he knew he wasn’t going to let her go after this encounter. He was going to take her to his room and fuck her until he couldn’t walk.

“Stay here,” he murmured as he stood up. He saw a glimmer of a smile cross her satisfied face when he adjusted his cock to try and find more room in his pants.

He tracked the waitress down and charged the drinks to his room. He went back to Alida and offered her his hand. “Come up to my room.”

It was only because he was watching her so closely that he noticed the flicker of doubt deep in her eyes. She was going to say no. He had almost resigned himself to take care of his hard-on alone when she smiled and took his hand.

At her touch, his body tightened and the creature dwelling inside him sniffed the air as if it scented something familiar. He didn’t know or care what made her decide to go with him. He’d take what she offered tonight. He led her through the lobby.

Chapter Four

Alida couldn't take her eyes off the man standing beside her in the elevator. In the garish lights, she noticed his dark brown hair was streaked with black; almost like stripes. They hadn't said anything since they'd gotten into the car. He seemed content to hold her hand and let her think.

Sighing, she knew thinking wasn't good for her. If she allowed herself to fill her mind, she would come up with thousands of reasons why she shouldn't be going to Cyno's room. There were thousands of additional reasons why she shouldn't have sex with him, as well.

She was tired, she realized as she studied him. From the moment she'd arrived on Earth, she had taken her father's order seriously. She had searched and tried to fall in love. Sex for sex's sake wasn't an option. It didn't mean that she didn't enjoy sex or crave it as much as other fae, but she couldn't bring herself to latch on to anything with a cock and sleep with it. Each encounter had to be meaningful.

Between her frantic search and her concerts, there had been no time for herself. Tonight was the night she took something to ease her heart. Tonight she wasn't going to think about her sisters and their fates. She was going to wrap herself around Cyno and ride him until they both exploded. Regret would come with the dawn.

He looked down at her and smiled. Reaching up, she pulled his head to hers. Their lips met in a soft kiss, as if they were both trying to learn something about each other. His arms wrapped around her waist and pulled her flush against his chest. She nibbled his bottom lip. A low growl came from the back of his throat. They fit together perfectly. It was like they had been made for each other. Alida knew it was crazy, but it was how he made her feel. Somehow her soul had come home in the arms of a stranger.

They broke apart as the elevator doors opened. He led her to his room. When she stepped inside, she felt a shiver of nervousness. It was odd. She had never been nervous before, yet her heart knew tonight was going to be different. It was going to be a turning point in her life.

"Are you having second thoughts?" He moved to stand behind her and twined his arms around her waist.

She leaned back against him and shook her head. "Just thinking."

"Thinking isn't allowed tonight. Only feeling." Nuzzling her neck, the vibration of his voice raced over her skin.

"Take me," she commanded, giving him the power to do what he wanted to her.

* * * *

"I can't take you slow this time. I've got a cock that's been aching for you."

Cyno turned her around and fisted his hands in her t-shirt. With a jerk, he ripped it into shreds and tossed it over his shoulder. Her full breasts swelled, almost spilling out of the blue lace bra she wore. He unhooked the clasp and stripped it from her. He saw the tattoo of a tiara on her right breast.

"What's this?" he asked.

She gave a shaky laugh. "I'm a princess, didn't you know?"

He laughed, but a part deep inside him wondered if she was really joking. He saw his hands shake as he reached out to cup her. No lover had ever made his knees weak and his hands tremble, but she did it just by standing there. When he squeezed her breast, her gasp shot lust straight to his groin.

He took just her nipples between his forefingers and thumbs. Tugging and pinching them, he reveled in the sounds she made. Her passion wouldn't allow her to stand still, and she reached for him.

"Sorry, love, no touching for you." He swept her into his arms and carried her to the bed. He laid her there and tugged her jeans off. Standing back, he ripped his own clothes off and flung them about the room. He saw her smile at his eagerness.

Capturing her wrists, he pinned her hands above her head as he eased down beside her. His mouth found her nipple and he got his first taste of her skin. She tasted like cinnamon and vanilla. He could become addicted to her if he allowed his heart free rein. His tongue swirled and lapped at her breasts as his hand traced the curve of her hip. The treasure it sought was laid bare when Alida spread her thighs.

A mutual groan filled the air when his thumb pressed against her clit. It was sensitive; he could tell because the slightest touch made her arch off the bed. Pleasure was building, but he wanted to be inside her when she came. His inner beast demanded that he mate with her and he was losing control of it. Patches of brown fur came and went on his arms. Thank God, Alida's eyes were closed.

Rolling her over, he urged her to her hands and knees. "I have to take you like this. I have to." His voice sounded frantic to his own ears.

She didn't question or complain. He set the blunt head of his shaft at her dripping opening and impaled her from behind. He took her fast and savagely. The creature inside wouldn't have it any other way. The human part of his brain worried he was hurting her, but she never protested. Her hips moved in perfect rhythm with his.

He leaned forward until his belly rubbed against her ass. Sliding one hand around, he started tapping her clit with the tip of his finger. She cried out and her sheath clasped him tight as orgasm swamped her. Her pure voice screaming his name drove his climax into explosion. He threw back his head and roared even as he slammed his cock into her.

To his horror, his control of his form slipped and he could see claws forming on his hand and fur racing up his arm. His teeth were growing and his jaw lengthening. There was no way he could allow the change to happen. Even as his hips continued to jerk, riding the last waves of lust, he grabbed the beast and caged it back inside his soul. His body was back to normal by the time he moved out of her and to her side.

He felt a tug of shame when he saw the red marks he had put on her golden skin. He tried so hard to monitor his strength, but the mating had overwhelmed him.

"Are you okay?" he asked after a few minutes of silence.

She snorted. "I feel like a jellyfish—no bones, just mush."

"So I take it you enjoyed yourself?" He hoped he didn't sound as pathetic as he thought he did.

*

"Yes, I enjoyed it." Alida thought of how inadequate the word enjoy was to describe how she felt. She had never been so thoroughly fucked in her life. Even for those few seconds when she felt something trying to manifest, she had still been in the throes of the

best orgasm she had ever had.

“Good.”

The smug, satisfied sound of Cyno’s voice made her laugh. She rolled over to glance at him. He looked sated and happy, but there was weariness in his eyes, as well. Making up her mind, she tugged the blankets over them. She piled pillows behind her and leaned against the headboard. She cuddled his head to her breast and started to sing.

Her voice was soft and gentle. Her words weren’t mortal as she sang to him the faerie lullabies her mother used to sing to her. Using her power, she planted suggestions of sleep and good dreams in the underlying harmony of the song. Cyno’s eyes drifted closed and she sang him into a deep healing sleep.

Chapter Five

“Thank the Goddess,” Baxter said as he appeared. “I thought you two would never finish.”

“How long have you been hanging around?” Alida asked as she slid from Cyno’s bed. She strengthened the sleep spell so their conversation wouldn’t bother him.

“Don’t worry. I didn’t see anything, but it’s not like I haven’t seen you having sex before.” Baxter strolled over to the bed and looked down at the man lying there. “Of course, I’ve never seen you having sex with a man this good looking before. Oh, be still my heart.” He placed his hand over his heart and sighed.

“Stop acting like an idiot. What are you doing here?” She knew she had to get Baxter back on track or the faerie would never get around to telling her what he wanted.

