

End of the Rainbow

Amelia Elias

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Prologue

Shades closed in, vicious, soulless creatures existing only to slash and kill. Brida cast a shadow shield around herself and her enthralled golem to ward them off for the moment it would take her to find the spell she wanted. The golem could stand there and get beaten up while she searched -- after all, that was why she used the thing. Far better for the creature to get beaten and bloodied than her.

But just as she found the spell, one shade slipped past her golem. She cursed, turned to run, and realized the haste spell that increased her running speed had worn off while she'd been standing there. Fighting hand-to-hand was definitely not the forte of a moon elf sorceress, but she swung her scimitar at her enemy, desperate to survive. Two swipes later, it was all over.

For her, that was.

"Damn it!" Brida snarled as her character collapsed to the floor and the golem disintegrated. "I goddamn *hate* this goddamn impossible goddamn fucking level!"

"Dunno why you play that thing, B," her cousin commented from the couch. "You always die, then curse, then die some more. You're never going to beat it, and anyway, it's a *game*, for heaven's sake."

"Bite me, Aoibheal."

The Fae Queen laughed. "If you're so bored, I could always send you a few of my lovelies to play with. They always amuse me, especially in groups."

Brida sighed and debated the merits of cheating on the game. Yeah, it would defeat the whole point, which was to win a mortal game in the mortal way, but she'd been born too many thousands of years ago to really get comfortable with all the tiny buttons on the video game controller. Half the time she hit the wrong thing and ended up dying because she drank the magic-regenerating potion instead of the life-giving

one, or tried to cast a shield around the golem and banished the damn thing instead. It was enough to give an immortal a very human headache.

She glared at her moon elf's dead form on the plasma screen. "Real magic is so much easier," she grumbled. "Honestly, when's the last time you mispronounced a word and cast the wrong spell?"

Aoibheal laughed again. "My magic's not like yours, cousin. It doesn't depend on words. I will it to be so, and it is."

"You're missing the point."

"No, I think you are." She rose from her couch, tall and regal, and crossed to stand in front of the huge plasma screen. "Brida, why are you obsessed with these human toys? Look at this!" she said, waving a hand to take in the enormous television, the top-of-the-line surround sound system, the collection of gaming systems and their associated disks, all sorted by game type. "All adventure games, all about saving the world from evil. You're bored, cousin, and playing games for the rest of eternity isn't going to fix it."

As always, Aoibheal struck a little too close to home for comfort. That, combined with the sight of the tall, beautiful fairy towering over her, spurred Brida to her feet. "Thank you so much, Queen Obvious," she said as coolly as she could. "Yes, I'm bored, all right? Up until a thousand years ago, I had real work to do. Worshippers. Petitions to grant or deny. I was *needed*."

Now she wasn't. She didn't have to finish the thought. She was certain Aoibheal heard the words just as clearly as if she'd spoken them aloud. It was the one thing an immortal feared.

Becoming obsolete, unnecessary, forgotten.

And it had happened to them both.

"It's been more like fifteen hundred, cousin," the fairy corrected her, and for a moment, all Brida could do was stare, utterly stunned. Sweet Dagda, she'd lost time -- she'd lost five *centuries* of time. Had it really been so long? Had she been sleeping

longer, doing less? Where had the years gone, and how could she have missed their passing?

Aoibheal paused at the sight of Brida's obvious shock and her lovely face softened. "I know how you feel," she murmured, and Brida knew they weren't empty words. At one time, humans had courted the favor of the *Tuatha Dé Danaan*, before the *Age of Reason* had convinced the mortal world that there was nothing on Earth that couldn't be explained by their precious science. Aoibheal had suffered the same human indifference as Brida, but Aoibheal had her Fae court to amuse her and occupy her mind. She had a kingdom to rule.

Brida had nothing.

"They made me into a saint," she spat, still incensed beyond measure. When Christianity had taken over her beloved land, they hadn't been able to eradicate her from the hearts of her worshippers. For a time, Brida had handed out blessings without limit to her people in reward for their faithfulness, but there was a reason the Catholic Church had taken over the world. If they couldn't be rid of her, they could change her. Slowly, planting the seeds of doubt in the minds of her people, they rearranged her legend.

No longer a goddess of motherhood, of both war and healing, the sacred herald of the coming of spring, Brida was reborn in the Catholic Church as Brigit, a sainted nun. *A nun!* It was an insult she still could not forgive. Throughout her existence, Brida had raised up women to be her priestesses, had given them power and prestige, had forbidden any male to hold sway over her acolytes or even enter her sacred places, and they had remade her as a *nun*, servant to many men -- the abbot, the Pope, and finally the Christian Father God.

Where the sword failed, the whisper succeeded. And as her people began to worship this pale shadow of her true self, her power had faded, her place had been usurped, and she'd been left as she was now. Unneeded, forgotten, and so bored she almost wished she could suffer the trials and dramas of mortals.

Almost.

Her cousin waved a graceful hand, dismissing the issue of her sainthood as if it were of no importance. "When was the last time you visited the mortal realm?"

Brida shrugged, then nodded vaguely at her electronics. "Had to buy these somewhere, didn't I?" Aoibheal just raised an eyebrow and waited. Finally she sighed and admitted it. "All right, so I poofed them up here. Your point?"

"What you need, dear cousin, is to go slumming. Spend some time wallowing in the filth of the mortal world. Talk with those creatures, smell them, fuck a few. Remind yourself how shallow and vapid they are. After a week, you'll be glad to come back and forget them for another fifteen hundred years, I'd wager."

For the first time in longer than she'd care to admit, interest sparked in Brida's heart. Aoibheal used no word carelessly. "And what would you wager?"

The Fae Queen smiled, clearly pleased that Brida had taken the bait. "Humans are inferior," she said. "If you can find one with the intelligence, the patience, and the beauty of a *Tuatha Dé Danaan*, then I will make that creature into a god."

