

# **Ill Met by Moonlight**

by

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# 1

It was a dream. She knew it was a dream. But somehow that didn't seem to matter.

She was in a warm place, and she was deliciously, tropically warm. And, even though she didn't recognise her surroundings, she felt as safe and enclosed as if someone she loved and trusted was holding her tight.

Sniffing the air, she caught the scents of pine and balsam. Woodsy odours that were both clean and earthy at the same time.

She was waiting for a man. She'd been waiting for him quite a while, but somehow that didn't seem to matter either. Just to be here, relaxed and ready, was a pleasure.

*Who are you? Do I know you?*

Lois wondered if it might be Oliver, her ex. But why would she be waiting for him, even in this floating unreality? They'd parted ages ago, in an easy break, and, when she was awake, she barely ever thought of him . . . so why suddenly dream about him now?

In their heyday, though, the sex had been good. So maybe that was the reason? She was horny, so her body had fixed on its last source of satisfaction – other than her by own efforts. She remembered some of Ollie's finer moments with a twinge of hot nostalgia.

The room was dark and full of deep shadows, lit only by a nightlight and the flickering of a low burning fire. There was a womblike quality to the walls, something natural and

organic, and she still couldn't work out where she was. She only knew it was somewhere new to her that felt irrationally like home too.

*Maybe I was here in a former life?*

Now there was a peculiar notion, if ever there was one . . . but, then, everything about the situation was strange and other-worldly.

*Maybe I'm remembering something I dreamt once before? Now that's complicated . . . a dream within a dream. Whatever next?*

Whatever it was, she couldn't deny that she felt mellow and loose and sexy.

Touching her hands to her body, she was surprised. What the devil was she wearing?

Instead of her habitual shabby T-shirt and overwashed knickers, she found the voluminous and enveloping folds of an old-fashioned brushed-cotton nightdress. Nestling into it like a small furry animal, she sighed. Who'd have thought that something so prim could also be so sexy? The long full nightgown was both cosy and erotic at the same time, and the contrast between being all chastely covered up on top, and bare and devoid of panties beneath was sinfully naughty. As her naked thighs slid against each other, her nipples stiffened and puckered, their tips chafed by the virginal white fabric in a subtle autonomic caress.

*I'd rather have a man do that, but where is he? Where is he?*

Someone was coming though, she knew that. He just wasn't here yet. And, in the meantime, she would make her own amusement.

Picturing a pair of hands that were long and elegant, but full of suppressed strength, she clasped her breasts through the soft cotton of the gown and teased them with light squeezes. The mind image was almost supernaturally clear.

Strong hands, sleek golden skin . . .

Graceful fingers that were gentle but strangely cool . . .

*Curiouser and curiouser . . . but also mmm mmm mmm . . .*

When she flicked her thumbs across the hardened peaks of her nipples, the slight contact sent streaks of sensation flashing along her nerves. She could almost see that too, like little pathways glittering and silvery beneath the white nightdress and her own skin. She watched them zip and twinkle until they popped tiny starbursts in her clitoris. Of their own accord, her hips lifted and she moaned.

*Ohmigod, all I've done is touch my breasts and I'm almost there! What's going happen when I really get down to business? Or he does?*

Suddenly, she couldn't wait . . . she could hardly breathe.

Wriggling against the crisply laundered sheets, she hitched up her nightgown. Up and up until it was just a scrunched-up crumpled bunch under her armpits.

She was a goddess of sex. An odalisque exhibiting herself for a hundred watching eyes. She'd kicked off the sheets as she'd pulled up her nightgown and now she was on display from her chest down to her toes, her skin lapped by the warm scented air.

Breasts. Belly. Thighs. Pubis. The Full Monty.

She could smell herself too. A new perfume had blended itself into the pine, the earth and the juniper wood smoke. Her arousal, salty and pungent and also of the earth.

She stared down at her body, pale as alabaster against the luminous white sheets, the curls of her pussy a wild sandy shock between her thighs. She could see a glint of juiciness sparkling through the hair there and, shimmying against the mattress, she clenched herself, tensing up her strong inner muscles, and felt the slow honeyed roll of her arousal.

*I'm very wet, secret lover . . . very wet. I'm ready . . . where the hell are you?*

Should she touch herself? Or should she save herself for *him*? For a moment, she fantasised that he'd tied her hands to the bed-rails behind her head, punishing her, preventing her from stealing that special privilege.

Then, suddenly, because it was a dream . . . her hands *were* tied!

She was lashed to the brass rails with what looked like the cords from a couple of old-fashioned dressing gowns. How bizarre was that?

Instantly, of course, the need to touch her sex ramped up to an almost agonising pitch. Unable to suppress it or ignore it, she threw herself around on the mattress, hips circling and weaving while she tried desperately *not* to imagine her legs being fastened too.

Uh oh, too late!

No sooner had she thought it than the deed was done and she was bound hand and foot with more dressing-gown cords. Had she ever had a dressing gown like that? Did she know anyone else who had one? Where the hell was all this stuff coming from? She only knew that her ankles were spread wide apart and there was no longer any way whatsoever to get ease from the ravening itch of desire.

And it was now, when somehow she'd managed to make herself totally vulnerable, that the unknown dream lover finally put in an appearance.

The door swung back just like in an old Dracula movie and a figure appeared in the doorway.

And she didn't have the slightest idea who he was.

*Who the hell are you, Dream Lover? And, boy, do you know how to make a big entrance!*

Dream Lover was a cliché as well as a total stranger. Your

actual tall, dark and handsome, but with a twist, and dressed all in black – a long coat, close-fitting T-shirt, jeans and boots.

And he had the most amazing hair!

It was almost black, yet also blond. Like ebony frosted with gold, and cut short, but not too short. A touch of wild, natural curl set off its startling pale tipping and made it appear to glow in the dim room like a halo, its brilliance second only to the fire in its owner's gleaming, flashing eyes.

Lois blinked. There was something weird about those eyes, but their very brightness made it impossible to work out what it was. She could only stare into them, like a willing patsy totally hooked by a hypnotist's spinning coin.

Talk about a fantasy man.

*This is a dream, you fool! Of course he's a fantasy man . . .*

But still, why the hair? And the eyes that she wished she could see better.

She must have conjured him up from the very depths of memory, from some long-lost book she'd read, or image she'd once seen. A world of faeries or earth spirits, of beings of supernatural power and alchemical attraction that she'd loved in more innocent times before she'd become a techno-geek.

But, however she'd cooked him up, God, how she wanted him! Between her thighs, she grew wetter, wetter, wetter . . .

The apparition didn't speak, and Lois couldn't. But still those amazing eyes pinned her to the spot, widening with an unmistakable hunger. He immediately zeroed in on her cunt, and his fine-cut nostrils flared as if he'd smelt her. Which wasn't surprising, because she could certainly smell herself.

And the more she stared at him, the more she thought he was a dish fit for a queen.

He really was quite something. Face broad and intelligent, and vaguely familiar somehow now. Cheekbones high, jaw firm and a mouth that was strong and manly yet ever so

slightly pouty in a way that made her long to nibble his plump lower lip. Even as she hungered for him and his eyes told her he was hungering for her in return, his tongue flicked out and moistened those succulent lips. It was pointed and very pink, darting lasciviously.

Almost expiring with lust, Lois hauled in a deep breath, and began to smell Dream Lover as much as he could smell her, getting yet another surprise into the bargain.

Not for him the smells of leather and sweat. Not for him the cool blue smells of male cologne.

No, as he approached her across the cabin, soft-footed on the wooden floor, he brought with him the sweet smell of flowers.

Violets, wild roses, delicate woodland blooms . . . and, most piercingly and headily, the scent of lavender.

It was like swigging down a triple belt of some perfumed liqueur made by monks in the wilds of rural France.

Lois squirmed around against the mattress, the very quick of her body aching like the devil as if the sweet odour was stimulating it directly. She throbbed and throbbed, her simmering flesh begging for contact. Just the tiniest little touch would do it. The stranger's mouth twisted in a slow knowing smile as he drew nearer. It seemed to light his every feature like a candle.

And still they hadn't exchanged a single word.

While Lois watched like a starving beast eyeing up a prime rib, Dream Lover flung off his long dark coat and then knelt on the bed. Having braced herself for the bounce of substantially muscled body hitting the mattress, she got a shock that made her gasp. He was big – tall and broad and solid – but the sheet on which she lay barely seemed dented. It was the oddest phenomenon, and Lois knew she should be frightened . . . but in a dream, she supposed, weird stuff like this was normal.

That was, if it *was* a dream? Some of it was far too vivid to be imaginary.

Free of his coat, Dream Lover's body was shown off to perfection. His arms gleamed in the firelight as if they were fashioned from polished wood and strength shone around him like an aura. The golden glitter that dusted his thick dark hair was even more breathtaking in close proximity, and his close-fitting black T-shirt embraced the ripped contours of his torso. Beneath the tough dark fabric of his jeans, his thighs were as sturdy as oak branches, and at his crotch there was a fine chunky bulge.

Lois's fingers itched to explore him, but her bonds were disturbingly real in an imaginary situation. She simply could not move, and Dream Lover's velvety, tantalising lips curved at the sight of her struggles. His hand, so conveniently *unfettered*, reached out towards her body, hovering for several seconds over her breast, before dropping to the full curve and cupping it. Lois hissed through her teeth, as his long thumb settled against her nipple as if it belonged there. His skin was as cool as she'd imagined it to be . . .

Her hiss turned to an outright groan as he flicked and tickled her; her mystery man smiled, his passionate mouth widening in a smile that was impish and knowing. With slow calculation, he strummed her again and again, and the compulsion to thrash about and rub the skin of her bare buttocks against the sheet beneath her grew stronger and stronger by the second. She tried to stay still, because for some bizarre reason it seemed important to show a little decorum, but it was hopeless. Wriggling like a strumpet, she knew she'd never looked sluttier in her life.

*Why can't I just ask you who you are?*

She opened her mouth to speak, but Dream Lover put paid to all questions by tweaking the nipple quite hard now, rolling



it between finger and thumb, plucking at it and pulling at it, making it stiffer and pinker than ever. He cocked his gilded head on one side as she bucked against the mattress, attempting to widen her thighs and entice him with her sticky melting sex. She'd never behaved like this before, even in her wildest moments, and her own wantonness both appalled and excited her, goading her aroused body to even greater heights of shamelessness.

*Please . . . please . . .* she begged him silently, still unable to speak. *Touch my cunt. Stroke me with your fingers . . . Fuck me! Please, please, fuck me now!*

The golden-frosted head cocked again, and he grinned like the sun.

*You heard that, didn't you, you bastard? You read my mind!*

Maybe mind-reading was standard operational procedure in dreams? Anything was possible. Watching her face, Dream Lover continued to play idly with her breast for a while, all the time watching her face with the intensity of a scientist.

*I can't take much more of this.*

Lois watched his face for an acknowledgement, but Dream Lover just regarded her benignly as he went on with his fondling.

But Lois didn't feel benign. She wanted to kill him, or fuck him, or even both. Between her legs tension gathered and gathered and her head seemed to be floating it felt so light. Her brain was emptying of thought. She was about to come.

Just from having her breast touched? Surely not? But anything seemed achievable in this wonderful warm place.

But just when it seemed almost about to happen, Dream Lover withdrew his hand.

'You bastard!'

So near, yet suddenly so far, Lois found her tongue at last, and Dream Lover's brow puckered. What was he thinking? Planning some devilish new sexual torture for her, no doubt. He snagged his sinful lower lip with his Colgate-white teeth, and his brilliant eyes sparkled with mischief.

Lois blinked. Surely not? It had suddenly dawned on her what was peculiar about those eyes – they were two different colours. The right one was a sharp, electrical sky blue and the left one was as warm and brown as Armagnac.

She was just about to remark on this unexpected phenomenon, or just simply beg him to fuck her now she'd finally got her voice back, when, without warning, Dream Lover scooted back to the edge of the bed, and then reached down to unbuckle his heavy boots. After kicking them vigorously away across the room, he plucked at the hem of his T-shirt and pulled it out of his waistband with equal impatience. A second later it flew away on the same trajectory as the boots, and she was gifted with the sight of the most awesome male pulchritude. Muscles rippled across his chest and abdomen as he moved, bunching and relaxing beneath skin the colour of honeyed sandstone, almost too beautiful and magnificently male to be real.

*Well, I've never wanted to worship a guy before, but I do now, she thought hazily. What are you, some kind of magical deity? A prince of the world of dreams . . . a perfect lover?*

Coming to her again, he lay over her, his chest hard and smooth against her nipples, while the coarse workaday cloth of his jeans was equally rough against the bare skin of her belly. Lois blushed furiously as he pressed his hard crotch against her mons. She was soaking wet down there and it would surely seep through his jeans and he'd be able to feel it.

But then she forgot about qualms and wetness and jeans

and everything. His mouth came down on hers, and she almost drowned in his sweet floral odour.

The contact of his lips on hers was soft at first, almost ethereal, like chilled velvet. Then, after a few seconds, the kiss grew wild and his tongue pushed inside her mouth, bringing with it a taste that was as heady as his smell. Lois gasped. His lips were candy sweet, and his tongue was cool and wicked, darting like a benevolent serpent inside her mouth, tasting and probing, then powerfully devouring. The pressure of the kiss became so intense that her jaw ached a little from the effort of giving back as good as she was getting.

Big hands settled over her smaller ones where they were fastened to the bedhead. He laced his fingers between hers as he used his entire body to caress and excite her, rubbing her with silky skin and with the denim and with the hardness of his muscles and his cock. His strong hips rocked and rocked, and the bulge of his erection somehow worked its way between her thighs, spreading her sex-lips so it could stimulate her clitoris.

And suddenly it was all too much . . . and yet not enough.

Muffled by his tongue, Lois growled a garbled sound of protest, her pelvis jerking against his, commanding him to give her more, more, more.

In return, Dream Lover laughed, his glee as sweet in her mouth as his taste was. Then he slid one hand down her body, visiting her breasts and her belly. His cool skin was a satin kiss against her heat.

*Touch me! Touch me down there! Masturbate my clit and make me come and make me come before I die!*

But, even if he'd heard her, he was determined to do what he wanted.

Working blind, still kissing, he worked deftly at the button and zip of his jeans and uncovered himself. Lois couldn't see his

size, but, hot damn, she could feel it. He was huge and breathtaking against her thighs, hard and determined as he sought his target. With just a little help from his hand, he navigated himself inside her. His sex was as strong and sturdy as the rest of him and just its presence, cool inside her, was a thrill.

Aroused beyond anything she'd ever known before, she was stretched around him, and the bulk of his penis almost made her come without him moving. She lay beneath him, trembling on the brink, gasping and dreaming.

But he was a man – even in the dream – and he wanted action. With barely a stroke or two he had her in rhapsodies. Her body clutched and clutched at him, clenching and contracting, the sensations twice as spicy because she was helpless and couldn't wrap her limbs around him. When he freed her lips, she peaked again, howling and whimpering. When he thrust again, her soul soared, swooping and flying.

Higher, higher, higher she arced, and then descended, barreling back down into her body like the little shooting star she suddenly and distinctly remembered watching earlier.

And with that, she achieved oblivion.

All went dark.

'Shit!'

Lois Hillyard jerked upright, her heart lurching with the sudden disorientation of waking up far too fast and not quite knowing where she was. She stared around wildly, her eyes skittering from object to object in the unfamiliar room.

