

A. O. E. M.: Matchmaker
Aubrey Ross

All rights reserved.
Copyright ©2005 Aubrey Ross

No part of this e-book may be reproduced or shared by any electronic or mechanical means, including but not limited to printing, file sharing, and email, without prior written permission from Changeling Press LLC.

ISBN (10): 1-59596-235-2

ISBN (13): 978-1-59596-235-5

Formats Available:

HTML, Adobe PDF,

MobiPocket, Microsoft Reader

Publisher:

Changeling Press LLC

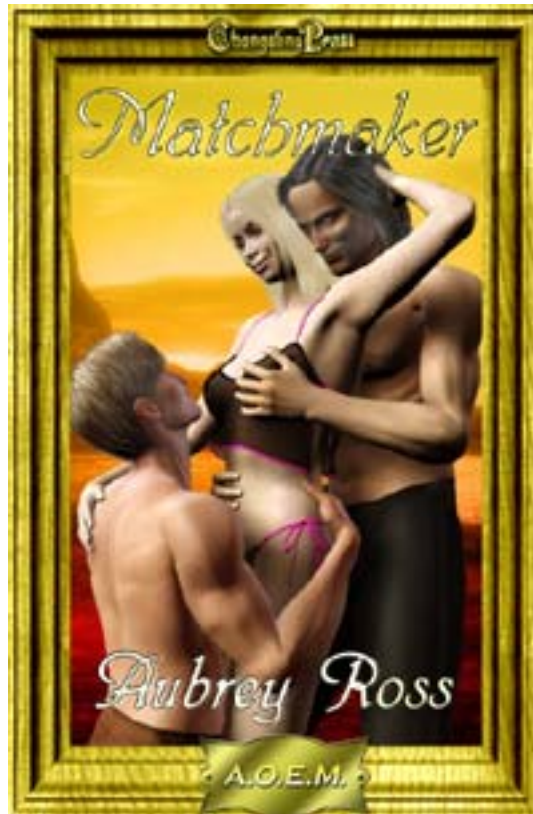
PO Box 1561

Shepherdstown, WV 25443-1561

www.ChangelingPress.com

Editor: *Maryam Salim*

Cover Artist: *Karen Fox*



This e-book file contains sexually explicit scenes and adult language which some may find offensive and which is not appropriate for a young audience. Changeling Press E-Books are for sale to adults, only, as defined by the laws of the country in which you made your purchase. Please store your files wisely, where they cannot be accessed by under-aged readers.

Chapter One

Falls Church, Virginia

Tapping his thumb against the glass tabletop, Sam Burton swept the mostly deserted restaurant with an impatient gaze. He'd done his best to clear his schedule for the afternoon, but fate conspired against him. *Where the hell is Yamir?*

The waitress set a large plate of food in front of the only other customer, a dark-haired man sitting on the other side of the room.

The main doors opened and sunlight spilled into the bistro. A tall, slender woman emerged from the glow. Her upswept hair glistened, a mesmerizing combination of silver and gold. The door swung shut behind her and the shimmering dissipated.

Sam glanced from the hostess to the dark-haired man. Hadn't they noticed the -- sparkling?

The woman approached the smiling hostess and said something Sam couldn't hear. His pulse leapt. Heat coursed through his veins and an unfamiliar yearning coiled in his abdomen. An erection wasn't far behind, but he didn't understand the other sensations.

Turning from the hostess with a smile, the woman started toward him. Desire slammed into Sam, making him adjust his position on his chair. Sleek black boots and burgundy stockings showcased the longest legs he'd ever seen. Her narrow skirt ended at mid-thigh, which left miles of those legs on display. After stealing a peek at her trim waist and gently curved breasts, he focused on her face. *Better late than never.* A guilty smile quirked one corner of his mouth.

Dramatically arched brows drew his attention to her bright, blue eyes. Even in the dimly lit dining room he could make out their vivid color. A pert nose, sculpted cheekbones, and full red lips... Damn, she was gorgeous.

She picked her way through the empty tables, her gaze fixed on him. The dark-haired man followed her progress while pretending not to stare.

"Mr. Burton?" Her voice played across his senses like warm summer rain.

Shaking away the distraction, Sam stood and extended his hand. "I'm Sam Burton, but you don't look much like Yamir."

"Sorry to disappoint you." Her devastating smile flashed again, framing even white teeth. She shook his hand, her grip warm and firm.

Sam pulled out her chair, then fisted his hands, resisting the urge to bury his fingers in her hair. *What the hell is wrong with me?* He'd seen beautiful women before. He cleared his throat and returned to his seat.

"It's no disappointment, I assure you." He had to stop gawking or he'd end up with a drink tossed in his face. Still, he couldn't drag his gaze away. "You are from the agency, aren't you?"

"Yes, sir. I --"

"Please, call me Sam."

"Sam." She inclined her head and he pictured her in an iridescent ball gown, candlelight reflecting off her smooth skin. Regal and ethereal, she belonged to another place and time. "My name is Marissa. I realize you contacted Yamir, but the agency felt I was better qualified to meet your needs."

His eyes widened and he licked his lips. Was this all there was to it? He'd expected a long drawn out process with more than one candidate. She laughed and the air around her sparkled. Tingles erupted across his forearms as the sparkles showered his skin.

"I'm a Matchmaker, not your next meal."

"A Matchmaker?" He groaned inwardly. *Pull it together, Burton. You sound like an imbecile!* Squaring his shoulders, he braced himself for her impact on his libido and

looked into her eyes. Specks of pink flickered in her gaze. "The agency sent you to process my application?"

"Something like that."

"Are you, by any chance, related to Yamir?"

"We're here to talk about you."

Yamir was an Elf or a Faerie, some sort of forest being. Sam knew Marissa wasn't human, he just couldn't determine what she *was*.

"Okay, I can see this is bothering you." She rested her elbows on the table and cupped her chin in one hand. Her voice fell to barely a whisper. "I'm a Faerie, you're a Dichotomy, and we're here to begin the process of finding you a mate."

Her patronizing tone snapped him out of his hormone induced stupor. "What do you need to get started?"

"How did you hear about the agency?"

"My sisters manage a nightclub called The Carousel. Yamir and Bianca are regulars when they aren't on Chimera Island. Bianca told Evette how she'd met Yamir through the A. O. E. M. and my older brothers, Ray and Delano, recently visited Chimera."

"I should've made the connection. I see the resemblance now."

"Do you know my brothers or my sisters?" He chuckled. "I don't think I look much like Evette."

"I met Ray while he was on Chimera. He's quite a character. How is Chelsea adjusting to... everything?"

"Very well." Chelsea was wonderful for his older brothers and they doted on her. Ray had been focused and content since his return from Chimera Island. Delano smiled frequently and even laughed from time to time. "I'll tell her you asked about her."

"Have you considered visiting Chimera? It's by far our most successful program. The tropical location and relaxing atmosphere lead to all sorts of adventures."

"There's no way. When Ray trotted off to Chimera without Delano's cooperation, Thane was furious."

"Thane is your twin?"

"Yes. Obviously he's nocturnal and I'm the day-dweller." Twin was a human term, but it was a relative equivalent to a Dichotomy's nature. Thane existed as pure energy during the day and emerged each night. Sam reverted to energy at night and took on a physical form during the day. Still, they were two halves of the same being.

"I was under the impression Nocturnal Dichotomies are dominant. Doesn't Thane have to initiate a soul bonding?"

He folded his hands on the tabletop and sighed. She appeared to have a grasp of the challenges facing him. Hopefully that would be the first step toward overcoming them.

A waitress approached, postponing his explanation. She asked what they wanted to drink. "I have an appointment in less than an hour," he told her and ordered his food as well. When the server departed, he turned back to Marissa and continued. "If I wait for Thane to initiate a soul bonding, I'll be too old to participate."

"I see. Is there some reason he's reluctant to search for a mate?"

"Have you heard of the Discernment?" She shook her head. "Certain Dichotomies are able to create a telepathic connection which allows potential mates to meet on a metaphysical level."

"Could you translate that into English, please?" His gaze focused on her lips. The sensual shape, the lush red sheen, she had a truly amazing mouth.

Clearing his throat, he fought back the unwanted awareness. She was the Matchmaker, not a potential match. "During a Discernment, three souls touch. It's a way of determining compatibility. A female must be compatible with both halves of our nature if we hope to reproduce."

"How do you know if the female is compatible?"

"By the intensity of the pleasure."

She grinned. "Ah, it's *that* sort of connection."

He glanced away from her knowing smile and his gaze collided with the dark stare of the other customer. Sam narrowed his eyes and the other man looked away. "Thane and I participated in a Discernment." Returning his attention to his companion, he continued, "The results were rather sketchy. Delano warned us that he couldn't pronounce the Discernment a success, but we didn't listen to him."

"What is Delano's role in the Discernment?"

"He's a Guide. He establishes the connection and objectively monitors the female's responsiveness."

Her brow arched. "That must be fun for him."

"He's one of the few Dichotomies who still moves in the gift. His services are in great demand."

"So, the Discernment was indecisive, but you pursued the female anyway."

"Yes." He paused, staring at the tabletop as he debated what to tell her. Marissa needed to know about Kayla, but he still wanted to throttle the little bitch every time he thought about her.

"I thought you were pressed for time." She softened the criticism with a playful smile.

"A soul bonding is different than having sex. Kayla willingly, no, eagerly, had sex with each of us. But when the time came to bond, she wanted nothing to do with us. Well, that's not exactly true. She refused to bind herself permanently to someone like Thane."

The waitress returned with their drinks and assured him his food would only take a few minutes longer. Marissa unwrapped her herbal tea bag and dropped it into a mug of steaming water. Her long tapered fingers fascinated him. He'd never thought hands were sexy before, but every move she made triggered images in his mind. He saw her trailing those long fingers across his chest, exploring his abdomen, circling his cock...

"Tell me about Thane. Why did Kayla find him so disagreeable?"

Sam chuckled. "Everyone finds him disagreeable." He took a moment to compose his thoughts. He didn't want to give her the wrong idea, but Thane could be a regular pain in the ass. "Thane has always been difficult. You might love them or hate them, but you'll never be indifferent to a Nocturnal Dichotomy. Thane manages Pyrite."

"Pyrite?" Her delicate brows drew together. "What is his interest in fool's gold?"

"You've never heard of Pyrite?"

"Sorry."

"They're a hugely popular rock band. Thane has been their business manager since Burton and Associates financed their first tour thirty some years ago. Of course, they've only been Pyrite for the last four or five years."

"How can you go to work every morning if Thane tours with a rock band?"

"I don't think you understand how big this band is. Thane's staff tours with the band. He negotiates their contracts and... This is all beside the point. Thane's office is at The Carousel. I can try and describe him, but it's best if you see him in action. Pyrite is playing a private party at the club tonight. It's an invitation only, end of summer bash. I'll make sure your name is on the list."

* * *

"I really don't think you should go to this thing alone." Bianca crossed her arms over her chest, her lovely features tense with concern.

"The Burtons own the club. How dangerous can it be?" Marissa waved away Bianca's concern and flipped to the next page in the entertainment magazine she held. The trip back to Chimera had taken longer than she planned. In her Faerie form she flew like the wind, but the jet stream was hell on her wings. "What about this one?" She held up a picture for her friend's consideration.

"Not... tawdry enough."

Marissa laughed. "To blend into this crowd, I'll need to look tawdry? Maybe I should ask Yamir to tag along."

"Maybe you should summon Lyell."

Yamir's family had adopted Marissa when she was abandoned in D'Arcy Aiden, the Elvin capital in the Unseleighe realm. Lyell was one of Yamir's three brothers and the mention of his name made Marissa pause. Lyell's ruthlessness was matched only by his temper. How could a party at The Carousel warrant the attention of the Unseleighe Sidhe's fiercest warrior?

"Tell me about this band," Marissa prompted.

Bianca took the magazine from her hand and thumbed through the pages. "I can't believe you haven't heard of Pyrite. You left D'Arcy Aiden almost a year ago." A lock of long, dark hair slid into her eyes. She tucked it behind her pointed ear. "The band is huge. I think their last CD went triple platinum. Here we go. The Carousel will be teeming with people like this."

Marissa looked at the picture and narrowed her gaze. That was definitely tawdry. Absorbing the image, she surrounded herself with glamour and turned to the full-length mirror.

Sleek black hair surrounded her pale face and thick eyeliner accented her eyes. Her lips gleamed with a red so dark it was nearly black and long tapered nails, the same deep red, extended from her fingers.

"This is interesting." A tiny black dress hugged every curve and hollow of her body, while fishnet stockings encased her legs. Black lace-up boots completed the ensemble.

"Damn, woman, you make goth look good."

"Thank you, I think. Are these boots right? They're so... clunky."

"They're perfect." Bianca tossed the magazine onto Marissa's bed, worry making her dark eyes shine. "No matter what they promise, don't let them take you downstairs."