The audacity of it stole Brida's breath. Find a human who interested her, who could amuse her, and she could keep it forever? It was too good to be true, and when dealing with the Fae, Brida knew better than to believe anything was as good as it seemed. "And if I don't?"

Aoibheal smoothed the gossamer sleeve of her gown. "If you don't, then I will recreate you as a mortal for the span of one human life," she said, carelessly offering to do the one thing that was beyond Brida's own powers. "Either way, your longing for a visit to the mortal realm will be sated, your need for amusement will be met, and I won't have to listen to you curse that blasted game for a decent span of time."

Brida laughed out loud. Although her cousin might not see it in the same light, either way Brida would win. This wasn't a true challenge, this was a gift.

"I accept," she said, placing her hands over her heart and inclining her head. "Let the game begin."

Chapter One

Joseph McKiloughery was late for class. And if there was one thing he hated, it was being late.

There weren't enough hours in the day for a professor. There were classes to prepare, papers to grade -- although he foisted as many as he could off on his assistants -- handouts to compose, tests to plan. Just the thought of all he needed to do was enough to make him wish he didn't need sleep.

Not that most of his students cared.

He pushed open the door and strode to his lectern exactly fourteen minutes after the start of class and pretended not to listen for his students' groans. Roll call might be interesting, at least. Perhaps he should give out a bonus answer for the final to everyone who hadn't left before the fifteen minute mark, the official time when students could assume the class had been cancelled and leave.

His notes assembled, he glanced over the theatre for the first time since walking in. No surprises here -- in a class of eighty, exactly two males were enrolled, and neither was present. Those two empty chairs were the only vacant ones in the class.

So much for the bonus. He still would've given it out if he hadn't been so certain that it wasn't devotion to ancient religious studies that kept these women glued to their seats instead of skipping out for a period of rest.

Seventy-eight pairs of dreamy goo-goo eyes followed him as he walked over and turned on the overhead projector. It was disconcerting enough that he hardly remembered to curse the antiquated equipment. When he turned his back, he could practically feel the collective feminine gaze settle on his ass. He slapped a transparency on the glass, mentally slapping himself for forgetting to put on his long professor's robe.

If he could choose one thing about his appearance to change, it would be everything.

Although to some extent it was his own fault. His fascination with ancient religions had started early, nurtured by a doting and equally curious father. The more he learned, the more his interest turned to ancient customs, and being a boy, he'd wanted to be a knight in shining armor when he grew up. And as he'd gotten older, that desire had never changed.

So he'd pursued it, first attending and then performing at renaissance fairs whenever they came near his Dublin home, and his body showed it. His dark hair was kept a bit long, a bit shaggy, to fit his ideal of a knight of old. His shoulders were broad, thick, tapering down to a trim waist and tight ass -- the product of years of live-steel broadsword fighting. His thighs were heavily muscled, a result of wearing heavy steel armor during practice and exhibitions of the sword fighting.

Live-steel fighting was anything but safe, and he had a collection of scars that seemed to draw female interest. The little slash through his eyebrow had attracted far too many delicate fingers, tracing the line as a succession of soft voices asked what had happened, and had it hurt terribly?

And if all that wasn't bad enough, the worst of it had nothing to do with his hobby. No matter what he did, he couldn't find a pair of jeans that didn't make him look like he had a sock stuffed down the front of his pants, and he'd tried everything to make *that* part of himself less noticeable during class. Being well-hung was a blessing for about two percent of his life and a pain in the ass for the rest. At least when his back was turned, his students couldn't stare *there*.

Heaven help him if any of the hormonally overloaded walking vaginas who took his class ever found out that he was a closet knight. He'd never get a moment's peace again.

"Today we'll be continuing our study of the ancient gods and goddesses of the Celts," he said, keeping his back to the class and wondering if he could untuck his T-shirt without being too obvious about it.

He started reading the transparency aloud, listing the gods and goddesses, enumerating their attributes, while his mind half-wandered. It was a habit he'd sworn he'd never get into, one he remembered from his own days at university. Students could always tell when the prof's mind was elsewhere, or at least he'd always been able to. And he'd always felt cheated when they'd expected him to pay closer attention to their subject than they were.

With a wrench, he jerked his mind back to the subject at hand, namely the Christianization of the Celts. "St. George, who slew the dragon, started life as a Celtic god," he said, turning around and stepping quickly behind the lectern. Most of the eyes that met his were already glazing over -- apparently not even beefcake could make a dry subject more interesting to these girls.

It was a shame, because it was a subject he found fascinating. As he expounded upon the myth of St. George, changing the transparency to show an aerial view of Dragon Hill in Oxfordshire, the bare-summited hill where legend held that the dragon had been slain, he lost himself in the myth. "See that white slash at the top? It's chalk. Legend holds that nothing could grow on the land tainted by the dragon's magical blood. Unlike the Uffington White Horse --" he reached over and slapped a new transparency down, showing the huge, white chalk horse carved into the landscape, "-- which requires regular maintenance to stop the encroaching grass, Dragon Hill remains bare on its own."

He was just about to change transparencies again, to show the pagan Celtic stone figures found in certain Christian graveyards in Ireland, when the bell sounded, marking the end of his class. As always, Joseph felt a little deflated at the obvious relief that swept the room at the sound.

Again he wished like hell he looked different. If he were old, balding, and fat, his classes would likely be much smaller, but at least he'd have the pleasure of teaching students who could understand his passion for the subject.

He abandoned his transparencies and waved off the pair of giggling students who headed his way, muttering an excuse about being late for some faculty thing, as he

fled through the door to his office. It was a luxury he treasured while he could. Soon finals would begin, and he'd have to make time to meet with his students. All three classes of them, over two hundred students in all.