*What the hell am I doing in a log cabin and why is it so bloody cold?*

She scabbled for the quilt, which was on the floor beside her bed and, as she swaddled it around herself, she started to remember things. Things like why she was here in a log cabin in the wilds of nowhere beside the sea, which she could hear

rolling outside instead of traffic noises to which she was more accustomed.

And things like stray hot fragments of the dream from which she'd just woken.

'Shit,' she muttered again, burrowing even deeper into the quilt and puffing out her cheeks, still in shock.

*What the hell was all that about?*

She'd had sex dreams before, but never one so vivid, so strange . . . or so kinky.

Bondage with an unknown man who had gold in his hair and smelt of lavender . . . Where had that madness come from?

Dreams were weird. You usually forgot most of them within moments of waking. But not this one.

Her Dream Lover sprang into her mind instantaneously, every detail like crystal.

He'd been tall, muscular, and graceful with the most astonishing hair and eyes. What possessed someone's subconscious to cook up details like that? Still in her duvet, gripped by the shakes, she tried to analyse him.

Well, the height might have come from a TV actor she was keen on, and the long black coat and funereal garb in general was *de rigueur* for vaguely threatening men of mystery.

But the hair? The eyes? The strangely cool skin? She hadn't the faintest . . .

Face? Well, funny as it seemed, she could pin that. The basic features were her actor again, but there was a touch, just a touch, of the man sharing the beach with her as well.

But why the hell dream about *him* though? It wasn't as if there was any chance, she'd quickly discovered, of getting off with him. No holiday romance there, no way.

Neighbour Guy, as she called him, seemed to have been going out of his way to avoid her, and when they had run into

each other he'd been surly at best. He was worthy of fancying, in a purely physical sense, but, in terms of conversation, he seemed to begrudge every monosyllable.

Well, sod you, she'd thought, catching sight of him once or twice, stalking the beach or the rough gravelled track to the local shop, but, somehow, she couldn't help feeling sorry for him too. Somehow, without knowing why, she'd formed a distinct impression that he was a man with a load of sorrow hanging over him. And for that she could almost forgive his chilly grumpiness.

Yes, her fantasy guy of the gilded hair and other magnificent accoutrements had resembled her unhappy neighbour ever so slightly, but otherwise they couldn't have been more different.

Dream Lover had been full of the joys of life. And rambunctiously overflowing with the joys of vigorous pervy sex!

Her body was still tingling with the aftermath, and between her legs she was humid and sticky.

*Ohmigod, I must have come in my sleep!*

Well, all this sea air and the woodland ambience must be good for something. It had put her in touch with her earth goddess self, or something like that. Being out here in the wild beyonds of unconnected nowhere was going to be a blast if she had a dream like that every night, and with any luck she'd not miss the internet at all. With no television, and a mobile connection that kept dropping out every two minutes, all she had for entertainment otherwise were a couple of uninspiring novels.

*You knew this, didn't you, Sand!*

Sandy, her friend and partner in their small web-development business, had been moaning at her for long enough to take a well-earned holiday and get away from it all for a while, and had more or less strong-armed her into accepting this offer of a seaside-cabin break from one of their grateful clients.

Unbeknown to Sandy, Lois had brought her laptop, and had planned to work anyway . . . until, of course, it had dawned on her that she was miles and miles from the nearest wi-fi hotspot!

'Twit!

That would teach her to take the digital, technological world so completely for granted. It served her right for trying to wriggle out of the rest that Sandy had so kindly levered upon her.

It was still frustrating though. Especially when the weather was unseasonably grim and icy for the end of May and the best place to be was inside the cabin, tucked up with a steaming-hot laptop. But her mobile connection was too erratic and slow and, even if she did work, she had no way to upload anything to the testing server without tearing her hair out waiting for minute after minute after minute.

*Better just concentrate on erotic fantasies then . . . They seem to be downloading just fine!*

Either that or do some cleaning.

*Why the hell is this stupid place suddenly covered in dust? It wasn't here earlier . . . Where is it all coming from?*

The cabin had been impressively spick and span when she'd arrived but now a delicate veil of dust lay over most of the surfaces and drifted across the floor. There were even whorls of dust scattered over the bed and on the pillows, with several strange heaps against the head and the foot rails.

*What the f--?*

She shivered. She sniffed the air. And then tentatively, almost reluctantly, she slipped a hand down into her knickers and touched her wetness. Of which there was a lot. Far more than there ought to have been from simply playing with herself.

But it wasn't the quantity that bothered her, it was the way it smelt.

As she withdrew her fingers, a familiar odour made her head spin.

*Lavender . . . It was lavender . . . Why does my crotch smell of lavender?*

Pulling the quilt over her head, she tried hard not to think.



## 2

In human form, Robin crouched on the woodshed roof and tasted the flutters of fear in Lois's mind.

No, this was not what he wanted. Not at all. He'd wanted to give her pleasure, not scare the living daylights out of her. Savouring the physical sensations of sighing, he sent out his mind, and touched hers again, filling it with soothing waves of peace that granted sleep.

There, that was better. Unable to resist the temptation, he disassociated and floated through the roof of the cabin so he could be close to his new object of curiosity.

Touching down, he reassociated, and stood by the bed, just looking at her. Not that there was much to see with human eyes. She was curled up beneath the thick quilt like a hibernating dormouse, and only a few tufts of her tousled blonde hair were protruding from the top of it.

There was much to be said for being what he was though. If she woke up now, and emerged from her hiding place, she would see a man . . . but what she couldn't perceive were the powers he still retained.

He could see through the quilt to the pretty face, and even prettier body that lay beneath.

She was delightful and complex and Robin liked that. Connecting with her gave him everything that was delicious about assuming human form. Every year in the month of May, when the transformation was possible, he tasted and interacted with humans, feasting indulgently on their complicated

and sometimes turbulent feelings. His own kind had emotions, true, but they were mild, bland and somewhat basic. Contentment. Satisfaction. A kind of wistful regret, occasionally. The only emotion that really stirred him while discarnate was curiosity. And, in that, he knew he was unusual among his breed.

And one of the very few to pursue the ancient privileges of merry May.

But look where it had got him!

He was addicted now, perhaps polluted somehow. Even while discarnate, he was gripped by powerful yearnings. Feelings had filtered through by osmosis into the whole of his existence and he only felt truly alive when he was 'human' . . . or as near as to that condition as he could approximate.

And tonight, with beautiful Lois, he'd almost believed for a moment that he was a man.

Dipping lightly into her mind, he relived the delicious episode, smiling at the way her own subconscious had provided all the elements of the scenario.

*You didn't realise you were so kinky, did you?* he told her sub-vocally, relishing the words he'd picked up from her vocabulary and from others, over the years.

Binding her to the bed and tormenting her with pleasure had stirred him mightily. And it stiffened his temporary flesh now in a way that made his spirit swirl with emotion and heady pleasure.

Now this, he thought, placing his large hand over his swelling groin and giving it a gentle squeeze, was something his own kind were really missing. Yes, they had a melding of sorts, and it was exceptionally pleasant, but it was a pale shadow in comparison to the hot, wild, sweaty, pumping chaos of human sex with its pungent fluids, its loss of control and ecstatic release.

For that alone, with a special woman like Lois, he might be prepared to lose the many powers humans lacked.

As Lois stirred, probably sensing him, he stepped back from the bed, ready to disassociate and disappear instantaneously. Her head emerged from under the coverlet, and he was struck again by the sweet appeal of her human face.

It was elegant and oval, but with a soft rounding to the cheeks and a rather snub nose that he knew she sometimes fretted about. He'd modelled his own nose a little on it, to reassure her of the attractiveness of the shape. He'd noted too that, despite her qualms, she'd also found the very same feature subconsciously attractive in the man next door, so he'd taken elements of that face too, when creating the image of his own.

His thoughts balked for a moment, troubled as the consciousness of Lois's neighbour briefly touched his own.

Now there was a human emotion he *didn't* want too much of. Grief. Intense sadness. Inconsolable loss. The man in the next cabin had lost a lover, and lost her here, in this place, to the force of the sea. Robin knew what was in the thoughts of Lois's neighbour and, though he felt he understood them, the course of action that the man was planning was anathema to him. Did he not know how precious a thing the human condition was? Even in its darkest, direst hours . . .

Shaking his head as if that might dispel the received sorrow, Robin returned his attention to the warm sleeping woman who lay before him.

Her hair, he considered, was delightful; the shimmering golden colour of sunlight. He knew, of course, that it had been tampered with to make it look that way, but who was he, an entirely artificial human form, inspired by elements from many sources, to disapprove of a bit of creative enhancement? He'd taken his cue from her in acquiring his own sunlit streaks.

She was deeply asleep again now, without dreams, but the temptation to intervene once more was vivid. His penis was hard, stiff and aching, although the sensation was deliciously pleasant, despite the discomfort. Her body was smooth and warm beneath her untidy T-shirt and panties, and the odour of her sex teased his senses and reinforced them.

How delightful it would be to ensorcell her again and plunge his borrowed stiffness into her.

He experienced a momentary qualm . . . guilt, he recognised. Guilt at exploiting the slumbering woman, and using her for his own satisfaction – even though he had given her pleasure and her subconscious had gladly welcomed him.

No, next time they joined – fucked, had sex, made love, as the humans so whimsically called it, even when they didn't love each other – next time, exquisite Lois would be an active conscious participant. That was a promise he silently made, and swore to keep.

Yet still his acquired flesh ached and ached.

Of course, the answer was to disassociate again. No body. No arousal. No physical ache. But he didn't want to do that. The month of May was precious and there were only a couple of days remaining. He wanted to remain human for as much time as he could.

Settling into his chair, he unzipped his jeans and drew out his cock.

How fine and delightful it felt to caress himself. To fuck the beautiful girl curled up on the bed was obviously the ideal satisfaction, but handling himself had its own particular charm. Curling his large fist around himself, he pumped greedily at his penis, working and working it. There was no need to take his time. No need to delay in order to increase his partner's sensations. He could rush, snatch his release quickly, come fast and hard.

But, when relief came, her name was noiseless on his lips.

For a while afterwards, he just sat there, letting his consciousness roam around the room, examining her possessions and her clothing, learning about her.

Eventually his attention settled on the device set on the rustic table, the one she called her laptop.

Robin had come to understand what the laptop was, and he applauded it as an excellent mode of communication. Humankind might be sorely limited in the way they interacted with one another, but they were ingenious in creating mechanisms to allow themselves to do the best they could, and this small computer was a prime example of what they could achieve.

He touched it and, energised by *his* energy, it sprang to life. Quickly, he rode its patterns of force and deduced the way to mute its operating noises. He didn't want to wake Lois yet. It would be better to 'meet' her for the first time in more acceptable circumstances. Finding an intruder in her bedroom wouldn't get their relationship off to a very good start!

As he played with the device, he sifted through thoughts and notions that he'd gleaned from Lois. She was vexed with her little computer, and vexed with herself over it. Out here, far from so-called civilisation, there was no way for her to connect it to the great web of energy lines she called 'the internet'. It needed something called 'wi-fi' to become a part of that matrix.

Robin smiled. It was simply a node that was required, a nexus that would focus yet another pattern of force. Swooping down, he caught up a big handful of dust and compressed it tightly in his palm.

A moment later, he looked down at a small gleaming lozenge shape that pulsed softly in the dim light of the cabin.

His kind weren't called magical for nothing, he thought

wryly, as he attached the little 'hotspot' to the underside of the desk, well out of sight.

A gift, my Lois, he thought fondly. In return for the pleasure you gifted to me.

With one last longing glance at her, he disassociated and floated away.

'What the fuck?'

Staring at the screen, Lois forgot the shivering chill of the cabin. She forgot the fact that her feet were blocks of ice and she could only keep marginally warm by wrapping the entire duvet and a couple of extra blankets around her. She even, for the moment, forgot the raving hot erotic dream she'd had, that seemed to have burnt itself into her brain in lurid Technicolor detail.

She had a wi-fi connection where one was impossible.

'This is mad!' She refreshed the list again.

But there it was. She was logged into a connection designated 'ooooo' and the signal strength was excellent and the speed frankly phenomenal!

Absently rubbing her chilled toes together to increase their circulation, she went through all the settings, and everywhere, where there should have been strings of figures, she got 'ooooo'.

'This is mad,' she repeated, and then clicked on the icon for Google, which brought up the search engine instantaneously.

The inexplicable connection bugged her, but after a few fruitless minutes of diagnostics, she gave up.

What the hell, at least the IP address wasn't 666.666.666.6.

By the time she'd checked all her favourite pages, and even uploaded a bit of work to her testing server, the sun was high in the sky and its soft yellow rays were cascading in through the windows to warm up the cabin.

*Thank heavens for an oil-fired heating system!*

Lois was grateful for that small mercy as she took a shower in the tiny cubicle. It might be absolute rubbish at warming the rooms of the cabin, but at least it provided plenty of hot water.

She needed to be clean after last night. She'd felt icky and sticky and foxy after that dream. Masturbating in her sleep? Nothing wrong with it, really, nothing at all, but still sort of disturbing that she should be so horny, and not actually all that consciously aware of it.

Touching herself before she stepped beneath the spray, she'd been almost afraid she'd smell the odour of lavender on her fingers, and she'd been relieved – but irrationally disappointed – when all she'd smelt was plain old Lois-smell.

The bay was bright and blue when she stepped out on to the shared porch connecting the two cabins. Despite its convenience, the phantom wi-fi connection troubled her more than she cared to think about and, contrary to her every usual instinct and inclination, she'd turned off her laptop and decided to get out into the fresh air and do some 'nature'.

*But why is it so bloody cold?*

Despite the late-May sun, she was glad of her fleece and her boots as she trudged down the short packed-earth track and on to the beach. With just the two holiday cabins sharing it, the tiny bay was deserted. Lois had no idea where her neighbour was. She'd thought she'd heard him tramping about on the porch earlier, but now there was no sign of him. It would have been nice to make friends because, when she had managed to encounter him briefly once or twice, she'd rather fancied him. He was good-looking in a slightly heavy-set sort of way. But there was nothing doing. His responses had been barely monosyllabic, and a dark pall of 'touch me not' sadness seemed to envelop him.

'Poor bugger,' Lois observed as she stepped out on to the sand and made for the firmer stuff, closer to the water's edge, 'but you can't be happy if you don't give anyone a chance to cheer you up, can you?'

Yes, it would have been nice to forge a little holiday romance with her bay-mate if he'd been amenable, but maybe she didn't really need one. Not with the hyper-real sex dreams she was having! She was having plenty of erotic kink without any of the effort of the courtship dance. It was perfect. She could be as lazy as she liked, and still get satisfaction. Result!

Away from the pull of her computer, and the puzzle of the mysterious wi-fi connection, her experience of last night rushed in again to claim her.

*Boy, had it been hot!*

Dream Lover might have been chilly-skinned, but everything else about him was nothing short of incendiary. Just thinking about it all warmed her up inside her fleece and jeans, despite the spiteful bite of the nippy wind.

Dream Lover rose up before her in her imagination.

The tall dark powerful man out of nowhere was a classic romantic archetype, but where the hell had the image of odd eyes and gold-frosted hair come from? She had no explanation for those.

Not to mention the funky smell of lavender.

She seemed to smell it now, that rich sweet scent. And her body was growing warmer and warmer and warmer, surging and rousing with a rush of reborn lust.

The mysterious stranger advanced through her mind towards her and she felt so weak at the knees that she was forced to stagger to a scrappy outcrop of sand grass that had created a small dune at the edge of the beach.

Cowering on the little hump, she hugged her arms around her, shaken by the intensity of returned lust.