Bianca was only a few years older than Marissa, but Yamir's over-protectiveness had rubbed off. Generally, Marissa took it all in stride. She'd been raised with four brothers, after all. Tonight she found it annoying.

"I'm not a complete idiot. This is recon, just like I do for all my clients." Turning from the mirror she took several steps, trying out the clunky boots. She was tempted to ask Bianca what she knew about Thane. The privacy clause in the A.O. E. M. contract held her back.

"Yamir told me about your assignment," Bianca said with a gentle smile.

"Stop reading my mind. It's rude. Assignments are supposed to be confidential."

"I'm his wife." Bianca waved away her concern. "Besides, I was standing there when Sam called."

"Sam said you and Yamir frequent The Carousel. How well do you know Thane?"

"Evette introduced us, but he isn't the talkative type."

Marissa sighed. Difficult, closed-mouthed, and gun shy. Yeah, finding a match for Thane should be a piece of cake.

"What did you think of Sam?" A knowing gleam ignited in Bianca's eyes.

"He's nice enough." If Bianca had been scanning her mind, she knew exactly what she'd thought of Sam. "Charming in a polished, ultra-urban sort of way."

Bianca laughed. "No one would ever guess you were raised by Dark Elves. Did you want to mess up his hair and wrinkle his clothes?"

She'd wanted to strip him naked and have her wicked way with him right there on the sturdy round table, but Bianca didn't need to hear her admit it. "I'm not worried about Sam. Women stand in line for men like him."

"Even those raised by the Unseleighe Sidhe?"

"I'm the Matchmaker. You already have a job."

Chapter Two

The forest beyond D'Arcy Aiden Unseleighe realm

Beneath a verdant canopy of primordial trees, the sorcerer paced. His boots crushed newly fallen leaves with each agitated step. He clasped his hands behind his back and glared at his spy.

"He escaped into the realm of mortals." His spy spoke with infuriating aplomb. Why wasn't she trembling before him? She knew the extent of his power. "We have no choice but to follow."

"There are always choices."

She inclined her head, but defiance flickered in her gaze before she masked it with her long lashes.

"Do you know where he went?" the sorcerer asked.

"Not yet, but it's only a matter of time before I learn his destination and motivation for leaving the Unseleighe realm."

"You're very sure of yourself." He narrowed his gaze on her beautiful face. She had served him faithfully for years. Why was he filled with trepidation?

"Have I ever failed you?"

She hadn't. Still, she kept herself separate from him, guarding her thoughts, and neglecting the sexual tribute all his other spies offered him. Her lush, young body and fiery spirit promised hours of pleasure if she ever relented on her refusal. His cock stirred just looking at her. He'd pressured her in the past and her next report had been filled with misinformation. He needed her eyes and ears, her uncanny ability to ferret out the truth, more than he needed her sweet pussy.

“Do you have news of the Halfling?”

“She believes the lies she was told and has no reason to doubt them now.”

The sorcerer nodded. “Watch her and report any variance, regardless of how insignificant. I want to know everything.”

* * *

Knowing she was running out of time, Marissa summoned an Escort and told him her destination. “The concert is scheduled to begin in less than an hour. I’m sure the club is already crowded. Can you set me down behind the building so no one sees me pop into view?”

But of course, the Escort’s raspy voice sounded in her mind.

Escorts gave her the creeps. Visible, yet non-corporeal, they existed between dimensions, creating gateways from one place to another. They reminded Marissa of the forest wraiths who fed on the fear of Elvin children.

She manufactured a smile. “I’m ready.”

The Escort swirled around her, a warm cloud of dense gray. She spun in a dizzying circle before she found her bearings in the mist. He swept her along with staggering velocity, driving the breath from her body. Weightlessness made her stomach lurch. She had no choice but to ride it out.

The driving bass beat of distorted music infiltrated the cloud. Had the concert already started? The Escort set her down and she stumbled back, her butt connecting with a concrete wall. She communicated her thanks as the Escort swirled away, leaving her alone in the gloom between two buildings.

Her head spun and her legs trembled. She braced her hands against her knees and dragged air into her burning lungs. She looked up, expecting to see stars. *Shit!* This wasn’t an alley. She was in a windowless passageway. Was she even in The Carousel?

Doorways lined the corridor, two on one side, and one on the other. There was only one way out. She crept forward. Getting arrested for breaking and entering would be the perfect start to the evening’s festivities.

Laughter penetrated the din followed by the rumble of deep voices. Marissa pressed against the wall as she neared the end of the hallway. She peered around the corner and into the room beyond. Black leather and bad attitudes. She got no more than an impression before she ducked back into the corridor.

Bianca's warning echoed through her mind. *No matter what they promise, don't let them take you downstairs.*

The music grew louder. Had someone opened a door? Slowly, keeping her body concealed by the wall, Marissa peeked around the corner. Lavishly decorated in crimson and gold, a large room spread between her and the staircase. A burly man stood at the top of the stairs as three young women hurried down.

"A blonde, a brunette, and a redhead," the man called out from the top of the stairs. "You need anything else, Mr. Steele, I'll be right outside this door."

"Thanks, Tom." One of the five men walked toward the stairs. Tall and lithe, he moved with hypnotic grace. Dark brown hair brushed his shoulders and his dark eyes flashed. "Welcome, ladies."

Mr. Steele? Marissa wanted to laugh. Couldn't he have thought of a more original stage name? He leaned toward each woman as they filed past. Was he *smelling* them?

Sexual energy pulsed. Marissa pressed a hand to her chest and licked her lips. Were these men the members of Pyrite? Shiny, dark hair, rawboned features, and hungry eyes, they certainly looked like rock stars.

Mr. Steele grabbed the brunette and pushed her up against the wall. He raised her arms above her head and pressed his face against her neck. She giggled and twisted. Ignoring her halfhearted struggle, he licked her throat from the underside of her jaw to her shoulder, over and over. Gradually her wiggling stilled. She arched her neck, offering him better access to her throat. Her lips parted and her eyes closed. He'd seduced her with nothing more than the stroke of his tongue. Marissa shivered.

The blonde went eagerly into the arms of one of the other men. His mouth covered hers and their tongues dueled. He cupped her breast and she raised one of her

legs to his hip, rocking her pelvis against his. No words, no pretense, just uninhibited carnality. Marissa had never seen anything like it.

Two of the men sandwiched the redhead between them. She kissed one while caressing the other's cock. The last man knelt behind the blonde. He pushed her skirt up and moved her thong aside revealing her damp folds.

Marissa glanced at the door, restless and hot. The only way out was through the orgy.

Her gaze returned to Mr. Steele. He stood against the wall now, pumping his cock between the eager lips of the brunette. With his eyes closed in pleasure, he arched his neck and opened his mouth. Fangs!

A hand clamped over her mouth and a strong arm banded her waist, trapping her arms against her sides. The clean, spicy scent of her captor's cologne filled her nose. She struggled against his hold, fighting back the instinctual transformation to her Faerie form. She knew that scent, remembered it from the bistro. She hadn't needed to find Thane, he'd found her.

"Where'd you come from?" He whispered the question just above her ear. How did he expect her to answer with his hand covering her mouth? He dragged her backward, pulling her inside one of the rooms off the hallway.

A spacious office lay beyond the doorway. He kicked the door shut, blocking out most of the noise. His forearm locked her in place, but he lowered his hand from her mouth.

"There are only two ways into that corridor, through the green room and through this office. I know you didn't come through here and somehow I doubt you made it through the green room without anyone noticing you."

"Why is it called a green room?" She even managed to sound calm.

He turned her to face him, his hands firm on her upper arms. "Who are you?"

Marissa stared into her captor's face, mesmerized by his masculine beauty. Angular features, slashing eyebrows, high, hollow cheekbones, each component

accented the others with stunning results. Black hair and vivid green eyes, what a lethal combination.

She focused on his eyes. Thick-lashed and enigmatic, the expression might be completely different but these were Sam's eyes.

"Like what you see?" One of his eyebrows arched, compounding the mockery in his tone.

"Are you with the band?"

His gaze narrowed. "If you want to get fucked by a rock star, there's the door." He pushed her away.

"I'm not a groupie." She rubbed her upper arms even though he hadn't hurt her. "I just wanted to see the show."

He laughed. "Mission accomplished. What did you think of the performance?"

"I thought this sort of thing went on after concerts. Don't they need to save their strength for the stage?"

"Where do you think all that raw sexuality and untamed energy comes from?" He leaned against his desk, arms crossed over his chest, stretching his tee shirt across sculpted muscles. "You still didn't answer my question. How did you get in here?"

"You dragged me."

"Funny girl."

She shrugged, forcing her gaze away from his handsome face. How could she explain her presence without giving herself away? "I don't have an invitation, so I teleported in from the alley. Apparently, I overshot my destination."

He stalked toward her. His gaze swept the length of her body before settling on her face. Indolent, arrogant as hell, he exuded confidence and menace. "You're a Pyrite fan?"

She nodded, her mouth going dry.

"What's the lead singer's real name?"

"Nosferatu."

Pressing her back against the door, he caged her with his body. "Is that what this is about? Are you here to find out if the members of Pyrite are vampires?"

"Mission accomplished," she whispered.

"Did you get more than you bargained for, little girl?"

She could barely hear his words over the roaring in her ears. Her nipples gathered and a slow, melting sensation spiraled through her abdomen. This is how she'd felt in the bistro. Mixing business with pleasure was a recipe for disaster. Everyone knew that. She wasn't here to fuck his brains out, this was simple recon!

She licked her lips. His gaze focused on her mouth.

"There's fear in those big blue eyes, but this," he cupped her mound, "is what I smell."

Heat sank into her flesh. Her pussy throbbed as his fingers eased between her thighs, bunching her dress, teasing her folds.

"Tell me when you've had enough."

He curved his other hand around the nape of her neck, tilting her head up and back. His mouth covered hers. He caressed her with his lips, while his fingers drew her skirt up along her thigh. She clutched his thick biceps, her body quaking with the need for release.

You might love them or hate them, but you'll never be indifferent to a Nocturnal Dichotomy. Had Sam known what would happen? Had he sent her to Thane to be seduced?

Thane slipped his fingers inside her panties as his tongue parted her lips. She buried her hands in his hair, luxuriating in the softness. Exotic and faintly smoky, his taste rolled across her tongue. She tilted her head and took the kiss deeper, savoring his taste, inhaling his scent, aching for more of him.

He hooked her knee over his elbow and parted her thighs. She couldn't do this. She had to stop him, but her body wanted him -- demanded him. Pushing two fingers into her slick core, he moaned into her mouth. She squeezed his fingers as his thumb found her clit.

“Come for me, sweetness. I need to feel you come.”

The hoarse demand in his words sent tingles up her spine. He needed to feel her pleasure and she needed release. Arching into the subtle movement of his hand, she kissed him with all the passion surging through her body. Wild, hot, ravenous, she couldn't get enough.

He sucked her lower lip into his mouth and spread his fingers inside her. She cried out, shaking in his arms as pleasure burst within her. After the last spasm passed, he released her lip and soothed it with gentle licks. Marissa clutched his shoulders. His fingers were still inside her.

Staring into her eyes, he drew his fingers out and methodically licked her cream from his fingertips. She held her breath, imagining his mouth pressed against the apex of her thighs, moving over her, demanding, devouring.

“This isn't why I came here,” she whispered.

“I don't care why you came, but I sure like the way you come.” He moved closer, rubbing the distinct ridge of his cock against her mound. “Are you ready for more or have you had enough? Do you want to hear what I want to do now?”

“I have a pretty good idea.” Her hands rested on his shoulders as he pressed her against the door. “I'm not going to fuck you, Thane, so you might as well --”

“How do you know my name?” His tone snapped with demand and his gaze narrowed. “Who the hell are you?”

She disentangled her leg and crossed her arms over her aching breasts. What a mess she'd made of this one. “I told you who I am.” He made no move to stop her when she pushed away from the door and slipped beyond him.

He turned as she moved past him, his gaze assessing her face with a combination of speculation and menace. He opened the door and stepped halfway into the hall. His body blocked her retreat -- as long as she remained in this form.

“Rafe, come here for a minute.”

Who was Rafe? Thane had said one of the ways into the corridor was through his office. She looked at the other side of the room. There were three additional doorways. Did one lead to a staircase?

Mr. Steele ambled into the office. His black leather pants were fastened now, but he hadn't bothered to don a shirt. "What's up?" His casual tone didn't fool her for a second. His eyes were ravenous.

"I think we've got a reporter on our hands, and she saw you guys feed."

"Really?" Rafe moved toward her, his predatory grace spellbinding. "What makes you think she's a reporter?"

"She was playing dumb earlier," Thane said. "Now she suddenly knows my name."

"You know how I hate reporters."

Chills sped down Marissa's spine. Okay, time to fly. "I'm not a reporter and you're both assholes." She transformed into her Faerie form and flew toward the open door.

With preternatural speed, Rafe kicked it closed. "She's a Faerie."

"I see that." Thane followed her zigzagging path with remarkable ease. "Come on, Tinkerbell, we're not going to hurt you."