A quick peek confirmed that the huge classroom was finally empty. Joseph emerged and started gathering up his notes, absently noticing that they'd been rifled through. No doubt someone was trying to get something that'd help on their final exam. It didn't matter -- he'd be making up the test on the night before he gave it, as always. If reading his notes made them feel better, more power to them.

He only noticed the missing page when it appeared in his line of vision. The paper, covered in his mostly illegible scrawl with a few sketches at the edge, was held steady between slender, feminine fingers. "You'll be wanting this back, I'd imagine," she said, her soft voice touched with amusement.

He barely stopped a shudder. What a nightmare this day was turning out to be. First he was late to his own class, and now he was alone in a closed room with one of his female students, a situation he'd painstakingly avoided since discovering he was the campus sex object.

He reached for the paper and forced himself to look up, prepared to level the full force of his patented Displeased Professor glare on her, only to draw up short.

He didn't know who this woman was, but she sure as hell wasn't one of his students.

It was hard to put his finger on exactly what was different about her. She was tall, nearly equal to his own height, but he'd taught tall women before. Her golden hair fell past her waist in bright waves, held back from her face by golden combs, and while hair like hers was certainly noteworthy, long hair was currently fashionable on campus. Her skin was the classic peaches and cream complexion of the Irish, fine and smooth and, he was certain, soft as silk -- but several of his students were blessed with the same perfect skin. Even her beauty, from her rounded cheeks and aristocratic nose to the slight tilt of her eyes, wasn't so extreme as to stop him in his tracks.

And then Joseph met her eyes, and momentarily forgot how to breathe.

Time shimmered in those blue eyes, centuries of it, more than centuries. Knowledge teased him from beneath her long lashes. Humor and power played in their depths, sparks of amusement dancing at his shock.

Oh, no, whoever -- whatever -- she was, this woman had nothing to do with his class. "May -- may I help you?" he asked, his voice rusty, as if he hadn't spoken for weeks.

She smiled and offered the page again, making him realize that while he'd reached for it, he hadn't actually taken it from her. He accepted it and forced himself to blink. When he met her gaze again, the strangeness of her eyes had vanished.

He wasn't stupid enough to believe it had never been there, however.

"It's good, what you've done here," she said in a musical Irish accent, but another accent overlaying it made her words ring of something he couldn't quite place. "But you've not quite got it, Professor McKiloughery. Brida is the daughter of Dagda, king of the gods, and cousin to the Fae, but you err in naming her as a Fae."

She'd even pronounced it right -- *Breed*, not *Bride-uh* as his students were wont to say it. Only now did he notice the goddess's name on his scribbled notes. "Um," he said, glancing down at what he'd written, mostly to break away from those knowing eyes. "I'm sorry, but I don't think you've registered for my class, and I don't see a visitor badge. What is your name, please?"

She tilted her head, still smiling, looking amused now. "Come, Joseph," she said, her tone chiding. "Long and long it's been since I was taught in my true form. Are you so surprised, then, that you cannot recognize truth when it stands before you?"

He stared some more, thrown by her words, and she finally shook her head with an impatient sigh. "And here I was even talking all old-world for you, too," she said, her accent lessened, but not gone. "Come on, I'm giving it to you on a platter here. I gave you the notes. I've corrected your mistake. I even let you see my true face. Is it so hard for you to believe in what you teach?"

For some reason, the modern accent was more convincing than her strange phrasing had been, and Joseph felt the bottom drop out of his stomach. "*Brida?*" he

asked, feeling stupid for believing it even a bit, while the rest of him couldn't see any other conclusion.

She clapped her hands and grinned. It was like being washed in light, and he had to shake his head hard to clear it. "Well done!" she said. Taking his hand, she drew him out from behind the lectern. The touch of her fingers on his wrist sent shivers of electricity through his body, and he was both bereft and relieved when she released him.

Walking a slow circle around him, Brida surveyed him even more intently than his most amorous students ever had. He felt a flush creeping up the back of his neck and dropped his arm so that the paper still dangling from his hand partially covered his groin. "What's this about?" he asked, craning his neck to follow her progress around him.

She ignored him. "Nice," she murmured, tracing a fingertip across the breadth of his shoulders. His cock responded to her touch with an entirely unwelcome twitch. "Very nice." Her finger slid down his spine. "You have a brilliant mind and a beautiful body, Joseph McKiloughery."

"Thanks, how about getting your hands off it?" he shot back, stepping away as she circled around to face him.

She laughed. "And a warrior's spirit," she added, nodding approvingly. "I like you. Yes, I think you'll do nicely."

Alarm skittered up his spine, killing the faint arousal her touch had created. "Do for what?" he demanded, but again, she wasn't listening.

She cupped his face in her hands and leaned closer. "Kiss me, Joseph McKiloughery. Let me taste the mortal passion I've missed for so many long years."

Chapter Two

Her touch triggered a wave of desire that crashed over his confusion, almost drowning it. Joseph hadn't felt such powerful lust since... ever. It was hot, pulse-pounding, and utterly irresistible. When she stepped nearer, her body only a breath away from his, he closed the distance between them himself and claimed her mouth in a searing kiss.

Her lips parted eagerly and he licked into her mouth, finding her tongue and caressing it with his own. His arms slid around her and pulled her tight against him. The feel of her body pressed willingly against his, her soft breasts tipped with tight nipples he could feel even through the twin layers of their shirts, his erection cradled against her belly... it was all he could do to tear himself away and suck in a deep, shuddering breath.

He *never* lost control like this.

"What are you doing to me?" The demand came out as a gasp, and even then, he couldn't bring himself to release her.

Brida smiled and nipped his chin before licking a path down his throat. "Make love to me," she murmured, her breath hot on his skin, her teeth nibbling the sensitive flesh over his pulse. "Show me you're as magnificent as you seem and you will be rewarded."

Her hands slid over his shoulders and down his back in a long caress that cranked his lust yet higher. "I don't want any reward," he said, then moaned as she pulled his T-shirt out of his pants and let her hands wander beneath it.