“What?” He dragged his eyes from Cyno’s sleeping form. “I’m here to whisk you away on a lovely mini-vacation. Say good-bye to your boy toy, darling, and let’s get you dressed.”

He took her hand and winked at her. She took one last look at Cyno before they disappeared. When they reappeared in her hotel room, she gasped in shock. Her clothes were thrown around the room. Her make-up had been dumped and tossed over the bathroom floor.

“Shit, girl, you’re a total slob.” Baxter bent down to pick up one of her shirts.

“You know me better than that. I’d never leave a room like this.” She turned around in the center of the room. “Someone shredded my clothes.”

Baxter jerked his hand away from the shirt. “You think someone broke into your room and ruined your clothes? Whatever for?”

“I don’t know. As far as I know, I’ve never ticked anyone off enough for them to do this.” She was stunned by the pure viciousness of the destruction.

As she surveyed the room, she noticed a small envelope placed on the top of the hotel T.V. Alida was reluctant to look at it. She grabbed it and, bracing herself, opened it.

You slut. I said you were mine, but you chose to ignore me. This is just beginning.

She didn’t cry out or drop the card. All she did was sigh. Why couldn’t life be easy? The wonderful joyous feeling she had enjoyed in Cyno’s arms melted away. Whenever she found a happy moment this year, something had always destroyed it.

Baxter snatched the card from her. His unwrinkled skin twitched into a frown. Then he tossed the note back on the T.V. Taking her arm, he led her to her bed. Pushing her down, he started digging through the piles of ruined clothes.

“We’ll find you some clothes to wear and then we’re getting out of here.”

“I can’t just disappear. I have to let Jason know where I am,” she protested.

“No. I don’t want him showing up and destroying your vacation.” He chucked a pair of black leather pants and a blue t-shirt on the bed next to her. “Put these on. We’ll worry about getting you more clothes when we get there.”

Alida wasn’t up to arguing with him. She knew it wouldn’t do any good. When Baxter got a plan, he couldn’t be swayed from it. Sliding on the clothes, she found herself longing to talk to her sisters. She closed her eyes and tried to conjure up their images. Tears dropped from her eyes as she realized she couldn’t see them anymore. A different

image materialized.

Cyno's rough features found a place in her memories and her heart seemed to sing at the thought of him. She gasped as the song swelled in accompaniment as she remembered their lovemaking. Her body began to tingle all over again. He had been rough, but she didn't mind.

"Ready?" Baxter asked as she finished pulling the t-shirt over her head.

"Yeah, I guess so."

"Let's go." He clasped her hand and the vandalized room blinked out of view.

* * * *

When the world became visible again, Alida found herself standing in a large living room. A huge bay window dominated the room and allowed her to look out over an ancient forest.

"Where are we?" She walked to the window and stared outside.

"It's a cabin I leased just outside of Pyengana. There's nothing in the town except a cheese factory, though there are some waterfalls. The lady I talked to called them the St. Columba Falls. If you want, we can hike there."

Gapped at him, she whipped around so fast she almost lost her balance. "Did you say hike?"

"Yes." Baxter glanced at her like she was crazy.

She rushed to his side and pressed her hand to his forehead. "My poor friend, I knew living on Earth would drive you crazy eventually."

"What the hell are you talking about?" He brushed her hand off and stalked away.

"I figure you have to be insane if you're suggesting we go for a hike." She grinned at him. "When your idea of exercise is usually lifting a glass of wine, I begin to worry at your obvious willingness to actually sweat."

"Bitch," Baxter said with a smile. "All right, I'll admit I was hoping you wouldn't take me up on the offer."

She laughed and threw her arms around her oldest friend. "I love you, Baxter. You always know how to make me laugh."

He pulled her close and squeezed her tight. "That's what I'm here for, love. Now I hate to tell you this, but you stink. Go take a shower and I'll scrounge something for us to eat."

Alida agreed and headed towards the main bedroom he had pointed out for her. She smelled of sex, sweat and a compelling musk scent which could only be Cyno's. Stripping her clothes off as she moved through the bedroom, she turned on the water before she glanced in the mirror. She saw the bruises on her hips and smiled at the memory of how they were caused. She continued to study her reflection in the glass as the steam began to fog it. Something was wrong and she felt like something was missing.

In shock and rising horror, she lifted her hand to her neck. *My wings*, she thought. *Where are they?* Scrambling, she searched the floor between the bathroom and the pile of clothes in the middle of the bed. She dug through the shirt and pants. She found nothing. Sitting on the bed, she cried out.

Baxter raced in, rolling pin in hand. "What's wrong?"

Tears streamed down her cheeks. "My wings. I can't find my wings."

"Holy Goddesses and Mothers of Faeries," he whispered. "Did you search your

clothes?”

“Yes.” She patted the blue shirt. “They aren’t here.”

“We have to be calm about this.” He paced the bedroom, gesturing wildly with the rolling pin. “We’ll go back. When was the last time you know for sure you had them?”

Closing her eyes, she thought about the chain and the last time she felt its weight. “I remember touching it in Cyno’s room. Right before he ripped my shirt off.” Her eyes jerked open. “He must have broken the chain. They’re in his hotel room. I’m sure of it.”

“Strange. I didn’t think a mortal could break a faerie chain.” He scratched his chin.

“You have to go and get them back for me. Father will be livid if he finds out.” She knew the mention of her father would get Baxter’s cooperation.

“I’m going.” Baxter disappeared.

She didn’t have her friend’s power to translocate, so even if it took him a few more hours, it would be quicker than her having to drive back to Hobart and Cyno was probably gone by then. She could only hope he didn’t find her necklace and take it with him.

Alida forgot about the shower running. She forgot about the gorgeous old growth forest outside her window. All she could do was sit and wait, feeling overwhelmingly naked without her wings.

* * * *

Several hours later, Baxter returned. Alida could tell by the droop of his shoulders that he hadn’t found anything.

“I searched the room. It wasn’t there.” Her friend sat beside her and wrapped his arms around her. “Your man was gone, as well. He must have left shortly after we did.”

She shook her head. “You forget that it might only seem like a second when you jump, but in the mortal world it’s several hours later.”

“Damn, I did forget.” He shoved his hand through his long red hair, which he had dyed to match hers.

“Did you get an address?” she asked in desperation.

“Sorry. You know I don’t have the magic to coax people to tell me anything. What do you know about him?”

“His name’s Cyno Wellington. He just arrived back from a very long trip abroad.” She shrugged and realized she knew nothing about the facts of the man’s life. Her heart had known she could trust him and that had been the only thing that mattered.

“We’re screwed then, darling. There isn’t a huge population on this island, but it’s got enough of one to make finding him hard.”

She couldn’t think. Her mind blocked the knowledge that she might have lost her wings for good. All faeries carried them in different ways, but not one had ever lost her wings. Everyone knew faeries were useless without them. Panic rose to choke her. Goddess, she had proven her father right. He had always believed she was irresponsible and here she sat without the most important thing to a faerie.

Baxter patted her shoulder. “Alida, you should lie down and rest. I’m not saying things will be better when you wake up, but maybe we’ll be able to form a plan to find your man.”