She ignored him and circled the room. There had to be an air vent or some other way out.

"I've never seen a Faerie before. Her wings are beautiful." Was he mocking her? Marissa charged him, flying directly into his face. The vampire laughed and stumbled back a step. "Oh, she's feisty."

A perfunctory knock preceded her rescue. Someone eased the door open and Marissa flew through the opening and down the corridor as fast as her wings would carry her.

* * *

"Was that a Faerie?" Evette asked, clearly dumbfounded.

"In the flesh," Thane muttered. "She's a long way from home."

"Do you think she'll be a problem?" Rafe asked.

"It's hard to say." Thane slipped behind his desk and sat. "I don't think she had a camera, but her story was bullshit."

Rafe turned to Evette. "Don't you know some Faeries? Maybe they can tell us who Tinkerbell is."

"Yamir and Bianca are Elves, not Faeries."

"I didn't realize there was a difference."

"Elves can't turn into insects and fly away down the hall." Thane drummed his fingers against his desktop, lost in speculation.

"Why did you have her trapped in here?" Evette shook her head before he could answer and turned back to Rafe. "Your band is upstairs and the crowd is getting restless. Can this conversation wait?"

"No problem, doll." He kissed both her cheeks and headed for the door. Pausing with his hand on the latch, he turned back and smiled at Thane. "Don't worry about the Faerie. Even if she has pictures, it wouldn't be the first time I've been accused of being a vampire."

Chapter Three

Squinting into the midday sun, Marissa paged through the files on her notebook computer, her mouth pressed into a worried frown. Her preliminary search had turned up three possible matches for the Burton brothers. This was her job. It was her responsibility to unite people who might not otherwise find each other.

So why did her heart ache just thinking about Sam and Thane with someone else?

As if to mock her inappropriate attraction, Sam strolled into the sun-drenched park. He'd discarded his suit jacket and loosened his tie, but he looked every inch the affluent executive. His golden hair had been impeccably styled, short on the sides and in back, while longer on top. The wavy strands gleamed in the sun, drawing her attention like a beacon.

He smiled as he approached, showcasing even white teeth and the distinct brackets framing his mouth. "Good afternoon."

"Good afternoon." Her treacherous body melted and her toes curled. Where was her professional detachment? He was a client, for heaven's sake.

He sat beside her on the park bench, his green eyes intent upon her face. "What did you think of Thane?"

"He's... intense."

Sam chuckled. "One of the nicer adjectives attributed to my darker half."

Had Sam heard about the Faerie Thane caught spying outside his office? Did Sam know Thane had kissed her and touched her intimately? There was nothing in his demeanor indicating he knew, and Marissa preferred to leave it that way.

Sam motioned toward her computer. "How is the search coming?"

"After meeting Thane," she cleared her throat, "I completed your profiles and ran them through our program." She slid the computer so half rested on her leg, the other on his. He scooted closer, placing his arm on the back of the bench. Heat seeped into her back and her thigh. He wasn't even touching her! She opened the first profile. "This is Selma Duvall. She's mildly telepathic and --"

"She's too young."

"She's twenty-four."

He shook his head. "Too young."

"I wish you'd specified an age range yesterday. The second match is twenty-two."

His gaze caressed her face and his fingers trapped a lock of her hair, absently stroking the strands. "How many possible matches did the computer produce?"

"Three, but this is just the preliminary run. I can adjust various elements until we find the right person."

"Tell me about number three."

"She's thirty-two. Her personality profile indicates she would be grounded enough for you, yet open-minded enough to enjoy Thane's intensity. She owns her own business." Marissa hesitated over the last two facts. Many men might consider them hurdles. "She has a child from a previous marriage."

"I love children, but I'm not sure Thane is ready for that sort of responsibility. Is she human?"

"Her father is human. Her mother is -- a mermaid."

"Does she have to live near the ocean?"

"I'm afraid so."

Sam shook his head. "I don't know. She would have to be extraordinary for us to relocate. I'm not disqualifying her, but why don't you adjust the parameters and run another search."

"Don't you want to see her profile?"

"I try not to get caught up in appearances. There are so many other things that are more important. Now if you'd said she was part troll, I'd probably want to see her."

"All right." Marissa powered down her computer and put it away. If he wasn't interested in appearances, why had his gaze not left her face?

"Let's walk around the lake."

Her heart fluttered and tingles spread out from between her thighs. If just the timbre of his voice aroused her senses, what would she do if he touched her? She better limit her contact with him and keep it strictly professional.

"Sorry, I didn't really dress for a stroll." She raised her foot off the grass, drawing his attention to her high-heeled pumps.

"Take them off."

"I'm wearing silk stockings."

"I noticed."

She licked her lips as tension coiled through her feminine core. *Run like hell, Marissa! You don't sleep with your clients.*

"I'll buy you a new pair." His voice was soft and low. "Or better yet, take them off too."

She chuckled. "Right. Hike up my skirt and unfasten my garters right here in a public park."

One of his eyebrows arched as he smiled. "Haven't you ever done anything naughty in a public park?"

"Not in broad daylight."

"Well, it's about time you did." With challenge shining in his eyes and a sexy smile playing about his mouth, Sam crouched in front of her and slipped off her shoes.

Marissa looked around the park. There weren't that many people despite the mild autumn day. A couple walked hand in hand on the other side of the lake, and two teens threw a Frisbee as their dog barked and jumped trying to intercept the disk.

Sam's warm fingers caressed her calf, drawing her attention back to him. "I liked the short skirt better. You have fabulous legs." She sucked in a breath as his hands reached her knee.

"You shouldn't be doing this," she whispered, her blood rushing through her veins.

"Why? No one can see anything."

"Except your hands up my skirt," she protested with a breathless laugh.

He found the clasps on her garter belt and freed the stocking. She clutched the edge of the bench as he repeated the process with her other leg. His gaze bore into hers, narrowed and intense, while his fingers deftly worked beneath her skirt. He rolled down her stockings, caressing his way to her ankles before slipping the stockings off.

She exhaled a ragged sigh, lips parted, pulse pounding.

"Doesn't that feel better?"

No! She could barely breathe. He tucked her stockings inside her shoes and picked up her computer case. Slipping the strap over his shoulder, he held out his free hand. She placed her hand on his palm and his warm fingers closed around hers.

A gentle wind rustled the tree branches and cooled Marissa's burning cheeks as they strolled along the asphalt path. It was a glorious afternoon. Summer's warmth had yet to surrender to the brutal demands of winter. All around them leaves danced in the breeze, gold, copper and crimson.

"How long have you worked for the agency?" His fingers still surrounded hers.

"A little over a year." She pulled her hand free and reached for her shoes, which dangled from his fingertips. "I did research for several months before I was approved as a field agent."

"So, when you're not in the field, your home is on Chimera Island?"

"Yes."

They lapsed into silence. Tension gripped her heart like a fist.

"I dreamed about you last night."

She looked into his passion-bright eyes and the world tipped out of balance. This couldn't be happening. She reached for her computer. He turned his shoulder away and cupped the side of her face with his hand.

"It's elemental with Dichotomies. We're either compatible or we're not. I know you feel it, Marissa." He leaned in, his eyes staring deeply into hers, compelling, demanding, caressing.

She averted her face and his lips brushed her cheek. "I can't do this. You're my client." He didn't stop her when she slipped her computer case from his shoulder. "I'll contact you when I have more selections."

* * *

Marissa sat at her computer three days later, searching the agency's archives. Sleep had eluded her despite her fatigue. Flying back to Chimera Island should have cleared her head and calmed her nerves. Nothing was as relaxing as the sun on her face and the wind beneath her wings.

Her thoughts returned again and again to Sam and Thane. She remembered Sam's playful smile, his warm hands caressing her legs. She felt Thane's fingers moving between her thighs, heard his voice, felt the warm brush of his breath against her lips. Her heart beat so fast she could hear nothing else.

She closed her eyes and rubbed the bridge of her nose. They were her clients! She couldn't allow herself to think of them in any other context. Sam had contracted her to find them a bonded mate and that was exactly what she was going to do.

Despite her determination, her mind continued to wander. Her fixation with Thane didn't surprise her. Danger attracted her like a moth to a flame, a fact that drove her brothers crazy. But what about Sam? Slick, sophisticated men generally left her indifferent.

Unbidden, the image of the red-haired groupie flittered to life within Marissa's mind. What would it be like to have two men focused entirely on her pleasure? Four hands would stroke her flesh. Two mouths would suck and nibble...

Someone tapped on her office door. "Come in." Marissa opened her eyes and found Bianca standing in the open doorway.

"Are you all right?"

"I'm not sure." Bianca knew her too well. She'd never be able to brush her concerns aside. Perhaps she could sidetrack her. "Did you realize the members of Pyrite are vampires, or at least the lead singer is?"

"Rafe Steele is a vampire? Wait a minute. When and how did you find this out?"

"The freaking Escort deposited me in the basement of The Carousel. Let's just say the members of Pyrite don't like to perform on an empty stomach."

"You saw them -- feed?"

"More or less. I saw Rafe's fangs and then Thane grabbed me and pulled me into his office."

Bianca finger combed her hair out of her eyes and she sat in the chair in front of Marissa's desk. "Thane caught you spying on the band? No wonder you look like shit. What did he do to you?"

Not nearly as much as I wanted him to do.

"Don't let Yamir hear you say that or --"

"I didn't say anything. Stay the hell out of my mind!"

Bianca paused, staring at her for a long, silent moment. "What's going on, Marissa? I've never seen you like this."

"I don't know what's wrong with me." She swallowed and averted her gaze. "They... When I met Sam... If it were just Thane, I could understand it, but Sam..."

"If you want me to stay out of your mind, you're going to have to complete a sentence."

Marissa raked her fingers through her hair and looked at her friend. "When the agency transferred this case to me, I did background research on Dichotomies."

"There's nothing unusual in that, is there?"

"No. They're fascinating really. We didn't know much about them until Ray and Delano used our service."

"You're rambling."

Marissa sighed and did her best to focus her thoughts. "According to our records, when a female is compatible with their physiology she -- responds to them. It's like an aphrodisiac."

"This only affects females who are compatible with their physiology?" Marissa nodded. "They make you horny as hell, so you think *you're* their bonded mate?"

"I don't know." Marissa pushed away from her desk and stood. "I've never felt this way before. I can't concentrate. I'm crawling out of my skin and it's completely inappropriate."

"When have you ever worried about what's appropriate?"

"I don't want a bonded mate, much less two."

"Then transfer the case to someone else."

"I don't want to."

Bianca laughed. "Go talk to Chelsea. She's just been through this. Maybe she can help you understand what's happening to you."

* * *

"Has it ever been done before?" Chelsea asked Delano.

Marissa held her breath as she waited for his answer. The family resemblance between Thane and Delano was unmistakable, though Delano's eyes were blue.

"I've never conducted a Discernment this way, but I don't see any reason why it wouldn't work. I'm just not sure it's the wisest choice for Sam and Thane."

She released her breath and scooted to the edge of her chair. "When you brought them together with Kayla was the Discernment itself unpleasant?"

"No. But Thane is adamant in his refusal to participate in another one."

"You didn't ask my permission before you and Sam visited me," Chelsea pointed out. "You told me the primary reason for a Discernment is to assess compatibility on an *instinctual* level."

"I don't know what else to do." Marissa glanced away from Delano's assessing stare. "I've tried ignoring the urgency and it only gets worse. Can Thane be any less cooperative than he is now?"

"I'll Guide you, but be prepared for his hostility."

She nodded. "Can you bring us all together then go away? I really don't want you to watch."

He chuckled, his gaze straying to Chelsea. "I've facilitated hundreds of Discernments. You don't need to be embarrassed."

"You won't even know he's there," Chelsea assured her.

Marissa fidgeted, her gaze moving from Chelsea to Delano and back. "It doesn't bother you that he watches other couples have sex?"

"Being a Guide is as much a part of Delano as Ray is. He was born with the gift and it would be a great disservice to his people if he didn't use it."

"If I decide to do this, how would it work?"

"Our physical bodies don't require sleep as often as humans do, but we do require sleep. About once a week, each twin sleeps for a few hours before the transition. Sam is sleeping now, so this would be an ideal time to attempt a reverse Discernment."

"But Chelsea told me Ray has already transitioned. Doesn't it happen at the same time for all of you?"

"The transition takes place around dawn and dusk. It's not an exact science." He paused for a lazy smile, another Nocturnal Dichotomy characteristic. "Sleep slows the onset. You should have plenty of time."

"And if I'm not ready to do it right now?"

He shook his head. "Are you always so contrary?" She smiled. "You can attempt to ignore the urgency and I'll conduct the Discernment next week while Thane sleeps."

Marissa rubbed her arms, restless and uncomfortable. "I guess now is good."

Chelsea took her to a guestroom on the second floor of the massive house. "Do all the Burtons live under one roof?"

“I have a house on the other side of town. This is closer to the Burton and Associates’ office and my house is closer to the campus where I teach. We spend time in both places.”

