

ELLORA'S CAVE PRESENTS

JACI BURTON

WINTER ICE

A STORM FOR ALL SEASONS: BOOK 3



WINTER ICE

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**A STORM FOR ALL SEASONS:**

**WINTER ICE**

**Jaci Burton**

## *Dedication*

To everyone who believes in the magic of love.

To my editor, Briana St James, as always...thank you for giving me the freedom to create the characters and worlds that live inside my head.

To Patti and Puawai for your advance read and invaluable assistance in shaping this book.

To Missy for all that you've done for me. I'm forever thankful.

And to Charlie, who has a magic about him that calls to me in ways I could never explain. We share a destiny. I love you.

## Chapter One

Even in the heat of fucking, Sophie felt the chill Logan emanated. Despite the sweat pouring down his brow, the keening wails coming from the woman's mouth as Logan fed his cock to her pussy, he was cold, distant, removed from the experience as if it was an out-of-body event.

Sophie hid in the corner of the darkened alley, mesmerized by the sight of Logan's thick cock thrusting and withdrawing.

The beautiful redhead he was fucking didn't seem to notice the faraway look in Logan's eyes, but Sophie saw. And wondered why.

She wondered a lot of things. Like what Logan Storm, CEO of New Orleans' fanciest hotel, was doing in a dark alley in the French Quarter at midnight. He was casually screwing the woman with such disinterest he might as well be making out a business agenda.

Sophie felt it all, though. Every stroke of his shaft, every kiss, every caress, everything the redhead experienced. The woman was heated past the boiling point. Logan gave it to her with an icy calm.

Yes, he was definitely cold. At least with the woman. He wasn't giving all of himself, almost as if he'd removed himself from the passion. Yet underneath she felt his heat—so why was he holding back?

"Fuck me, Logan," the redhead cried. "Give me that legendary cock of yours. Hard and deep, baby."

Logan grunted, but didn't speak, just rammed his shaft in and out of the woman's dripping pussy. Sophie's cunt contracted as if Logan's shaft had speared *her* swollen and aching slit.

What brought him out this time of night? This was her area of town, the alleys and streets she haunted. Definitely not a place she imagined Logan Storm frequenting. He had a fine hotel, and he lived in the penthouse apartments above it. Surely he didn't need to have sex in an alley.

Maybe he was hiding out, attempting to be anonymous, thinking no one would see him here. Though Sophie had recognized him right away. Who wouldn't? His face graced the cover of many New Orleans magazines time and time again.

Then again, it was Mardi Gras, and pretty much anything happened in the French Quarter during this time of year. Winters were relatively mild in New Orleans, and Mardi Gras brought out the tourists and the locals alike.

But a big business mogul fucking a woman in an alley? Now that she hadn't expected.

Yet here he was, in the last place she'd ever thought she'd see him. Men like Logan didn't travel in the same circles as she did. No, it was highly unlikely their paths would cross here. Although she'd known they were destined to meet, and soon. The visions had been growing stronger lately.

Their meeting had been preordained. She just hadn't expected it to be like this. Not here, and sure as hell not like this.

Fate sure was funny at times.

The cool February wind shifted, swirling around her feet and lifting her skirts. The bells on her ankle bracelet tinkled in the breeze.

Logan looked up and turned his sharp gaze to her.

Too late to slip away in the shadows. He'd seen her.

Now what? The polite thing to do would be to leave, go back where she'd come from, and allow Logan and the woman their privacy.

But something in his cold stare compelled her to stay put. A challenge there, perhaps? Maybe a trace of heat? A connection? She'd certainly felt it, an invisible line tying her to him. Did he feel it, too?

He hadn't spoken, and the redhead couldn't see her. Logan's body was between Sophie and the woman's head. Though Sophie could lean to the side and see the woman's torso, could see Logan's long cock piercing the folds of her pussy.

Not that it was necessary for her to see. She felt every single one of Logan's thrusts as if he were fucking her instead.

Her lips parted as she sucked in a breath of the crisp, wintry air. Beneath the thin peasant top her breasts swelled, her nipples aching to be free of the confines of the material. Juices poured from her slit, soaking her thighs with the cream of arousal.

In her mind, Logan was fucking her. In her heart, she wished for it to be so.

Soon, it would be.

As if he'd heard her thoughts, he frowned. She held his gaze and drew her hands up to her breasts, massaging them, caressing the taut nipples through the thin cotton.

He inhaled sharply and grabbed the redhead's buttocks, lifting the woman's skirt even higher over her hips as he drove deep and fast, relentless in his punishing thrusts. The redhead cried out and wrapped one leg around Logan's hip.

"*Mon Dieu*, Logan. Fuck me harder! Make me come!" the woman begged, bucking her hips and grinding her pussy against his pelvis.

Logan seemed impervious to the woman's pleas, his gaze still riveted on Sophie. Something compelled her, some calling from Logan. Mental telepathy? She didn't know what it was, only that it had to be answered. The urge had grown too strong. She couldn't resist sliding her palm over her belly and lower, lifting the ankle-length gauze skirt to her thighs, desperate to massage the ache between her legs. The agony of arousal called to her and she needed relief only an orgasm could provide.

Her hand became Logan's hand, her fingers Logan's shaft as she slipped them between the moist folds and plunged them inside her cunt. Her soft walls quivered, then squeezed her fingers as if they were welcoming a hard cock.