*This is mad! Just mad! I'm going crazy!*

For the second time in a morning, it was impossible to focus on reality. She was right back in her sweet, dangerous, nocturnal fantasy even while she scanned the bright clear sky above the bay.

A solitary bird was wheeling in the brisk salty air. It was dark, and appeared tiny so far aloft, but, as she watched it, there suddenly seemed a new purpose to its circling. It swooped, and seemed to be flying right at her, inducing a wild rush of Hitchcock-related panic.

*Don't be crazy! How can it have seen you? And, if it has, why would it fly at you?*

Yet still the bird, a gull of some kind, was closing, diving on dark wings, but revealing a strange mottling to its plumage as it neared. There were lighter speckles among the feathers around its head and its eyes, possibly white, possibly yellow . . . possibly gold.

Lois wanted to spring to her feet, and run back to her cabin, pack up her gear and just get the hell out of Dodge . . . but all she could do was sit and watch, locked in place as the bird began to circle again, slowly, maintaining its distance in the air over the water.

The leisurely repeated sweeps were hypnotic. Her fear ebbed, and the strange warmth in her body grew almost tropical.

And so, to her astonishment, did the low, deep, sweet welling of desire. Night and day coexisted somehow; she was in her dream, but also awake, in the sunshine.

Half her mind watched a bird. Half of it was back in the cabin, in the soft lamplight, watching Dream Lover approach, anticipating his touch.

'Oh please,' she whimpered, repeating her plea from last night.

She yearned for him, desire flickering deep in her groin for

this vivid, but imaginary man. Her nipples tingled, her sex clenched on emptiness, the hunger to be filled so intense it brought tears to her eyes.

No real man had ever satisfied her like him.

Without thinking, she clasped her hand to her crotch, squeezing, trying to ease the ache. Pressing and massaging, she stared up at the strange dark gull, watching it execute a graceful diving spiral, almost in response to her action. Then she looked down again, observing her own pale hand against the stonewashed cloth of her jeans, and wishing it were another hand. One that was bigger and stronger and totally male.

Imagining him behind her, she moaned, longing for it to be his great body on which she leant while she took her pleasure, longing for his arms to enfold her and gentle her through the spasms.

'Oh! Oh, God!' Crying out, she came in a sudden rush, out of the blue, dimly hearing the gull shriek too, as if applauding her or even sharing her crisis.

Still clutching herself, she wrapped her other arm around her torso, hugging and rocking.

She didn't hear the heavy trudging footsteps until it was too late, and, when they did penetrate her haze, she looked straight up into the frowning face of her next-door neighbour.

'Are you all right?'

Hot blood flooded her cheeks. Oh, God, it must be obvious what she'd been doing, and his dour frown seemed to confirm her worst suspicions. His grim set expression spoilt what was really a very personable countenance. Any normal man would have been smirking at her, turned on by what she'd been up to . . . but not him. He appeared unutterably depressed and disapproving.

'Yes, I'm fine.' Even though it was a lost cause, Lois snatched

her hand from her crotch and stuffed it surreptitiously into her pocket. 'Thanks. Just got a bit of a stitch. It's going now. Thanks.'

'Sure?' His brow was still crumpled.

She had no idea whether he believed her but, if he didn't, her little exhibition obviously left him cold. His eyes were bleak and bitter, as if he were already weary of talking to her.

'Yes, thanks, I'm fine,' she parroted, her face flaming.

'I'll be getting along then. Be seeing you,' he concluded gruffly, and, as he turned and stomped away, Lois didn't know whether to be angry or relieved.

*He thinks I'm some kind of sex maniac. He thinks I'm disgusting!*

'Well, screw you!' she muttered, hurling the suppressed insult at the broad retreating back that had already reached the path and was rapidly receding from view. 'Any *normal* man would be all over me like a rash.'

Attracted by a flash of movement, she realised that the dark gull-like bird had landed only a couple of yards away from her and was regarding her solemnly, its peculiarly mottled head cocked on one side.

'Yeah, yeah, yeah, birdie! I know the guy's obviously got some serious problems and I should feel sorry for him . . .' She paused, her throat tight all of a sudden, and her eyes hot with unexpected tears. 'But I'm lonely. I'm used to being around people . . . but Sandy said I needed a break.' Bright avian eyes blinked and Lois blinked too. There was something very odd about this creature, and yet she couldn't stop herself rambling on to it. 'I don't know . . . when I saw him, I was sort of hopeful; it's a while since I, um, was with anybody, and I suppose I was hoping I'd get a bit of holiday nookie.'

The bird hopped sideways and flapped its wings making Lois jump.

'Oh fucking hell, I'm talking to birds now! I've had enough of this . . . I'm off to the shop to get some wine and I'm going to get drunk!'

She leapt to her feet and, as she did so, the bird took flight and seemed to hover for a moment, floating above her, before flapping vigorously and soaring away.

Lois shook her head. *I'm going nuts here . . . just another day or so, to keep Sandy quiet, and then I'm back to town, no messing.*

Wondering what kind of wine the small local shop stocked, and how much of it they had, she stomped off towards the path, her sandy footsteps blending with those of her neighbour.

### 3

'Why is it so bloody cold in here?'

Lois hugged the quilt around her, and took another swig of her wine. It was supposed to be spring but this accursed place felt like the depths of midwinter despite the underfloor heating. The cabin was far from a wretched hovel, with its electricity and plumbing and whatnot, but at the moment she might as well have been residing in a primitive mud hut for all the benefit the mod cons seemed to be providing.

*Not the only thing around here that's primitive*, she thought, scowling fiercely at her laptop, which sat on the small wooden table, dead as a doornail. The bloody thing had insisted on repeatedly crashing all day, which was doubly frustrating now she'd mysteriously gained a wireless broadband connection. She could probably fix it, but it would take some troubleshooting, and she didn't feel like tackling it in this perpetual depressing cold.

Casting one last fulminating glance at the recalcitrant computer, she set aside her drink but not her quilt, padded over to the wood-burning stove and, using an old potholder to open the front door panel, she peeped inside.

*Goddamnit to hell!*

The bloody thing was burning down and there were no more logs chopped. The stove was the only thing that seemed to be keeping the room above Antarctic temperatures.

The logical thing would be to turn in, just throw all her clothes and all the available blankets over the top of herself

and sleep. But she was restless. Feverish inside, despite the cold. She wanted to stay awake because she had the strangest idea that she needed to.

Nothing in the log basket. Not a splinter.

Was it worth nipping out the back and chopping some wood? Normally she would have copped out and waited until morning, but that funky sense of expectation – and the glasses of wine she'd drunk – made her grit her teeth and pull on her jeans and fleece over her jersey shorts and top. After stuffing her feet into her slippers, she shuffled outside.

The second thoughts kicked in when she reached the hard standing at the back of the cabin, where the chopping block stood. The high full moon made the night brilliant, almost unearthly, but was it really a good idea to start chopping wood at this hour, especially when you'd been drinking and you were probably the world's worst survivalist to start with?

'Just one or two, Lois.' She opened the woodshed that contained the boiler, the wood . . . and the axe.

Third thoughts halted her once she had a log on the block, but dragging in a deep breath she lifted the axe and aimed as best she could.

And missed, sending the lethal tool sliding erratically sideways across the chopping surface.

Another blow resulted in a quarter-inch sliver off the edge of the log.

The third missed again.

'Oh, bloody fucking hell!'

Her profanity assaulted the beautiful night, and echoed back at her from the surrounding woodlands that backed on to the rear of the cabin.

'Can I be of any help?' enquired a soft amused male voice that seemed to emanate unexpectedly from somewhere above her.

*What the hell?*

Flinging the axe across the hard standing, safely clear of her feet, Lois looked up towards the moonlight sky.

There was a man crouched on the roof of the woodshed.

*Oh, God!*

She staggered, not even knowing whether she'd spoken aloud or not, and as she tumbled backwards, then landed hard on her bottom, she observed the most astonishing phenomenon play out in slow motion.

The crouching man was big and clad all in black and, as he launched himself from the woodshed roof and jumped down, his long black coat billowed and flapped like the wings of a great dark bird. His descent seemed to take an age, although she knew it was only in her mind, and, when he touched down, he seemed to land as lightly as if he'd been fashioned from thistledown.

'Are you all right, my dear?' The stranger swooped down in a low crouch again, and reached out to touch her.

Lois scuttled away from him, terrified for any number of reasons.

*Do I know you?*

To her astonishment, and shivering excitement, she realised that she did.

The descending man was also Dream Lover!

The same broad intelligent face. The same dark clothing. Dear God, the same astonishing gold-tipped hair . . . Dazzled, she hardly dared look too closely at him, but she would have put good money on the fact that his eyes were odd too.

In the flesh, so to speak, and in reality, he was quite, quite beautiful. Big, in the sense of very tall, and built like the proverbial, but glorious with it.

His great head tilted on one side; he was obviously waiting for her answer, but the sheer impossibility of his presence had struck her dumb.

Her mouth opened, but nothing came out.

*How the hell can you be here?*

The words were silent, and she blinked at him, expecting him to disappear and for her to be back in the cottage, huddled beneath the covers and dragging herself out of sleep with her hand in her knickers.

But a second later, his gentle but firm hold on her arm was real. And so was the way he effortlessly helped her to her feet.

'Are you all right?' he repeated softly, and, now that she managed to look into his eyes, her suspicions were confirmed.

One was the colour of fire-lit brandy, the other a brilliant aquamarine blue.

'Um . . . yes, I'm fine,' she lied. 'Thank you.'

He was gorgeous, and seemed benign, but still her terror made her lash out.

'At least I would be if you hadn't given me such a shock. What the hell were you doing up there? And who are you for that matter? Skulking around here at the dead of night on people's roofs.'

His face split with a wide personable smile that exhibited a set of brilliant, immaculately even and possibly quite *sharp* teeth. In the moment before he spoke, notions of vampires and werewolves flitted disquietingly through Lois's mind. She loved a horror fantasy as much as the next person, but, until now, that was all they were . . . just fantasies and stories.

Until now . . .

'I'm sorry, that was rather bad of me, wasn't it?' He nodded in the general direction of the woodshed roof. 'But there's such a good view up there, and I was concerned for your safety. Who knows what might be lurking in the forest at this time of night?'

*Did he just wink then?*



'Well, it's very kind of you to be concerned, whoever you are, but I think I can manage to look after myself, thank you very much.'

'Well, you weren't doing too well at chopping your own wood, were you?' He cocked his head towards her pathetic splinters and the axe lying at the edge of the woods where she'd flung it. 'Would you like some help?'

*With what?* her stirring libido suddenly prompted. Dream Lover was even more of a dish standing in front of her, and she was reminded alarmingly of her confession to the bird that morning. She *was* lonely. And it *was* a long time since she'd had the pleasure of a man.

Dream Lover looked as if he was more than enough man for any woman, and if there were the slightest chance that he performed as well in reality as he had in her fantasy . . . Well, wouldn't it be worth taking a chance?

Even so, putting a sharp and heavy axe into the hand of someone who might be a pervert or a stalker, and who peeped at women from roofs was tantamount to booking a slot on *Crimewatch* in advance, wasn't it?

*I should run into the cabin and lock the door. Now.*

But, instead, she heard herself saying, 'Well, yes, I suppose so. A few logs would be great, if it's not too much trouble?'

Dream Lover beamed, which did weird things to her knee joints, and even weirder, hotter things between her legs. He really did have the most sumptuous white smile.

'Not at all.' Still smiling, he held out a large capable-looking hand. 'And my name is Robin. What's yours?'

'Er, Lois . . . and I'm – I'm pleased to meet you.'

She put her small hand in his big one and only just managed to keep herself from trembling.

His skin was cool and smooth. Just like in the dream. And his lips were cool too. Deliciously cool and firm and supple as

he drew her fingers up to them and pressed a light kiss upon her trembling skin.

'And I'm very pleased to meet you, Lois,' he said crisply, releasing her hand, giving her a little nod, before striding away to retrieve the axe. 'Now how much chopped wood do you need?'

'Oh, just enough for tonight, really. That'd be great.'

He nodded again as if she'd said something very wise and sensible, then, after setting the axe on the block, he shed his voluminous black coat.

And then his T-shirt . . .

*Dear heaven, what a bod!*

Lois watched entranced as Robin hefted the first log on to the block and began to splice and dice it like an expert woodsman. His torso was like wood too, honeyed gold wood, polished and gleaming in the brilliant moonlight, every bit as ripped as that of his dream counterpart and just as toffee-golden.

His muscles flexed and bunched as he worked, like visual poetry.

*This is crazy . . . I just dreamt him up . . . Why is he actually here ?*

But there was no denying that Robin was here. The rate at which he was racking up the firewood proved that. Within a few minutes there was a stack big enough to heat twenty cabins.

'Thanks ever so much. That's fabulous!' That prime body was making her gush like a giddy teenager, and she could feel her face getting hot as he straightened up and smiled at her again, axe still in hand. 'I . . . er . . . would you like to come in for a glass of wine or something?'

His strange eyes twinkled at her, almost as if he'd known she was going to say that. Unease fluttered through her, but faced

with his beautiful smile – and his beautiful body – she squashed it, embracing the risks.

‘Why that would be splendid, Lois,’ he said roundly, setting down the axe and pushing his fingers through his crisp gold-tipped hair, ‘Thank you, I would be delighted to share a glass of wine with you.’

Oh, his eyes, his mouth, his whole body, even . . . They were all saying how much more than wine it was he hoped to share.

‘Cool.’ Muttering, Lois scooted for the cabin door, too dazzled to be able to look at him any more. She heard him scoop up his clothes and an armful of firewood and follow her, yet strangely it was the rustle of his leather coat against the wood that marked his progress, not his footsteps.

*What is it with him? He barely seems to touch the ground and yet he’s such a great big hunk.*

Swinging open the door, she wondered just what kind of madwoman she was being. But it was too late. Robin was right behind her and already inside.

For a log cabin, Sandy’s hideaway was spacious, and Lois had been favourably surprised on arrival, having expected a dismal shack. But now, however, it felt as if she were in a rustic doll’s house, complete with miniature furniture. The kitchen area, the cosy fireside with two comfy armchairs, and the large bed and chest of drawers at the other end of the long room were all dwarfed by the massive man who strode forwards and flung his dark coat and T-shirt across the back of a chair.

Still stripped to the waist, Robin jammed a couple of decent-sized logs into the stove, and then stacked the rest of them in the wood basket. With the age-old seriousness of ‘man who make fire’, he plied the poker expertly and coaxed the flames. Within seconds the freezing room became a tropical paradise. In fact, far more so than it had a logical right to be.

*Stop standing around like a lemon just staring at him! Say something, woman!*

But all she could manage to do was stare . . . at a set of splendid pecs, a narrow waist and a luscious and suggestively packed crotch.

Robin beamed back at her as if he knew that before the night was out they'd be sleeping together.

'Er, would you like a shower or something . . . with all that chopping and flinging wood about?'

She half expected him to laugh, but he didn't.

'Of course, that's a wonderful idea. Thank you.' Before she could stop him, he'd taken off his boots and kicked them away across the room. The next moment, he was at his belt and the zip of his jeans and then stepped out of them.

Lois's jaw dropped. It was a cliché, but she almost had to pick it up off the floor.

Robin wasn't a wearer of socks or underwear, it seemed. He stood there unperturbed, displaying his majestic male equipment as if it were perfectly normal to fling off his clothes in front of a woman he'd met just minutes ago.

'Through there?' He gestured gracefully towards the door to the cabin's small shower room.