Marissa slipped off her shoes and sat on the bed. “You seem so well adjusted. I’m not sure I could accept it all without blinking an eye.”

“Don’t kid yourself. It has changed my life in more ways than I can count. Not all of the changes are easy, but the rewards are well worth it.”

“Do I need to undress?”

“Nope. Delano will guide them into your mind and they should do the rest.”

Accepting her assurance with a stiff nod, Marissa climbed onto the bed and lay down. Chelsea slipped from the room and Marissa tried to relax. Dark Elves were all telepathic to one degree or another. She’d always envied their ability to speak mind to mind.

Close your eyes and concentrate on your breathing. I’ll bring Sam to you first.

Delano sent a calming pulse along with the words. She closed her eyes and inhaled deeply, releasing her breath in a slow, even stream. Sensation faded, then refocused with increased intensity. She gasped, her skin prickled, and her eyelids stung.

Open your eyes.

She obeyed Delano’s directive and found herself in bed with Sam. His long, lean body stretched out beside her on his back. “Oh my,” she whispered, the words audible. This was far more vivid than any dream. She hadn’t expected a “touching of the souls” to be so tangible.

She caressed his shoulder, marveling at his warm, firm flesh. His torso rippled with muscular definition, narrowing dramatically at the waist. Lean hips gave way to strong legs. Her gaze returned to the apex of those legs and her mouth dried up. Even relaxed and flaccid his cock was impressive, long and thick, with the promise of breath-stealing proportions once aroused.

Licking her lips, she dragged her gaze from his naked body and ventured a glance at herself. No wonder she didn’t need to undress; just like Sam, she was naked.

His eyelids flew open and he sprang up, confusion twisting his expression. He looked around the guestroom, then focused his gaze on her. "Marissa."

Tingles danced along her nerve endings and her heart missed a beat. He pulled her into his arms, sweeping her beneath him. His aggression made her gasp. She expected Thane to play a little rough, but Sam was gentle and refined. Wasn't he?

His mouth captured hers in a demanding kiss that muddled her thinking. He pulled her arms above her head and held them there as his tongue plundered her mouth. Her head spun. Her heart pounded and fire erupted in her blood.

Yes! This was what she needed, craved. He cupped her breast and nudged her thighs apart, kneeling between her legs.

"I've dreamed of you, thought of nothing but you. I'm so glad you're here."

His words thrilled her almost as much as his touch. He wandered along her throat, teasing her skin with his tongue and his teeth. He wanted her, longed for her as she longed for him. His warm fingers rolled her nipples, making them tingle.

She combed her fingers through his hair. The color might be lighter than Thane's, but the silky texture was identical. Where was Thane? The Discernment was supposed to bring them all together.

Sam closed his lips around one of her nipples and laved it with his tongue. She pressed him closer, urging him on. Suckling with long, steady pulls, he sent heat curling deep into her abdomen. Her body pulsed, eager for release, anxious to explore the sensations she'd repressed over the last few days.

Scooting down along her body, he pushed her legs up and back. "So beautiful." His warm breath teased her curls as he lowered his mouth to her slit. She trembled, waiting for the first brush of his tongue.

"Do you want me to taste you?" His voice was throaty, thick with emotion.

"Yes."

"Then show me. Part the way for my tongue."

She skimmed her hands along her body and parted her folds. He circled her clit with his tongue, keeping his touch light, the barest hint of contact. She arched her hips, pressing herself against his mouth. He chuckled. "You're a greedy little sprite."

He pushed a finger into her core and Marissa gasped. "Yes! More. I need you inside me."

"We have to wait for Thane. If you don't accept him, we can't bond."

Should she tell him Thane had already kissed her, touched her, brought her to climax? Sam's finger moved in her pussy and his tongue flicked her clit. Marissa moaned. He added a second finger and the first ripples of an orgasm erupted between her thighs.

He pumped his fingers into her, stimulating her clit with ruthless flicks. She rocked her hips and tightened her inner muscles, absorbing the pleasure while she longed for more substantial penetration.

Thrusting his fingers deep, he caught her clit between his lips and sucked. She cried out. Each careful pull of his lips triggered another wave of pleasure.

"What the fuck is going on? We are *not* doing this again."

Sam kissed her inner thigh, pulled his fingers out of her tingling core, and turned to face Thane. "I didn't initiate this. Marissa did."

Still shaky from the orgasm Sam unleashed in her, Marissa got to her knees. Thane stood at the foot of the bed, gloriously naked, fists on his hips. His mouth pressed into a grim line and fury burned in his gaze. Maybe this wasn't such a good idea.

Chelsea said the passive participants only remembered a Discernment when it was successful. What did she have to lose? She had to know why they set her senses on fire with just an appreciative look, why she couldn't banish their faces from her mind, or her imagination. Crawling off the side of the bed, she crept toward Thane. His gaze moved over her naked body with obvious interest.

She stood before him, waiting. All he had to do was raise his hand.

He didn't move.

“Touch me,” she whispered. “I want you to.”

“This doesn’t mean anything,” he sneered, then pounced.

Sam knelt on the bed beside them. Thane turned her and pushed her against Sam’s chest. Sam guided her arms up and back until her hands touched behind his neck. She interlaced her fingers as if her wrists were bound. Excitement surged through her with staggering force. Being with one or the other only satisfied to a certain point. She longed to feel the three of them moving together as one.

Thane stroked her body from neck to knees, never lingering in one place for long. Sam caressed her breasts and nibbled on her earlobe. Taking her face between his hands, Thane stared into her eyes. Passion’s heat emanated from his gaze, but anger and mistrust tainted the emerald flame.

Using just the tip of his tongue, he traced her mouth. She parted her lips in silent invitation. He chuckled and shook his head. Working his way from one corner of her mouth to the other, he nipped then soothed the sting with a slow stroke of his tongue. She whimpered, desperate for his kiss.

“If you won’t kiss her, I will,” Sam growled. He turned her head, angling her face so he could reach her mouth. Thane bent to her breasts as Sam kissed her, stroking his tongue over hers and filling her with the taste of her own desire.

Thane suckled one nipple as he worked the other to a tight peak with his fingers. So many sensations, Marissa could hardly breathe.

Kneeling in front of her, Thane combed his fingers through the damp curls covering her mound. Marissa whimpered. She’d wanted him to do this that night in his office, had imagined his mouth on her pussy every night since. He parted her folds and paused. She trembled, her fingers clenching until her knuckles ached.

“Do I need to show you how it’s done?” Sam snapped.

Thane lifted her leg to his shoulder and thrust his tongue into her cunt. Marissa cried out in frustration. She needed his tongue on her clit! He moved in and out, pressing his mouth flush with her folds so he could reach even deeper. Sam kissed her

tenderly, matching the movement of his tongue to Thane's. She squirmed. Thane grabbed her hips, holding her still, while his tongue fucked her.

"Stop being a bastard, Thane." There was definite warning in Sam's tone. "Make her come."

Thane pushed away from her and stood. "I'm not *making* her do anything. She started this."

Hurt and humiliated, Marissa struggled out of Sam's embrace. "And I'm ending it. Delano, get me out of here."

"Marissa, wait!"

Sam's voice echoed through her mind. She opened her eyes, tears blurring her vision. She was alone in the guest room, her heart aching unbearably. She crawled off the bed and stepped into her shoes. Easing open the window, she transformed into her Faerie form and escaped into the night.

Chapter Four

"Who the hell is Marissa?"

Sam cringed as Thane shouted the question for the second time. "I sort of hired her."

"What?"

"Stop shouting at me!" Sam stormed from their bedroom and knocked on the door to Delano's office.

"It's open."

Sam entered, Thane close behind. "Where is she?"

"While you two were screaming at each other, she left."

"Wonderful!"

Thane turned on Delano. "Why did you agree to -- whatever the fuck that was? I told you I'd never participate in one of your little rituals again."

"They aren't just rituals, and from what I sensed, you should have paid attention."

Thane glared at Delano and Sam by turns. "What's that supposed to mean?"

"Did Kayla remember the Discernment?"

"Not really."

"That fact above all others convinced me she wasn't your soul mate. If a Discernment is successful, the passive party remembers the pleasure."

"What are you getting at?"

Sam watched Delano closely. Could this mean what he thought it meant? Sam felt something stir every time he was near Marissa. Deeper than lust, more complicated than physical attraction, he'd never experienced the sensation before. She must feel it

too or she never would have sought out Delano. Touching her, tasting her had filled him with passion and longing like he'd never imagined.

"You didn't even get to the pleasure," Delano said. "Yet you remember Marissa clearly."

Thane faced him, dismissing Delano with a hostile look. "Who is she?"

He'd finally stopped shouting. Sam hated to rile him again. "She works for the Agency of Extraordinary Mates."

"In what capacity?"

He crossed his arms over his chest, resisting the urge to smack Thane. "She's a Matchmaker. I hired her to --"

"Oh, this is rich." He snorted. "You hired her to find us a mate and she set her sights on *you*?"

"I feel what you feel, you irrational prick. You wanted her!"

"Hell yes, I wanted her. She may have been the most beautiful woman I've ever seen." Thane took a deep breath, his eyes still flashing. "You're a few days too late. I met someone special the other night. Marissa can't be our soul mate because I think Tinkerbell is."

Sam laughed, which only made Thane scowl harder. "Tinkerbell? You met a woman named Tinkerbell?"

"That's not her real name. I don't know her real name."

"If you met someone special, why doesn't Sam know about her?" Chelsea asked from the doorway.

"For the same reason I knew nothing about Marissa," Thane defended. "I recite song lyrics during transition and he quotes stock returns."

"How mature." She crossed the room and Delano pulled her down onto his lap.

"When and where did you meet this Tinkerbell?" Delano asked.

"At The Carousel, Friday night."

"You want us to bond with a groupie?" Sam shook his head. "Marissa is beautiful and intelligent, accomplished and respected, but you'd rather have a Pyrite groupie?"

"I never said she was a groupie. I think she's a reporter and I've been busting my ass to find out who she is."

"I don't understand," Chelsea said. "Why don't you know who she is?"

"I caught her in the basement of The Carousel, spying on the band. She was in the corridor outside my office and I couldn't figure out how she got there. I invited her inside so we could discuss it."

"Meaning you dragged her into your office and proceeded to seduce her?" Chelsea grinned, undaunted by Thane's dark mood.

"Close enough."

"What makes her different from your flavor of the week?" Sam knew there was more to the story and they were running out of time. He could feel the transition beginning deep inside of him.

"I knew it as soon as I touched her. She's the one. But she pulled her Tinkerbell act before I could find out her name."

"Tinkerbell? Like Peter Pan?" Sam laughed as cramps gripped his abdomen. "Was this amazing reporter, by chance, a Faerie?"

"Why is it so damn funny?"

"She wasn't spying on Pyrite, you asshole, she was spying on you." Sam surrendered to the transition, allowing his physical form to disperse. "Your elusive Tinkerbell is Marissa!"

* * *

The sorcerer skidded to a halt as he entered his bedchamber. A female Elf knelt on the middle of his bed, naked, eyes downcast. Long, dark hair flowed around her, the ends pooling on the mattress.

"How did you get in here?" His voice snapped with demand.

She gathered her hair and moved it behind her shoulders, exposing her firm breasts and the message suspended around her neck on a silken cord. One corner of his mouth quirked as he examined her lissome body. Her long legs were folded beneath her and her hands rested on her parted thighs. He only glanced at her hairless mound and delicate folds before raising his gaze to the message.

He untied the cord and slipped the message free. The Elf sat still and silent, even when his fingers brushed her breast.

Breaking the wax seal, he unfolded the parchment and read:

I have located your lost assassin. It is worse than we thought. He has found the Halfling, though he has yet to make a move. I am monitoring the situation, but I believe this requires your personal attention.

Anticipating how upsetting you will find this news, I have sent you a gift. I hope I have not been too bold.

The message was not signed.

* * *

"You want me to do what?"

Rafe looked at Thane with such incredulity Thane chuckled. "Be my bloodhound for the night," he repeated. "I have to find someone and I need your help."

"I'm a vampire, you moron, bloodhound means something completely different to me."

"I don't swing that way and you know it."

"Neither do I," Rafe insisted, "which is why your request freaked me out."

"I have something she touched. Can you sense where she is if you touch it?"

"That depends on what you want me to touch and where you touched her with it." Rafe laughed and slapped Thane on the back. "If you whip out your cock, man, I'm out of here."

"I don't have time for your sense of humor tonight. Can you help me or not?"

"Do you have a plan B?"

"No," Thane grumbled.

"Then ask me nicely."

"You are such a pain in the ass."

"That wasn't nice at all."

Thane clenched his jaw then expelled a ragged breath and handed Rafe the pillowcase. "Would you please touch this and see if you can sense where Marissa is?"

"Pretty please."

"Don't push it."

Rafe buried his face in the pillowcase inhaling deeply. Thane hid his smile. And Rafe wondered why he called him a bloodhound.