She wished.

Panting, already near a blistering climax, she kept her focus on Logan. His cold blue eyes pierced her, held her captive, demanded her satisfaction as if her pleasure drove him.

Wordlessly, he commanded her and she followed his thoughts, driving her fingers deeper, faster, searching out her clit with her other hand and circling the distended nub, the explosion growing closer and closer.

The redhead screamed, and Sophie leaned her head against the cool brick wall, needing support as her legs trembled and nearly buckled. Logan continued to pound his cock into the whimpering woman, harder and faster.

As if the redhead didn't exist, as if Sophie was responsible for his gratification, he nodded to her. She let the floodgates loose. Her climax ripped through her and she bit down on her bottom lip to keep from crying out. Logan tensed, then groaned and uttered a string of curses as he came. She'd never experienced anything more erotic than having Logan's clear blue eyes focused on her as he came inside another woman.

She felt it all, the spasms of his cock, the trembling of his arms as he held the woman tight, the taste of brandy lingering on his lips as he bent to take the woman's mouth. She felt every single movement as if he was touching her.

She'd never climaxed so strongly from her own hand.

Spent, she could only lean against the building, watching the heat disappear from Logan's eyes. He stepped back, removed the condom and righted his clothing as the woman smoothed her skirt over her hips.

The redhead smirked, pressed a kiss to his lips and caressed his cheek. "You are an animal, *mon ami*. I can't believe you agreed to fuck me out here."



"This place is just as good as any other," he replied, no warmth or emotion in his voice. "Besides, you wanted it this way."

The redhead caressed his cheek. "*Oui*. And you know exactly what I want, *cher*."

Sophie was relieved that Logan's body hid the redhead from view. The last thing she wanted was to embarrass the woman. Then again, if the woman had been worried about discovery, she probably wouldn't have screwed Logan in a public place.

"I need to go," the woman said, squinting to read her watch in the soft light of the streetlamp.

Sophie shook her head, surprised that both of them would consider what had happened as more like a business meeting than a heated exchange of passion. That was the problem. Logan didn't *feel* the heat with that woman.

Because he'd been with the wrong woman.

"Later, *cherie*," he said, and Sophie inhaled the husky tones of his voice. A mix of Cajun, French and downright sexy, his voice enticed her. Just as she always knew it would. She'd been hearing it in her visions for as long as she could remember.

The woman walked toward the main street. Sauntered actually, her hips rocking back and forth. No doubt for effect. But Logan wasn't watching. He'd turned and trained his glowering gaze on her, instead.

She waited as he approached.

"Enjoy the show?" he asked, the sarcasm evident in his now cold voice.

"You know I did."

He crossed his arms across his broad chest, one side of his mouth curling in a sardonic smile. "Glad to be of...assistance."

"I want to see you again," she blurted, knowing that if she didn't do it now, the opportunity might be forever lost.

He arched a raven brow. "I don't think so, *cher*."

"You don't understand. We share a destiny."

She expected anger, not the loud roar of laughter as he tipped his head back and howled into the night. When he dropped his gaze back to hers, bitter cold emanated from his icy blue eyes. "Did my mother send you here?"

Before she could respond, he held up his hand. "Don't answer that. I already know. Look, I enjoyed your masturbation performance, and I'm glad I could help get you off. But that's the end of it."

He didn't know. How could he? Although, she'd always thought he would be aware of her, just as she'd been aware of him. Maybe he did, and was fighting their connection. She wouldn't be at all surprised. "You will come see me." She pulled her card from the pocket of her skirt and held it out to him.

Logan shook his head. "Not a chance in hell, sweetheart. This game is over."

When he refused to take the card, she dropped it on the ground, the wind flipping it toward his shoe.

"You *will* come to me, Logan," she said, then turned and walked away, knowing that nothing she could say or do at the moment would convince him. He'd have to mull it over first. Then disregard the pull he felt for as long as he could.

But it wouldn't do any good.

Soon enough, he'd show up on her doorstep. He wouldn't be able to help himself.

\* \* \* \* \*

The woman's sultry voice lingered as Logan watched her walk away, admiring the soft sway of her hips that was completely natural, rather than the affected swivel Vivian presented him as she'd left.

*You will come to me.*

Bullshit. No one told him what he would or wouldn't do. Even if that someone was a gorgeous gypsy of a woman, with waist-length hair the color of a cloudless night and eyes a vivid violet that seemed to sparkle like flowers under a bright sun. Even if she

did have buttery soft, mocha skin that he could already feel gliding over his body despite the fact he'd never once touched her.

She was too young for him anyway. Couldn't be more than her mid-twenties, about ten years younger than him. Even so, her eyes belied her age.

An old soul, his mother would say.

Speaking of his mother, Logan would bet anything that his meddling parent had sent the woman. If there was one thing Angelina Storm never tired of talking about, it was the destiny of her children.

That supernatural crap might have worked on Aidan and Shannon, but it held no appeal to him. He had no destiny, no woman he was "meant" to be with. That was all magic, and he wanted nothing to do with magic, especially not the kind that lived within him.

He'd controlled it for thirty-five years and he'd damn well keep it at bay forever. Whatever the mystery woman wanted would have to remain a mystery.