She nodded and allowed him to tuck her under the blankets. He turned off the water in the bathroom and the lights in the bedroom. Encased in cool darkness, she closed her

eyes and willed herself to sleep. She was so very tired.

Chapter Six

Cyno found himself running his thumb over the gold pendant. He had discovered it tangled in the shirt he'd ripped off Alida when he was packing to leave Hobart. Why hadn't he left it at the front desk when he'd checked out? He didn't know and didn't really want to dig too deeply into his reasons.

He lifted the pendant and sniffed. Usually metal didn't give off a scent, but he caught a whiff of her unique smell and his body hardened. A strange melody hummed in his ears. He glanced at the car's radio. It was off, but the music got louder. Heat came from the winged pendant he held.

Pulling over to the side of the road, he put the car in park and held the necklace up into the sunlight. He felt a shock when he saw the wings were glowing. The hairs on his neck stood up and he couldn't help but snarl as a feeling of immense power washed over him. There was something strange about the piece of jewelry and the woman who wore it.

The light and music faded as suddenly as it began, and he set the necklace on the seat next to him. He would study it later, when he got home. He pushed all thoughts of Alida out of his mind. He was going to relax and enjoy the Tasmanian countryside. He had another five hours before he got into St. Helens and another hour after that before he got home. There would be time enough to worry about Alida when he wasn't driving.

* * * *

Alida woke up as a burst of laughter came from the other side of the door. Sitting up, she glanced at the shadows creeping across the floor. She had slept most of the day. She stretched and felt a delicious ache between her legs. A small smile came to her face as she thought about what had caused that ache. Then she remembered what had caused her tears.

She took a deep breath before she started crying again. They would figure out how to get her wings back. She climbed out of bed and headed in to take a shower.

When she got out, a pile of clothes was waiting for her on the bed. Baxter had left a note: *Put these on and come out. We have company.* She could feel his excitement in the tilt of his writing. She wasn't in the mood for entertaining curious locals, but Baxter had been too good a friend for her to turn coward and stay in the bedroom.

She opened the door and made her way into the living room. Baxter sat on the couch next to a petite blonde woman. He nodded as she talked, but his eyes were glued to the tall brown-haired man standing with his back to the room. He stared out at the forest. She coughed and three sets of eyes turned to her. She managed to put on a smile as she joined them.

Baxter jumped to his feet and gave her a hug. Turning to the others, he said, "This is Alida. Alida, this is Lynn Rexius and her brother, Steven. They're the people I leased the cabin from."

Lynn jumped to her feet. "Omigod, I'm a huge fan." She hugged Alida.

Alida was used to reactions like that. Being famous took any personal space away

from her. She hugged the woman back. "Thank you. I'm always glad to meet a fan."

Steven's grim face didn't seem to lighten, but she saw a smile sparkle in his eyes when he looked at Lynn. "Back off, sis. You'll scare her away." He held out his hand. "I'm glad the cabin was available for you and your friend."

"I'm thrilled, except I didn't realize it was so isolated here. Baxter, can you get everyone drinks?" She gestured for Lynn and Steven to sit as she went to the chair across from the couch.

Baxter nodded and Steven offered to help. She looked out the window and soaked up the darkness resting just outside the glass. Looking at Lynn, she asked, "What's Pyengana's claim to fame?" She feigned interest. She might not want to socialize, but she was good at faking it.

"Well, we have a cheese factory. It has a world renowned reputation for gourmet cheeses."

"Mmm." Cheese wasn't really anything she'd be tempted to go and see.

"St. Columba Falls are one of the highest waterfalls in Tasmania. It's a wonderful walk through our old growth forest." Lynn's enthusiasm bubbled in her voice.

"Calm down. You're starting to sound like a tour guide." Steven came in from the kitchen. He held a tray of glasses and a pitcher of lemonade. Baxter followed, carrying a tray of cheese, crackers and fruit. She was worried he'd trip since his gaze was fixed on Steven's ass.

"Why not tell them about our true claim to fame?" Lynn smirked at her brother.

"Okay." Steven handed out the drinks and settled next to his sister on the couch.

"Have either of you heard of the Tasmanian Tiger?"

"Tiger? In Tasmania?" Alida couldn't help sounding skeptical.

"The thylacine, or Tasmanian Tiger as it's usually called, isn't really a tiger. It's more a wolf-like creature," Lynn added.

"I rather prefer a tiger," Baxter joked as he sat on the floor beside Alida's chair.

"It's the only mammal to become extinct in Tasmania since white settlers came. The last tiger died in captivity in 1936. There might have been another one shot a couple years later, but no one knows for sure. Since then there have been hundreds of sightings, but no one can be sure people aren't making it up, or it might be some other kind of animal."

"So what does your town have to do with this?" Alida asked.

"In 1995, a park ranger claims to have seen a tiger in this area. A huge investigation was launched, but again no proof was found. I'm afraid they've disappeared." Steven's voice was sad.

"It's hard to watch things disappear and know you'll never be able to get them back." Baxter reached over and squeezed the man's knee.

Alida knew he was talking about Faeridae. Could he know the truth about her purpose on Earth? She didn't have time to think about it. Lynn changed the subject and the other three let her. They chatted for a while longer until true dark fell.

Steven and his sister took their leave after making Alida promise she and Baxter would join them for dinner the next night. Baxter didn't seem inclined to chat after the Rexius' left. They murmured their good nights and headed to bed.

Chapter Seven

Staring, Alida stood at the foot of the St. Columba Falls. She couldn't get over how beautiful they were. Even more beautiful than the ones on Faeridae. She let her mind and soul become lost in the cascading music the water made. It carried her away from the trouble she faced in the real world.

Drifting and dreaming, she wandered back down the trail towards where she had left the car. Her magic caught the rhythm of the rushing stream and she started to sing. Entranced, she never noticed when she stepped off the path and started making her way into the forest.

She lifted her voice in joy for the beauty of the world around her. In this pristine wilderness, she found reminders of her true home. The birds began to join in until the air vibrated with the song of life. She trekked into a clearing from the barely visible track she had followed.

The sunbeams sparkled like diamonds caught in mid-air. She had the sudden urge to feel them on her skin. With no thought of watchers, she stripped and twirled amidst the light and air. Her power rose like a command through the forest. Soon, birds, animals and butterflies surrounded her.

As they brushed against and caressed her, she found herself wishing Cyno was with her to absorb the perfection of nature. A movement caught her gaze. She turned and there he was.

*

Cyno had come to the falls that morning to say hello to them. It was a ritual he had started observing when he first traveled away from his home. He was shocked to spot a familiar burgundy and purple ponytail bobbing along the trail in front of him. Then her voice drifted back on the gentle morning breeze and he couldn't do anything except follow her.

When she left the well-marked trail, he felt a twinge of worry. She kept singing and he could tell she was oblivious to her surroundings. He arrived at the edge of the clearing in time to see her take off her clothes and start dancing in the sun. Transfixed, lust and awe welled up inside him, along with another emotion he wasn't sure he wanted to feel.

Surprised, he watched the inhabitants of the rainforest join her in her enthralling dance. She was a pagan goddess or a faerie welcoming her worshippers, and all he could do was fall at her feet. Later, he would never remember moving across the open meadow. The next thing he knew she was in his arms and they were kissing wildly.