"Don't say no, Joseph McKiloughery."

He started to do just that, but then she pulled away from her sensual exploration of his throat and he made the mistake of meeting her eyes. Behind the desire, behind the

magic, he caught a glimpse of very human vulnerability. Brida lowered her lashes as if she realized what he'd seen and, too late, tried to hide it. "Why me?" he asked softly. "You're a goddess, Brida, if you are what you say you are. Why do you want a junior professor as your lover? You can have kings, gods, whoever you want."

She rested her forehead on his shoulder. "But you remember me," she whispered, and if she was faking the forlorn tone, she was one hell of an actress.

The emotion in her voice was his undoing. Joseph finally released her waist and let his hands slide up her back, beneath the silken fall of her hair. Without a word, he lifted her head from his shoulder and kissed her again, throwing caution to the wind for the first time in his life.

She reacted with such passion his knees went weak. She drew his tongue into her mouth, caressed it with her own, suckled it when he invaded the deep recesses of her mouth. His cock swelled, throbbing with need. Her thighs parted and she wrapped one perfect leg around his waist, pressing him still closer as her hands dipped into the back pockets of his jeans and squeezed.

"Christ," he gasped, drawing back and panting for breath. "I wanted to take you home, but if you keep that up I'll have you right here on the floor."

She made a low purr of pleasure deep in her throat and rubbed against him again. "I vote for the floor."

Joseph heard a series of clicks at the back of the room and his head snapped up, belatedly realizing that they were still in the class theatre, that anyone could've walked in while he stood here necking with this beautiful stranger. He started to pull away but Brida tightened her hold on him. "The doors are locked now," she assured him. "Now kiss me again. I love the way you taste."

Talk about an offer he couldn't refuse. Joseph complied, kissing her fiercely, possessively, lifting her completely off the ground so she could wrap both legs around his waist. The feel of her soft thighs embracing his hips was so damn sexy he could hardly stand it. The few steps to the desk seemed like a mile, but somehow he managed to bridge the distance and set her atop the cluttered surface.

Brida moaned a protest when he broke the kiss, but the sound turned to one of pleasure when he nipped and suckled her earlobe. She arched and tightened her legs around him. His cock nestled in the vee of her legs, only separated from her by her skirt and his jeans, and it throbbed with the demand to get inside her. Joseph rocked against her, rubbing his rigid length against her pussy, and growled at her gasp of pleasure.

More. He wanted more, and he wanted it now.

As if reading his mind, Brida reached up and started to unbutton her blouse. "I want your mouth on my nipples," she moaned, her fingers clumsy with desire and urgency. Fumbling at the stubborn buttons, finally she growled and yanked at the shirt, sending buttons flying in all directions and exposing two of the most perfect breasts lace had ever embraced. "Now!"

His mouth was already watering for a taste of her gorgeous breasts. He cupped them, filling his hands with her softness, and the sight of his dark, rough hands against her pale skin and pink lace bra was the most erotic thing he'd ever seen. She grabbed his wrists, urging him to hurry, but suddenly he was in no mood to rush.

He swept his thumbs over her tight nipples and was rewarded by her gasp. He imagined suckling her, rolling those little peaks on his tongue, and pinched her nipples lightly through the lace. God, he knew she'd be delicious, and the little whimpers she made deep in her throat as he played with her were driving him crazy.

"I bet I could make you come just like this." He bent and blew a hot breath across the valley between her breasts, then flicked his tongue over the goose bumps he'd raised. "I could lick your nipples until you come, without ever touching your sweet pussy. Would you like that, goddess?"

"Please," she moaned. "Oh, please, don't tease me!"

He chuckled and nuzzled the edge of one of the lace cups. "Ahh, but I like to tease." Her hands tightened on his wrists and he caught the lace between his teeth, pulling it slowly aside.

Her breath came in little pants as he kissed the swell of her breast. She released his wrists to bury her hands in his hair, trying to urge him closer to her nipple, but he

refused to be rushed. He inhaled deeply against her skin, savoring the scent of her -- clean, natural, tinged with arousal. She made an incoherent sound of pleasure and impatience, quite possibly the sexiest sound he'd ever heard, and he rewarded her by flicking his tongue over her nipple.

Brida's head dropped back, exposing the long curve of her throat to him. He dropped open-mouthed kisses on the soft skin as he unfastened the front-clasp of her bra. They both groaned when the fabric parted, spilling her breasts into his palms, and he decided that teasing time was over. Never in his life had he wanted to taste a woman so badly.

He dipped his head and caught her nipple between his teeth, tormenting the imprisoned flesh with his tongue as he rolled her other nipple between his fingers. She arched like a bow, squeezing him hard with her thighs. His cock ached as the confinement of his jeans became unbearable. Still suckling her, he grasped the hem of her long skirt in both hands and pushed it up, desperate to taste more of her.

Her skin was soft beneath his palms as she parted her thighs without hesitation for him. She was moaning words he didn't understand, words she probably wasn't even aware of speaking, as her hips rocked involuntarily. He kissed his way to her other breast, giving in to the urge to nip the sensitive underside before suckling hard, using lips and teeth and tongue to drive her wild, giving her a preview of what he had planned for another delicious bit of her flesh.

And then his fingertips brushed the curls at the juncture of her thighs, moist and slick with her arousal, and the discovery that she was utterly bare beneath the modest skirt was his undoing.

Abandoning her nipples, Joseph dropped to his knees between her thighs and draped her legs over his shoulders. "Don't scream," he warned her an instant before he parted her labia with one hand and thrust his tongue as deep inside her as it could go.