The cool wind fluttered her card against his shoe. He would not pick it up, no matter what.

But it called to him. Dared him to take a look.

Ridiculous.

Okay, maybe just to see what it said, then he'd tear it up.

The background of the business card was the same color as the woman's violet eyes.

Her name was Sophie Breaux. He snorted at the verbiage below her name.

*Psychic Readings, Fortune-Telling, Tarot Cards and Mystical Spells.*

A fucking fortune-teller. A carnival sideshow meant to bilk unwary travelers with mind tricks and voodoo mumbo jumbo.

Did she think he'd run to her so she could tell his future? What kind of idiot did she take him for?

Obviously a big one, considering she'd seemed so confident that he'd be showing up on her doorstep soon.

Yeah, he'd show up all right. When hell froze over. He ripped the card up and tossed it into the wind, then shoved his hands in his pockets and moved down the alley, forcing his thoughts back to Vivian, the redheaded siren who'd tried her best to fuck his brains out.

They'd been casual sex partners for over a year. Suited them both fine to keep things impersonal. Vivian was a divorcée with a ton of alimony coming her way each month. The last thing she wanted was her very rich ex-husband getting wind of her having a relationship, since he was still possessive as hell over her.

And if she pissed off her ex, he might not be so generous with the money he tossed her way each month. Vivian valued her ex-husband's money much more than she craved a relationship. So they kept things physical. Occasionally, Vivian liked to be naughty and do it in public, though she always pretended to be shocked by it.

Location didn't matter to him. A fuck was a fuck. Sex alleviated the tension and allowed him to focus on business the rest of the time without having to worry about a woman's feelings. That's why he and Vivian got along so well.

The last thing he wanted was an emotional involvement with a woman. Not with what he carried inside him. No way would he fall in love. It was fine for the rest of the Storms, but love wasn't for Logan.

He'd been told before that he was cold as ice. Unfeeling. Lacking emotion and warmth.

Exactly the way he wanted to be. In control.

He turned and headed back to the hotel, confident that he was in charge of his destiny. When he was younger, he'd struggled against the magic, hating losing control over himself. It took a while, but he'd mastered it, pushed it deep within. As long as he remained cold, removed from anything emotional, the magic stayed hidden.

He was no freak, no sideshow spectacle for people to wonder about, to point and laugh at, or even worse—to fear. He wanted to be a normal, human male living his normal, human life. And he didn't need love and all the ties associated with it to enjoy his life. All he wanted was to be...ordinary.

Sophie Breaux was the opposite of ordinary in every way. He'd bet a million she was as fake as any illusionist. A mistress of tricks and chicanery.

A con artist.

No way was he going to involve himself with someone like her, even if she had made his blood boil in ways he considered both good and bad.

Bad, in that for a moment there, he'd felt the magic churning to life. Good, in that watching Sophie bring herself to orgasm gave him the best sex he could remember. When she touched herself, it was like he'd been fucking her instead of Vivian.

Which was all his imagination, brought about, no doubt, by the concept of having a ménage à trois in the alley. Sure, he'd had his cock in Vivian, but he'd also had the pleasure of enjoying a superb mind-fuck with Sophie. He'd been so in tune to her scent, the slight sounds she made while she pleased herself and the way her body shuddered in climax.

Yeah, it had been good, for a onetime thing. His connection with her had been sexual, and nothing more. The reason it had been so good was just the mental and visual associated with doing it in public and having someone watch. Watch, and get herself off at the same time. His cock twitched to life again visualizing Sophie's pussy, her dark, swollen pussy lips moistened with the cream of her desire. God, he could even smell her scent—a sweet, musky perfume that had sailed across the alley on the wind.

It had been damn good.

But it would never happen again.

Just like seeing Sophie Breaux. Never again.

## **Chapter Two**

“Mr. Santiago, if you look at what The Rising Storm offers, I’m sure you’ll agree it’s the best hotel for the price and will provide your clients a fantastic stay during the convention.”

Logan waited for the man’s response to Aidan’s pitch, familiar with the game Santiago played. They sat near the window inside a small café in the Quarter, the midafternoon sun casting its warming light across them.

Santiago was a shrewd businessman. Logan had worked with him in the past. Santiago always tried to finagle a bigger discount than what Logan was willing to give. Which was why he’d accompanied Aidan and Lissa to this meeting today. More business was always great, and booking a big convention like Santiago’s company had every year would definitely be worthwhile. But he wasn’t going to give it away for free, either. Bringing Aidan and Lissa in meant more allies in his corner, and the hopes he could eventually turn this pain-in-the-butt client over to them in the future.

“Now, about this discount,” Santiago started, and Logan fought the urge to roll his eyes. Same thing every year. They’d argue back and forth, Logan would give him the discount he wanted, and Santiago would want one penny more off that.

Which, of course, he’d agree to, since Logan knew exactly how to deal with this man. Soon, hopefully, so would Aidan and Melissa. Then he could ignore the multimillion dollar cheapskate in the future.

He’d tuned out Santiago, well-versed in the man’s argumentative nature, and turned his attention to the window. A colorful skirt caught his eye as it sailed past the window, the familiarity of it making his heart lurch in his chest.

He could swear he heard bells tinkling around her ankles.

Sophie. With that long raven hair flying in the breeze, it could only be her.