"She's in a hotel room, could be anywhere." Rafe handed the pillowcase back to him. "She looks mighty unhappy. What'd you do to her?"

"That's a long, complicated story."

"She's gorgeous, by the way. Who is she?"

"That was Tinkerbell."

"No shit? The goth babe from the other night is really a blonde?"

"Are you sure you can't figure out where her hotel room is?"

Rafe rolled his shoulders and narrowed his eyes. "What's it worth to you?"

"You have more money than you can waste in a lifetime."

"Yeah, but I've got more than one lifetime to waste."

Thane shook his head. "What do you want?"

"A promise."

"What sort of promise?"

Rafe smiled and walked across the hotel room. Pyrite was scheduled for a photo shoot the following day. If not for the appointment Rafe would have headed back to New York after the party at The Carousel.

"If I need something, you'll help me get it." Rafe looked out the window, a secretive smile curving the corners of his mouth.

"That's my job."

"This would be outside the scope of your job."

Thane hesitated. Rafe could be unpredictable. Offering him an open-ended promise was unwise. "Would it be outside the scope of the law?"

"You're *stalking* Tinkerbelle." He crossed his arms over his chest and met Thane's gaze, challenge burning in his dark eyes. "Is that within the scope of the law?" Thane said nothing. "Your next request is going to be that I get you in her room, because there's no way in hell she's going to let you in."

"You know where she is?"

"Will you help me when -- and if -- I need your help?"

Closing his eyes, Thane searched his mind for an alternative. The A. O. E. M. wasn't going to release information about one of their employees and Marissa could easily elude him.

"When and if you need my help, I'll do what I can to help you."

"I'll depend on your resourcefulness." He glanced out the window again. "Do you realize someone is following you?"

"What are you talking about?" Thane joined him at the window.

"The man loitering across the street just *materialized* when you drove up."

Thane looked at his friend, eyes narrowed. "How much have you had to drink?"

"He was at the club too."

"You remember every person who was at The Carousel?" Over the years, Thane had learned not to question Rafe's abilities, but this was weird even for Rafe. "I can hardly see him. How do you know it's the same guy?"

"When I scan him, he registers as undead."

"He's a vampire?"

"I don't know what the fuck he is." Rafe closed the curtains and moved away from the window. "I only know he's not human and he didn't show up until you did. Let's go."

"Where are we going?"

“She’s in the Hilton over on Embassy Row. Let’s see if he tails us.” Rafe shot him a sidelong glance as he grabbed his black leather jacket. “You’re lucky she ordered room service. Her room number was written on the bill.”

* * *

Marissa stared at the television, her mind a chaotic jumble of thoughts and speculation. She’d return to Chimera Island tomorrow and insist they reassign the Burton case. A spark of irritation penetrated her hurt. This was her first unsuccessful case. How could her instincts have been so wrong?

The hairs on the back of her neck prickled and a shiver skittered down her spine. She scooted off the bed, her pulse pounding. Violet mist curled under the door, twisting in a miniature tornado before Rafe Steele solidified in the vortex.

“Hello, beautiful.” He smiled. No fangs tonight? It didn’t make him any less dangerous. His dark eyes swept the length of her body with brash insolence.

“What do you want?” She’d put the bed between her and the door, which inadvertently put the phone on the opposite side as well. As if security could help! *Um, yes, could you please come right away? Rafe Steele just slipped himself under my door.*

“I don’t want anything, but,” he unlocked the door and pulled it open, allowing Thane into the room, “Thane seems to think you have unfinished business.”

“Thanks, Rafe.”

“No problem.” The vampire blew her a kiss. “Have fun. I’ll find my own way back.”

Rafe left and Marissa stared at Thane, tension gripping her belly. How had he found her so quickly? Why had he bothered? “There is *nothing* unfinished between us. Leave before I call security.” At least he couldn’t dissolve into mist.

“Just hear me out.” He moved closer, his steps hesitant, his gaze cautious, yet intense. “Did Sam tell you about Kayla?” She nodded. “Then you know how I feel about Discernments. Why did you choose to contact us that way?”

She tightened the belt on her bathrobe, clutching the lapels in one hand. "I was under the impression a Discernment was the first step in determining the compatibility of a potential mate for a Dichotomy."

"It is." He faced her, the bed between them a subtle reminder of their "unfinished business." "But you sprung it on us like Ray --"

"When a male Dichotomy initiates the Discernment do they forewarn the woman?"

"No. This was different. I was searching for the captivating Faerie I caught spying on Pyrite. No one knew who she was or where she'd come from. I wanted Tinkerbell and only Tinkerbell. I had no intention of betraying what I sensed in her by touching another woman."

Her heart fluttered at the promise in his words. She crossed her arms over her breasts, holding on to her anger with both hands. There was no way she was going to make this easy for him. She remained silent as he rounded the bed.

"Can we start over?" He proffered his hand, his smile accelerating her pulse. "I'm Thane Burton, and you are?"

She glanced away from his piercing gaze. How could she resist the call of her heart? His rejection had been a demonstration of his loyalty. Despite her wounded pride, she slipped her hand into his.

"Marissa Karlis." His long fingers wrapped around hers and he pulled her into his arms. Chuckling she raised her hands to his chest. "This is rather forward if we've just met."

"I'm not a patient man."

She turned her head when he tried to kiss her. "What kind of man are you?"

"I'm stubborn and opinionated, hot-tempered and possessive. When I feel passionately about someone, I dedicate myself wholeheartedly to pleasing them."

"Sam said you've managed Pyrite for over thirty years. You must feel passionately about them."

He traced her hairline from her brow to her ear, his gaze intent upon her face. "The members of Pyrite have been together for almost four hundred years. They drop out of sight every few decades and reinvent themselves for the new generation. I'm amazed by their loyalty to each other and their dedication to their art."

"I witnessed their dedication to their art." She turned around. He encircled her waist with his arm and pulled her back against his chest. "I was less than amazed."

"They're vampires. They can no more deny their nature than I can separate myself from Sam." Teasing the outer edge of her ear with his fingertip, he whispered, "I thought Faeries had pointed ears."

"That physical characteristic is more common among Elves."

He swept her into his arms. Marissa gasped as her feet left the floor. Carrying her to the large armchair across the room, he sat and arranged her across his lap. He draped her legs over the chair's arm, cradling her against his chest. Uncertainty complicated the desire gathering inside her. What did she really know about Thane and Sam? She couldn't deny her body responded to them. Would desire be enough?

"How long have you worked for the agency?" His tone was casual, polite, but his hand slipped beneath her robe, caressing her legs.

She sighed. His warm palm soothed as it teased. What had he asked her? She gave herself a mental shake.

"A little over a year," she replied. "Yamir thought my abilities would make me useful as a field agent."

"Do you have abilities other than the ones I've seen?"

His fingers dipped between her knees and inched up along her inner thigh. She grabbed his wrist and pressed her legs together determined to ignore his casual touch.

"In this form, I'm able to disguise myself with Faerie glamour. I can't change the shape of my body, just my outward appearance."

"Do you have wings in this form?"

She shook her head. "I have to transform into my Faerie form to fly." His fingertips brushed her folds once, then drifted away.

"Which form is your natural form?"

"That's like asking if you or Sam is the natural half of your being."

He pressed a kiss to her temple. "How long have you known Yamir?"

"His parents adopted me after..." She pushed his hand back to her knee, trying to scoot off his lap.

"You were raised by Elves?" He grasped her hip, holding her in place.

"I inherited the ability to change my appearance from my mother. I'm told she was a spy." She'd never known her mother, only the stories of her evil deeds. Still, the subject never failed to churn up a cesspool of unwanted emotions.

"What happened to her and where was your father?" Curiosity lit his gaze. Didn't he realize how uncomfortable she found this topic?

Heaving a ragged sigh, she explained. "My mother was exposed as a spy when I was still a child. The clan wars were raging and my father volunteered for campaign after campaign. Many said he had a death wish and his wish was granted."

"Was your father an Elf or a Faerie?"

"My father was Unseleighe Sidhe, a Dark Elf. He had no idea my mother had deceived him until after I was born."

"Then you are --"

"A Halfling." She'd learned to hate the word as she grew up surrounded by noble Unseleighe Sidhe. "My father abandoned me while he went off to war. If a passerby hadn't heard me crying, I would have starved to death."

He stroked her hair, guiding her head to his shoulder. "I'm certainly glad for the passerby," he whispered. "Was your adopted family good to you?"

"They were wonderful. Vinall had always wanted a daughter, but she was blessed with four healthy sons. When I was brought to the town council, she offered to take me in."

"How old were you when she adopted you?" His voice was hushed and cautious.

“Four.” She lifted her head from his shoulder and looked into his eyes. “Can we talk about something else? These memories are not pleasant.”

“We can talk about anything you like, or we can find something more interesting to do with our mouths.”

Chapter Five

She crawled off his lap and moved away.

Thane felt her absence with his whole body. "I'm sorry. I'm being an insensitive jerk."

"You were just asking the usual questions." She tucked a strand of her hair behind her ear. "It's not your fault I have unusual answers."

"Perhaps, but I will always regret causing you pain." Pushing to his feet, Thane searched her features with his gaze. She suddenly seemed so far away.

"That sounded *almost* sincere."

"Why would you doubt my sincerity?" He moved closer, keeping his hands at his sides. Her eyes had the half-panicked look of a forest creature about to bolt into the trees. "If you choose to bond with us, your happiness becomes my top priority."

"That's a sweet sentiment, but I've read your profile. You have an awful lot in common with the band you manage. Flavor of the week, isn't that what Sam calls them?"

"Sam's account of my -- activities is grossly exaggerated. After Kayla, I had no interest in searching for our soul mate. Nothing less than a soul mate would satisfy Sam, so every time I took a lover it infuriated him."

"Do Dichotomies ever bond with other Dichotomies?"

"It isn't forbidden, there are just so few of us left."

She looked at the bed, then crossed her arms over her breasts, tucking her hands up inside her sleeves.

"Let me touch you, Marissa. I can ease the ache."

"This is so unfair." Her breath escaped in a frustrated hiss. "What if I don't want two mates? What if I get tired of your arrogance? What if --"

He grabbed the lapels of her robe and drew her toward him. "What if we're the best thing that ever happened to you? What if your soul will only be satisfied with two mates? What if you parted your lips and let me kiss you?"

After a moment's hesitation, she raised her arms, circled his neck, and parted her lips.

Pausing to inhale her intoxicating scent, he covered her mouth with his. She pushed past his lips, stroking her tongue against his before he could deepen the kiss. His breath hitched at her eagerness. His mate needed him.

He eased his hands between their bodies and found the belt securing her robe. After unknitting the fabric, he parted the overlapping halves and groaned into her mouth. She was soft, warm, and naked beneath the robe.

She tugged his tee shirt off over his head and reached for the button at the top of his fly. He caught her wrist and shook his head. "We have to wait for Sam."

"It's hours until dawn." She closed her eyes, trembling. "I'm not going to make it."

"I'll do my best to keep you alive until he gets here." He smiled into her eyes and pulled her back into his arms.

The robe slipped to the floor before she wrapped her arms around him. Thane framed her face with his hands. She opened her mouth accepting the bold thrust of his tongue. He explored the velvet soft interior of her mouth, savoring her unique taste and her breathless sighs.

Her hands roamed freely across his torso, stroking, squeezing, abrading his skin with her nails. He bent her backward, arching her over his arm as he pressed her pelvis against his straining cock. If he thought about how badly he ached, he would never make it until morning.

Her full breasts thrust toward him, begging for attention. He lowered his mouth to one pouting nipple and circled it with his tongue. She tangled her fingers in his hair, pressing his face against her breast. Suckling until the tip was tight and damp, he caught her nipple between his teeth. He flicked it with his tongue and felt her tremble.

"I ache, Thane. I need you inside me." Her plaintive cry challenged his control. He wanted nothing more than to be inside her.

He guided her back until her legs connected with the edge of the bed. She sat and he knelt in front of her. "Lie back." She reclined and pulled her legs up, resting her heels on the edge of the mattress. Cream coated her folds. Thane shook as he imagined what it would feel like to unfasten his pants and thrust hard into her waiting warmth. She was so responsive, so ready.

Slipping his hands beneath her, he raised her pussy to his mouth. He circled her clit with his tongue. She only lasted a few seconds, then her hips jerked and her body throbbed against his lips. She cried out and he delved deeper, parting her folds and lapping her cream.

She arched into his kiss, her bottom flexing against his hands. After he'd wrung the last spasm from her body, he lowered her hips to the bed. Her breasts jostled with each panting breath. A deep flush colored her skin.

Thane stroked her legs and her silky hips. God, she was beautiful. Even disguised as a goth groupie, he'd been fascinated by her. His chest tightened with possessive pride. He wanted to hear her cries of pleasure again and again.

Pushing two fingers into her core, Thane groaned. Snug, hot, *his*, her inner walls caressed him. He thrust and withdrew as he circled her clit with his tongue. She raised her legs to his shoulders, resting them against his back.