Brida went rigid, even her breath freezing, as Joseph's head reeled with her intoxicating taste. God, he'd always loved pussy, the slickness on his tongue, the texture of a woman's softest flesh, the hot, salty flavor of her pleasure, and never had any

woman been more delicious. One of her hands left his hair and he heard her muffled cries of pleasure as he devoured her in long, hot licks. Wiggling his tongue inside her as she writhed, sucking her plump pussy lips into his mouth, and finally zeroing in on the place he wanted more than any other, he devoted his entire attention to worshipping her gorgeous pussy.

And when she came, her body bucking and her thighs clamping his head so hard he could barely breathe, he licked up every delicious drop.

He gave her sweet, pink clit one last kiss before rising to his feet to examine his handiwork. He greatly approved of what he saw. The goddess lay back on the desk, propped on one, trembling arm, with her other hand still pressed to her open mouth. Her cheeks and breasts were flushed with passion and her half-closed eyes were hazy with the aftermath of her orgasm. He pressed the heel of his hand against his aching cock, taking one more moment to fully appreciate her bared breasts, bunched-up skirt, and wet, exposed pussy, before unsnapping the top button of his jeans.

“Did you enjoy that, Brida?”

She moaned in answer as her eyes closed fully, nodding with her hand still over her mouth, confirming what he already knew. He’d felt the spasms of her intense orgasm all around his tongue.

Joseph smiled, knowing his expression had a feral edge. “Open your eyes, goddess. Now it’s my turn, and this time I want to see your face when you come for me.”

Brida obeyed, opening her dazed blue eyes and finally uncovering her mouth to return his smile. The curve of her lips was so languorous, so incredibly satisfied and sexy, that his desperation to free his cock from his jeans reached a dangerous intensity. “I can’t wait to feel you inside me,” she murmured, and it was all he could do not to come right then.

His hands shook as he unzipped his jeans, finally allowing his rock-hard cock freedom from the torturous confinement. Brida’s gaze locked on his groin and she licked her lips. The image of her bending over him, sucking him deep, licking him from

tip to balls, burst through his mind and refused to leave. He closed his eyes and desperately recited the names and birthdates of all fifteen of King James II's children to keep from spilling his load like an overeager teenager.

She didn't give him much time to cool down. Just as he opened his eyes, she ran a fingertip down the throbbing vein on the underside of his cock. The touch tore a raw groan from his throat and he couldn't stop himself from thrusting against her hand.

"You have a beautiful cock, Joseph McKiloughery," Brida said, still staring at it as she smoothed her fingertips over his head and around the hypersensitive rim. "Thick and strong and so very *hard*." She squeezed him on that last word and the surge of pleasure almost sent him to his knees.

He grabbed her hands and pulled them away before she could send him over the edge. "It won't be for much longer if you keep that up," he groaned, breathing hard. "Touch me again and it'll all be over."

She smiled and bit her lower lip. "I'd hate for that to happen. I'm looking forward to riding you far too much."

"Jesus." Joseph rested his forehead against hers, reciting dates and trying to ignore the scent of her cream, the lingering flavor on his lips, the memory of her tight heat clamping down on his tongue as she came...

Forget restraint, his cock urged him. Get inside her and lose yourself in the slick wetness, her heat, get inside that pussy and fuck her already!

He growled at his runaway thoughts and grabbed her hips. Restraint was overrated anyway. Without another word, he pulled her to the edge of the desk, pressed against her slick core, and thrust deep.

They both moaned, and Joseph couldn't hold back. The feel of her tight pussy clenching around his cock as he withdrew, opening to admit him when he surged back inside... the scent of her, the musky, sweet aroma of woman and lust... the tremors that rocked her inner muscles as her thighs wound tight around him, her breath coming faster as she prepared to come again...

He threw back his head and plunged into her over and over, his balls drawing up tight, his hips slapping her thighs as he thrust. When Brida cried out and her body clamped down on his cock, quivering all along his length, he pressed his face against her throat, buried himself to the balls, and came so hard his vision went black.

Long minutes passed while they leaned on his desk, bodies entangled, still intimately joined, both gasping for breath as they recovered. Joseph pressed a soft kiss to her throat. He couldn't find the words to express his wonder, his gratitude, but he wanted to. Never in his life had he come so hard or enjoyed a woman so damn much. Somehow he had to find a way to let her know it without sounding like he was comparing her to lovers he'd had before.

Brida regained her voice first. "Thank you, Joseph McKiloughery," she murmured. "That was incredible. Worthy of a god."

Then she looked up at the ceiling and called out words he'd never heard before, words that seemed to reverberate in his very bones, phrases that seared him with power and passed instantly out of his memory, leaving behind only the recollection of the feelings they'd evoked. When she finished speaking, another voice answered, and although this one also carried power in every syllable, she spoke Gaelic, a language he understood.

"Why do you call me, cousin? Your time in that realm hasn't even passed a month yet. Surely you can't be tired of mortals so soon."

Brida's gaze fixed on his, and the triumph he saw there replaced his post-orgasm lassitude with apprehension. "I have fulfilled our bargain, Aoibheal," she replied, also in Gaelic. "Now take this man and make a god for me."

Chapter Three

The human stumbled in his haste to pull out of her and back away. Brida frowned as he held up both hands, as if that could ward off the power that she and her cousin wielded. "Whoa, hold the phone!" he cried, putting the lectern between them. "Okay, yeah, the sex was incredible, but who says I want to be a god?"

It was an effort not to gape at him, but she managed it. Just. "Why wouldn't you?" Brida asked, utterly taken aback. "It has been my experience that all mortals want to touch the divine when they die, so why --"

"It may have escaped your notice, but I'm not dead yet, nor do I plan on getting dead for quite some time!"

She rolled her eyes. "You fear death?" Ahh, she'd forgotten that. The drive to live, that survival instinct, so strong in this realm, so absent in hers. It was part of what made mortal sex so very intense. That drive to procreate, and the realization of how very little time they had to walk the earth... it spiced every experience. "Death is nothing more than a transition, Joseph McKiloughery. What kind of afterlife do you believe in? Do you want to go to Heaven, or drink at Valhalla or walk the Elysian Fields? I offer you something better -- the chance to create your own paradise."