A rush of sensation came over him, a feeling of desire so intense it was all he could do to remain seated. The urge to go after her was strong, almost as if he was in a trance and some unknown force pulled at him. Something too strong to resist. God knows he tried, but he couldn't even turn his head to listen to the conversation at the table. His focus was on Sophie. He needed to go to her.

Now.

"Excuse me for a minute," he mumbled not even looking at his tablemates. He rose and hurried out the door in her direction.

His feet moved of their own volition. He didn't even know where he was going, only that he had to get "there".

"There" turned out to be *Cosmic Connection*, just on the outskirts of the Quarter. He opened the door, his senses assaulted by the scent of patchouli and cinnamon.

Incense burned in small jars on top of all the glass display cases. The shop was tiny, jam-packed with all kinds of voodoo and magic things. Tarot cards, crystal balls, beads, incense, candles, books of spells, magic wands, just about anything imaginable.

What the fuck was he doing in here, anyway?

A beautiful young woman with strawberry-blond hair approached, her amber eyes showing intense interest. When she smiled, she lit up the room. "Hi. I'm Samantha. Can I help you with something?"

He stared at her, but for some reason he couldn't find his voice. Probably because he had no idea what he'd even say. "I...I..."

Great. Now he was babbling.

"Hey there. I'm Joshua. You looking for something? Or maybe someone?"

He turned toward the sound of a male voice behind the counter. A tall, well-built guy in his mid-twenties with wavy brown hair approached him. Logan shook his head negatively, not sure how to answer.

And he hadn't even had alcohol with lunch.

Suddenly the colorful skirt he'd spotted at the restaurant breezed through the hanging beads separating the main shop from another room. The skirt was attached to the object of his search.

"Sophie," he managed, finally able to find his voice long enough to utter her name.

She smiled and her violet eyes seemed to dance with light. "Logan."

He picked up her scent, similar to the sweet patchouli fragrance of the shop. Only muskier, more sensual, like the woman wearing it. When she moved, bells jangled around her wrists and feet.

At a loss for words, he could only stare at her, oblivious to the other man and woman in the shop.

"We need to talk," she said, slipping her arm through his and leading him into the other room. He turned to offer an apology to the others for being so rude and not speaking, but what was he going to say? *Sorry, I'm in a trance right now?*

She sat him down at a square wood table centering what looked like a sultan's palace. Soft pillows in jeweled colors brightened a small beige couch against the wall. Tapestries of faeries and dragons decorated the walls, and the only light came from the fifty or so candles scattered throughout the room.

Hell, it was sexy in here. Exotic, sensuous and inviting. Despite not knowing what compelled him to come, he relaxed. Possibly because of the beautiful woman who graced him with a warm smile, though his thoughts about her were anything but relaxing.

"I'm so glad you came. I knew you would."

He started to object, but then she reached for his hands, sliding her palms over his fingers. He jerked as a shot of pure electricity soared through his body, hardening him in an instant.

Damn! What the hell was that?

She massaged his fingers lightly, and he began to breathe heavily.



"I need to tell your future," she said, her voice soft and raspy. The kind of voice a man wanted whispering in his ear when his cock was buried deep inside her. The kind of voice that a man would love to hear begging him to fuck her harder, faster. Logan shifted to accommodate his erection, mentally damning himself for the weakness that had suddenly surfaced within him.

"You don't know my future," he objected, starting to feel ridiculous for even being in this place.

"Oh, but you're wrong. While I don't know it all, I do know some things. That's why I wanted to see you again. I have something to tell you. Something urgent."

*This should be good.* "Okay, go ahead."

The smile left her face. "Your family is in danger."

*Priceless.* "Really."

She nodded. "Yes. Grave danger. Unfortunately, I don't know the time or place it will occur, but something bad will happen very soon."

Could she be more vague? He almost laughed. "That's not telling me much, *cher*. Easy to see how you could successfully predict the future with information like that."

"I knew you wouldn't believe me. You'll just have to trust me. You must be on your guard because you are the catalyst. Somehow this revolves around you."

"Okay, I have a question."

"Sure."

"Do people actually pay you money for this crap?"

He expected her to be angry. Instead, she nodded and smiled. "Actually, they do. Because I'm always right."

He pulled his hands away and crossed his arms. "What do you tell them? That someday they're going to die? That the stock market will go up one day and down the next? That the local candidate running for office has a 50/50 chance of being elected over his opponent?"

This whole fortune-telling thing was ludicrous, and he wasn't going to stay here a minute longer. He stood and headed toward the exit.

"Logan, wait!"

She rose and approached, stopping inches away from him. Tilting her neck back to meet his gaze, she said, "Please trust me on this. I've had visions about you...very strong ones. You and I are fated to—"

"Hang on a second. Fated? Like destined?"

"Yes."

"Holy shit!" He couldn't believe it. How could she do this to him? Dear God, how old did she think he was, anyway? "My mother put you up to this, didn't she? First the thing in the alley, and now this."

"Your mother? I don't know your mother."

He wasn't buying her confused frown. "Sure you do. Petite woman, busybody. I'll bet she convinced you that you and I shared some kind of fate, right?"

Sophie shook her head. "No, Logan. I've never met your mother. Sometimes you have to take things on pure faith."