*

Yes, Alida's heart cried out. *This is how it should be.*

She was meant to be in his arms, crushed to his chest and feasting off his lips. In seconds, his shirt was open and she was rubbing her breasts against his hot skin. Holding onto his shoulders, she leaned her head back to give him access to her neck.

He nibbled and kissed his way down her neck to the valley between her breasts. She gasped as his warm, moist mouth covered her hard nipple. As he sucked and licked, she pushed her mound against the bulge in his jeans. She could feel her juices soak into the fabric.

As he suckled her, he gripped her ass and lifted her. She felt the prickly meadow grass on her skin as he knelt and laid her down. Moaning, she felt the loss of his mouth when he released her nipple.

“I could suck your tit all day, but there are other places that I think will taste just as good.”

At the rough sound of his voice in her ear, she groaned and her thighs fell open, granting him access to the very heart of her body.

He murmured his lust against her stomach and hips. Her legs spread wider to accommodate him as he lay between them. Lifting her legs over his shoulders, he gently pulled her wet pink lips apart.

“Oh, yes,” she whispered as he blew a hot burst of air over her throbbing clit.

She buried her hands in his silky hair and held on. His tongue swirled around the hard button and down to where her juices flowed. She could tell he was trying to drive her crazy with his slow licks when she wanted him to feast on her. He seemed to savor her like a fine wine instead of devouring her like a starving man.

“Please,” she begged and pressed her pussy tighter to him as he dipped his tongue into her.

With a growl, he licked her clit. Tugging with his teeth, he stroked it with the pointed tip of his tongue. Her head thrashed from side to side as the pleasure built. When he bit her a little harder than before, the twinge of pain mingled with the overwhelming passion and she came.

Her musical voice echoed throughout the forest as she cried out his name. He wouldn't let go of her hips even when her orgasm faded. She untangled her fingers from his hair. Lifting his head, he smiled at her. Passion, lust and something more primitive shined in his glowing eyes.

He moved up her body and pressed his erection into her mound. She cried out softly. He was huge and all she could think about was getting him into her as soon as possible. She tried to push him off but he wouldn't budge.

“I want you in me now,” she demanded.

He laughed harshly. “No, it would be over too soon. I told you that the next time would be slow. I haven't even begun to fuck you.”

Her eyes crossed and she was sure her heart stopped for a moment. He had brought her to the best orgasms she had ever had in her life and he said he hadn't even started. She wasn't sure she'd survive any more.

Alida realized she said that last thought aloud when his smile flashed again and his eyes traced her body.

“You'll survive, love. When I'm done with you, you won't remember any other man you might have had.” He leaned forward and whispered in her ear. “You're mine, Alida, and I won't ever share you.”

She felt a twinge of unease, but before she could do anything about it, he pressed his lips to hers and her mind emptied of all thoughts. None of her former lovers had ever kissed her as if she were a piece of faerie glass, easily broken. She could taste her own juices in his mouth and started to burn again.

His tongue stroking her teeth distracted her enough that she didn't notice his hand slide down her body to cup her glistening curls. It was only when he thrust one of his fingers into her dripping pussy that she realized he was doing something else to her. She

pulled her mouth away from his and screamed.

He pulled out and thrust two fingers in. She couldn't hold still anymore. Her hips had picked up the rhythm of his movements and she began to take him deeper into her heat. The air filled with her whimpers. Scraping her sweet spot with each surge of his fingers, he was driving her over the edge.

Right before she came for the second time, he rolled her over and dragged her hips up so her ass was exposed to the crisp air. She hid her face with her arms. She heard the rustling of clothes as he took his jeans off. Then his hard thick cock impaled her and she came again. Her inner muscles gripped him as he rode her hard into her orgasm. Without letting up, he drove her into a third one before she felt him come. The feel of his cum filling her had her screaming his name ... again.

* * * *

Cyno found the strength to pull out of her and collapse on the ground next to her. He placed his hand on her back and marveled at the smoothness of her skin. She purred as he ran his fingers up and down her spine.

"How did you find me?" she asked.

He chuckled. "I wasn't looking for you. I live outside of Pyengana. Whenever I return home from a trip, I come to the falls. It's a ritual that helps cleanse me, I guess." He shrugged, unsure of how much she really wanted to know.

"That was pretty arrogant of me to assume you were looking for me." She sighed and snuggled close to him. "However it happened, I'm glad you're here."

"So am I, love." He moaned as he shifted. "I'm getting too old for fooling around outside unless there's blankets around."

She giggled and he smiled. He dropped a kiss on the top of her head. Pulling her closer, he closed his eyes. How he would love to wake up every morning with her in his arms. It would be wonderful to hear her cry out his name as he pleased her. He dozed off to the quiet songs of the birds.

Chapter Eight

Cyno woke to find Alida talking to a man. She was still naked and didn't seem too concerned with the fact. Moving slowly, he tried not to attract their attention until he could cover himself.

"Damn, girl. Every time I come looking for you, you're having sex with that guy." The stranger's blue eyes pinned Cyno in place. "I'll admit he's pretty easy on the eyes and he has some impressive equipment."

Cyno couldn't believe he was blushing when Alida turned around and both of them ogled him. Usually being naked was as easy as breathing for him, but there was something about Alida and the way she was staring at him that made him feel awkward.

"Hush, Baxter, don't tease him. He's not used to you." She turned her friend around. Winking at Cyno, she said, "You can get dressed. He'll be a good boy."

While he got dressed, he listened to their conversation.

"Why'd you come looking for me?" Alida was asking.

Baxter shrugged. "When you didn't come back in a reasonable time, I got worried. You never know what you might find in the woods. Of course, if there are more like him, maybe I should take up hiking."

"Baxter," Alida warned.

Cyno had finished dressing and studied the pair in front of him. They looked so much alike. The only real difference was Baxter was thin hipped and slender like a boy where Alida was all lush curves. Both stood about five-five or five-six. He towered over them at six foot even. Their hair stopped at the middle of their backs and was a striking burgundy with purple streaks. He thought it was a great dye job. Their faces were thin with high cheekbones and delicate noses. Their lips were full and they seemed to find it easy to laugh. Their tilt tipped eyes were of the brightest amethyst. There was something "otherworldly" about them. He wondered if they were related since Alida wasn't uncomfortable around the other man. Not many women of Cyno's acquaintance acted so nonchalant about being naked.

"Wait a minute. When did you jump?" Alida's voice held a hint of suspicion in it.

"A few minutes before I found you."

Even Cyno could tell Baxter was lying.

"Wrong answer, friend. Try again." She poked the other man in the ribs.

"All right. I jumped about five minutes after you left." Baxter threw his hand in the air and stomped a little ways away. "I forgot about the whole time thing. As much as I'd have liked to be a hero, I would've been too late."

"I know you, Baxter. You wouldn't come after me on a vague notion of worry." She frowned at her friend.

Baxter glanced back at Cyno and shrugged. "Maybe we should talk about it later."

Cyno didn't feel left out. He had his own secrets he didn't want to reveal, but as he watched, Alida turned and faced him. He found he wanted her to tell him everything about her.

"No secrets. What happened?" Alida moved towards Cyno and slipped her arm through his. He felt his heart swell.

“You got another note. It was sitting on your pillow.” Baxter’s voice held a hint of worry.