He looked positively panicked now. Groping behind him through the door to his office, his hand landed on the pommel of one of the shining broadswords he'd leaned beside his door. He snatched it and, to her complete and utter surprise, dropped into a perfect fighting stance. "I'm not going to any goddamn afterlife," he growled.

Surprise. She closed her eyes, savoring it. Aoibheal had been right -- life was a thousand times better than video games. This was real, visceral, shockingly immediate. "I will speak with you more another time, cousin," she said in the language of the Fae. "I have decided not to end my *slumming* quite so soon."

Aoibheal's laughter danced through the air. "He's really a delicious mortal. I must admit, you've made a nice choice. Just get him to agree so I can taste him when you return, hmm?"

Brida scowled at the thought of sharing. This mortal was *her* find, *her* prize, but she felt Aoibheal depart before she could reply. *Well, no matter*, she told herself, letting her gaze drift over her new lover. *I'll have time to thoroughly stake my claim when I convince him to come back with me.*

Joseph's eyes showed his fear, but overlying that emotion was his determination. Brida stepped closer, savoring the sight of him. He truly was magnificent. His broad shoulders and muscular arms tightened with the weight of the sword, making the already-tight T-shirt stretch over his powerful chest. His jeans were still open but he gave no indication that he'd noticed. The sword was rock-steady in his hands and everything in his face and bearing showed her he was ready to fight for his life.

Even knowing he faced a goddess.

A new emotion joined the desire she felt for him -- admiration. Brida smiled and closed the distance between them without fear. "You wield that blade like a man with experience," she said, placing her palm on the cold metal. "Like a warrior from long ago. Tell me, Joseph McKiloughery, would you like to see Ireland of old?"

A muscle jumped in his jaw but the sword never wavered. "Will you stop calling me that? My name is Joseph, just Joseph."

She inclined her head. "Let it be Joseph, then, if that is what you prefer. You didn't answer my question. I can take you to the time that has fascinated you since you were a child. Wouldn't you like to see the castles you've studied for so many years, not in ruins but full of life? Wouldn't you like to test your blade against true warriors on the practice fields and find out how accurate your re-creations really are? Come with me and I'll show you all this and more."

"For what price?" he shot back, but she could see he was tempted.

"No price," Brida replied, meaning it. She was certain that this taste of the divine powers she offered him would convince him to join her in immortality. What human

didn't dream of being all-powerful, living forever? "I merely wish to give you a taste of what you're refusing. I give you my word that I will return you to this exact time and place before night falls."

He held her eyes for a long time. She didn't press. To his credit, he didn't question her word -- scholar that he was, he must've known how the gods punished those who doubted their promises. Finally he lowered the broadsword, but he didn't release it. "All right, then," he said. "Take me to the past. I'd be a fool to refuse a chance to see something I've wanted for so long, and it'll erase any doubt that you are who you say you are."

She smiled. "Perfect. Take my hand, then, and I'll show you a new world."

Joseph didn't know what he expected -- maybe swirling lights or blurred glimpses of mysterious, unidentifiable things as time scrolled back, like he'd seen in movies -- but all that happened was that he took Brida's hand and the room vanished. Instantly, without flashing lights, crashing thunder, or any hint of disorientation, he was somewhere else.

Somewhere sunny, filled with the sounds of chickens and livestock, the crunch of wooden wheels on a dirt road, and a babble of laughter and casual Gaelic conversation.

For a moment he forgot to breathe. The sun shone down from a perfect blue sky accented with puffy clouds of purest white, warming his head and shoulders. The air smelled cleaner than anything he'd ever experienced, perfumed with hints of wildflowers and green grass, tainted only by the natural aroma of livestock. A bee zoomed by his ear on its way to a patch of flowers and he didn't even jump, so stunned was he by the total transformation of the world.

"Holy shit," he whispered, forgetting the sword still in his hand, forgetting the goddess, forgetting that his pants were still undone, forgetting everything except this hill he stood upon and the incredible scene below him. All he could do was stare at the bustling ancient village and the imposing castle behind it.

Brida's soft laughter brought him back to himself. "Welcome to Dublin Castle, Joseph. I hope the reality is as pleasant as you've dreamed it would be."

He couldn't stop gaping to answer her. Workmen surrounded the castle, which was just a shadow of its future self. More workmen were busy strengthening the walls enclosing the busy town. He did some calculations in his head and murmured, "Late 12th century, it has to be... reinforcing the walls, expanding the motte and bailey to a strong castle. Yes, late 12th or early 13th?"

The goddess laughed again, finally drawing his attention away from the scene around him. "Very good," she said with a smile. "This is the Dublin of King Henry II. Would you like to explore?"

"Oh, hell yeah," he agreed instantly, then abruptly realized that his clothing was still thoroughly 21st century. "But first I think I need some --"

His jeans and T-shirt melted away to be replaced by garments such as he'd only seen in shreds or reproductions in museums -- soft, loose-fitting woolen trousers, laced up the legs with woven, dyed cords; a homespun woolen undershirt covered by a tunic that reached past his waist and was cinched with a brightly dyed leather belt; a knee-length cape with otter-fur trim, and intricately embroidered leather shoes. After the space of a heartbeat, a scabbard appeared in his free hand, complete with a leather strap made to hang from a saddle, since swords like his were far too long and heavy to hang from his belt.

Brida circled him, tapping her chin. "Yes, yes, this will do nicely," she mused. "You're wearing several colors, which puts you above the peasants, but not so many as to mark you as royalty -- but you're close. Only nobility would have a sword like yours. Still, try not to let anyone look too closely at that thing. It's a fair reproduction, but any swordsmith worth his salt could tell it's not of this time."