'Um . . . yes.' Lois's tongue froze and she swallowed. Hard. Somehow she was incapable of raising her eyes above his waist level.

He was so big . . . and he was actually getting bigger as she watched.

'Thank you, I won't be but a few moments.' Robin's smile was calm, but there was a cheeky confidence in his odd eyes. He was totally aware of the effect he was having on her and, as he strode fluidly towards the bathroom in long loping strides, he had the gall to lightly frisk himself and look back to make sure that she was watching.

'What am I doing? What am I doing?'

Lois ran for the wine bottle on the table and poured a large measure into her glass. 'What am I doing?' she repeated, cradling it in both her hands like a magical chalice, hoping that the Merlot would wash away the last of her doubts and her qualms about Robin.

*He's just bloody glorious!*

She drank a few mouthfuls of the rich red wine, trying to concentrate on the positives of having the best-looking and best-built man she'd met in years tucked away with her in this cabin miles from anywhere. At the same time, she tried to dismiss the fact that there were some things that were undeniably strange about him.

Not bad. Just weird . . . very weird.

As the water sluiced down in the room beyond, Lois had a feeling that her new friend had been neither dirty nor sweaty. She'd noticed no odour of work-induced perspiration as he'd passed her, and there was no hint of it now, as she picked up his clothing and couldn't resist sniffing it.

What she did smell set her trembling and grabbing for her wineglass again.

Flowers again, and predominantly lavender.

Lois looked at her bag, her scattered clothes. There were only a few toilet items in the shower room. She could be out of here, in her car and on the road before he had finished showering.

But, almost before she calculated her chances, the water stopped, and she knew she wouldn't have gone anyway. Instead, she wriggled out of her jeans and fleece, then dived across to the mirror over the chest of drawers and frowned into it. The image disheartened her. Her tufted hair, her grungy old sleep shorts and top, and the make-up-free ordinariness of her staring wide-eyed face were less than alluring. She pushed at a few curls, pinched her cheeks to

give them some colour and bit her lips, but it was already too late.

The shower room door swung open and Robin walked into the room. He was still nude and casually towelling at his hair.

Lois gasped, aware that this was becoming a habit in this strange man's presence. His naked body was sublime, gleaming and fresh from the shower, and he had no qualms whatsoever about showing it to her. The only problem was that she was having trouble forming coherent thoughts, much less sophisticated adult conversation, with all that male comeliness on show.

'Perhaps I could have that glass of wine now?' Robin let his towel drop around his shoulders, but made no attempt to cover his mighty nether regions.

'Yes. Yes, of course.' Lois scooted for the wooden kitchen table, poured out a glass of red for Robin and surreptitiously topped up her own.

*If I'm going to behave as if I'm too stupid to live, I might as well use the booze as my excuse.*

Turning, she discovered that Robin had settled into one of the easy chairs by the fire, and the towel lay abandoned on the floor. Lois smiled and felt strangely reassured. He might be her literal Dream Lover right out of her fantasies, but in term of household sloppiness he was a very normal man. She handed him his glass, swept up the towel and placed it over the little drying rack that stood against the wall.

'Oops! Sorry.' Robin's grin said he wasn't sorry at all, cheeky sod.

Lois let herself down carefully into the other seat, still tongue-tied and increasingly aware that her shorts and her little buttoned top weren't a particularly substantial covering. Of course, if she'd been in her right mind, she would've put

her robe back on, but she was in her entirely wrong mind. All she could do was sit, frozen in place, unable to do anything but gaze and goggle at the man sitting opposite her.

His long limbs were stretched out like those of a classical sculpture, and his superb body appeared entirely too big for the modest chair. He looked comfortable though, leaning back into the upholstery, his peculiar eyes closed as if he were dozing.

*Great! Just come in, make yourself at home and flaunt your fabulous tackle at me . . . and then fall asleep.*

Robin's eyes flicked open. 'Does my nakedness bother you? Shall I put my clothes back on again?'

*Yes, put them on and go, because I'm scared shitless of you!*

*No, stay and never wear a stitch again . . . because it'll break my heart if you cover all that gorgeousness up!*

'No, not all. If you're comfortable, that's fine by me.'

Robin nodded and lifted his glass in salute. 'To you, Lois, I'm glad I found you.'

Lois gulped at her own wine, alarmed. 'What on earth does that mean?' she demanded, a droplet of Merlot sneaking down her chin and requiring a swift swipe of the hand.

Lashes that were far too long and pretty for a man with such a large cock swept down, giving him an almost shame-faced look. 'I'm afraid I've been watching you, Lois.' He toyed with his glass, one moment watching the flames from the little stove through it, the next, looking at her. 'You might say I've become enchanted by you. You're very beautiful and I like beautiful things.'

Lois laughed out loud. Oh great, she'd got a stalker with a nice line in compliments now.

'I think you need your eyes testing, Robin. I look like a bag lady tonight, and I haven't been looking all that great since I got here. I'm on holiday, and as there's no talent around – or

there didn't seem to be at first – I haven't been making an effort.'

'Talent?'

'Men. Crumpet. Male totty . . . you know?'

She wasn't sure at first whether he did know, but then he smiled and looked pleased with himself. Obviously he was supremely confident that *he* was totty.

And the way his penis was growing said the same too.

'But you have a neighbour. What about him? Do you not like the look of him?'

'Well, he's all right, but he seems a bit solitary. He doesn't seem to be interested in company.'

Robin looked serious for a moment, his face very pure and solemn. 'Indeed, he is a very unhappy man. A pall of great sadness hangs over him.'

Lois narrowed her eyes. Had he been watching the neighbour too?

Robin shrugged. 'But you said as much yourself.'

*What? What the fuck? Can you read my mind?*

Robin simply smiled and lounged even more languidly in his chair, one hand loosely cradling his wineglass, the other spread upon his thigh, close to his cock, almost as if he wanted to draw her attention to its gathering might as a diversion.

His beautiful lashes fluttered down again, and he appeared to be dozing.

What the hell was happening? Could he read her thoughts? Again and again the mantra circled in her head: *Who are you? Who are you? What are you?*

But she got no answer from the silent relaxed man.

'I dreamt about you last night.'

The words were out before she could stop herself, and Robin's peculiar bi-coloured eyes snapped open again, instantly flashing their two brilliant hues.



'Did you know that? I dreamt about you,' she rushed on, panicking. 'How can I have dreamt about you when I just met you not half an hour ago? It doesn't make sense!'

Without warning, Robin set his glass aside and slid out of his chair and on to his knees. His cock bounced from side to side as he shuffled across the patchwork rug until he was kneeling in front of her, his great head tilted to one side a little, his gaze questioning and hypnotic.

Compulsively, Lois drank some wine, almost on autopilot, but the second she took the glass from her lips Robin reached for it, gently prised it from her fingers and set it aside. Still kneeling in front of her, he took her small warm hands in his much larger cooler ones.

'The woods and the sea are magical places, Lois, and this cabin is right at the nexus of both their influences.' He squeezed her fingers very lightly, as if they were crystal and he didn't want to damage them. 'It's hardly surprising that unusual things happen here. What you dreamt last night might have been a part of the future seeping back into the present.'

'That's ridiculous!'

But she was shaking. Could she do that? Could she want that? It was all very well to imagine kinky things in fantasies, but for real? That was another story. Especially with a man she barely knew.

'The world is strange, Lois,' he murmured cryptically, his thumbs circling her palms in a light soothing caress that seemed to impact all over her body . . . especially between her legs. She suppressed an intense urge to squirm, experiencing his innocent touch deep in her sex. But then the look in his peculiar eyes said that he knew exactly what she was feeling.

'Your dream . . . was it pleasant?' With a slow smile, he lowered his head, looking up at her from beneath his sumptuous lashes,

and then brought first one, then the other of her hands to his lips for a kiss.

'I . . . er, yes, sort of. But it was strange . . . not something that could really happen.'

The touch of his lips was cool fire. She was shaking hard now, and she couldn't tell whether it was fear, confusion or extreme lust. Or a combination of all three.

'Are you sure?'

'I don't know! I don't know!' she almost cried.

He shuffled closer, reached for her, and this time brought her mouth to his in a delicate gentling kiss.

'What happened in your dream?' His words were like a whisper of perfumed air against her cheek and her ear.

Furious blood flushed her face as she remembered the game, and her body bound and open and vulnerable to him, hungering for him as it did now.

She tried to turn away from him, but he held her firm, his mouth against her hair.

'I can't! I can't say . . .'

But *his* lips were moving, and she realised he was murmuring softly, describing the fantasy.

'How do you know these things? How do you know? It's impossible for you to know what I dreamt . . .'

'Hush, my dearest.' He kissed her jaw, and then her throat. 'Just call it instinct, intuition . . . My dream, maybe, just as much as yours.'

'But I'm scared! I don't know if I want to do those things,' she protested, her heart fluttering in her chest like a wild bird, the strange gull maybe, in her chest. 'I don't know if I'd ever really want to do something like that.'

Taking her face between his large smooth hands, he forced her to look at him, straight into the disorientating beauty of his eyes.

'Then we can do other things, Lois, anything you like. Just say the word.'

'I d-don't know what the word is.'

'Why it's "yes", of course, isn't it?'

And then he kissed the whispered answer right from her lips.

## 4

His mouth was tender and flexible, and his cool tongue naughty and daring as it delicately pressed for entrance. Her face was cradled in his long elegant hands and there was no way to escape the kiss even if she'd wanted to.

And oh, his taste was so sweet! She'd read of kisses being described as delicious, but Robin's really were. The flavour of wildflower honey seemed to fill her mouth along with his tongue, the taste and scent of it as intoxicating as the sensuous exploration. Her hands fluttered wildly, and then she threw her arms around his large muscular body, embracing his magnificent back as she surrendered to his kiss.

Dimly, a far way back in her mind, she recognised that she could probably be accused of being wilfully stupid, encouraging this strangest of strangers to kiss her, touch her and much, much more. But she was too ensorcelled to do anything but silence the voice of dissent and hold on to him.

The kiss went on a long, long time, their tongues flickering around one another, teasing, challenging and tasting. Other delightful sensations impinged on her consciousness too.

The warmth of the fire on her skin was a counterpoint to the strange living chill of Robin's body. The contrast was thrilling. He seemed to be able to sear her with skin and flesh that had the silky hardness of polished marble, and her hands couldn't seem to explore it fast enough. Her fingertips roved feverishly over his shoulders, his back and his torso.

Eventually, he freed her mouth and sat back on his heels,

just looking at her. His odd eyes glittered with hunger, with devilment, and the flickering light from the fire danced like magic dust over his fast-drying gold-tipped hair.

'You are beautiful,' he said, stealing the exact words she'd been going to utter away from her.

Rapt as she was, Lois found herself compelled to laugh. 'And you're crazy! Have you really looked at me? I'm a mess. I look like a complete fright. My hair's all over the place, my skin is all pale and pasty, and these are probably the nastiest old clothes in my possession.'

He smiled at her and shrugged his big shoulders and silently mimed the word 'Nonsense'.

'Well, I think you ought to get those weird eyes of yours tested then!'

'You're beautiful,' he repeated, a small mild smile playing around his sensual lips. 'You're beautiful and I want to give you pleasure.'

*Oh, God, I want you to give it me too!*

But she could no longer speak because he came forwards again, and began kissing her neck, then the crook of her shoulder, then her collarbone and chest where her granddad T-shirt was unbuttoned. His hands rested on her thighs as his lips nibbled and travelled.

She looked down at his magical hair, and the smooth planes of his back. Tentatively she touched his satiny skin. The delicate way he was mouthing her almost made her want to swoon, especially when he touched her with the tip of his tongue.

Immediately, her sex surged, as if imagining the sensation of that determined little serpent flickering against the sensitive bud of her clitoris. Unable to prevent herself, the very thought made her groan.

Robin's gilded head shot up and he grinned at her.

*Oh, dear Lord, he can read my mind!*

Big hands reached for her top, deftly opening it to reveal her breasts. Lois gasped. Her nipples were already puckered and tight. The air wasn't cold, but the contrast between concealment and exposure was a little shock.

Robin swooped in with hands and mouth, his lips settling on one breast, while he cradled his fingers around her curves, flexing them lightly to hold her.

His cool tongue moved as it had in her mouth, darting, swirling, tickle-tasting. Lois kicked with pleasure, her bare feet sliding against his thighs, his shins. Her hips started to weave. She was out of control, grabbing on to the arms of the chair for stability.

He gave her breast a long hard suck and she wailed, shooting almost to the point of orgasm. He'd done that in the dream, she remembered hazily, fondled her breast and brought her to pleasure when it shouldn't have been possible.

But suddenly she wanted more, more. She wanted what she'd had in her dream. His cock inside her as he thrust, his strong hips swinging to get in deeper than deep.

She tried to tell him. She tried to rise. But he quelled her, and kept her in her seat. His fingers plucked at the elastic of her shorts, his eyes locking on hers, as if asking permission to remove them.

*Oh yes! Go on! Yes!*

Efficiently he pulled off her shorts and flung them away, baring her crotch to his gaze in the firelight. A moment later, his spread fingers settled on her belly, pressing gently, thumb stroking. Making a frame for her navel, he dipped his pointed tongue into it.

A sharp, almost painful jolt of sensation shot through her, right to her core. Again, she moaned, even closer to the edge. Her bare feet scrabbled against him again, and her knuckles went white where she gouged at the chair arm. Her hips wafted

upwards as if they were inviting him of their own accord to go further.

He placed a slow precise kiss on her lower belly, just at the edge of her pubic bush.

*If only I'd waxed*, she thought, even though subliminally she knew he didn't give a hoot whether she was jungle-hairy, trimmed or even shaven. Who was to know she'd literally meet the man of her dreams out here in this remote little hideaway. Even her neighbour had been a surprise when she'd encountered him.

'Oh yes, oh yes . . .' he murmured softly, lifting his face a moment, and flashing her a hot look, before diving down again. As his mouth moved ever closer to its target, his capable hands slid beneath her buttocks to cup and lift her.

Like one cat greeting another, he lightly rubbed his cheeks and his chin and his closed mouth against the soft hair between her legs, his nostrils flaring as he drew in her odour. Frustrated by the lightness of the contact, Lois shuffled and stirred, trying to press herself against his face, all the time wishing that she was the one who'd just taken a shower. And yet, and even more catlike, Robin seemed to purr with satisfaction at the smell of her sex and his lashes fluttered like fans as he breathed her in.

'Delicious,' he whispered, just touching his tongue against the soft flossiness and teasing it. Then his juicy mouth curved into a devilish grin and, supporting her bottom on one hand, he positioned her leg over his shoulder. Deftly swapping hands, he repeated the process with the other, and then took hold of her bottom again to bring her crotch right to his face.

With his lips just inches from her, he paused again, as if surveying the landscape of her sex in intimate detail. With her thighs stretched around his head, she was open to him, moist and revealed in a way that even surpassed her dream. The

sensation of being studied was like a caress in itself. Stirring and moaning, she reached back and grasped the chair back behind her to create a base from which to push herself against him.

She wanted to writhe. She wanted to buck about. She didn't dare look down at him, crouched and naked, his face between her thighs.

But she did.

Robin was staring at her sex. His eyes were intent with knowing expectancy, and he was smiling like a demon. The fine gold tipping of his dark hair was almost shooting sparks and, as she watched, he ran his tongue lightly over his lips as if preparing them to savour her flesh.

And then he looked up. Right into her eyes. His own were flashing with a brilliant eldritch light that owed nothing to reflections from the fire or the lamps. Something moved and danced in those duo-coloured depths, something not of this world. Lois gasped, riding high on a silvery strand of terror that only increased her arousal.