Alida stiffened beside Cyno. The stench of fear mixed with her enticing scent. His protective nature raced to the forefront. He pushed her behind him and snarled at Baxter.

“Cyno, what are you doing? Baxter isn’t going to hurt me,” Alida protested.

“Then what are you afraid of? What’s this letter about?” He lifted her gaze to his. “Is someone stalking you?”

She shrugged. “Every famous person gets crazy fans. The cards don’t mean anything, I’m sure.”

“You shouldn’t take risks though. Crazy people aren’t predictable. You shouldn’t wander around by yourself.” He couldn’t believe how upset he was getting. He had never tried to tell any of his lovers what to do, but his heart told him he wouldn’t survive without this woman.

She was staring at him strangely. “I’m perfectly capable of taking care of myself. No one will ever dictate where I go or what I do. Not even a man I care for.” She stalked off to where her clothes were piled.

He started to follow her when Baxter stopped him.

“It wouldn’t be smart to go and talk to her right now,” the slender man suggested.

“I was going to apologize.” Cyno ran his hands through his hair. “I’ve never come on that strong. We’ve had sex twice. Granted it was the best sex of my life and I’d love to have more, but that doesn’t make us committed to each other.”

Baxter stared at him. “If you keep yelling, you’ll be committed somewhere else wearing a white jacket.” Alida’s friend smiled at him. “She’s afraid of you, but in a different way than the fear she feels for the crazy stalker.”

“What do you mean?” He was confused and the emotions he was experiencing pushed him to go after her. He watched her walk toward the main path.

“Alida’s been with a lot of guys.” Cyno cringed. He didn’t want to hear that. “But they were all using her to try and meet her father. She was using them, as well; she’ll be the first to admit it. You’re different because you want her for who she is, not what she can do for you. I’ve known her for a long time and I know she’s in danger of falling in love with you. You might want to think about how you feel about her before you take this relationship any further.”

Cyno watched the man leave while he tried to fight the urge to shift. Once Baxter was clear of the meadow, Cyno’s clothes came off and he tucked them out of sight under a tree. Reaching inside his soul, he found the beast he had locked up. Unleashing it, he fell to his knees and moaned. The change swept through him like the strongest climax he had ever known. Maybe that was why he had to fight it every time he had sex with Alida.

When he was in his natural form, he stretched. It had been a long time and he needed to run his territory. With a soft yip, he ran off into the forest, delighting in the scents and smells of nature.

* * * *

“Where is he?” Alida asked as Baxter joined her.

“He wasn’t in the clearing when I went back. He must have taken off.” Baxter didn’t look too concerned.

“He did say he lives around here, so he probably knows his way home without any

help from us.” She turned and headed back to the car parking lot.

“How did you two find each other again?” Baxter hurried to catch up with her.

“I don’t know. I was caught up in the music from the falls. I was dancing in the middle of the clearing.”

“Not again. Were you naked, as well?”

She glared back at him. “Of course, I was. What good is communing with nature if you’re not totally open to it?”

“Mortals tend to think people who dance naked in the woods are a little strange,” Baxter pointed out.

She didn’t reply to that because she knew it was the truth. She also wasn’t going to change her ways this late in life.

“Did you get your wings back from him?” Baxter’s voice held a causal tone.

“Damn. The Goddesses hate me, Baxter. They truly do. I was too busy doing other things to ask him for them.”

“You mean you were too busy doing him.” He reached out and patted her shoulder. “Don’t worry. If he lives around here, we can find him again. Though it strikes me as strange that he shows up at the same time another letter from your fan does.”

Baxter’s words stopped her. Without the distracting presence of Cyno, she thought back to his words as he fucked her. *You’re mine and I’ll never share you again.* Had that just been something he said in the heat of lust or was there a more sinister purpose behind it?

She searched her memory and realized that her power never once signaled uneasiness when Cyno was around. His voice was rough and deep and she knew he was hiding something. Yet nothing told her his secrets were dangerous. She shook her head.

“I don’t think he has anything to do with the notes.”

“Your magic tells you that?”

“Yes.”

Baxter didn’t say anything else. He knew her magic was rarely wrong about people.

“Come on. Let’s go.” She started down the trail. “I need to get back to the cabin and take a shower before we head over to the Rexius’.”

Baxter’s face broke into an eager grin and he rushed past her. She laughed and caught up to him as they ran for the car.

Chapter Nine

“Why did you leave?”

Alida nearly jumped out of her skin when Cyno’s voice broke through the shadows of the Rexius’ porch. She had wandered away from the threesome inside to listen to the music of the silence. She whirled to look at him.

“What the hell are you doing here?” she demanded.

He shrugged and glided closer. “Lynn and Steven are old friends of mine. I always have dinner with them my first night home.”

He grabbed her arms and pulled her tight to him. Leaning down, he pressed a kiss to her cheek. He set her from him and walked a few steps away. “Why did you leave?” he asked again.

“I was afraid I’d say something cruel to you and I didn’t want to fight.”

His expression was puzzled. “Fight?”

“What? Did you think I’d let you tell me how I should conduct myself?” She was shocked and a little disappointed.

Understanding burst through on his face. “I’m sorry about that. I don’t know what got into me. I was worried that you’d put yourself in harm’s way and I wasn’t sure how strong I would be if something happened to you.”

The sincerity in his voice convinced her he was telling the truth. She moved closer.

“That’s not what I’m talking about,” he said. “Our first night together. When I woke up, you were gone. You didn’t even take your clothes. I get the feeling you left something very important behind.” He held up the necklace in the fading twilight.

Crying out, she snatched the pendant from his hands. It flared and glowed a brilliant purple. Alida sighed as she wrapped her hands around the warm metal. She was complete again. She looked up to find Cyno staring at her. “Baxter came and got me. By the time I realized they were missing, it had been several hours. We tend to lose track of time when we travel.”

“It hurt when I woke up to find you gone. I thought you were using me like a lot of artists tend to do.”

The vulnerability in his voice touched her heart. Moving closer, she cupped his cheek with her hand. “Maybe this isn’t the time to mention it. I know we’ve known each other for barely two days, but in my soul, I’ve known you forever. If I had a choice, I’d stay by your side forever.”

With a groan, he turned his head and kissed her palm. Before he could say anything, a horrible screeching noise came from a bush next to the porch. Lynn, Steven and Baxter rushed out of the house. Alida stepped back when Lynn caught sight of Cyno and launched herself at him.

“You’re back. Why didn’t you call?” Her voice was closer to a shout so that they could hear her over the noise.

“I got a little sidetracked.” His eyes caught Alida and the lust in them reminded her what they had done earlier.

“All right. Tell him to stop making all that racket.” Steven hugged Cyno, as well.

“Goddess, what is making all that noise?” Baxter whined.

Cyno smiled as he went to the edge of the porch and yelled, "All right, Beezie, stop it."

The noise stopped and a small black animal shuffled from the bush. Beezie was black with a collar of white fur around his neck.

"What in the name of all the Heavens is that?" Baxter moved closer to look at it.

"Next to the thylocine, this is our most recognizable mammal." Cyno smiled at the creature nuzzling around his legs. "This is a Tasmanian Devil. His name is Beelzebub, but I call him Beezie."