He laughed. "Faith? In you? I have no more faith in you than the phony fortune-teller at a carnival midway, honey. Now if you'll excuse me, there's someplace I need to be."

Like at the business meeting he'd left abruptly. How the hell was he going to explain leaving like that?

Maybe he needed a vacation. The stress was getting to him.

He moved to leave, but she reached out and touched his arm. He looked at her, refusing to believe the vulnerability in her beseeching gaze. "Please, Logan, you don't know how important this is. You must be on your guard."

Tired of this ridiculous game, he grabbed her arms and hauled her against his chest, ignoring the feel of her full breasts pressing against him. "The only person I need to be

on my guard against is you." He pulled his wallet out of his coat and slammed it on the table. "People like you are driven by this," he said, pointing to the leather billfold stuffed with greenbacks.

"I don't want your money, Logan," she whispered.

"Bullshit. That's the only thing people like you want. Money. Greed and opportunity are your companions. I don't know what kind of game you and my mother have concocted, but I'm not going to play. Understand?"

She shook her head again, her eyes wide pools of purple, darkening with desire. Her body flamed to life like an inferno, burning his hands with her heat. He quickly dropped his arms to his sides, still feeling the scorching fire she emanated.

"I know why you're doing this," she said. "You're afraid of the feelings I bring out in you."

He arched a brow, unable to believe her arrogant conceit. "I don't feel a damn thing for you."

"You're lying. To me and to yourself. I can feel what you feel, Logan. I know, because I have the same need. We *have* to be one. It's fated."

Boiling anger raged within him. He hated being manipulated. "No, sweetheart. We don't *have* to be anything. We're not *going* to be anything."

"I won't give up on you, Logan. You need me. And I need you."

When her lips parted and her tongue flicked out to lick her bottom lip, he lost it. Well and completely lost it. Fury mixed with desire and he could no longer separate the stronger emotion. All he knew was that he had to touch her.

Right now.

He absorbed her gasp when his mouth descended over hers.

Sophie fought for breath under Logan's punishing kiss. He meant to hurt her, to frighten her, but he'd failed. Instead, the warm cream of her desire spilled onto her

panties and her nipples hardened as he pulled her closer. His heart beat as frantically as hers, and she wound her fingers into the soft darkness of his hair, tangling her tongue against his and drinking in his groan as his fingers found her hips.

He rocked his erection against her mound and she cried out into his mouth as shooting sparks flamed her cunt. She was throbbing, aching, desperate to feel his hard shaft buried inside her. That night in the alley had filled her dreams for a week now, making her want with an intensity that kept her awake nights. She'd brought herself to orgasm after orgasm visualizing Logan fucking that redhead, until the images blurred and the redhead became her. Yet she was never satisfied. That lingering desire blasted full force now, and she whimpered when he squeezed her buttocks and pulled her tighter against his hard-on.

Desperate to feel him, she reached between them and palmed his cock, rewarded with a muttered curse that tore from his lips like an accusation. She didn't care. She knew his desire, knew he'd dreamed of her the same way she'd dreamed of him. He could deny it all he wanted to, but the fact was, they *would* make love someday.

And if he wanted it right now, she'd give it to him. She didn't want to wait another minute.

He moved one hand over her hip and rib cage, then settled on her breast, easily finding the distended nipple through the thin cotton of her blouse. When he rolled the bud between his fingers, she cried out and arched her back, needing more of the sweet torment.

Goddess, she could come right now just from him petting her nipple.

But then a shock of cold air swept into the room, a frigid breeze blowing out half the candles. Logan stepped away and she opened her eyes.

The heat that had been there seconds ago was gone, replaced by the icy chill of his anger.

"You aren't my type, Sophie. We have nothing in common. You don't have a damn thing I'm interested in. Leave me alone." Turning quickly on his heel, he strode through the beads. She followed, trying to calm the raging desire that hadn't yet abated.

She knew this wasn't going to be easy. Why she had thought he'd come in here today and take her words as true had been nothing more than wishful thinking on her part.

But she wouldn't give up. She couldn't. His life and the lives of his family depended on her persistence.

Her gaze swept to Samantha's wide-eyed look of surprise, then over to Joshua's glare. Logan paused, nodded curtly to both of them and left the shop without another word.

He'd left without believing in her.

But she wouldn't think of this as a failure.

After all, he *had* come here, had heard her calling to him.

This was just going to take time. And she'd take whatever time necessary to assure his safety. It was her destiny to do so.

## Chapter Three

Logan stormed out of the shop and ran smack into Aidan, who smiled and arched a brow.

"Did you have some urgent need to have your fortune told? Maybe a burning desire to buy some tarot cards?"

Shit, shit, shit! This he did not need. He tried to brush past Aidan, but his brother wouldn't allow it. He grabbed Logan's arm. "We took care of Santiago, so you don't have any reason to hurry back. We really want to hear this story."

Logan looked behind Aidan to see Lissa standing there, her eyes as wide as saucers.

She probably thought he'd lost his mind.

She was probably right.

"I don't want to talk about it," he said.

"You don't have to. We'll just ask the beautiful woman behind you."

Logan turned to find Sophie standing in the doorway. She stepped toward him and handed him his wallet.

"You forgot this. I'm glad I caught you before you left." She turned to Aidan and Lissa and smiled, holding out her hand. "Hello. I'm Sophie Breaux."