But, before she could process it, he plunged in – and she forgot it.



## 5

The touch of his tongue brought a sharp cry to her lips. She was so ready for it, yet still he surprised her. With cool, delicate precision, he explored her, he caressed her. Flicking his tongue-tip lightly over her slippery folds, tasting and teasing and pleasuring as he went.

The first contact with her clitoris made her drum her heels on his bare back, and her torso arch, pressing her opened sex closer to his face. The second contact made her howl like a woodland animal as he furled his tongue to a silky point and batted it to and fro over the sensitive little button.

The third contact, a firm assertive press with no hesitation or mercy, made her come, shouting and kicking at once.

She couldn't keep still. She twisted like an electrified eel, her muscles taut and her nails gouging the upholstery of the chair back. But still he held her, feasting and lapping at her sex while she struggled, her bottom a foot off the chair and cradled in his hands.

When he sucked her clit, she came again, and his name, wrought by her lips, filled the cabin in a ringing shout of triumph.

And then, it was like being in the dream again. Well, almost . . . Her consciousness wavered, her mind knocked sideways by the intense pleasure, and she blinked and blinked again, as she peered down the length of her own trembling body.

Robin seemed to be clothed in gold, his skin dazzling, and his outline mutable, misty and shifting. She opened her mouth

to exclaim in fear and wonder, but then her perceptions shifted again, dropping back into place, and all she saw was the most handsome piece of flesh-and-blood male gorgeousness she'd ever seen, looking up at her, grinning at her across the humid planes of her abdomen, his red mouth shimmering with the moisture from her sex.

Gently, he let her down into the seat again, and slid her thighs from off his shoulders, setting her feet on the floor again. Lois released her death-grip on the back of the armchair and slumped against the upholstery as if she'd had every molecule of air in her lungs knocked out of her.

Kneeling up, Robin loomed over her. He touched her face, stroking it with utmost tenderness, smoothing her sweaty hair away from her brow. He seemed to be soothing her as if she'd endured some stringent ordeal, or suffered something terrible and gruelling on his behalf, and his beautiful eyes were solicitous.

'All right now?' he whispered, taking her hand and bringing it to his lips.

Lois had to laugh, and Robin beamed at her, laughter in his face too.

'Bloody fantastic, thanks to you!' she exclaimed, sitting up, flinging her arm around his shoulder and pulling him close to her for a proper kiss.

He accepted it, still smiling and looking disgustingly pleased with himself.

'I don't know where you learnt to do that, but, man, you are a genius!'

'Sheer instinct, my dearest,' he murmured, dropping an outrageous wink, then stealing another kiss as he drew her by the arms on to the rug in front of the stove.

The wooden floorboards were hard beneath them, and the old-fashioned rag-rug was bumpy beneath her bottom, but what were minor discomforts like that when you were in the arms of

a beautiful magical man who'd just given you the best head you'd had in your entire life? It seemed perfectly natural to coil her arms around Robin and continue the kiss where they'd left off.

Only this time he was lying half over her, his body imposing itself on hers, but not weighing her down. As their tongues duelled, she savoured the sweet taste of his mouth, blended with the salty contrast of her own lingering flavour. His skin was silky smooth as it moved against hers, and the sliding contact set strange thoughts circling and flitting around her mind.

*He's not normal. He's so not normal . . .*

The fact that he was able to drape himself across her and she barely felt his weight just didn't make sense. His body had great size and substance, but seemed to lack the commensurate pounds and ounces. As he scooped his hands beneath her and held her to him, pressing her hard against a truly mighty erection, she seemed to see and hear him leap down from the woodshed roof again. He'd almost floated to earth. How could that happen? It defied all logic.

And then there was the undoubted mind-reading.

*Maybe he's just very empathetic*, she thought, sliding her hands over his back and his tight male bottom, loving the feel of his skin and its peculiar lack of heat.

*And that's another thing!*

How could he feel cool, yet warm her up. It wasn't only the stove that was heating her. Her skin seemed to glow wherever Robin touched her – which was just about everywhere – and yet the temperature of his own skin seemed far lower than that of a normal person.

*I should be afraid. I should be very afraid . . . And yet I'm not.*

No, the only feelings she experienced as Robin worked his hips, and rubbed his glorious cock against her were wonder, delight and pure desire.

*Oh, how I want you!*

The thought echoed in her mind. Really echoed. She'd actually heard it twice, the two versions very closely overlaid, Robin's voice on hers.

Without too much effort, she placed her hand on his chest and compelled him to break the kiss and back up a little, so she could look up at him.

His unusual eyes were dark, yet brilliant with desire, and with unfathomable complexity. She sensed great emotion in him, a turbulent well of confused feelings. His eyes were full of a perplexed affection, and warmth, and a poignant yearning.

*Oh baby!*

Enormous tenderness roiled inside her. She didn't know how, but she knew he was seeking something. Searching . . . reaching out for more than just sex. He was magnificent. Competent. He knew just how to stir her and to pleasure her, but beneath that skill lay innocence and longing.

*Whatever it is . . . take it! Take it from me!*

Her thought seemed to galvanise him, and his body surged against her, pushing at her with more force. And this time the hardness of the floor did make an impact.

She placed her hand on his chest, halting him. 'Shall we get into bed for this? It'll be much more comfy. The floor's a bit hard.'

Robin stared down at her, and in his face she saw gratitude and a glow of something ineffably sweet. For a moment, she thought he might speak but, instead, he just kissed her forehead, then slid off her, came up on his knees and scooped her effortlessly up into his arms. She coiled her own arms around his neck as he strode lightly to the bed and set her down on it. A moment later, he'd whisked up the quilt from under her, slid his body next to hers, and then settled the quilt back down over them like a soft cocoon of intimacy.

This wasn't at all like her fantasy. It wasn't exotic or kinky,

but in many ways it was much, much better. She felt closer to Robin than to any man, ever, in her life. For a moment he just stared at her again, his head next to hers on the pillow, and she read questions in his eyes. She didn't know what they were, but she sensed she held the answers.

Then they were kissing again, their mouths fused as he passively allowed her hands to travel and fondle.

His body was beautiful to her touch, and that much was still part of her fantasy. No common man could be this perfect, this muscled and smooth. She ran her fingertips over his back, his waist, his bottom – all as splendid and cool as living alabaster. When he adjusted the tilt of his hips, she slid her hand naturally to his cock.

Dear God Almighty, he was big! And he felt bigger now than ever. It was as if his very flesh had read her desires and reformed to comply with them. She'd always longed to be with a really big man.

He let out a soft huff of encouragement as she handled and explored him, tracing the veins of his shaft and the flared shape of his tip. From what she could tell, he was circumcised, and a thin slippery fluid was seeping silkily from his love-eye.

Why did it not surprise her that the feel of it was cool?

There was a lot of it too and, even if she'd not been running wet between her own legs, Robin's slipperiness would have been more than adequate lubrication for his entry . . .

As if that notion somehow shattered his passivity, Robin rolled towards her, then over her, pinning her effortlessly on her back. Between her thighs, his great penis nestled and then pushed.

*Condom!*

The word rang in her mind like a bell, and, still poised, Robin came up on his elbows and looked down at her. His gold-frosted hair glinted like a halo in the soft light from the lamps, and his eyes were steady, and almost curious.

'You have nothing to fear from me, dearest Lois,' he said, his voice ringing oddly, almost like a hypnotist's.

The cynical man-suspicious Lois of old would have replied, 'Is that a fact?' but the Lois of now, cuddled in the magic womb of the duvet and the heat that wasn't of Robin, and yet came from him, believed him utterly.

Some ancient, primal, unexplainable knowledge in the pit of her brain told her unequivocally that Robin hailed from somewhere that was outside the fear of disease. He had no connection with the world of pain and infection and, if he could make her pregnant, so be it. She suddenly even wanted that despite the fact she'd never ever wanted it before.

She stared back up at him, and thought, with all her power. *This is a dream again, isn't it?*

Robin's beautiful mouth curved in a teasing smile. 'Does this feel like a dream to you?'

He pressed harder, and she could feel the broad silky tip of his penis nudging its way imperiously between her sex-lips, then sliding with unerring accuracy right to her very entrance.

Lois shook violently, her body almost vibrating with a befuddling concoction of pure fear and a lust and desire to be filled so intense it made her push back against him and tilt her hips to aid his entrance.

*He can read my mind! He really can!*

But then fear, uncertainty and the ability to question were all subsumed in the wild overload of sensation. Robin slid into her, slowly, slowly, stretching her as he went, and the feeling of being full, right to the brim with solid male flesh, drove out all extraneous thoughts from her mind as if by main force.

Sublime penetration eradicated all doubt, and Robin settled in as if her body was his home.

As he rocked his hips, and sealed the fit, his voice was a soft

zephyr in her ear. 'Are you all right, my love? Are you comfortable? I don't want to hurt you.'

'Don't worry,' she murmured back at him, hitching her own pelvis, trying to get closer and tighter with him, even though it probably wasn't possible. She smiled too, suddenly touched by his question. He was just trying to ease her mind, she knew that. Given what he could do, and what he could sense, there was no way he didn't know already that his cock felt incredible inside her.

And then he began to kiss her, his mouth like lavender honey as he thrust and thrust smoothly inside her. It was like being part of some divine, reciprocal engine, and each movement, each long, delicious plunge, seemed to make contact with a new pleasure receptor in her depths.

She moaned into his mouth with each smooth, deep shove, sipping at his sweetness as the interior stretching did insane things to her clit. His every movement created a divine tugging sensation in the tiny sensitive organ, and on the profound in-stroke his pubic bone seemed to knock against it. She wriggled to adjust the angle of their bodies for even greater perfection, but still Robin kept up his rhythm and momentum.

*How can he do this?* she questioned dimly, her entire body throbbing, pulsating, teetering on the brink of some great starburst of pleasure. *He barely weighs anything, yet he has this power, this force?*

A heartbeat later, there were no more questions, no more thoughts, no more conscious analysis of any kind.

Just pure sensation as her body sparked and heart and soul flew upwards, borne aloft on a giant wave of loving pleasure.

*I love you . . . I love you . . . I love you . . .*

She heard the words like bells as she soared among the stars, but for the life of her she couldn't have specified who'd said them.

## 6

Sitting up, letting the quilt slide from his shoulders, Robin gazed down at the sleeping woman at his side.

His human fingers tingled with the intense need to touch her again, and in his heart, also temporarily human, emotion surged.

How beautiful she was with her sex-tousled hair and her flushed cheeks. Her body was warm against his, radiating heat and life. He ached to be able to stay and sleep with her in his arms but, even during this special and almost finished month, he could only be the Robin she knew for a limited period. He could only touch, and feel, and experience this depth of passion for a couple of hours, or a little more, after which he was compelled to disassociate.

And he didn't want to do that in front of Lois.

But just how much would it faze her though?

She was brave, bold and curious. From her thoughts, he knew she was aware that he wasn't quite what he seemed. Yet still she embraced him and gave herself to him.

*And, for that, I love you.*

And he loved her even, he sensed, in his discarnate form, where emotions were fainter, rarefied and far less intense. When May was over, he might still feel the ache of loss.

She was compassionate too. His fingertips hovered a centimetre above her lips, her cheek and then her brow. He sensed the sympathy she felt for her surly neighbour, who had not



been polite to her. She'd seen through the man's bluntness to the sad state of his heart.

*Would you feel sorry for me?*

His ersatz heart twisted with anguish, as he glanced towards her watch on the bedside cabinet, and heard its tick, tick, tick like a giant tolling bell. His sharp vision noted again the date function.

Tomorrow was the last day of May. The last day of his approximate humanity. How he wished that she'd arrived here on the first of the month.

As if affected by the proximity of the month's end, his form began to waver, so he rose from the bed and gathered his clothes. Not that they would remain if he disassociated. They were part of his illusion. But it seemed important to be as human as he could for as long as he could.

Dressed, he circled the room, wishing there was more he could do for her. When he touched the dark screen of her small computer, he sensed a fault in it and remembered her frustration with it. With a flick of his wrist, he scattered dust across the keyboard and watched as it glittered and sank into the guts of the device, healing the patterns of force as it went.

Well, at least that would bring her some satisfaction in the days to come, and distract her from the loss of her temporary playmate. He knew he could wipe her entire memory of him, just as he could have wiped the laptop's electronic memory if he'd so wished. But the humanity that gripped him made him selfish.

He didn't want to be forgotten. He wanted her to think of him. And at least remember a little of what they'd shared.

Lifting the curtain at the window, he looked outside. The moon and stars were beginning to fade in the sky across the bay, and already the pink intimations of dawn were slowly gathering.

His hand, where it held the cloth, was fading too, and a stir from the bed said that Lois was waking.

With an ache of regret, Robin abandoned his form and drifted upwards and away through the cabin's ceiling.

Lois woke early, and for a moment, before her faculties fully reconstituted themselves, she lay warm and huddled in the quilt, bathing in contentment. Never ever had her body felt so relaxed, so sated, so complete.

But as cold – really cold – reality set in, so did a profound and jumbled whirl of feelings.

*You were real this time! You were fucking real!*

Gathering the covers around her shoulders against the chill of the cabin, she ran her fingers over the sheet at her side.

No residual heat. No indentation of a large male body. But he *had* been here in the bed, she knew it. He really had.

There was other evidence.

Lowering her face to the sheet, she drew in a great breath of lavender and, as she sat up again, she studied her hand and saw on it that faint veil of glimmering dust she'd seen in the cabin the previous morning.

It was insubstantial. Not in the least bit gritty, it was smooth as silk and seemed to dissolve against her skin. But it was real, and it wasn't just confined to the bed.

Padding around the cabin, she found it dusted across the rag rug, on the floor, and even scattered thinly across her laptop.

'Great! Now I've got dust in the works as well as corrupted programs!'

But, when out of habit she fired the thing up, not only did the wi-fi connection spring into life, but also files she seemed to have lost yesterday were restored and full of data she'd believed gone forever.

She began to shake. Hard. So hard she had to sit down on the bed again.

'What the fuck are you, Robin?' she demanded of the empty air.

It was impossible to ignore now, the strangeness of him. He'd sprinkled her bloody computer with fairy dust or whatever . . . and mended it.

'Oh, God, help me, what's going on?'

The temptation to dive under the duvet and just hide again was enormous, but she resisted it. The temptation to pour herself a tot of brandy was enormous too, and that she succumbed to, thinking it was a pretty poor turn of affairs that she was driven to drink, boozing first thing in the morning because she was afraid she just might have fucked a supernatural being last night.

She prowled the cabin, stirring up the Robin-dust with the trailing duvet that swept the floor much in the style of a geisha's formal kimono.

'This is stupid! There are no spirits, ghosties, sprites and fairies and what-have-you! And I'm sure you're not a vampire because you've got such lovely teeth!'

But, if he was a real man, where the hell was he? Surely he would have stayed, especially if there was the prospect of a repeat performance?

'Now this is just fantastic! You're either a supernatural spook and you've turned into a pumpkin or something in the daylight . . . or you're just a normal bloke who also happens to be a fuck 'em and run bastard!' She swigged her brandy, then coughed at the bite of it. 'Bloody hell, I certainly know how to pick men!'

But she couldn't sit round getting drunk.

Still trying not to think too hard about anything, she showered and dressed and picked at some cereal for breakfast. She

tidied the cabin and swept up, but that just swung her thoughts back to things incomprehensible.