Each of her moans and panting breaths thrilled him -- and tortured him. His desire to take her nearly overwhelmed him. How would he last until morning? She cried out again, her cunt squeezing his fingers with greedy enthusiasm.

She sat as he dragged his fingers from her clingy heat. Lowering her legs to the floor, she caught his upper arms and pulled him toward her. "I know we can't," she kissed him, boldly filling his mouth with her tongue, "actually make love." She kissed him again. "Is there any reason I can't return the favor?"

Unable to resist such temptation, he stood, his legs shaking beneath him, and unfastened his jeans. He'd no sooner lowered the zipper than she took over. Slipping

her hands inside the waistband, she guided his jeans over his hips to his knees. His cock arched toward her, hard and eager for her kiss.

She stroked him with one hand, cupping his aching balls with the other. He shook his head. He wouldn't last long at this rate. Her warm tongue stroked his tip, circling and teasing. Desire pulsed hot and demanding as her mouth closed around him. He shut his eyes and stroked her face. She sucked him deep, deeper, before she eased back and flicked him with her tongue.

He clenched and unclenched his hands. *That felt so fucking good!* Caressing her face with one hand, he cupped her breast with the other, lost in the pleasure. The firm circle of her lips slid up and down his length. Her tongue flicked, circled, and stabbed at his opening.

Grabbing his hips with both hands, she sucked him hard and fast. Thane surrendered to the sweet pull of her mouth, pumping his seed down her throat.

Marissa eased away and lay back across the bed. He'd brought her to climax twice and her body still burned. "Will it always be like this? How will we ever get out of bed?"

Thane chuckled and righted his jeans. "The bonding will stabilize our emotions. The urgency is nature's way of ensuring our race continues."

"What time is it?"

"Time for me to get something out of my car." He kissed her, then pulled on his tee shirt and grabbed the cardkey off the nightstand. "I won't be gone long."

She covered herself with her robe, not bothering to put it on. Could she really go through with this? Could she accept them both into her body at the same time? Longing swirled, bringing with it vivid images. They stood beside the bed, Sam behind her as he'd been in the Discernment. His hands caressed her body, while Thane licked her clit.

Desire surged in response to the graphic image. She groaned and cupped her mound. Thane said the bonding would stabilize these yearnings, but that didn't help her now. The image shifted. Sam stretched out on his back and she straddled his face.

He thrust into her mouth as he devoured her pussy. Thane stood beside the bed, working his middle finger in and out of her ass. She trembled, helpless to stop the onslaught of her imagination.

The image shifted again. She straddled Sam's hips, his cock buried deep in her pussy. Thane knelt on the bed behind them, driving hard into her ass.

The door opened and she jumped, quickly moving her hand away from her mound.

"Did you miss me?" He smiled and her heart pounded in her breast. He was *beautiful* when he smiled. It was such a feminine word for someone so masculine, but nothing else adequately expressed the appeal of his angular features.

She looked at the clock. Three fifty-six. "I don't think I'm going to make it."

He sat beside her, his gaze caressing her face. "Sam will sense the urgency and transition as soon as he possibly can. How are you feeling?"

Clutching the robe to her breasts, she sat and pushed her hair over her shoulders. "I feel exhilarated and confused, content, yet frightened."

"All of which is perfectly natural." He brushed her cheek with the back of his fingers.

"You're an expert on these feelings?" She challenged him with her smile.

"I'm a Dichotomy. I was raised with these concepts. This is all new to you."

She couldn't argue with that. "What did you get from your car?"

He placed a small zippered case on the bed between them. "I believe in being prepared for any and all emergencies." His grin did cruel things to her over-stimulated libido. Pulling a tiny container from the front pocket of the case, he flipped it open and offered her a thin square of red film.

"What is that?"

"Trust me."

She narrowed her gaze, but opened her mouth. He placed the square on her tongue and she smiled. The film dissolved and the taste of cinnamon burst in her mouth. "Very nice."

After taking a square himself, Thane put the container away.

“What else is in the case?”

He looked into her eyes, his gaze smoldering. “Toys. I want you to be ready when --”

“You drive around with a case full of sex toys in your car?”

“Not exactly.”

“Well, when *exactly* did you put the case in your car?”

“I told Sam and Delano about the Faerie I met at The Carousel and Sam figured out it was probably you.”

“How did you find me? I didn’t tell anyone where I was staying.”

“Rafe has some unusual abilities even for a vampire. I gave him the pillowcase from our guest bedroom and he followed your metaphysical trail.”

“Like a psychic bloodhound.”

Thane laughed. “Don’t ever call him that. Apparently to a vampire it has a very different meaning.”

“Back to your bag of tricks.” She motioned toward the zippered case. “Rafe figured out where I was and you presumed you’d need...”

He cupped her chin with one hand and stroked her hair with the other. “You’re our soul mate. I knew it when I first touched you. Everything that has happened since only confirmed what my heart told me back at The Carousel.” He brushed his lips over hers, his breath scented with cinnamon.

“You don’t need help arousing me.” She whispered the words against his lips. “I get all warm and shivery just looking at you.”

“They’re not that kind of toys.”

She swallowed hard as comprehension dawned.

“I don’t want to hurt you, sweetness.” He tucked her hair behind her ear and eased away.

“What’s the alternative?”

“Turn over and I’ll show you.”

She was going to have to get used to being touched there, being *entered* there. In her most secret fantasies, she'd always flirted with the idea. Still, she'd never dreamed it would ever become more than a titillating fantasy. Rolling to her stomach, she rested her chin on her hands and closed her eyes.

Thane pulled the robe aside and stroked the entire length of her spine. "You are so incredibly beautiful." His words pleased her, soothed her as his hands wandered over her back. Strong and warm, his fingers massaged her tense muscles. "My first glimpse of this fabulous ass was beneath a short, black spandex dress."

She smiled, but didn't open her eyes.

"You looked wild and defiant, yet just enough out of place that I knew you were hiding something." He eased her legs apart, tracing the crease between her cheeks with his fingers. "I wanted to feel your mouth caressing my cock, then I wanted to feast on your cream. I wanted to bend you over my desk and take you from behind. I wanted all of you."

He found her anus with his fingertip, circling and teasing. His fingers slid against her, making her tingle. Had he licked them before he started or was there some sort of lube in the case? He pushed into her ass and her thoughts scattered.

"All of you, Marissa. Are you ready to surrender everything?" Deep and thick with emotion, his voice was as evocative as his touch. He slipped his arm beneath her hips and lifted her to her knees, moving her legs apart. She groaned.

He pushed into her feminine core with other fingers as he pulled out of her ass. His thumb gently stroked her clit. She couldn't see exactly what he was doing, but there was a long pause, then something blunt and slick pressed against her anus.

"Push out against it. Relax and accept this inside you."

Pressure, a tiny sting, then sweet fullness sank into Marissa's body. Her nipples tightened and her pussy rippled around his fingers. Indecision might cloud her mind, but her body was more than ready. He nipped her bottom and she yelped, glancing over her shoulder to meet his passion-bright gaze.

"I've wanted to nibble on your ass for days."

Her laugh turned into a moan as he drew the toy back. She sucked in a quick breath and he pushed it deep again.

“How’s that feel?”

“Strange.” She shivered. “Different.”

With a subtle twisting motion, he slid the toy in and out. All the while, he circled her clit with his thumb and caressed her internal walls. Marissa relaxed, concentrating on the new sensations, the undeniable fullness.

He withdrew the toy and she released a ragged sigh. Before she could relax completely, he positioned another one. “How many of those things are there?” she gasped.

“Three.”

The second toy didn’t feel significantly different than the first. Dramatically graduated from narrow tip to thick base, the third stretched her wide at the apex of each thrust. Thane paused from time to time, smearing lube around her anus and along the toy. Marissa gasped and wiggled, imagining how his cock would feel inside her.

“Oh, fuck,” Thane groaned. Removing the toy, he scrambled off the bed.

Marissa turned her head, then sat in the middle of the bed. His features contorted with pain and light dissected his body. She squinted into the brightness. His hands clenched at his sides as he undulated in and out of focus. She held her breath. Written descriptions of this transformation hadn’t prepared her for the reality.

Sam materialized in the glow, blended with Thane at first, then separating as he took on shape. Velocity tossed Sam against the bed.

“Holy shit!” he cried. “That was intense.”

“The transition isn’t usually so violent?” she asked.

Sam shook his head, panting and blinking his eyes. “I felt like I was sucked out of slumber state and hurled into…” He looked around. “Where are we?”

“In a hotel room.” Thane crawled onto the bed, reaching for Marissa. “She can explain everything after my transition. We’ve only got an hour to establish the bond.”

Sam stood beside the bed, his gaze moving over her with unmistakable interest. "I take it you found Tinkerbell?"

Marissa winced. "Am I stuck with that nickname?"

"We wouldn't do that to you." He glanced at the zippered case, then looked into her eyes. "I see Thane's been busy in my absence. Are you sure you're ready for this? We don't have to bond today."

Thane closed his eyes, shaking his head in silent disagreement.

"I'm a Matchmaker. Couples frequently tell me they *just know* when they've met their mate. I never understood what that meant until I took this case. We are meant to be together." She looked from Sam to Thane and back. "I'm not afraid."

"Thank god!" Thane pulled her over backward and took her face between his hands. Marissa shrieked, then laughed until his mouth silenced her.

Sam undressed as fast as physically possible and joined them on the bed. His mouth claimed her nipple as his hand caressed her other breast. Marissa reached up and curved her fingers around the nape of Thane's neck. She found Sam's hair and combed her fingers through the thick strands.

She dragged her mouth away from Thane's and looked into Sam's eyes. "We've been waiting for you for hours."

Sam grinned. "I appreciate it."

"I want you inside me." She looked at Thane, giddy with anticipation. "I want both of you inside me."

They groaned at her bold words, but Thane pulled her onto his lap, scooting back until he rested against the headboard. He pulled her arms above her head, guiding them behind his neck. "Grab your hands like you did in the Discernment."

"I can't take any more foreplay."

"Do it or foreplay is all you'll get," Sam warned, and heat curled through her body. Thane was supposed to be the aggressive one. She grasped her hands and shifted restlessly. They were determined to torment her.

Slipping his hands under her calves, Sam hooked her legs over Thane's knees. Thane moved his legs apart, spreading her thighs in the process. She trembled, unable to ignore the significance. Thane held her, offering her body for Sam's pleasure.

Sam knelt between her thighs. His gaze moved over her, his expression tense with anticipation. Thane cupped her breasts and Sam bent to suckle. Her breath hitched and her mind whirled. Her dreams, her fantasies were fulfilled with each caress. Sam stroked her thighs, her hips, her ribs, while his mouth drew upon her nipples.

Marissa panted, her over-sensitized body protesting the stimulation. Sam meandered across her torso. His lips pressed, while his fingers played. Thane rolled her nipples, keeping them tight and achy.

"Kiss me, Tinkerbelle." Somehow, Thane made the name sound sexy. She turned her head, arching her neck until their mouths met.

Sam kissed his way across her belly and hovered over her mound. His fingers parted her folds. He paused, his warm breath wafting against the damp heart of her desire. "Here?" He rimmed her pussy with his tongue. "Do you want me here?"

She tried to answer, but Thane wouldn't release her mouth. Sam traced her cleft with his cock, rubbing the flared head over her clit. Whimpering into Thane's mouth, she canted her hips. *Please, now. Fuck me now!*

Soon, sweetheart. You're not quite ready.

She tore her mouth away from Thane's. "I heard Sam's voice inside my head."

"It's part of the bonding." Thane kissed her temple. "We'll be able to speak mind to mind from now on."

"Look at me," Sam said. She met his gaze and he shook his head. *Watch my cock as I enter you.*

She looked down along the length of her naked body. Thane's hands covered her breasts, his thumbs stroking her nipples. Hooked over Thane's legs, her thighs spread wide, inviting Sam's entry. Sam held himself at her opening, his cock long, thick, ready.

He pushed into her slowly. Inch after inch disappeared into her depths. She saw him and felt him, trembling at the combination. When his balls pressed against her ass,

he arched over her and claimed her mouth. His lips moved against hers, his tongue thrust in and out of her mouth, but his cock just filled her.

Enough, Thane's voice growled in her mind. Lie back, so I can join the bonding.

Clasping her hips, Sam lay back across the bed and pulled her on top of him. She straddled his hips, his cock driven deeper because of their new position. Thane reached into his zippered case and retrieved a tube of shiny gel. Lubricant, she realized, a tingle skidding along her nerve endings.

Parting her cheeks, Thane inserted the long, narrow nozzle into her ass. Her hands clenched the sheets on either side of Sam's shoulders. He framed her face with his hands.

"I thought you weren't afraid," Sam teased.

"I've seen the size of his cock."

Thane set the lube aside and rubbed her back. "Your body is ready for this. As long as you don't tense up, I won't hurt you. Sam's going to kiss you and I'm going to make this joining real."