Joseph sheathed it at once and, briefly at a loss how to carry it without a horse, finally slipped the strap over his shoulder beneath the cloak. The goddess nodded her approval. "Good. Ready to explore?"

His heart leapt in his chest, suddenly pounding so hard he wasn't sure he could speak. This was it, then. Literally a dream come true. He nodded, not trusting his voice, and followed Brida through the gates and into the village.

Chapter Four

Brida enjoyed the day almost as much as her mortal did. His wonder at everything he saw was contagious. She'd forgotten what it was like to experience something for the first time, and watching Joseph's enjoyment at his first taste of fresh, hearth-baked bread and homemade cheese made her own simple meal taste better. He was less enamored of the lack of restroom facilities, but he kept a sense of humor about it. Even his heavily-accented Gaelic sounded musical to her, simply because his joy at speaking it, at hearing it all around him, colored her perceptions.

When the sun dipped to the horizon and they sat upon his spread cloak on the hilltop, she was almost as disappointed at the prospect of leaving as he was.

It didn't make sense. She could come back here at any time, and often did. Why feel sad to leave now, when she could return tomorrow, on any number of tomorrows?

"Thank you for this, Brida."

Joseph's soft voice broke her from her strange thoughts and she turned to him with a smile, banishing her concerns. "It is nothing, truly."

"To you, perhaps," he said. "To me... it's worth more than I can express."

She saw an opening and took it. "You can come back anytime if you're a god, you know. This time, and any other that interests you, will be open to you forever. You can spend a lifetime here, then turn around and do it all again. Whatever you wish."

But he was already shaking his head before she even finished speaking. "I'll treasure this memory, I truly will, but I don't want to give up my life for more."

"Why?" She finally lost her patience and turned on him, hands on her hips. "You act like I'm trying to take something away from you. I wish to *give* you eternity, not rob you of anything! Why do you reject me?"

He reached out and took her hands to draw her to his side. "Brida, come here." She resisted for a moment, not willing to let him change the subject yet again as he had so many times during the day, but finally relented. He pulled her closer and cupped her face in his hands. "When we go back to my time, I know you're going to leave," he murmured. "I want to say a proper farewell to you, my goddess."

His lips were demanding when he kissed her, taking the lead without apology, and she sank into his embrace with a sigh. Sweet Dagda, he tasted so good, like ale and heat and pure aroused man, and she suckled his tongue just to savor his flavor. He groaned and thrust his tongue in and out of her mouth, filling her with desire and urgency to have more.

Joseph rolled her beneath him on the cloak and trapped her under his hard body, never breaking the kiss. She wrapped her legs around his waist and groaned with frustration. There were too many layers between them. His pants, her skirts, thick wool separating her body from his... with a wish, they vanished, and the abrupt full-body press of his hot skin to hers startled a cry from both of them.

He broke the kiss with a strained laugh. "Nice trick, but a little warning would be nice," he teased.

Brida wasn't in the mood for teasing. All it took was one kiss from this man to set her body on fire and she could think of a hundred better things for him to use that mouth for than speaking. "Don't stop!" she demanded, sliding her hands over every part of him she could reach, arching to rub her body against his. "I need more!"

His laugh turned into a groan and he kissed her again, longer, deeper, gloriously wild. His hands were moving now too, tracing long caresses from shoulder to thigh. His chest felt divine against her nipples and she rubbed against him shamelessly, loving the friction and the deep vibration of his moans of pleasure. She knew he had to feel her quivering, but he didn't rush no matter how she wiggled beneath him. Had she ever been this hot in her entire existence?

Finally she bit his lip and growled. "Joseph McKiloughery, if you don't fuck me soon I swear I'll make you impotent for the rest of your life!"

And he laughed, actually *laughed*, at her threat! "Patience, goddess, patience."

"I'm all out of patience," she snapped. "I want your cock and I want it now!"

His hands swept slowly up her body and finally, finally reached her breasts. "And here I thought you might appreciate a little foreplay," he murmured as he pinched her nipples.

"Foreplay later!" By this time she was writhing, panting, so wet and empty inside that her pussy literally ached. "Fucking now!"

He bent his head and suckled first one nipple, then the other, tormenting the hard little peaks with his tongue and teeth. She hardly recognized the sounds she made as one hand trailed down her belly, inching toward her throbbing clit. When his thumb brushed against it, she closed her eyes and tried to grind against him, wanting to come so badly she wondered if she could die.

"You're so damn wet," he whispered, his breath tickling her nipples. "I want to lick you clean, goddess. Do you know how good you taste? How incredible it is to feel you come in my mouth?"

By this point she was begging, alternating Gaelic demands with English pleas, her hips thrusting against his teasing fingers no matter how she tried to still them. He bit her nipple, just hard enough to make her cry out, then soothed the sting with his agile tongue before doing the same to the other nipple. All the while his fingers were never still, playing with her pussy, dipping inside just enough to make her crazy without ever giving her enough to satisfy.

"I could eat you alive," he groaned, finally raising his head to stare down at her with intense eyes. "But I think you want something else from me right now, don't you?"

"Please," she moaned, forgetting pride, forgetting everything but the burning need to have him inside her, to feel his thick cock stretching her to the limit. "Please, Joseph!"

Suddenly his fingers vanished and were replaced with the thick head of his cock, pressing against her slick pussy. She thrust her hips, drawing him deeper, and his hiss

of pleasure thrilled her. He surged home, filling her completely. They both moaned and at last Joseph lost control.

He thrust hard, deep, angling his hips so his shaft rubbed her clit with every thrust. Brida came almost at once, screaming his name, but he didn't slow. The sight of him suspended above her, his shoulders taut as he supported his weight on his arms, his ridged abs rippling with every powerful surge, was enough to send her over the edge a second time, and she dug her fingers into the grass to keep from flying away on the powerful waves of ecstasy.