"Why isn't he living in the wild?" Alida knelt down to get a better look at him.

"Beezie's blind. He'd never survive in the wild. I adopted him when he was a baby. I couldn't leave him to his fate." Cyno basked in the look of approval he got from her. He wondered when her opinions of him came to mean so much.

"Beezie can't come inside and dinner's ready," Lynn said.

The five of them made their way in to enjoy the meal Lynn had made.

* * * *

After dinner, Cyno asked Alida to go for a walk with him. Baxter was happily chatting with Lynn and her brother. Alida agreed and let him lead her down a moonlit trail to a clearing bathed in silver. A wave of homesickness swamped her and she felt tears well in her eyes.

"What's wrong?" Cyno asked her in a quiet voice.

"I'm missing my home and my sisters." Misty eyed, she smiled at him.

"How many sisters do you have?"

"Three. We were born on the same day and we've never been apart until this past year." She couldn't stop the tear from rolling down her cheek.

He reached out and caught the drop with the tip of his finger. "Do they look like you?"

Wandering into the middle of the clearing, she shook her head. "No, we're all different."

She found thinking about them difficult, so she changed the subject. "Do you have any family?"

A look of despair and loneliness crossed his face. "There's no one left. I'm the last of my kind."

"Last of your kind?" She wasn't sure what he meant by that.

He stared at her and she could tell he was trying to see deep inside her. She was relieved when he nodded. He must have found what he was looking for.

"What are you doing?" She asked when he started unbuttoning his shirt.

"Just watch and don't worry. I won't hurt you."

"Won't hurt me?" She caught his clothes as he flung them at her.

His eyes started to glow. She stood washed in awe as he transformed before her eyes. She had to turn away when the light got too bright. A soft yip drew her attention and she gasped in delight.

A wolf-like creature stood where Cyno had been standing. From the tip of his nose to the tip of his tail, he was six feet long. His head came to her waist. He had short rough brown fur with black stripes along his back. His change didn't shock her. She had seen shifters on Faeridae before. She approached him cautiously. The animal lay down and

rolled over to bare its stomach. She laughed and knelt to stroke his warm body. He leapt to his feet and nuzzled her cheek.

“You’re beautiful,” she whispered. Humility touched her soul for the first time in her life. Cyno trusted her enough to reveal his deepest secret. She had to honor that by sharing hers.

“Wait. I want to show you something.” She climbed to her feet and moved away from him.

She found a patch of moonlight and shed her clothes. Wearing only her winged pendant, she raised her arms to the night sky and sang:

*Goddess of the elements
Fire, water, earth and air
With my love, my secret share.
Goddess of the sacred places
North, south, east and west
Show his heart, his place to rest.
Goddess of both our worlds
Allow my voice to ring
Grant our souls their rightful wings.*

*

Cyno kept his eyes trained on Alida. A purple glow emanated from the pendant she wore. The purple from her hair and the light blended together. He felt his jaw unhinge as the light coalesced into wings on her back. The burgundy of her hair melted into her skin.

Soon, before him was a creature out of legends. Her beauty brought tears to his eyes. Her purple wings fluttered slightly in the gentle night breeze. He shifted back to his human form and knelt in front of her. He reached out, but stopped before he could touch her.

“Who are you?” The awe in his voice was only a small fraction of how he really felt.

“I’m Alida, Fourth Princess of Faeridae and the Faerie of Song.” She smiled and took his hand in hers. Tugging on it, she urged him to stand. “There’s no reason to kneel. We are equals.”

Even her voice sounded different. It was deeper and lighter at the same time. It held the vastness of the sky and the smallness of an atom. There was nothing he could do but pull her to him and worship her mouth. He whispered kisses along her cheeks to her neck. Nipping her tender flesh where her pulse raced, he then soothed it with his tongue.

He frowned when she pushed him away and groaned as she went to her knees before him. Her amethyst eyes gleamed in the moonlight. She looked up at him and grinned.

“Let me pleasure you.”

There was no way he could argue as she cupped his balls in her hand and squeezed. Lust poured over him and he allowed himself to go along for the ride. His hands fisted in her hair when her warm tongue licked its way down one side of his cock and up the other. He fought the need to thrust it as deep as he could into her mouth. He tried to train his gaze on the top of her head, but the purple shimmer of her wings distracted him. Sliding one hand around to cup the back of her head, he didn’t allow her to stop. With his other hand, he stroked one wing as if he were petting a butterfly.

Alida moaned and he realized her wings must be an erogenous zone for her. He traced the veins and she hummed. The vibrations from her throat surrounded his shaft and

he growled as his hips flexed.

Her moist mouth lured him in until the blunt head of his cock hit the back of her throat. He cried out. He had never had a woman take him that far in. She lifted her head, slowly drawing off and sucking hard. She rolled his sac in her hand and teased the sensitive skin behind them with a finger. Her other hand slid around to fondle his ass.

He started thrusting and crying out her name with each jerk. Her swirling tongue tasted the slit at the head of his cock and sipped the pre-cum leaking out. A squeeze, a lick and a stroke of his genitals and he was ready to explode. When her finger whispered over the rosette of his ass, he came with a roar. He impaled himself on her mouth and poured his seed into her. She didn't struggle, just swallowed until he was dry.

Chapter Ten

Letting go of her head, Cyno sank to his knees. Alida pushed him so he was lying down. She licked his cock as if he was her favorite flavor of ice cream. He pulled her on top of his chest. Her fragile wings folded against her back and she tucked her head under his chin. Stroking her soft skin, he felt her shiver each time his fingers caressed her wings.

“What creature do you become?” Her voice traveled throughout his spine.

“I’m a Tasmanian Tiger.”

She pulled back and looked at him. “A thylacine? The very creature everyone believes is extinct?”

“We are extinct, love. I’ve searched all over Tasmania and the world looking for more like me. I’ve never found any.” He sighed.

Her eyes filled with sadness. “I can’t imagine what it feels like to know you’re the only one left. Even though I can’t see them, I know my sisters are still alive and happy, I hope.”

“It’s hard, especially when the forests are disappearing at an alarming rate. It’s hard to watch trees I’ve played under for years being cut down to accommodate the mortal’s world. There are no longer any safe places for shifters or even animals to live.” He closed his eyes and turned his head away to hide his tears.

She cupped his cheek and turned his gaze back to hers. “You’ll always have a place to live. The place by my side has your name on it whenever you want to take it.”

He kissed her with tender devotion. He felt his cock stir again, but the lust was at a low ebb that hadn’t turned into consuming passion yet. He smiled up at the night sky and thought how strange it was that he was lying in a forest with a burgundy faerie in his arms.

“What do you do for a living?” Alida asked. She realized that though she loved Cyno beyond her life, she didn’t know much about him.

“I’m a cryptozoologist.”

“A what?”

His chest rumbled with his laughter. “A cryptozoologist. I search for species that are supposed to be extinct or species that haven’t been discovered yet.”

“Like Big Foot or the Loch Ness monster?”

“Exactly like that. I work for an organization called International Cryptozoologists United or ICU. When reports come in about sightings or evidence, we go out and see what we can find. I have a friend who is on his way to Scotland because there’s been another Nessie sighting.”

“Mmm...” She could feel him harden against her thigh.