The day had just gone completely to hell. Aidan and Lissa waited expectantly. Christ, he didn't want to do this!

"Sophie, this is my brother Aidan and his fiancée, Melissa."

"Call me Lissa. I love your shop. I've passed by it many times, but haven't had a chance to go in. All this magic stuff intrigues me," she added, winking at Aidan.

Sophie beamed. "Thank you! Please, come inside and let me show you around."

Before he could object, and really, what would he have said to Lissa anyway, she followed Sophie inside, leaving him standing there with Aidan.

A very curious Aidan, knowing his nosy brother.

"Well?"

"Well, what?" Although there was no sense in playing dumb.

"Who's *la belle jeune fille*?"

"Just a woman I met."

Arching a brow, Aidan said, "She doesn't really look your type."

Logan didn't even know he had a "type". "I'm not dating her, Aidan."

"Then what are you doing with her?"

"Nothing."

"Didn't look like nothing to me. C'mon, *mon frere*, you don't just date women. And you sure as hell don't take off in the middle of a business meeting to follow a pretty skirt. So, give me the details."

"She's nobody. Nothing to me. I met her a week or so ago and she thinks she can con me."

"Con you. How?"

"Aidan! Do you know what Sophie does?"

Logan turned at the sound of Lissa's voice. She was grinning and tugging at Aidan's hand.

"No, *cher*, tell me what Sophie does."

"She's a fortune-teller. And a damn good one, too."

Aidan smirked at Logan and then grinned at Lissa. "Oh yeah?"

"Yes. You should see the stuff in her shop. And she comes from a long line of voodoo priestesses."

Voodoo? Logan didn't know that. Priestess? Sophie?

Bullshit.

“Voodoo, huh?” Aidan said, shifting his gaze to Sophie.

“My grandmere was Lisette Pilar,” Sophie added quietly.

Lisette Pilar was a very famous Creole woman whose voodoo magic was legendary in New Orleans. Which didn’t mean a damn thing as far as Sophie’s legitimacy as a fortune-teller. Logan turned away, refusing to notice the way her dark lashes swept against her sculpted cheekbones when she bowed her head.

As if she was embarrassed. The woman was one hell of an actress.

“It’s all for show,” Logan said.

Lissa’s eyes widened. “Are you kidding me? It is not. She told me things that...”

“What? She told you what?”

Lissa blushed. “Trust me. She’s the real deal.” Quickly turning away from Logan’s glare, she looked at Aidan. “Anyway, wouldn’t she be great as entertainment for the Mardi Gras ball at the hotel?”

Aidan pursed his lips. “An authentic voodoo priestess? In full costume?” His eyes gleamed and he grinned.

Lissa nodded. “Exactly. We’ll make the patrons pay a bundle for her services. Sophie will get a cut, and the rest will go toward the children’s charity fund.”

Damn. Charity. Leave it to Lissa to let her heart bleed all over the street.

“Bad idea,” Logan said.

“Great idea,” Aidan countered. “I love it. Sophie, you interested?”

Sophie looked from Aidan to Logan. Logan hoped the frosty look he leveled at her would dissuade her from doing something really stupid. Like agreeing to perform at the ball.

Her full lips curved in a soft smile. Clearly, she wasn’t the least bit intimidated by Logan’s trademark glare. “I’d be honored to participate, as long as you don’t pay me anything. I’d love to contribute to the children’s charity fund,” she replied.



"Wonderful!" Lissa exclaimed. "Aidan, come inside the shop and look around with me. I have so much to tell you."

"You two go back inside," Aidan said. "I need to talk to Logan for a minute. I'll be right there."

After the women left, Aidan turned to him. "Okay, now don't give me the crap you did before. Tell me what Sophie is to you."

Logan jammed his hands in his coat pockets. "She's nothing to me. I told you that already."

"If she's nothing, why did you leave the meeting and follow her? And why did you let her tell your fortune?"

"I don't want to talk about this. She's a fraud, Aidan. I don't want her at the ball. She'll embarrass the family."

"First off, she's gorgeous and she'll draw a crowd. Second, if Lissa says she's legit, then she is. Lissa would never put the business in a compromising position and you know that."

"Sophie's a con artist. She'll rip everyone off. All she's after is money."

"If that's the case, how come she returned your wallet? And shouldn't you look inside to make sure all your money's there?"

He already knew it was, which was why he hadn't checked. "I have another meeting. I don't have time for this. I don't want Sophie at the ball."

Before Aidan could respond, Logan turned on his heel and stormed down the street, feeling more than a little ridiculous for causing this ruckus.

Jamming his fingers through his hair, he focused his gaze on the Rising Storm and quickened his step, muttering to himself along the way.

"Voodoo priestess, my ass. What a bunch of crap. Why the hell did I have to follow her? I need a goddamn vacation."

This entire debacle was Sophie's fault. He wished he'd never met her that night in the alley. And he sure as hell shouldn't have kissed her inside the shop.

Her taste still lingered on his lips. Both sweet and spicy, like the woman he couldn't seem to get out of his mind, no matter how hard he tried.

\* \* \* \* \*

Sophie grinned and waved Lissa and Aidan off. After they left, she turned to find two sets of very curious eyes staring at her.

"What?"