The fairy dust or whatever it was seemed to disintegrate as fast as she brushed at it, and irrationally, seeing it go, she felt an aching wrench in the place where she knew her heart was.

He was magically beautiful and she was destroying his very essence.

She stopped cleaning up and tried to do some work. But it was hopeless. The code danced before her, and all she seemed to see were a pair of bi-coloured eyes, a glinting smile and gold-tipped hair . . . All that, and the most perfect male body, either fantastic or real.

She could feel him too. Deep in the quick of her, it was like having an echo of his penis still there, displacing the tender flesh that had embraced his as he moved and thrust and loved her. As she clenched her inner muscles, caressing a ghost, a deep pleasure gripped her and made her catch her breath.

Staggering almost, she collapsed into one of the easy chairs, her body trembling finely, her nerves, her heart – yes – her sex on fire as if Robin were with her, touching her, fucking her. Ripples of sensation licked over her skin like flames and she couldn't tell if the feeling was real, in her imagination, or in her memory. The agitation in her flesh made her toss her head and writhe against the upholstery, the turn-on far more intense and visceral almost than those moments of displaced lust on the beach. She cupped her breast and her crotch, her heels kicking against the rug as her hands seemed to become Robin's to stir her.

*Where are you? Where are you? I need you!*

Opening eyes she didn't realise she'd closed, she looked down and seemed to see his glorious face looking up at her from between her legs, just like last night.

He smiled, he winked, and her body surged, the sudden sharp arousal capsizing in an instant, as she kneaded herself and the rough pressure made her come.

As she fell back into herself, the absurdity of her actions scared her. It was either that, or the fact that she wasn't entirely sure they'd been her actions. Her impetus . . .

Had that just been a visitation? What had happened?

*Oh, God, I think I'm going mad!*

'I can't go on like this! I've got to get out of here!'

The sound of her own voice snapped Lois mercifully from her fugue, and she grabbed her coat, threw it on and set out for a walk.

The day was grim and cold again, and the skies leaden. A brisk wind was whipping up high seas and making spray lash the beach. Gritting her teeth and huddling into her puffed jacket, Lois took the path into the woods, her walking shoes squishing as she tramped the packed earth that had partly turned to mud. She wasn't quite sure where she was going, but her feet just kept putting themselves one in front of the other.

*Are you out here, Robin? Is this where you hang?*

The silent trees mocked her, and there was no sign of life other than a few dubious-sounding rustles in the undergrowth. She wondered whether to turn back. What if there were foxes, or some other wild animals that might attack her?

*Probably nothing more dangerous than the man-thing I fucked last night,* she decided, shaking her head, and then strode on.

The woods were dark and dank, and were frankly starting to scare her. But, just on the point of turning back, she seemed to burst out into a little glade that was chocolate-box pretty and lifted straight from an illustrated Victorian fairytale. It was bright here too and, when she looked up, she was astonished

to discover that the sun had finally come out and was peppering the little dell with golden light.

There had been nothing about this on the BBC Weather site, but, with her face still lifted towards the welcome sunshine fragmenting through the higher branches, Lois unzipped her jacket. With the light had come heat. She stepped forwards into the glade, and then laughed out loud. Not only was she in a circle of light and warmth, but she was also standing in a fairy ring of toadstools.

'I don't believe this! It's got to be a joke.'

Although she was half expecting Robin to pop out from behind a tree and answer her, nothing happened. She was still alone. Vaguely disappointed but also slightly relieved, she crossed the ring and sat down on a large fallen log, puffing out her cheeks.

'So where are you, Magic Man?'

Her words echoed strangely, almost as if she were in a church, ringing and rebounding.

Still nothing.

Well, not completely nothing. As she sat motionless on the log, there was a rustling in the low brush, and an animal hopped out into the circle, almost floating over the short cropped turf.

It was a hare, long-shanked and lop-eared, mottled in colour, cream and dark brown.

Laughter burst like a bubble from Lois's lips and she instantly expected the timid animal to bolt back the way it had come. Instead, it cocked its head on one side, studying her with bright intelligent eyes.

Bright intelligent eyes that had something really peculiar about them. Peculiar and familiar . . .

Lois opened her mouth to speak, but suddenly there was a loud crack in the underbrush behind her, like the breaking of

a twig, and she almost leapt up from the log, swivelling around.

Nothing behind her this time, but, when she whipped back around to face the clearing and dappled light and the toadstools, she was no longer alone.

Robin, standing tall and dark in his long black coat, his head cocked on one side, was studying her with bright intelligent eyes.

He was on the very same spot the hare had occupied.

She'd heard no sound of the animal's movement or his.

No rustle of grass or undergrowth. No displacement of air.

The hare had simply disappeared and left Robin in its place.

The broken sunlight faded, becoming splodged with black as the dell began to spin violently.

Lois fainted.

Struggling back to consciousness, she found herself firmly held and encircled. Fight or flight reflex made her jerk and wriggle and try to get free.

She knew whose strong arms were around her.

Or *what's* arms.

That idea made her fight hard. But to no avail. His hold was unbreakable.

'Let me go! Let me go! Get off me!'

The hold loosened, but bizarrely, now she was free, her limbs felt too heavy and lethargic to allow her to move. She stared at her booted toes and his much bigger ones beside them.

They were sitting on the short firm turf, their backs against the log, their legs stretched out in front of them. She could not, dared not, look at him. But his large cool hand gently stroked her face and, against all the odds, it seemed the simplest and most comfortable thing in the world to rest her head against

the strength of his shoulder. The backs of his fingers moved slowly and soothingly against her cheek.

'Hush, don't be afraid,' he whispered. 'Nothing to be scared of.'

Lois huffed out a little breath. Easy for him to say that.

'That hare . . . it was you, wasn't it?'

There seemed to be no way she could get away from him, even if she'd wanted to, so it made best sense to meet the issue head on. She shifted around a little and, adjusting her position, she managed to screw up the courage to face him.

His luminous eyes – both blue and brown – were steady, clear and candid.

'Yes.' He gave a little shrug, and his splendid mouth quirked. 'And I was also the bird, down on the beach, yesterday.'

The little well of bravery she'd gathered around her faltered, and she dragged in a great breath, utterly shaken.

'H-how can that be? How is it possible?' She shook her head. 'I mean, I've watched *Buffy* and *Doctor Who* and all that . . . but they're just stories. Fiction, made-up stuff . . . You can't seriously be, um, I don't know . . . a shape-shifter or whatever they're called. That's just crazy! It's not possible!'

Robin blinked at her, his glorious face troubled, his brow crumpling. 'I am what I am, Lois, and I can change form, become other creatures . . . and be human sometimes.'

Suddenly, a real sadness glittered in his eyes, and Lois realised to her astonishment that the azure and the brandy brown both were shiny with the gloss of real tears.

Human tears?

Her fear vanished. What was wrong? Why so sad? A great need to comfort and nurture surged up in her. It was kind of maternal, and yet not motherly at all. She was too close to him, and he smelt too wonderful and felt too strong to deny more earthy feelings.



'What's wrong?' she whispered, turning her face into his palm, and kissing it impulsively to offer comfort . . . and more.

'I'd like to stay human longer, but, after tomorrow, when June arrives, I can't.'

She supposed there was some great mythology to explain this, and that it would probably be wiser to understand it if she could, but a sudden urgency compelled her to ignore it for the moment. And forget anything but the here and now of Robin, the most beautiful and extraordinary *man* she'd ever met. She was probably being ten dozen different types of brainless bimbo-fools, but, if he had less than 24 hours in the shape he currently wore, she couldn't waste a minute debating parapsychology!

And yet, as she took his soft mobile lips in a tender kiss, and breathed in his sigh of relief and happiness, she couldn't help but see how many things now made sense.

His lack of physical weight and the coolness of his skin had seemed downright bizarre, but she supposed a part of her mind had just not asked questions. Or maybe they had, but those questions had been squelched . . . because Robin could read her thoughts, and probably manipulate them.

Which accounted for the erotic dreams too, she supposed.

*I should be angry . . . but I'm not.*

Oh, and there'd been other clues too.

His hair and eyes could be explained rationally, but not the sudden uncanny manifestation of wireless broadband and the self-mending computer.

*It's all magic! Robin's magic . . .*

There was magic, too, in the feel of his mouth, although the delicious contact was far from imaginary. He felt real, completely real, and of the flesh.

*He's a . . . a . . . something, and I still want to kiss him. He's not human, and I still want to fuck him. This is insane, but it makes perfect sense.*

Of course it made sense! If Robin would be gone soon, she had to have him now.

Sliding her hands inside his coat, she pushed it off his shoulders, and then, impatiently, tugged at the hem of his black T-shirt and snuck her fingers under it to cruise his silky skin.

He was cool, of course, but not cold. The contours of his chest and torso were like marble that was just beginning to feel the kiss of the morning sun. Flawless to the touch, and almost as hard in its muscular perfection. That was what magic did, she supposed, caressing his abs, and then flickering up to circle his taut male nipples. Why settle for second best when you could recreate a girl's ultimate wet dream?

Suddenly, she had to see him. In the arboreal sunlight, and maybe for the last time.

'Coat off, whatever you are,' she commanded, sweetening the order with a pepper of kisses against his throat.

Robin obeyed, and his grin showed that he'd forgotten his momentary distress and was now into the spirit of things. He slid off his heavy coat, then whipped his black T-shirt off over the top of his head, ruffling his golden-tipped hair endearingly in the process.

*What the devil are you?* Lois demanded silently, admiring the sweetly ripped lines of his chest, arms and shoulders. *In fact, are you a devil?*

Robin shook his curly head and Lois felt a great rush of relief.

'What then? An angel? A ghost?'

Again, he shook his head.

'You must be something though . . . just tell me!'

Leaning forwards, he pressed his lips to her ear and whispered a few words into it, all very low and very quiet.

## 7

'Get away with you!' Lois laughed and reached out to stroke his cool face. 'You're too big and butch and macho. Whatever happened to gauzy wings and pointy hats and perching on bluebells and all that? And, anyway, I thought they were all girls?'

'Oh no.' Robin smiled slyly at her, his eyes naughty. 'I can be whatever I want, if necessary, but my natural inclination is towards the male.' His big hand settled on her cheek, then slid down her throat and her shoulder, before settling on her breast. 'Especially now ...'

His fingers cradled her flesh with perfect delicacy, and his lips were just as apposite as they pressed against hers. He seemed confident, but also a supplicant.

*Be with me, I beg of you*, he seemed to say in her mind. *Please be with me, there isn't much time.*

Lois responded, fighting the anguish that threatened to overwhelm her. She'd finally found her ideal man, but he wasn't actually a man. She wanted to be with him forever, but there were only a few hours before she'd lose him and not see him again for a year. If then.

She kissed him back hard, letting her own hands wander again over the firm muscular contours of his body. His need, and her own, made her bold. Pushing him by the shoulders, she urged him downwards, making him lie on the turf so she could surge over him and revel in the male splendour laid out for her pleasure.

And his too, really, she supposed. She couldn't imagine him making himself look ugly if he had the choice.

He tried to reach for her again, but she took him by the hands, and then pressed her lips to his palms, one after the other.

'Relax, Magic Man, let me explore you,' she murmured, pressing his arms back at his side, forcing him to lie inert, waiting, accepting. He seemed to be submitting, but the hot glint in his strange eyes told another tale. The King of the Grove was only *allowing* her to play with him. He looked more like a pasha accepting homage than a boy-toy at her bidding.

She touched her fingertips to his chest, flicking them over his nipples and then smiling when he wriggled and made a little sound of appreciation. She let her hand drift lower and the sound became closer to a growl.

His hips lifted when she traced his zipper with her fingernail.

'I think it's time we took a look at your wand, eh, don't you?'

Robin's strong arms came up, grabbing for her, but she pushed him back down again, tut-tutting and revelling in the way he allowed her to master his strength. For the time being at least.

As if accepting the status quo, he folded his arms behind his head, as a pillow. 'Help yourself,' he purred, a twinkle in his eyes.

Lois attacked his belt with gusto, unfastening the heavy buckle, then the button that lay beneath it. The black clothing, the archetypal garb for the dark predator . . . where did it come from? Were the coat and the boots et al. magic too? A part of him? What would happen if he disappeared while he was out of them?

Toying with his zip, she looked into his face rather than at

his crotch, knowing it was quite likely that he was reading her mind.

'All this – the way you look? Where does it come from? I mean, is it from your imagination, or do you have some sort of . . . um . . . template or something?'

'Inspiration comes from many sources, my sweet.' His gaze flicked from her hovering fingers to her face. 'Just as you garner images for your web designs from here and there and everywhere, I gathered them from around me . . . and from your mind.'

Pausing in her explorations, Lois sat back a little, frowning. Peering at him through narrowed eyes. The face, yes, she could see it now . . . Familiar elements . . .

Looking at Robin, she suddenly recognised the likenesses.

One of her favourite actors, yes, there was a bit of him there. And the clothes, she suddenly realised, they came from a different character in a different show that she liked. His nose, faintly snub, she realised with astonishment, was not dissimilar to her own, only bigger of course and innately masculine . . . and, by God, he even had a bit of a look of the neighbour about him too if you looked closely enough!

'Well, I've never seen anyone with hair like yours before or eyes that are different colours. Where the hell did those come from?'

Robin laughed softly and, defying her edict, he half sat up and reached out for her hands again, drawing them towards his groin area.

'Well, those touches are uniquely my own. I have to be allowed a little creativity, don't I?'

'It's pretty bizarre though, isn't it, to have one blue eye and one brown, especially when . . .' She crumpled her brow, and peered more closely. 'Especially when the colours actually seem to swap places from one time I see you to the next!'

'But I *am* bizarre, Lois, aren't I?' His large but deft fingers stroked the back of her hands where they rested against his crotch. 'But a good fellow all the same, don't you think?'

The glint in his eyes shimmered like a spinning Christmas firework, and his words seemed to dance and shimmer just as teasingly. For a moment, just a tiny, tiny fraction of a second, her paramour seemed to ripple and glitter and become all the colours of the rainbow, then just as quickly, he was simply a man again.

A beautiful big, very male man, with an imposing hard-on swelling in his jeans.

Lois shook her head. Enough already! Enough of this fanciful madness. Robin was completely real, for the moment, and he wanted her. He wanted her, he was gorgeous . . . and she wanted him right back.

She resumed her attack on his jeans, undoing the button and whizzing down the zip. His erect cock sprang out in a way that was as comical as it was sudden, and before she could stop herself she'd giggled.

Immediately she felt a wash of remorse. Were supernatural male beings as sensitive about their equipment as their human counterparts? In which case, had she mortally offended his feelings and put him off?

'Whoops!' said Robin cheerfully, an inordinately proud grin on his face.

No insecurity problems there, obviously. Lois grinned back at him, and reached for the member in question. It was hard, as cool as the rest of him, and silkily textured.

'Well, I must say I like your magic wand!'

'So do I, and I . . . I like it even more when you're touching it!'

Robin stirred against the greensward, lifting his hips to meet her caresses as she handled him and traced the beautifully defined veins that adorned his cock.

He was thick and long, and the tip was flared and red and hungry looking with a stretched and open 'eye' that was already weeping copious pre-come. Taking a little of this satin fluid on her thumb, Lois slowly and meticulously massaged him.

'Mmm, oh, my dear . . . that's wonderful, wonderful,' he burred, his eyes closing and his hands clenching and relaxing, clenching and relaxing against the turf as she ministered to him.

Lois had never been a great one for giving hand-jobs. Oh, she'd done it often enough, and been praised for her touch sometimes, but mostly she'd always been keen to move on to more mutual pleasures.