"More," Joseph growled, quickening his thrusts, changing his angle so his cockhead bumped that hypersensitive place deep inside her with every thrust. "Come again for me, goddess. Let me feel that sweet pussy of yours come on my cock again."

And when she came for the third time, arching off the ground as the most powerful orgasm of her entire life ripped through her body, Joseph went rigid in her arms and cried out his own pleasure as his cock filled her up inside.

They collapsed together, lying in a tangled, sweaty heap on the cloak. Joseph brushed the hair from her forehead with a shaking hand and pressed a kiss on the skin he'd revealed. "I could never get enough of you," he whispered.

"Then come with me." She knew she was begging now, but she didn't care. She'd fucked half the gods in heaven and most of the incubi in hell, and none of them had ever brought her as much pleasure as this mere mortal in her arms. "I don't want to give this up," she admitted. "You're special, Joseph. There's no one in heaven like you."

He propped himself up on an elbow and looked down at her, his green eyes serious. "Brida, if I became a god, do you really think I wouldn't change?"

She was prepared to tempt him with all sorts of persuasions, but his question stopped her. Was that the secret of his appeal? His mortality?

Joseph spoke again before she could recover her voice. "I love life, Brida. I really love it. I enjoy every day because I know I'll never have that day again. You told me that I could go back and relive anything if I was a god -- but where's the challenge in

that? Where's the mystery and the interest? I don't want to have a perfect life that lasts forever. You can't appreciate sweetness if you never taste anything bitter."

For a long time, Brida couldn't find her voice. Everything he said made sense to her. The sex they'd shared, the food they'd tasted, even the sunlight on her face -- it had been better today than ever before, because she'd seen it as Joseph had. As a once-in-a-lifetime experience, something never to be repeated. He'd squeezed every ounce of sensation out of the day because he'd never have it again, and she'd unconsciously imitated him and, in doing so, had enjoyed one of the most incredible days of her existence. Had she ever felt this intensely? Perhaps once, long ago... but not now. Not until this one incredible day with her mortal lover.

This man blazed with the passion of his mortality. Did she want to extinguish that fire and give him the slow-burning coals of forever instead?

No. She didn't want to change one single thing about Joseph. He was magnificent as he was. She had no right to make him into something he wasn't and destroy the very things about him that had attracted her in the first place, and that she so envied.

"It's time to return to your world," she said, struggling not to let her sadness show. She made the jump before he could reply, bringing them back to his classroom at the university, clothing them both and reappearing on the far side of his desk.

If she touched him, she'd lose her resolve. By the stars, she'd never wanted to keep something so badly, and she had to let him go.

This time she didn't have to summon Aoibheal. The Fae Queen's voice rang out a bare instant after they arrived. "Have you persuaded your mortal?"

"No," she replied, watching Joseph's face as she spoke, seeing her own sadness reflected in his eyes. "I was wrong, cousin. This man should not be a god. He's perfect as he is."

There was a little pause, just enough to let her know she'd shocked Aoibheal. "Then you will call me when you've found another likely mortal?"

She couldn't imagine finding a man more perfect than Joseph. "No, Aoibheal. I find I've... lost my taste for the game."

This time the pause was longer, and when her cousin spoke again, the teasing note had left her voice. "You realize this means you lose our wager. Are you certain you want to do this, Brida?"

The terms of the wager came back to Brida with a shock. Either find a mortal worthy of divinity or become a mortal herself! Suddenly she felt like dancing, singing, clapping her hands and making the clover bloom in winter. Such joy was utterly alien to her and she loved it. "Yes! Oh, yes, Aoibheal, I'm certain. Do it now!"

Joseph frowned and she opened her mouth to explain to him, but abruptly she felt... she couldn't name precisely what she felt, but it took her voice and made her stumble. The strength ran out of her spine and legs as if someone had pulled the plug. Her vision narrowed and she lost the sense of the world around her, of the plants and animals and people in nearby rooms. A weight settled atop her shoulders, making her muscles tremble, especially in her thighs.

"Aoibheal, what is this?" she tried to ask in Fae, but it came out in Gaelic, and she couldn't remember a single word of the language she'd spoken with ease for millennia.

"It's mortality," her cousin replied in the same language, her voice sounding sad. "For the space of one lifetime, as we agreed. Your powers await you here at the end of your mortal life. Your body is no longer divine, and you're probably feeling the aches from that rather incredible fuck on the hill."

"Hey!" Joseph protested as he crossed the distance between them and wrapped his arms around Brida, supporting her. "Who invited you to spy on us?"

Aoibheal's musical laugh filled the room. "Such an incredible mortal! I don't blame my cousin for choosing you, although what she's given up for you might not be worth it in the end. Still, I wouldn't have minded trading places with her on that hilltop."

Joseph's neck reddened and Brida hugged him with a laugh. All these sensations would take some getting used to, but the feel of his body against hers was one heightened sensation she could use a little more of. "Cousin, go away. I think my professor's going to take me home and tutor me on how to be a mortal woman, and I don't think either of us wants an audience."

"Spoilsport." Then Aoibheal's voice softened. "Call on me should you have a need, cousin. I will not abandon you in the mortal realm."

"Neither will I."

Joseph's promise warmed Brida all the way to her heart and she tilted her face up with a smile. "I look forward to holding you to that promise, Joseph McKiloughery."

Amelia Elias

Amelia Elias is the nom de plume of a Central Texas home health nurse and mother of ten -- six cats, two dogs, and two monkeys who insist they're really boys. Amie was introduced to romances at the tender age of twelve by her late grandmother, who always packed a paperback for her to read during Bingo. After the last number was called, Amie would stay up late and, armed with a notepad and pencil, try to fill in those frustrating blank spots in the story when the characters closed the bedroom door. And yes, she still has those first clumsy attempts at writing the good stuff. Hopefully she's learned a thing or two since then. Learn more about Amelia by visiting her website at www.AmeliaElias.com