Sam pulled her face down to his. Still, she was aware of every brush of Thane's fingers. He caressed her skin, teased her crack, and finally ringed her anus. She clutched Sam's shoulders and his chuckle sounded in her mind.

Relax, Tinkerbell. Thane positioned himself against her. *Dichotomies are born for this.*

I'm not a Dichotomy.

He thrust into her in one smooth drive. *No, you're a Dichotomy's mate.*

Thane drew outward, stopping when only the head of his cock remained inside her. She moaned. *Oh god, that felt incredible!* He thrust in fast and pulled out slowly, waiting for her to accept the new sensations.

Better? Sam asked.

It's still very -- intense.

It's supposed to be. Thane pulled her up off Sam's chest. *Your turn.* With his hands on her hips, he showed her how to move. She lifted herself to the top of Sam's cock as Thane thrust deep. Then Thane pulled outward as she impaled herself on Sam.

They found a steady rhythm. Arching and straining, she reveled in the fullness and the slide. Sam caressed her breasts, his handsome face tense with desire, while tenderness shined in his eyes. Thane thrust hard and fast, his hands firm on her hips.

Their hearts beat as one.

Their souls wrapped around each other.

Marissa cried out. Pleasure burst within her body, trapping the breath in her lungs. Her heartbeat thundered. Her body pulsed. Sam thrust into her. Thane arched over her, pressing her against Sam. They came together, triggering another orgasm in Marissa. Her inner muscles squeezed their cocks as their hot seed filled her trembling body.

Chapter Six

Fascinated and confused, the sorcerer watched the threesome on the bed. The dark-haired man thrust into the Halfling's ass, while the blond fucked her pussy. It had been years since he watched two virile men plow a woman, longer still since he'd been one of the men. But what were these male creatures? The blond had literally burst from within the dark-haired man.

The Halfling cried out and the men thrust deep, shuddering in completion. The sorcerer drifted around and looked at the Halfling's face. Utter contentment. It was disgusting.

The men caressed her and kissed her, rolling to their sides, their cocks still deep inside her.

"Are you okay?" the blond asked.

She smiled. "I feel wonderful."

Not for long, the sorcerer thought. This night was about to take an unexpected turn.

"Let's go take a shower," the dark-haired man suggested.

Wonderful idea. If Navid proved to be as difficult as he suspected, he might need to use the Halfling as motivation. He couldn't stand mounting a woman when she reeked of another man.

They strolled into the bathroom and stepped into a small enclosure. The Halfling giggled and sighed as the two men worked together to cleanse her firm young body. The sorcerer relaxed and enjoyed the show. Time was irrelevant to his kind. It made them either faultlessly patient or in a hurry for everything. He fell into the first category.

The Halfling washed her lovers with just as much care. He pictured her long-fingered hands moving over his own body. Rape had not been his intention when he sought her out, but he wouldn't hesitate to defile her if it furthered his purpose.

The blond man stepped from the enclosure, reaching for one of the folded towels. Materializing behind him, the sorcerer lengthened his fingernail and pressed it against the man's jugular. "Transform, little Halfling, or this one dies."

The dark-haired man crouched, preparing to launch his body at them. The sorcerer flung him backward with a thought. He gazed again at the naked Halfling. "Transform!"

"Don't do it, Maris --" The blond's words ended as the sorcerer closed his throat.

The Halfling looked from the blond to the dark-haired man crumpled at her feet and then transformed into her Faerie self. The sorcerer cast a containment orb around her and shoved the blond away from him. Snatching the orb out of the air, the sorcerer disappeared from view.

* * *

"What the hell just happened?" Sam helped Thane to his feet, then tossed him a towel.

"I have no idea, but Rafe said someone was following me. He didn't see any sign of him when we left his hotel." Favoring his right leg, Thane hobbled into the bedroom and grabbed his jeans off the floor. "I've never seen anyone move that fast."

"If you thought someone was following you, why didn't you say anything?" Sam tossed his towel aside and gathered his clothes.

"I told you, Rafe didn't see him after we left his hotel. Besides, the man following me doesn't have a beard."

"He was behind me the whole time. What did this guy look like?"

"Dark hair and eyes, about as tall as you, short beard and mustache. He was dressed in a tunic and hose like someone from a renaissance festival."

"Time shifter?"

"I have no idea." Thane raked both hands through his damp hair, then pulled on his shirt.

Sam finished dressing as he sorted through the events. "You used Rafe to find Marissa?"

Thane nodded. "Sometimes it pays to have unconventional friends."

"It's almost dawn. Hasn't he crawled back into his coffin for the day?"

"You know damn good and well he doesn't sleep in a coffin."

"Anymore."

"Shut the hell up." Thane glared at him. "Rafe's our best chance of figuring out where he took her."

"You're not the only one with unconventional friends," Sam pointed out. "I'm not waiting around until dark. Transition so I can get moving."

"What's your plan?"

"Aurora knows more people at The Carousel than I do. I thought I'd have her meet me there and see what we can come up with."

"That's your plan? Our soul mate has just been --"

"Thane!" Sam faced him squarely, fists on his hips. "For once in your life think this through. If we don't work together Marissa could die. Rafe is out of commission until dusk. True or false?"

"True."

"Do you know anyone else with psychic abilities?"

"No, but if anything happens to her, I'll... We have to think of something." Thane paced beside the bed. "That bastard was obviously a wizard or... I've never seen anyone with that sort of power."

"We're bonded now. That gives us some power. Let's try and contact her."

Thane paused and met his gaze. "All right."

"Let's reach for each other and then we'll search for her." Sam barely got the words out before reality faded away. Color bled into gray and sensation subsided. He grasped for the bed. His hand passed right through. Damn Thane and his impatience!

What had he done now? Gray gave way to darkness, suffocating, inky black. He gasped, thrashing wildly.

Something was wrong.

Fear and desperation battled. This was their only chance!

Sensation twisted through his abdomen, excruciating pain and searing heat. Thane's scream echoed in his mind followed by the familiar blending of transition.

Shit! We're too late! Could he reach Marissa without Thane?

Spurred on by the urgency pumping through his veins, Sam struggled through the darkness. Where was she? He had to find Marissa.

He saturated his mind with images of her face, her smile, her beautiful eyes. Tenderness filled his heart and determination fueled his search, propelled him onward. *Open your mind, sweetheart. Bring me to you.*

The acrid stench of fear inundated his senses. Bitter rage filled his mouth like bile. He gagged. *Where are you? Tell me how to find you.*

D'Arcy Aiden. Sam barely made out the two words. Had she understood what he needed from her? *Yamir will know.* Her presence slipped from his mind and he crumpled to the floor in the hotel room.

He stumbled to the phone.

"Hello." Ray's voice came across the line.

"I need Aurora."

"Is that you, Sam? Are you all right?"

"I don't know yet. The Carousel is about halfway between us. Can you have Aurora meet me there?"

"What's going on? Should I come too?"

He thought about Thane's mystery man. Maybe it would be safer if she came with Ray. "Yeah. I'll see you both there, and be careful. I think we're being watched."

They had yet to arrive when Sam got to the club, so he let himself in through the back. Tension wound around the base of his skull, making his head pound. The terror

in Marissa's gaze wouldn't leave his mind. She'd willingly gone with -- whatever that was -- to protect him and Thane.

They would get her back. Regardless of what it took, they would see her safely returned. He needed to contact the A. O. E. M. They had information on all sorts of otherworldly beings and Marissa was one of their agents.

The club consisted of two main rooms with a carousel situated in the middle. A stage dominated one wall, separated from the carousel by a spacious dance floor. Ringed by a highly polished wooden bar, the carousel housed winged horses, griffins, and dragons -- as well as a wide selection of liquor.

Sam crossed to the carousel and turned on the lights behind the bar.

"What's going on, Sam?" Aurora's heels tapped out her anxiety as she walked across the dance floor. Her strawberry-blonde curls bounced against her shoulders and concern narrowed her green eyes.

"Where's Ray?"

"Parking the car. He wanted me to make sure you were all right. You sounded frantic on the phone."

"I'm fine, but Marissa is missing."

"Oh my god."

He waited until Ray joined them before he explained what had happened.

"You have no idea where this sorcerer took her or why he wanted her?" Ray asked.

Sam shook his head, needing to smash something badly. "Marissa was able to give me two clues." He looked at Aurora. "I'm hoping you have some idea what they mean. She said 'D'Arcy Aiden' and 'Yamir will know'."

"I have no idea what the first part means, but Yamir Karlis is her adopted brother."

Sam's pulse leapt and he slipped off the barstool. At least it was a start. "Do you know how to contact him?"

"He's out on Chimera Island. You'll have to go through the agency."

* * *

Torn between anger and fear, Marissa watched her captor pace before her. The shape of his ears and the occasional violet flare in his aura identified his race. He was Unseleighe Sidhe. Beyond that she had no idea who he was or what he wanted.

She flapped her wings only when she neared the bottom of the transparent bubble in which he'd imprisoned her, conserving her energy. She'd made the mistake of touching the thing and the soles of her feet still stung.

"It's surprisingly difficult to maintain one position in midair. I don't think a dead hostage is going to do you any good."

He turned to face her, his dark gaze narrowed with anger. His lips parted as if he would refute her claim, then he sneered and returned to his pacing.

A birdcage-style swing materialized inside the bubble. He thought he was funny. Marissa glared, but landed on the swing. Her naked bottom connected with the metal bar and a shiver sped up her spine. She folded her wings around her, affording herself what modesty she could.

"What sort of beings are your lovers, little Halfling?"

She despised the term. It had been whispered behind her back her entire life. Why did he know so much about her when she had no idea who he was? She averted her face, avoiding his penetrating stare.

"Did you enjoy having both of them inside you?" Her gaze snapped back to his. How long had he been watching them? "You certainly made enough noise, but pain and pleasure sound similar. Tell me how it felt." She glared and shivered. "You can talk to me or I'll release you and we can take up where they left off. I can't fuck both your holes at the same time, but I can take one and then the other, over and over, until you're too weak to move."

"I might be a little hard to rape in my present form."

"True." He smiled, the gesture not reaching his cold, dark eyes. "But you're a Halfling. You can't stay in that form indefinitely."

Her chest constricted and she struggled to swallow. Her mouth had gone completely dry. "Why have you brought me here?"

"Don't you recognize this cottage? I know you were young, but I thought you'd remember."

Despite her determination to be uncooperative, she looked around the cottage. It was impossible. *That* cottage had burned to the ground. In his grief and anger, her father had torched their home and moved into the heart of D'Arcy Aiden.

Her captor chuckled. "You do remember."

Her hands slipped against the cold metal chain supporting the swing. Bile rose into the back of her throat. Only a Raonull sorcerer could manipulate time. Still, the question remained, why had he brought her here?

"Tell me about your lovers. What sort of beings live within one another?"

The last thing she wanted was to fuel his interest in the Dichotomy. If he was part of the dreaded Raonull, she would do everything in her power to keep him out of the mortal realm. At least the Sidhe had some hope of combating his abilities. Mortals were powerless.

"Are we here to trap my mother or my father?"

"What I wanted from your mother I took. Then I compelled her to slit her wrists."

Icy chills shuddered through Marissa. Was he just provoking her or had he been responsible for her mother's death? If his words were true, she was in serious trouble. No one made confessions to a hostage they intended to release.

Chapter Seven

"Thank you," Yamir muttered as the Escort swirled away. He paused, hands braced on his knees. "Traveling by Escort is so much fun when you get motion sickness."

"Would you like a glass of water or something?" Aurora asked.

Yamir shook his head.

Sam studied the Dark Elf, determined not to be jealous. Marissa thought of this man as a brother. There was no reason for the tension gripping his gut.

After much discussion, they decided it was best to carry on as if nothing had happened, especially if they were being watched. So, Ray headed to the office and Sam stayed with Aurora.

"All she said was D'Arcy Aiden?" Yamir straightened, color returning to his swarthy face. He brushed his dark hair off his forehead and joined them at the bar.

"And 'Yamir will know'," Sam added.

"D'Arcy Aiden is the Unseleighe capital of the Forest Realm. But that doesn't narrow our search much. D'Arcy Aiden is vast."

"You won't find her without my help."

Sam turned his head as a tall figure emerged from the shadows. Aurora slipped her hand beneath the bar, reaching for the silent alarm no doubt. Had she pushed it?

"He's taken her beyond your reach." The stranger stepped into the light and Sam narrowed his gaze. He'd seen this man several times in the last few days, first at the bistro and again outside Burton and Associates' headquarters.

"How did you get in here?" Sam slipped off the barstool and faced the man directly. Short, black hair framed his sharp features, and piercing dark eyes dominated his face.

"You left the back door open. Is that really what you want to know?" One corner of his mouth quirked in a humorless smile.

"Why have you been following my brother and spying on me?"

"I wasn't following your brother. I was searching for Marissa." The stranger pronounced her name with a musical lilt. "Your bonded mate is my daughter."

"You're full of shit," Yamir snapped. "Marissa's father is dead."

"Yes, I know. All the Raonull are dead."