Samantha grinned. "Nothing. Just...well, nothing." Sam turned away and headed into the storeroom, leaving her to deal with Josh. And she could already guess how that was going to go.

"Don't start with me, Joshua."

Josh shook his head, his dark brown hair slipping down over his forehead. "You're way out of your league, Soph."

She approached him and reached out, brushing his hair away from his face. Josh was like family. They'd known each other...forever. Since they were kids. He used to spend all his afternoons with Sophie and her aunt, making fun of their spells and magic.

She loved Josh. Always had. Just not in the way he wanted her to. That she couldn't help.

"I appreciate you looking out for me, *mon ami*. But I know what I'm doing."

"Famous last words," he said, shrugging. "I don't know why you always think there's something better out there for you. Why can't you..."

His words trailed off, but she knew what they were. "Josh. You know why."

His brown eyes turned nearly black, frustration evident in the way he clenched his fists at his side. He'd always held his anger in check around her, no matter what she

said to him. But she felt it, simmering just near the surface of his emotions, ready to boil over.

Why couldn't he find a love of his own? Josh was so handsome. Tall, muscular and fit, with dark eyes that spoke of sensual depths that most women would swoon over.

But Sophie wasn't one of those women. She'd tried with Josh, but he had always felt like family to her. Or something. It just hadn't felt right, and she'd told him that as honestly and gently as she could. Josh had accepted it, reluctantly, but had continued to be her friend.

"I love you, Sophie."

"I know." She always hated this part of their conversations. They'd had the same one for years, and she always gave him the same answer. "I love you, too."

He arched a brow. "But."

Nodding, she grinned. "But not in that way. We're not destined, Josh."

"Destiny is bullshit. You make your own," he mumbled, moving off to open a new box of inventory.

Someday, maybe Josh would find his destiny with the right woman. But that woman could never be her. With a heavy sigh, Sophie stepped into the small room where she had told Logan's future.

Or at least part of his future. She inhaled and closed her eyes, feeling his presence, his unique scent, bits and pieces of his aura still clinging to the room.

Clinging to her.

He was part of her, whether he liked it or not.

It was only a matter of time until he saw what she saw, until he knew his destiny.

Even she didn't know all of it, just shadows and partial visions. Enough to know they were meant to be together.

Soon enough he'd figure that out.

## **Chapter Four**

If the stars were aligned and today was Logan's lucky day, Sophie wouldn't show up at the ball tonight.

He paced his suite, stopping for the fifth time in front of the mirror to adjust his bowtie.

He hated tuxes. Hated dressing up, hated this part of his job.

But it was a necessity for goodwill and good business.

The door to his suite slipped open and Aidan walked in, dressed in the same type of monkey suit.

"I hate fucking tuxes," Aidan mumbled, jamming his hands into his pockets.

Logan grinned. "My thoughts exactly. Where's everyone else?"

"Lissa, Shannon and Kaitlyn are in the ballroom already, squealing over their respective dresses."

Logan rolled his eyes. Females and their idiosyncrasies were so foreign to him. He never tried to understand how their minds worked. And having two sisters hadn't helped one bit over the years. If anything, they only confused him more. "Where's Max?"

"Doing a little PR work in the office. He said he'd be late."

Max Devlin, Shannon's fiancé, was as much a workaholic as Logan. Except when Shannon crooked her finger. Then he dropped everything and went after her like a dog scenting a bitch in heat.

Logan smirked. Not too far off the mark, actually, considering that Max was a werewolf.

His future brother-in-law a werewolf. And he thought *his* family was unusual. Would they ever have a normal life? Then again, the fact that Max was lupine didn't seem to bother Max at all. He was strong, capable, enjoyed his life and didn't let his unusual abilities affect the way he lived.

Why couldn't he do that, too? Why was it so fucking hard to accept who he was?

"Sophie's here."

Logan cast a sharp glare at Aidan. "I thought I made my wishes clear on that."

Aidan grinned. "We ignored you. Rather, the girls ignored you. Once Lissa told Shannon and Kaitlyn about her meeting with Sophie, there was no changing their minds. It's a done deal."

Figured they'd ignore him. After all, Logan was only the CEO. No one needed to listen to his directives, right?

"Might as well get down there, then." At least he could keep an eye on her, make sure she didn't slip her slender hand into a number of New Orleans' richest pockets, all of whom would be in attendance tonight.

The ballroom was packed. This was one of Mardi Gras' biggest parties, part of the grand celebrations of Carnival.

Logan spent a few minutes greeting the guests, then wandered around to find his sisters.

Kaitlyn was, as usual, fretting over minute details of décor and food. She hugged him when he came up to her.

"Have you tried the hors d'oeuvres yet? I'm not sure I selected the right ones."

He shook his head as he watched her wring her hands. "Would you relax? Everything is perfect."

"Marcel is an idiot."

He laughed. She was always fighting with the head chef. They had never seen eye to eye on menu selection and preparation. If Kaitlyn had her way, she'd cook every meal for every guest at the hotel herself. "Yes, he's an idiot. What did he do this time?"

"Substituted one of my recipes and decided to change the main course. I swear if I had another chef, I'd fire his ass on the spot."

Logan kissed Kaitlyn on the forehead. "That's your area, *cher*. You do whatever you think is right. But you're not going into the kitchens yourself."