She spread her legs and straddled him. Her pussy was becoming wet, so she rubbed herself on him. Groaning, he reached up and palmed her breasts. Her back arched and pushed her nipples into his hands. Her passion flared to life as her wings unfurled with a snap.

He took her nipples between his fingers and thumbs and tugged on them. She felt the pull deep in her womb. Reaching behind her, she found him erect and ready. Alida joined

their bodies together by lowering herself onto his cock. When she thought she had him in as far as she could, Cyno shoved her thighs wider apart and thrust deeper.

She set the tempo. Slow and easy, she rose and lowered herself. He snarled and yelled at her to speed up, but he never tried to take control away. Finally, he slid one hand down her belly into the glistening curls covering her mound. His fingers found her throbbing clit and pressed. She threw her head back and screamed. Her wings pulsed with a deep purple light.

“Come on, baby. You can ride me faster.” She heard him plead.

Her rhythm picked up and soon their cries and groans filled the air. Her wildly beating wings created a breeze that cooled the sweat on their bodies. Nothing could tame the heat burning them up inside. Her inner muscles grasped his cock and were reluctant to allow him to pull out. His control snapped and he grabbed her hips. She screamed his name as he rammed into her. The blunt head of his shaft hit her sweet spot and orgasm ripped through her.

Her muscles clamped onto him and milked every drop of cum out of his body. She heard him calling her name over and over again before she allowed her mind to slide into blackness.

* * * *

She wasn't sure how much time had passed before either of them was able to move. His hands moved up and down her spine. She noticed how careful he was not to touch her wings. Sighing, Alida climbed off Cyno and stretched. Staring down at the man who had stolen her heart, she couldn't help but smile with joy.

“We should head back or Baxter will worry.”

“Is Baxter a faerie as well?” Cyno asked as he climbed to his feet with grace.

“Yes, he's my oldest friend next to my sisters.” She threw his clothes to him.

Humming a little tune, her skin went back to its golden shade and her wings became the pendant again. She rushed into her own clothes.

“Does he have powers like you?” Cyno lead the way out of the clearing.

“The only power Baxter has is the ability to translocate, which is moving his body distances. Unfortunately, while it's wonderful on Faeridae, here on Earth, it's a little different. What would only be seconds on our world takes several hours here, so he rarely uses it.” She slid her hand into his.

He smiled at her. “Is that what he did when you disappeared the other night?”

“Yes.” A sudden screech stopped her. “What was that?”

“It's just Beezie. He's been waiting for us.” He gestured to where the devil had been waiting under a bush.

“Oh.” She couldn't help but laugh when Cyno bent down and picked up the animal, acting for all the world like Beezie was just a regular cat. “Aren't devils known for being mean?”

“Beezie's rather grumpy most of the time and if he wasn't blind, he'd never allow me to touch him. He knows he needs me and that I'll never hurt him, so he trusts me.” He ran his hand over Beezie's head.

“He senses a kindred spirit in you. There's a wildness in your soul that he relates to.”

They walked quietly after that, both of them were absorbing the newness of their love. They understood their lives would be different from that moment on. Soon they

were standing outside Alida's cabin.

"Will you stay the night?" She asked before she opened the door.

"Not tonight. I have to run. The tiger inside is demanding it." He sat Beezie down and enveloped her in his arms. Kissing her thoroughly, she knew he was staking his claim. "I'll meet you at the falls tomorrow."

"Okay. Be safe." She wasn't going to stop him from running free. She stood in the doorway and watched him head back into the forest with Beezie close by his feet. A few minutes later, she climbed in bed and fell asleep when her head hit the pillow.

Chapter Eleven

Alida whirled around with a smile on her face when she heard her name. The smile died and annoyance replaced it. Her manager, Jason, stood a few feet from her. She was shocked at his appearance. His hair was greasy and matted. His clothes were filthy, but it was the cold crazed look in his eyes that put her on guard.

“Alida, I told you. You’re mine and I won’t share you,” he growled at her.

Frowning, she tried to figure out what was wrong with his voice. “Jason, what are you talking about?”

“I sent you flowers. I tried to warn you what would happen if you continued to flaunt yourself on stage. Just when I thought you had learned your lesson, you sleep with some stranger. How could you?” His voice cracked. It went deep and then high. It was as if two people were talking.

“I wasn’t yours. I’m no one’s. You can’t order me around or lock me up. Are you crazy?” So that wasn’t the smartest thing to say, she realized when Jason laughed and pulled a knife from his pocket.

“Yes, Alida, I’m crazy, but there’s enough sanity in me to know you have to die.”

Shock robbed her of her voice as Jason rushed her. She shifted fast enough to avoid the blade, but not far enough to avoid the fist he swung at her. It slammed into the side of her face and her head rocked back.

“What the hell’s gotten into you?” she cried as she tried to dodge his flailing hands.

She glanced around for help, but no one was at the falls that early in the morning. Where was Cyno? It figured the one time she met a man who might actually be helpful and he wasn’t around. She felt the prick of the knife blade. Shit, she’d better start paying attention and stop worrying about some man.

Jason fainted with the weapon, and she gasped when his fist tried to punch a hole in her stomach. Goddess, that hurt.

“Drop the knife,” a voice bellowed.

She took a chance to glance over Jason’s shoulder. A police officer stood there, his gun drawn and pointed at Jason’s back. Holy shit, the man was shaking so badly, he’d be lucky to hit a barn much less Jason. Her attacker ignored the order and lunged for her.

“What the fuck?” Alida heard the officer say as she dodged Jason one more time.

A bark sounded, and a dark brown and black striped body jumped between her and her agent.

Thank the Goddess. Cyno’s finally here. She could feel herself relaxing. In some strange way, she trusted her shifter to handle the problem. Sinking to her knees, she closed her eyes and sighed.

Her feelings of relief and anger were receding when a shot rang out and she heard Cyno’s yelp of pain. Struggling to her feet, she opened her eyes to see Jason contained by the combined strength of Steven and Baxter. The police officer’s hands were still shaking, but he was staring into the woods.

“What the hell did you just do?” She wanted to grasp the man and shake him, but figured he was already on the edge of hysteria. Turning, she looked at Baxter and Steven. “Who did he shoot?”

Jason laughed, but it was a high-pitched feminine voice that answered her. “You may have found a man, Alida, daughter of Lucraxious VII, but you’ve lost him because of his love for you. You caused his death.”

Steven hammered his fist into Jason’s jaw and the man slumped forward. “If my eyes didn’t deceive me, our dear law enforcement officer just shot a thylocine.”

“Damn. Which direction did it go?” Alida glanced around searching for a glimpse of the brown body.

“It ran off that way, but from the amount of blood on the ground, he couldn’t have made it far.” Steven pointed in the same direction the officer was staring.

Not saying a word, Alida took off running. She had to be in time to save him. He had put his life in danger for her. Now that she had finally found someone she loved and respected, she wasn’t going to lose him to death. She wouldn’t let the spirit who inhabited Jason’s body win.

Following the blood trail, she realized Cyno was heading to the clearing where they had made love. As she ran, she sang her song of change. By the time she reached the clearing, her wings were unfurled and she glistened deep burgundy, the same color that poured from Cyno’s chest.

He was lying in the middle of the clearing. The loss of blood must have depleted his strength, so he couldn’t hold on to his animal form. She knelt beside him and cupped his cheek.