But not with Robin.

To touch him was a joy in itself. His skin was so smooth, so fine to the touch, and holding him and stroking him seemed to impart a refined aesthetic experience that was quite unique. She'd also never touched a cock that seemed quite so very clean before. It was as if it was brand new, and expressly fashioned to please her senses.

Which she supposed, in a way, it was.

Of course, it was totally impossible to resist tasting him.

Inclining over his strong, jeans-clad hips, Lois settled her mouth over the crown of Robin's penis – which, despite being what she most wanted to do at that moment, she still found to be quite a job.

The head of his cock was as big as a shiny ripe plum and ten times as delicious, and she had a dainty and feminine mouth. Her lips stretched around him as she took him inside, and she was aware that she was probably drooling all over him.

*I probably look an awful sight!*

But when she snuck a peek at him, up the length of his

glorious torso, she discovered that Robin was smiling at her with such tenderness, such wonder and such gratitude that her heart turned over with love and a huge desire to pleasure him.

Washing and lapping at him with her tongue, she folded her fingers lightly and ripplingly around his shaft, co-ordinating the actions of her hands and her mouth. She sipped and tasted him, adoring the sweet perfumed, honeyed flavour of him that reminded her more of the old-fashioned confectionery of her childhood than any other man she'd ever given head to.

*You're like the most delicious lollipop I ever tasted!*

No sooner had the thought materialised than Robin laughed out loud with joy and cradled her head gently in his hands.

Working with fingers and tongue, and with suction and long sweeping licks, Lois went about her sacred duty with enthusiasm. It suddenly, almost, didn't seem as if she needed pleasure of her own. This attention to Robin was the sole focus of her being. He'd be gone soon, but, before he went, she'd make him come.

Magical fingers tightened around her cheeks and ears, and she felt him trying to encourage her to lift her mouth from him.

'Lois, my love, you must stop now. If you don't, I feel it'll be too late . . . and I'll be selfish.'

Lois held station and, still holding him lightly between her lips, she shook her head infinitesimally. Then went about her fellatual duties with new gusto and as much artistry as she could muster.

She swirled her tongue. She sucked as hard as she could. She flicked and flirted and played, stroking him all the time with fingertips that travelled the length and breadth of his shaft, and even ventured down into his jeans to stroke his balls and his perineum.



When she managed to crook her wrist enough to get a finger in and press against his anus, he wailed almost like the gull-bird on the beach, and then jerked and filled her mouth with perfumed semen.

Pulse, pulse, pulse . . . it leapt from the tip of his cock, coated her tongue and then trickled down her throat. Lois swallowed eagerly savouring his pleasure as much as his taste, as the creamy fluid overflowed her lips and ran down her chin.

As if from a great distance she seemed to hear her lover sobbing. And then, as she released him, she realised he actually was in tears.

When his glittering, jewel-like eyes met hers, he sat up, reached for her and drew her up along his body and embraced her. Murmuring and muttering almost unintelligible thanks, he kissed her sticky lips and caressed her face with utmost reverence.

'You are a wonder, sweet Lois,' he whispered, his long pink tongue swooping around his own lips for a moment, cleaning his own transferred essence from their surface. 'A true miracle. If there's magic here, it's in you, my love, in you.'

*My love?* Did he really mean that?

For a moment, Robin put her away from him a little distance, so they could look into each other's eyes.

'Of course I love you,' he said simply. His face was beautiful with emotion, and yet, in the mismatched depths of his eyes, Lois could see pain.

'What's wrong? There's something . . . Is it because you have to – to go tomorrow?'

'Yes.' He bit his lip, hesitating, and Lois screamed silently for the whole truth.

'But it's more than that,' he went on, his expression serious. 'When I can't be human any more, I stop feeling as a human does . . . I might lose this emotion. I might forget what I feel

for you, and that I love you.' He took her hand in his and squeezed it in a way that came closer to hurting than anything he'd done to her before. 'And, though I don't want that to happen now, in a while, it might not matter as much to me.'

'I don't understand.'

'Nor do I, completely, when it happens.' His broad intelligent brow puckered in a frown.

'But don't you feel emotions when you're – you're how you normally are?'

'Yes, sort of, but they're faint. Like tiny ripples on a pond. Whereas now, when I look at you, I feel like the sea out there, surging and crashing and full of wildness. I feel love. And I want to *be* loved.'

She could see it, the turbulence of feeling in his expressive features.

'But I'm afraid that, after tomorrow, in the space of a few weeks, all I might still feel is curiosity, and not much more.'

Lois tried to imagine it. But she couldn't. Her life had always been a tapestry of feelings, richly coloured, not always happy, but mostly. How would it feel not to feel? It was incomprehensible.

'I just can't imagine how that would be,' she said, touching her fingertips to his face. His skin was smooth and cool, and she realised that there was no stubble, as such, on his cheeks. 'I – I mean, what do you remember of other years? Have you, um, interacted with other women?'

'Not in this way.' He turned his face, kissing her palm. 'I remember observing mostly. Observing couples. You're the first woman to come here on her own.' Long, long eyelashes flicked down, as if he were bashful, and a little ashamed of himself. 'I fear I may have taken advantage of you because of that. Forgive me.'

Lois laughed. He looked like a naughty little boy who'd stolen

some sweeties. 'If that's being taken advantage of, keep on taking, Magic Man, keep on taking.' She slid her hand down his strong jaw, his neck and across the hard muscular planes of his superbly formed chest.

'I serve your wishes, beautiful Lois –' his eyes darkened – 'for as long as I'm able.'

Silent communication passed between them. It wasn't his mental telepathy. It was deeper even than that somehow. It was as if they were having the same thought.

'Let's not waste any time then.'

## 8

Assertive in her hunger, Lois pushed hard on Robin's chest, compelling him to lie back so she could enjoy him and savour his astonishing male beauty.

First she pulled off his boots, then his jeans, rendering him naked in the enchanted little glade. Submitting to her, he lay back like some kind of strange amalgam of utterly masculine stud and compliant sex slave. He was like no man Lois had ever encountered . . . in more ways than one.

She touched his skin. She kissed his eyes, his throat and the inside of his elbows. She adored him, with her heart, with her eyes and fingertips. But, before long, just exploring and caressing was not enough.

'Why have I still got all these clothes on?' she demanded, then laughed when Robin gave a 'search me' shrug and it made his gloriously stiff erection dance and sway.

Ripping at her jacket and her shoes, her jeans and the rest of her clothing, Lois got naked faster than she could ever remember doing before. Buttons and zips, hooks and elastic all seemed to give way with supernatural ease. She laughed again as she realised that her things *were* coming off unnaturally fast. Robin might be lying there like a lounging gigolo, but he was helping her disrobe at the same time.

At last, she was as bare and untrammelled as he was . . . and she wasn't even cold. The chill of the coolest May for many years had disappeared completely, and they might have been basking in the gilded sunshine of midsummer.

She threw her leg across Robin's pelvis and hovered over him.

'I . . .' She paused, distracted by the slow slide of his silky tip against the inside of her thigh. 'I mean . . . Do I need protection? Do you know what I mean? Condoms and all that? I don't suppose I do, do I?'

Robin's face grew momentarily solemn. 'This body has never been with another. And it isn't human. There is no danger to you of any kind.'

*Only to my heart . . .*

Once again, Robin's remarkable face darkened with remorse. She felt his guilt, his regret that he'd made her fall for the most impossible of partners. One who might forget this tryst, and feel no pain of loss in the months to come the way she would.

'I'll *make* you remember, Robin! I swear I will!' she cried, flashing him a brilliant, imperious smile as she positioned him carefully at the snug entrance to her body, then began a slow, slow descent upon his cock.

She seemed to slide down, and down, and down, for what seemed like an eternity, her body flexing and expanding to accommodate his splendid, magical length and his impressive girth. He seemed to be moving not only into the quick of her sex, but also into her heart, her nerves, her cells.

Maybe he was even doing that literally? Somehow managing to infuse her flesh with his enchanted aura, stirring it to pleasure on a molecular level as well as simply entering her as a man?

Sliding, settling, Lois swayed. It was too much. Robin was too much, but somehow she seemed to open to him, accept him and take him all.

'Are you all right, my love?' He came up on his elbow, watching her face closely, his own face twitching a little with strain, as if fighting a huge rush of pleasure. 'I'm not hurting you, am I?'

'No! Not at all! You feel amazing!'

Big hands settled around her hips, holding her, securing her while he bucked upwards, plumbing her even deeper, possessing her utterly.

Lois groaned, overwhelmed, undulating slowly on the fulcrum of Robin's sex, loving the sensation of being stretched and being loved so hugely from within. Her clitoris leapt, and then leapt again when she saw his smile of hot delight when she reached down to touch herself. To stroke her own pleasure centre was to caress her lover's too.

She flicked her finger, and it was Robin's turn to toss his gold-frosted head, subsiding back against the turf, his hips lifting again and again. His long hands tightened, pressing his fingertips into the flesh of her buttocks, and Lois relished the desperation she felt in his grip.

'Lois! Lois!' he cried, writhing as she writhed, rising as she descended, grabbing at her to hold her on him, as she grabbed and caressed him from within.

'Lois! Oh my love, my love,' he exhorted her, his neck arching, his head tossing from side to side.

Then suddenly, his powerful hips came up and he remained still for moments, moments that seemed like frozen time, and then he was pushing again, his pelvis jerking convulsively in the rapid unmistakable dance of orgasm.

Filled in heart and body, Lois joined him, almost fainting from the exquisite rolling ripples of sensation. But, even as the pleasure threatened to overwhelm her, she exerted a supreme effort – and kept her eyes open when they would normally have fluttered closed.

*Remember this!* she commanded silently, staring down at Robin's face, still so beautiful despite his tense orgasmic grimace. *Remember it! Remember everything about it!*

But, as she cascaded forwards, wilting over her lover's prone

body like a lily whose stem could not bear the weight of its flower, she couldn't work out which of them the unspoken cry had been really aimed at.

They did not speak much as they gathered their clothes, dressed again and returned to the cabin. They did not speak much as they made love there, again and again, sometimes tenderly and sometimes ferocious in their passion.

But, all the while, Lois was acutely aware of Robin's total focus on what they were doing, and his concentration.

*He is trying to remember it all*, she thought in wonder as she looked up into his face when he entered her yet again, his eyes so dark and intense that for that moment they did appear to match each other. *He's trying to imprint it on his mind, his consciousness, or whatever he has . . . so he can retain it.*

Eventually they rested, though, because Lois was exhausted. She suspected that Robin could go on indefinitely, and his body would rouse again and again where a normal man's could not, but she was just human, and prone to fatigue no matter how fabulous the sex was.

Sleep claimed her for a while, and she drifted and skittered through strange dreams of loss where she was running through the woods and along the shore, chasing something intangible. Which, she realised, when she awoke again to find Robin watching her, might be an accurate reflection of the next eleven months without him.

'I'm going to keep coming here, you know.' Sitting up in bed, she grasped his large hand and squeezed it. 'I'm going to be around here, reminding you of all this. I'm not going to bloody well let you forget me because I'm going to be in your face, Magic Man, even when you haven't actually got one!'

For a moment, she thought she might have offended him, but Robin's guffaw of mirth immediately dispelled her worries.

'I'll watch you, beautiful Lois, I'll watch you, and, if there's a way to remember this feeling, I will.' Leaning over her, he kissed her again, at first tenderly and then with increasing purpose.

*Again?*

'Yes, again, my love, again,' he growled, pressing her back against the pillows.

A long time later, after night had fallen and the moon was in the sky, they tumbled from the bed, showered together and donned their clothes. Neither one of them spoke much, but, time and again, Lois found herself sneaking swift peeks at her little alarm clock.

Midnight was approaching. And with it the end of May.

'Let's go for a walk on the beach,' said Robin suddenly, reaching for his long dark coat.

'Um, yes, OK,' Lois agreed, her heart sinking. Even though they were no longer naked, she'd wanted there to be the option.

He held out her jacket, helped her into it, his fingers settling it on her shoulders almost lovingly, and then turned her around so he could zip it up and dress her like a daddy dressing his little girl.

'When the time comes, Lois, when the time comes, let me walk away as if I were a real man. Let me pretend to be a real man. Your real lover.'

'You *are* a real man to me, Robin.' She grabbed his arm, forcing him to look at her. 'And you're certainly the realest lover I've ever had!'

His eyes gleamed and, despite the angst of the moment, she could see he was pleased with himself. Lois grinned up at him.

Men! Even if they were magic imitations, they still liked to hear praise for their sexual prowess!



'Come on then, let's go for that walk.'

As she led the way to the door, though, something caught her eye. Her digital camera, on the table.

'One minute, Robin, let me take your picture! That way, I'll have something to remind me of you while you're . . . well . . . away.' She paused, thinking, thinking. 'And, when you come back, you'll have a template for when you take human form again.'

Robin looked impressed, but then he shrugged. 'We can try it, my love. It's a very good idea . . . But my kind are extraordinarily difficult to photograph.'

Lois snatched up the camera and, directing Robin to pose, she reeled off a few shots of him sitting, standing, smiling and looking moody.

She took upwards of twenty fast shots, using a variety of settings, but, frustratingly, they all came out strangely fuzzy and lacking in definition.

'Why are they so blurred?' she railed, flicking through the shots.

'Maybe because I'm becoming blurred, losing my focus.'

Lois's eyes flicked to the clock. Not long to go. With a sigh, she set down the camera, and then reached for Robin's hand – which still felt substantial and wonderful to her touch.

'Shall we walk then?'

They headed for the beach by silent mutual consent. Again, no telepathy. Lois just seemed to know that was the right place to head for.

The full moon was high as they walked, and she found herself stealing glances, again and again, at her companion, and tightening her fingers around his.

He was so real. And that perplexed her utterly.

How could she love a man who didn't really exist? A man she'd known for barely more than a day? A man, but one who was nothing more than a magical construct, made up from

fragments and images in her mind, an amalgam of many other men?

And yet she did. Mad as it seemed. She simply did.

The sand was firm beneath their feet and, in the brightness from the moon, they could see it stretching away ahead, along the shore, unnaturally white and scattered with driftwood and skeins of dark seaweed.

‘What’s that? Over there?’

By the edge of the lapping waves lay a small dark bundle. Clothing, what looked like a pair of boots and the glint of glass.

With Robin padding behind her, Lois ran to the bundle. She recognised her neighbour’s warm coat, his beanie hat with a watch laid neatly on top of it, and an empty bottle that had once contained Glenfiddich whisky beside them.

‘Where is he?’ She scanned the water, and then turned to Robin. ‘Surely he’s not gone swimming at this time of night? In this cold and full of booze? The water must be freezing.’

Her companion was peering out into the bay, his eyes narrowed. ‘He’s out there.’ He pointed to the waves. ‘He’s swimming now, but I don’t think he will be for long.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘I believe he’s trying to end his life. I sensed it in him before, but I thought that it was just a fleeting notion, not a real intention.’

Oh, God, she’d sensed the neighbour was unhappy, but not this bad.

‘But we’ve got to try and help him! He’s been drinking . . . He’ll feel different when he’s sober.’

She surged forwards, kicking off her shoes as she went, and flinging off her coat, but the water knocked the breath out of her before she reached waist depth it was so cold, so bitterly cold.

'Fucking hell!' she gasped, staggering and almost falling into the waves.

But, before she capsized, strong arms grasped her, and lifted her up on to her feet.