"What's a Raonull?" Aurora whispered.

Yamir moved up beside Sam. "If you're a Raonull, prove it."

The stranger inclined his head and disappeared.

"Oh my god!" Aurora flipped up a section of the bar and joined them in front of the carousel. "Where did he go?"

"Much as the Escorts move through space, the Raonull move through time," Yamir explained. "It's only one of their abilities, but it's the most impressive."

The stranger blinked back into view seated on one of the barstools. "Have we wasted enough time on this subject? My daughter is in grave danger."

"You know who took her and why?" Sam advanced on the sorcerer, assessing his features, searching his gaze.

"My master took her to recapture me." He held up his hand, stemming Sam's barrage of questions. "There is something you must understand before we go any farther. Shortly after I submitted myself to the Raonull ritual, my master enslaved my mind. I have scattered fragments of memories. I only know I have done horrible things."

Looking into his tormented gaze, Sam believed every word.

"I don't know what triggered my awakening, but something broke his hold on my mind."

"What's your name?" Suspicion smoldered in Yamir's gaze.

"In life I was Navid Frayne. My master sensed my latent abilities and sent one of his agents to watch over me. We loved each other with our whole beings and she gave

me a daughter. We named her Marissa and she brought us joy like we'd never imagined."

"Then why did you desert her?" Yamir sneered.

"I did not -- willingly."

"This is bullshit." Yamir made a derisive sound and moved away from Navid.

"Do we really have time for this?" Sam asked.

"Does your soul bonding with Marissa allow you to contact her?"

"We already tried. We could barely hear her."

"It will be much easier to transmit a telepathic signal if you know where to send it."

Sam rubbed his eyes. The pounding in his head intensified. "Knowing where to find her is only the beginning. We still have to get her away from your master."

"I understand." He stood and looked at Sam, his gaze narrowed with speculation. "I know you're not human, but I've never encountered your race before. What are your capabilities?"

"Beyond the telepathic link established with our bonding, we have no psychic powers."

"You keep saying we."

"I'm a Dichotomy. The other half of my being emerges at night. His name is Thane."

"Does this person keep company with vampires?"

A reluctant smile parted Sam's lips. "On occasion."

"I see." Navid rubbed his chin, staring at Sam with new interest. "What happens to you when Thane emerges?"

"We argue for an hour then my physical form disperses and his body absorbs my energy."

"For one hour you *both* have physical forms?" Navid sounded encouraged by the fact.

A bit of the tension banding Sam's skull eased. "Yes. Is there some way we can use that to our advantage?"

"I should say so. One of you can stay in this time while I take the other back to confront my master. It will give us an anchor, a beacon for which to aim. Time shifting is tricky at best. This will give us a definite advantage."

"But Thane won't emerge until dusk. We can't leave her at the mercy of your master for the rest of the day."

"I know where he's taken her. We will time our arrival shortly after his. She will not be at his mercy."

Sam stared at Navid, wary and conflicted. He needed to believe Navid was capable of the extraordinary feat, yet it all seemed a bit fantastical. It was possible Navid had done no more than hide himself from view for a few seconds. Still, what did he have to gain by concocting this story? Yamir's hostile glare reinforced Sam's suspicion.

"Who is your master?" Aurora asked, standing next to Yamir.

"I don't remember his name or his face, only his cruelty."

"How convenient." Yamir crossed his arms over his chest, his gaze never leaving Navid's face.

"I don't expect you to believe me. Sam, I will tell you exactly where he is keeping Marissa. Contact her and let her know she has nothing to fear."

"Why are you so certain you know where he's taken her?"

"I know how he thinks, the games he plays. Any thug with a dagger can take a life. My master revels in compelling people to destroy what they love most." He paused, exhaling a long, low sigh. "He has taken Marissa to our cottage on the day I burned it down. If I don't follow him and set her free, she will die in the fire, by my hand."

Sam shuddered. "Give me a minute. I've never sent my thoughts through time."

"I can assist you."

"No," Sam and Yamir said in unison.

"It's better if I do this alone."

Sam closed his eyes and summoned an image of Marissa. Silver-streaked hair cascaded around her shoulders and down her back. Her gaze stared back at him, bright with love and laughter. His heartbeat sped and heat infused his blood. He focused on the moment their souls joined, remembered the intensity of the pleasure.

Thick, towering trees surrounded a charming cottage. Sam narrowed his focus, penetrating the thatch roof. A tall, thin man sat before a crackling fire, gazing into the dancing flames. Deep shadows cast his sharp features into high relief. Dark hair swept back from his brow, brushing his tunic in the back.

A glowing object in the far corner caught Sam's attention. His hands clenched and his breathing sped. Marissa sat on a metal swing within the orb, her wings folded around her like a blanket. She leaned against the chain supporting one side of the swing, her expression forlorn, her eyes closed.

Sweetheart, can you hear me? Don't try to answer, just open your eyes.

Her eyes opened and she looked around the room.

We're coming for you. Hold on just a little longer.

* * *

Marissa unfurled her wings and floated off the swing. Sam's voice had been strong and clear within her mind, but he withdrew before she could respond. Nearly an hour had passed since her arrival at the cottage and her captor had more or less ignored her.

"Can you communicate with your lovers?"

He faced her and Marissa returned to the swing, covering herself with her wings. Had he sensed Sam's thoughts? *Oh, no!* Had he heard them? Her pulse kicked up a notch. She knew very little about the Raonull. Only that they briefly crossed into the afterlife during their induction ritual and they could shift through time.

Pushing to his feet, he crossed the cottage and stared into her cage. "If you won't talk to me, I'll find some other way to entertain myself."

"Yes, I can communicate with my lovers. What would you like me to tell them?"

"Nothing. I was just curious."

She studied his features, the shape of his eyes. He seemed familiar, yet she was nearly certain she'd never seen him before today. "Is my father still alive in this time?" She hadn't intended to interact with him, but his comment about her mother troubled her greatly.

"Ah, you've figured out what I am. Clever girl."

"What did you mean about my mother? Was she... your lover?" He smiled. The sudden intensity in his gaze made Marissa's stomach knot.

"She was many things to me, lover, apprentice, informant. Your father was her assignment, until she lost her objectivity."

"You killed her because she loved my father?" She clutched the swing as the world spun around her.

"I didn't touch her." He grinned. "I simply showed her what the future held for her precious daughter once her mother was exposed as a spy. Then I showed her the peaceful existence you would enjoy once she died."

Marissa's hand flew to her mouth. Her mother had taken her own life hoping to protect her from the scandal. "But her deception was exposed anyway."

The Raonull chuckled. "That, you can lay at your father's feet. If he hadn't been so stubborn, I wouldn't have been driven to extreme measures."

She looked away from the sorcerer wanting to weep, needing to scream. Was her father a Raonull? How could he have succumbed to such evil?

A blinding flash of light interrupted her tormented musings. A dark-haired man stood before her, Sam at his side. Was this her father? She transformed into her Elvin form. Pain seared her skin before the orb burst and she landed on the floor.

"Navid," her captor drawled. "I was starting to wonder if you had any memory at all."

Without speaking a word, her father blasted the other Raonull with magic. The sorcerer screamed, his body vibrating with the force of her father's attack.

“Every life I’ve taken in your service has increased my energy.” He continued the shimmering stream, aiming it into the center of his master’s chest. “I suspected I’d grown stronger than you. Let’s put my suspicion to the test.”

Her captor struggled within the stream. His features became emaciated. His eyes bulged out. Sweat beaded her father’s forehead and his body trembled. He kept his gaze fixed on his master, but his words were for Sam. “Get her out of here! I don’t think I can kill him outright, but I can hold him.”

Torchlight flickered in the distance and Marissa’s heart lurched. “No!” Fire was the only element capable of destroying a Raonull. Her father meant to sacrifice himself to the flames.

“Go!”

Sam wrapped his arm around her waist and pulled her back against his chest. Tears streamed down her face as the cottage faded from view. She closed her eyes against the pain and the sickening velocity. How could she have found him only to lose him again?

They materialized on the dance floor in The Carousel. Marissa wiped her tears on the back of her hand. Sam turned her to face him, pushing his fingers into her hair.

“It was the only way to protect you, to protect all of us.”

“I know.” She leaned into his caress.

Thane came up behind her, resting his hands on her shoulders. “Are you okay?”

“I will be.” She swallowed, absorbing Thane’s warmth, soothed by Sam’s gentle smile.

“If you ever put yourself in danger again...” Unable to complete the sentence, Thane wrapped his arms around her and held her close. Sam kissed her softly, combing his fingers through her hair.

Surrounding herself with their affection, she relaxed in their embrace. “Did Father tell you who his master was?”

Sam shook his head. “Something or someone severed the link between them, but your father remembered very little about the years he had been enslaved.”

She shuddered. "I won't think of my father like that. Navid Frayne died in battle many years ago."

Sam kissed her brow. "I understand how you feel, but he sacrificed himself for you today. Some flicker of who he was survived."

Marissa didn't argue, she pressed herself against his chest and reached back, drawing Thane even closer. "Why do I feel like it's not over? He should be at peace. So, why --"

"Sweetheart, your life was threatened and your father returned from the dead." Sam paused to kiss her again. "Give the world a minute to stabilize."

She exhaled a ragged breath. "I think it will take more than a minute with you two in my life."

Thane pulled her away from Sam and tenderly kissed her mouth. "If we're going to leave the club you should probably conjure some clothes. I'm rather fond of this outfit, but I don't want to share it with the rest of the world."

She hadn't even realized she was still naked. Stepping away from Thane, she surrounded herself in glamour. "Better?"

Thane shook his head. "Only until we get home."

Epilogue

Four days later Marissa awakened with Thane on one side and Sam on the other. She'd spent hours with Yamir detailing everything she could think of about the Raonull who had taken her captive. Yamir seemed more concerned with her reaction to her father's reappearance and subsequent death than any threat the sorcerer might pose.

"What are you thinking about?" Thane traced her mouth with his fingertip.

"Yamir seems to think the danger has passed," she murmured.

"You still believe it's not over?" Sam drew her face toward him.

"This was not just a Raonull sorcerer. He was powerful enough to enslave my father who was also a Raonull." She shook her head. "I would love to believe they both perished in the fire, and my father is finally at peace. It's been my experience that life is seldom that simple."

Neither of her mates argued with her, but they didn't allow her to brood for long.

"I don't think she feels safe, even sandwiched between us like this." Thane wrapped one leg over hers as Sam did the same. At exactly the same time, they eased their legs outward, pulling hers apart. She laughed at their antics and wiggled against their hold. "What should we do about her insecurity?" Thane's melodramatic tone made her smile.

"Why, wrap ourselves around her until she feels safe and warm." Sam cupped her breast and pressed his body against her side.

"I don't feel protected." She pushed his hand away. "I feel crushed."

"You're just being contrary, Tinkerbell." Thane persisted with the nickname no matter how vehemently she protested. "Neither one of us is crushing you -- yet."

Thane brushed his mouth across hers, waiting for her to part her lips. Sam bent to her breast and teased her nipple with his tongue.

"Have you heard back from the agency?" Thane whispered the question against her lips.

"Yes." She said nothing more.

Raising his head, Sam caught her nipple between his finger and thumb, rolling and tugging until she arched her back. "She is in a contrary mood."

Thane chuckled. "And this surprises you?"

"We've only got an hour, sweetheart. Do you really want to spend it talking?"

"The A. O. E. M. has officially approved my request to move my office here. I'm a field agent anyway. It doesn't really matter where my cases begin and end."

"It matters to us," Thane insisted.

"So shall we equip an office for you at the Burton and Associates' building?"

Thane scowled. "Maybe she wants her office at The Carousel."

Marissa laughed, joy unfurling within her heart. She pulled Sam back to her breast and found Thane's lips with hers, whispering her words against his mouth. "We only have an hour. Do you really want to spend it arguing?"

The End

Of this adventure...

Don't miss Aubrey's A. O. E. M.: *Carousel*

Someone is killing members of the Unseleighe Court. Lyell, the Unseleighe Sidhe's most ruthless warrior, is sent to track down the murderer. His investigation leads him to The Carousel, an exclusive nightclub that caters to otherworldly beings.

The club's owner, sultry Evette, immediately catches his eye, but Lyell hasn't ventured into the realm of mortals to indulge in carnal pleasures. He must catch the killer before they strike again.

Evette is fascinated by the Dark Elf. He stirs her passion in a way she's never experienced before. But Evette has a secret -- she's a Nocturnal Dichotomy. How will the other half of her being, easy going, day-dweller Aurora, react to Lyell's intense sexuality?

Aubrey Ross

Multi-award winning author Aubrey Ross writes an eclectic assortment of erotic fiction. From sinister power struggles between demonic clans, to adventurous Mystic Keepers, her books are filled with passion and imagination. Release your inhibitions and let her stories take you where only dreamers dare to soar.

You can visit Aubrey's website at <http://www.aubreyross.com> or join her news group at: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Anything-but-Ordinary>.