“Oh, my love, what have I done to you?” Her voice broke.

His amber eyes opened slowly and he smiled at her. “You stole my heart and gave me someone to love.” He reached out to catch one of the tears trailing down her face. He glanced at the trees around them. “Maybe this is for the best. I think I’ve outlived my usefulness here in this world, Alida.”

“No!” she yelled at him. “This world might not need you, but I do and I’m not letting you die on me.”

Taking a deep breath, she placed her hands over his wound and closed her eyes. She started to hum and each note joined with another until a ball of lavender fire rested over her hands. Throwing her head back, she started to sing. With each note and word, the energy flowed from her into his body and his injury began to heal.

She forced every emotion she ever had into the healing. She sang of pain and loss. Her words of doubt and hopelessness slowly changed into words of assurance and joy. Love and passion swarmed their bodies. Damaged muscle and severed veins knitted back together and her strength began to wane. Looking down, she noticed that his chest was back to normal, but there was something else wrong. His heartbeat was faint and unsteady. Damn, he had lost too much blood. If she didn’t manage to send him enough strength, his heart would stop and she would be alone again.

Praying to the Goddess, she begged them to help her. She longed to feel Damia, Nortia and Albinia touching her because she would need their love and strength to bring Cyno back. A gentle brush across her mind and she knew Baxter was offering her what he could. He might not have any true power, but he had love and that was what she needed most. A wave of despair threatened to overwhelm her when Cyno’s heartbeat faltered. *Goddess. Where was her family when she desperately needed them?*

We are here, daughter. Her father’s voice echoed in her mind. *We will always be with you, even if we are on the other side of the world.*

In a staggering flash, she felt her entire family join their magic in with hers and Cyno's heart steadied. Opening her eyes, she looked down. Cyno's eyes fluttered open and tears filled hers when he smiled at her. The last of her strength slipped from her and she collapsed over top of him.

* * * *

"Alida, my love, open your eyes."

She heard Cyno's voice calling her from a distance. She frowned trying to remember why she had been worried about him. He sounded fine to her.

"Come on. They're going to be here soon and I don't think you want all of them seeing you like this."

Like what? She forced her eyes open just to get him to stop bugging her. He was leaning over her wearing a bloodstained shirt. She did a mental inventory of her body. The blood wasn't hers. Then her wings twitched and the memory came back to her. Shooting up, she reached for him.

"Are you okay?" She ran her hands over his chest.

He laughed and kissed her. "Yes, I'm fine. Thanks to you. Baxter and Steven are coming and I didn't think you wanted Steven to see you in your true form."

She shivered as he ran a finger over her wing. "You're right. Thank you. You should probably make sure he doesn't see your shirt. He might wonder why you have blood on it." She started singing and felt a twinge of fear when her magic didn't respond to her call right away. After he stripped the shirt off, Cyno took her hand and a fresh flow of strength came into her. Her voice rose and her wings shrank into the charm and her skin transmuted back into a golden gleam. She had enough magic to insure she wasn't naked when the men arrived. Her voice died just as the two men burst into the clearing.

Steven rushed towards them asking if they were all right. Baxter hung back and stared at Alida until she nodded at him. A smile broke over his face and he twirled around in a circle. She couldn't help but laugh at him.

"Silly faerie," she said affectionately as he knelt beside her.

Cyno didn't give up his hold on her hand, but he greeted the other faerie with a nod. "She's okay, I think. Probably just tired from the fight and then chasing after some silly animal."

Baxter hugged her and whispered in her ear, "I'm glad your silly animal is okay."

"The police have taken Jason off to jail. You'll have to go in and press charges, but everyone's pretty sure he's insane. He keeps talking about Alida being a faerie princess and he had to stop her from falling in love or some such stupid drivel." Steven smiled down at the three people on the ground.

"She can go to the police station after she's rested. I'll make sure she's all right," Cyno promised.

Baxter climbed to his feet and linked his arm with Steven's. "Come on. Let's go and regale your sister with the tales of your bravery." As he led Cyno's friend from the clearing, he looked back at them and winked.

Alida and Cyno laughed. He pulled her into his arms and pressed a kiss on the top of her head. "I was so scared when I realized what was going on. I wasn't sure I'd get there in time to stop him."

"You rescued me, but got hurt doing it. I wouldn't have traded my life for yours."

You will be my love forever and I'm not willing to let you go any sooner than I must.”

He laid her on the ground again and slid her clothes from her body. Staring down at her naked skin, he traced a line around her hard nipples. “I prefer your true form, my love, but you need to rest before you transform again.”

She watched him quickly slip out of his clothes. She welcomed him in her arms and into her body with a sigh. He rocked against her with slow and steady strokes. She kept her gaze on his face, trying to erase the memories of his life fading away under her hands. The passion built into an inferno even though she knew he was trying to make it last. Finally, she gripped his hips and brought him tight to her.

“Take me, Cyno. Make me remember you like this and not cold and dying beneath my hands.”

His control broke at her words and he drove into her. Hard and fast, he drove them both to a mind-blowing climax. When it hit, their voices joined together as they cried out each other's name.

As she fell back to Earth, she heard him say, “Alida, my love, I have found a home in your heart.”

Her mission was complete.

The End

About the Author:

Tiffany Aaron has always been writing. She still has one of the first stories she ever wrote about a time machine and talking mushrooms. While her head was in the clouds, her parents told her to prepare for the “real” world. So she got a degree and a job, but never stopped writing. Her favorite question is “What if?” and so a story is born.

She lives in Michigan with her loving husband. She has two dogs—one who believes he's human and the other who loves to hear the sound of her own bark. When she's not writing, she's reading or watching Jet Li movies. Please visit her at www.tiffanyaaron.com

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The Faerie Book Of The Symmetry

Chapter 28

The Union Of Four

“And so it was that Hadrea’s thirst for vengeance and the Ogre King Eskimond’s dark lust for young faerie were defeated by the power of love. King Lucraxious VII and Queen Amara remained united in the sacred bond of holy union, and the governed world below, Earthatopia, lived on, with a mere four fortunate men aware that their planet and all who inhabit it stood in jeopardy of annihilation.”

“But all was not to be well from that moment onward, as the faerie princesses soon returned to Faeridae. When Damia and Alida spoke to Albinia and Nortia of the prophesy and the genuine reason Lucraxious had sent his daughters away, the sisters turned on their parents. A verbal battle raged, until a quadruplet-sized ruckus rocked the land, threatening the symmetry of the very Kingdom of Faeridae.”

“But as has been learned in many generations before and many generations hence, the power of love is the greatest force of all. The rage soon died and the faerie sisters saw, not only the newfound love for another in each other other’s eyes, but the love they shared for the king and queen. And so it was, that while the long-ago actions of Lucraxious and Amara demanded the king send his daughters away, it was those same actions that brought true love and a forever mate into the heart and life of each faerie.”

“As the double suns of Faeridae reached their highest point on the twenty-eighth birthday of the faerie princesses, each princess was joined in the sacred bond of holy union with her intended Earthatopian male. And while each princess would live with her mate, on the governed world below, for this day they stood together, connected as they had been from birth and happier than any soul, be they fae, shifter, human or spider, could remember.”

The End

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