'Go back into the shallows! I'll get him,' Robin commanded her. He'd already flung off his long coat and his boots. His face was hard and determined in the moonlight. 'Go back to safety now.'

'But Robin, I can help . . . Help drag him in.'

The bitter irony of the moment suddenly crashed in on her with more power than the biggest of the waves.

It was almost midnight. These were their last moments before eleven months apart, and yet she knew the man out in the bay stood his best chance of being saved if she let her lover plunge into the water after him.

'Go back, my love, I'll get him.'

For one brief second he crushed his lips against hers, and then he put her from him and threw himself forwards into the dark and bitter water.

## 9

Robin had never swum in human form before, but like all natural skills it came to him effortlessly and he struck out hard in the direction of where they'd last seen Lois's neighbour, the man known as Edgar.

But was he too late?

Edgar had already slipped beneath the waves and was descending into the depths, his lungs waterlogged and his hold on life ebbing. Plunging down after him, Robin grabbed for his shoulders.

The reaction was predictably violent. Just as a normal man would have struggled for survival with every last fibre of his being, Edgar seemed bent on struggling to achieve his death and he thrashed and struggled, kicked out and punched with what remained of his strength, and even Robin found it difficult to hold on to him.

*Let me help you! Please don't do this! It's not the way!*

He spoke directly into the man's mind. It was the only way. It was too late now to worry about the niceties of explaining who he was . . . and what.

A life was at stake. A precious life. A *human* life – something he would have cherished, at all costs, if he'd had it himself.

And, in this strange, unnatural hinterland between life and death, Edgar seemed to accept the fact of unspoken communication.

*Leave me alone! Let me go! She's here . . . I want to be with her . . .*

His thoughts were weak, yet Robin understood. He didn't know what to do, and his grip on the rapidly ebbing Edgar faltered.

The dying man wriggled feebly and slid away.

Robin grabbed for him again.

*No! Please! Let me be with her!*

Such desperation. Such love.

Robin felt the keen pain of it. He felt it himself. Wouldn't he undertake the most drastic and most extreme act in order to be with Lois? And it could well be true. Edgar's lover might be here in spirit, somewhere close.

Disassociating momentarily, Robin sent out his consciousness.

Yes, indeed, he sensed a hovering presence, watching, waiting.

The weight of human sadness, passion and love descended on him. This was how they lived, and it was terrifying, yet still it seemed worth all the tumult if it meant a life with the one you adored. A woman like Lois.

Robin hesitated.

Life was sacred. He couldn't just let Edgar die.

He attempted to reach for the fading man, and found he couldn't.

*No!*

Midnight, the perennial witching hour, had just this moment passed.

It was June, and he could no longer assume the form of a human man.

But could he still persuade Edgar to live? He reached out again, this time in intangible form, searching for Edgar's mind.

Too late. He was gone. Robin felt a rising, rushing surge in the ether as the human's spirit swept up, flying to meet the

one who waited, and, at the same time, his mortal shell began to descend.

Robin watched the body dropping in the water.

Until moments ago, it had been hale, hearty, strong and alive. A perfect vessel.

Could he? Dare he? Would it work? His people spoke of such things, passed down tales, stories . . . but had such a phenomenon ever really been achieved?

The vision of Lois seemed to shimmer before him, and he sensed her back there on the beach, distraught with worry and fear, readying herself to wade into the water again.

He had to try it. He had to try. Even at the risk of his own extinction in the process.

‘Robin! Robin! Are you all right?’

Lois had never shouted louder in her life, and it was making her throat sore and her lungs hurt, bellowing out into the bay again and again. But she couldn’t see anything. There was no sign of her lover or her neighbour at all now, just the waves and the glitter of moonlight glancing on their crests. She waded out into the water, thrashing and struggling, then realised it was pointless. Not the strongest of swimmers, she’d never had any lifesaving training, and she wasn’t even sure what direction to go in.

‘Oh, Robin! Please!’ she howled, staggering backwards and falling in a heap on the sand beside her neighbour’s abandoned clothes.

What about rescue? Was there a lifeboat she could summon or something? Struggling into a sitting position, she felt in her pocket for her mobile, and discovered she’d left it in the cabin.

‘Fuck!’

What about her neighbour? Did he have one? Plunging into

the pile of clothing, she rummaged in all his pockets, but found nothing.

'No! No!'

Tears streaming down her face, she sprang to her feet again, staring out into the empty bay and the waves.

The cabin. There was a landline there. She could phone from there.

But, just as she was about to set out, something caught her eye. Or, more correctly, the *lack* of something.

Where was Robin's coat? His boots? They'd been flung out on the sand, next to her neighbour's stuff . . . and now they were gone.

'Oh noooo!' she keened again. 'Robin! Robin!'

He was gone. Turned back, along with his clothes, into whatever he'd been before.

What if it'd happened under water? What if he'd drowned too?

*Could* he drown? Maybe he was still around here somewhere?

'Robin! Robin! Robin!' she yelled, shouting now to the intangible presence, not the man.

As she stared out over the surface of the waves, shielding her eyes against the almost unnatural brilliance of the moonlight, she suddenly saw a shape breach the surface of the water.

A head!

Someone was coming. Wading towards her.

'Robin!' she screamed, plunging back into the cold sea, floundering towards the human figure that was labouring in her direction, staggering to his feet when he hit the shallows, then falling into the surf again.

'Robin,' she sobbed in a small broken voice when she reached the naked retching figure, who knelt on all fours, coughing up seawater and gasping for breath.

*Not Robin*, she thought, her heart bereft as she slid her arms around her neighbour's bare shoulders and helped him half crawl and half stagger towards the safety of dry land.

*Robin, where are you?*

Lois sat in the armchair by the stove, cradling a cup of tea in her hands as she tried to warm up. It had a hefty slug of brandy in it, in an attempt to fire her up from within, but, so far, it wasn't making much in the way of an inroad into her inner chilliness.

It was over an hour since she'd half dragged and half carried her neighbour into her cabin and helped him on to the bed then rubbed him dry with towels and spare blankets. He'd seemed virtually comatose on his feet, and unable to speak, and had lapsed into what could be unconsciousness or maybe just sleep almost as soon as he was horizontal.

When she'd decided it was safe to leave him for a moment, Lois had run back down to the sand, calling for Robin – in vain, she knew – and scouring the moonlit ocean for any sign of him. She'd even peered up into the sky, hoping to see him in the gull-like form he'd assumed before.

But there was nothing. No trace of him either physically . . . or intangibly.

With a heavy heart, she'd scooped up her neighbour's clothing, and, on returning to the cabin, had discovered from a postcard in his jacket pocket that he was called Edgar.

She stared at Edgar now, sleeping the sleep of a baby, in her bed.

*I wish you were Robin!*

Immediately, she felt guilty. She wished that *both* of them had come back out of the water, improbable or impossible as that might have been. She padded over to the side of the bed and sat down on the hard chair bedside it, staring down at the



slumbering man, something keen twisting painfully inside her as she observed certain aspects of his appearance that reminded her of her supernatural lover.

'Well, he did say he took some "bits" from you,' she muttered, recognising a certain line to the jaw, and perhaps the shape of an eyebrow, the tilt of a cheekbone.

Edgar was older than her beautiful Robin, though, and stockier, and his drying hair was frosted with grey rather than highlights of gold. Under other circumstances, she might have found him attractive, especially now the colour was coming back to his cheeks and he was starting to look healthy and normal again. But it was all she could do, at the moment, to battle with the resentment she felt against him, and her own guilt at thinking ill of him.

God, the man had been unhappy enough to want to take his own life, and here she was near to hating him because he'd snatched away her last few minutes with Robin. The fact that it'd been the final precious fragment of time they'd share for eleven months was bad enough . . . but the possibility that something had gone wrong, and that was it for good, for all time, forever, she couldn't bear to think about.

Even thinking about it made her groan with pain and, as tears filled her eyes, she just gave in and slumped slowly forwards, across the sleeping man, weeping.

The sobs wrenched at her. It felt as if someone was pulling at her soul and mangling it up. The idea of never seeing, or even sensing, Robin again was agonising. She clutched at the inert body and arms of Edgar for blind consolation.

Moments passed, or maybe hours, but suddenly, as her tears were beginning to subside out of pure weariness, the man beneath her moved, and sighed, and she felt the very lightest touch of fingers on her head, slowly stroking.

'Oh, you're awake,' she said awkwardly, straightening up,

unable to look at the rousing Edgar, not quite knowing how to greet him. 'Are you all right?' She fussed with a blanket, tweaking it a bit further up his chest. 'Er, would you like a hot drink or something?'

'Lois?'

The voice was soft and strained, as if speaking was still an almost insurmountable effort, but the single word seemed to twinkle like a silvery bell, ringing beautifully through her consciousness. There was deep exhaustion there, but also – familiarity?

Slowly, fearfully, she turned and looked down into Edgar's waking face . . .

And saw a miracle.

Yes, it was the face of her taciturn fellow holidaymaker, who'd barely spoken to her . . . and yet it wasn't him. A subtle metamorphosis seemed to be under way, perceptible perhaps only to someone who knew what to look for, but the features of Edgar were beginning to change into those of her beloved Robin.

The exhausted eyes were still a little dull and weary, but, already, they were no longer the nondescript hazel they had been.

The left one was blue, and the right one was brown.

'Robin?'

Joy, confusion, fear, relief, a jumble of belief and disbelief suddenly rushed through her like a tidal wave.

She flung herself forwards to kiss his strangely mutable physiognomy and threw her arms around him. His body was warm, deliciously warm, and, when his arms came around her, the sensation was so sweetly that of one coming home after a long and dangerous journey that she burst into more tears, sobs of wrenching relief, and could not speak.

They hugged for quite a while, and as Robin – she supposed

she must call him that now, despite the lingering resemblance to Edgar – gained strength, he sat up and drew her on to the bed beside him.

Lois simply couldn't stop smiling, despite the strangeness and incomprehensibility of their situation.

'How is this possible?' She touched his new face, trickled her fingers over his hair, which looked less grey now and bore a growing hint of gold. A thought occurred, and she reared back a little, not knowing how to feel about it. Everything was so confused. 'You didn't snatch his body, did you?'

She was half laughing as she spoke, but felt a thrill of fear that was as dark as it was delicious.

'No, Lois, I didn't snatch his body,' replied Robin amiably, 'although I can see why you have to ask the question.'

'I'm sorry . . . I didn't mean it that way.' She searched his face, wondering if she'd hurt his feelings.

'It's all right, it was a fair conclusion.' He took her hands in his big warm ones. 'I didn't snatch Edgar's body. I simply slipped into it when he left it to go elsewhere.'

'Elsewhere?'

'Oh, he's around here somewhere, I think. Not too far . . . But he's not alone now. He's with somebody he loves.'

Lois blinked, and Robin lifted a long finger to wipe away a stray tear from her face.

'And I'm with somebody I love, so now everyone's happy.'

Lois smiled, still filled with wonder. 'So you . . . you're completely Robin in there . . . Not Edgar at all then?'

Robin shrugged, rolled his eyes and seemed suddenly to go inwards somehow. 'There're memories, knowledge, information that are available to me.' He looked at her and smiled. 'Which will no doubt be useful now that I'm going to have to live my life as a human being, don't you think?'

'Best of both worlds then?'

'Most definitely,' he declared roundly, his eyes twinkling now, looking brilliant and far more colourful. Cradling her jaw, he brought her face to his to steal a kiss.

The healthy human warmth in his lips might be new, but the way he kissed her was completely and utterly Robin. She sighed with pleasure beneath his mouth at the sweet familiarity, and low in her belly she felt another sweetness stir.

She wanted to ask him if he could still read her mind, but it seemed his body was certainly interpreting all the signals.

'Shouldn't you be resting?' she purred as he drew her further on to the bed, and moved over her, unfastening the cord of her dressing gown before plucking it open to reveal her bare skin underneath it. She'd not bothered to dress after the hot shower she'd taken to warm herself. 'I mean, you did just drown about an hour ago.'

'Ah, but it seems our dear friend Edgar was in prime physical condition, with superb powers of recuperation,' murmured Robin, beginning to kiss his way down her throat, towards her breasts, in a way that was unmistakably and utterly and completely 'him'.

'Yes, he's not in bad nick at all,' concurred Lois, running her hands down the firm and muscular form of her lover's torso.

And reaching his loins she got a deliciously welcome surprise . . . Not quite Robin's fantasy dick, but still a magnificent specimen.

'Not bad at all,' she purred, beginning to slowly fondle it.

'And the best bit is . . . I still know how to use it.'

For a while, they touched and caressed, Lois entranced by the warm human feel of Robin's skin and his sex.

Until a thought occurred to her . . .

She looked up at him, gnawing her lip. She was almost certain that he couldn't accurately read her mind any more, but she knew he could sense her emotion, her quandary.

'What is it, my love?' he asked. His expression was kind and far more tolerant of her hesitation at this crucial moment than any of her previous lovers would have been.

'Um, well, you're human now . . . we need . . .'

'Protection?' His eyes twinkled.

'Well, yes. I'm sorry, I mean, I don't . . .'

Robin drew her back into his arms, close and sweet. 'Don't worry, sweet Lois.' His breath was a whisper against her ear, and, as she nuzzled him, she realised that, very faintly, he still smelt of lavender. 'If you don't have condoms, there are plenty of *other* ways to give each other pleasure. I have the imagination of *two* men now, remember?'

'Well, actually,' she began bashfully, 'I was sort of half hoping for a holiday romance when I packed for this trip.' She pursed her lips. 'There are some condoms in the bedside drawer.' She pulled back a little and looked up at him, with a little smirk. 'Although we can still do some of that other stuff first, can't we?'

'With pleasure, my love.' His lips began the process that his hands and his body would soon complete, beginning the journey down her body, tasting lightly and sampling her skin with his tongue. 'With the greatest of pleasure,' he murmured, looking up at her, his odd eyes twinkling as he kissed the gentle curve of her belly.

## Epilogue

The sky was bright, the sun was high and the air was warm. It was summer already, a gorgeous June day, when just a week ago it had felt like deepest winter.

Lois squeezed Robin's hand as they strolled contentedly on the beach. They were barefoot in the surf but the rolling water held no fear for them. A short while earlier they'd taken a swim, frolicking happily.

'Look!' Robin gestured elegantly to a large chunk of driftwood a few yards away and, following his eye-line, Lois saw a pair of birds perched together on its highest branch.

They were billing and cooing, preening each other, a perfect picture of mutual devotion and affection. Lois squinted, in the sun, and wondered if her eyes were deceiving her. The two birds looked vaguely familiar, and very much like the gull-like form her Robin had taken before he'd found this new body, lately vacated by the unfortunate Edgar.

'They could be us,' she observed, as the birds continued to canoodle, despite the presence of two humans so close by.

'Not us,' replied Robin, turning to her, an odd expression on his broad handsome face. His hair was gold-tipped now, and it shone in the morning sun. 'But perhaps someone we know . . . and the one he longed to be with.'

'Really?'

Lois's astonished exclamation finally disturbed the two lovebirds, and they took to the skies above the bay, whirling

and wheeling, their glossy wings seeming to entwine as they soared in an aerial ballet of sheer exuberance.

'Looks like they're making love, doesn't it?' observed Robin, smiling as he watched their play. 'Shall we go back indoors and do the same?'

Lois looked up into his eyes, smiling back at him. The blue one was bluer and the brown one browner now that, more and more, he became the natural resident of his brand-new body.

'I'd love to, Magic Man, I'd really love to!'

Tugging on his big warm hand, she led the way towards the path.