She pursed her lips into a pout. "I'll figure something out." Shaking off whatever bugged her, she grinned. "You look very handsome tonight. And Sophie is a charm, Logan. Wherever did you find her?"

His smile died at the mention of Sophie's name. "I didn't find her. I don't even want her here."

"For heaven's sake, why not?"

Shannon sidled next to Kaitlyn. "Sophie's delightful. I don't understand."

It was a conspiracy of estrogen. He couldn't win. "Never mind. How's everything going?"

The light shimmered against Shannon's red, sparkling gown. "Great, of course. The casino's filled to capacity, we sold out of tickets for the ball, and Sophie is already dealing with a long line of patrons wanting their fortunes told. She's going to make us a ton of money for the charity. And she's still refusing to let us pay her for her time tonight. Which means everything we make from her fortune-telling will go to the charity."

She probably had an ulterior motive for giving up her fee. "I'm going to go talk to the mayor. I'll catch you later." He turned away, irritated that every conversation lately seemed to include Sophie.

She was set up alongside the wall in a booth decorated in vibrant silk drapes of purple, green and gold, a canopy and curtains to keep it private and intimate.

Sophie was the center of attention, dressed in a shimmering top of gold that draped off her shoulders, revealing cleavage that any man would want to slip his hand inside. Her full skirt matched the colors of carnival and glimmered against the soft lights of the ballroom. Long hoop earrings brushed against her jawline, and bracelets with bells jingled at her wrists.

The dark tinge of her skin highlighted her vivid violet eyes. Her full lips were made to suck a man's cock. Logan's dick took notice of that instantly, twitching to life at a most inopportune moment.

Adjusting his tightening pants, he approached, winding his way through the throng of people who should definitely know better than to buy into the bullshit of magic.

He peered through the side slit of the canopy. At least he'd managed to find the mayor, who was currently sitting across from Sophie while she thoroughly examined his hands.

No doubt checking his fingers for diamonds and his wrist for a Rolex.

Logan moved his way up front, just in time for Sophie to stand and step outside the curtains with the mayor. She looked up at him, offering a half smile.

A jolt hit him hard and he connected with her, exactly the same way it had been that night in the alley and that day in her shop. He tried to tear his gaze away, but found himself unable to.

His thoughts drifted to satin sheets, naked bodies writhing together, and a full, soft mouth closing over his rock-hard shaft.

She blinked and her eyes widened. When she flicked her tongue over her upper lip and swallowed, he knew then that she was aware of what he was thinking.

"Logan! How are you?"

He shook off the connection and smiled at the mayor, engaging the excited man in conversation.

"Sophie is a delight! What a coup to have her here tonight. She's brilliant, Logan. And genuine, too."

The mayor patted him on the back and moved away, leaving him standing across from Sophie.

"Would you like me to tell your fortune?" she asked, her gravelly voice making him itch to take her mouth in ways he had no business thinking of right now.

Or ever.

"I think you've already told me all I need to know."

She shook her head, her dark hair falling over her shoulder, one slender strand dipping into the generous cleavage between her luscious breasts.

He wanted to reach for that strand and caress the plump flesh that contained it.

"I haven't even begun to tell you what you need to know."

"Oh, and what does Logan need to know?"

Logan whipped around at the sound of his mother's voice.

"Hello, Mother," he said, kissing her on the cheek.

She smiled at Logan. "*Bon soir, mon fils.*" Turning to Sophie, she said, "This must be the Sophie Breaux my daughters have been telling me about."

Sophie rose and hurried over to his mother, enthusiastically shaking her hand. "*Bon soir, Madame Storm. Comment allez vous?*"

"*Je suis tres bien, Sophie, merci. S'il vous plaît, appelez-moi Angelina.*"

"*Merci, Angelina,*" Sophie replied.

His mother glanced over at him. "Leave us for a few moments, Logan." She practically pushed him out of the draped room, then shut the curtains.

What the hell was that all about? He didn't believe for one second that his mother didn't know who Sophie was. Maybe she'd finally seen through Sophie's charade and was going to lecture her privately. Or throw her out of the place completely.

He should be so lucky.



Too curious to walk away, he lingered, talking to the people in line. Important people. Rich people. People prominent in their community.

All of them lining up to hear their fortunes told by a two-bit phony.

He shook his head, unable to fathom the attraction to magical bullshit.

After about five minutes, his mother pulled the curtain aside and motioned the next person in line to go in, then linked her arm within Logan's and walked with him through the crowds.

"I need a drink," she whispered.

He turned his head and regarded her. Angelina Storm was a beautiful woman. No matter how old she got, Logan would forever see her as youthful, exuberant and vibrating with *joie de vivre*.

But right now her normally dark complexion had gone pale.

"What's wrong?"

She feigned a smile he knew wasn't sincere. "Nothing's wrong. I'm thirsty."

"Is it something Sophie said?" He stopped and glanced toward the tent. "I can ask her to leave if she upset you."

His mother patted his arm. "She did no such thing. Now quit worrying and go get me that drink."

Deciding not to press her right now, Logan led her to the bar and handed her a glass of champagne. She downed it in a few gulps while he stood by, shocked speechless and desperately wanting to know what happened when his mother had spoken to Sophie.

When she finished, she set the glass down on the bar, kissed him and said, "Bring Sophie to the house for dinner on Sunday."

"Huh?"

"Oh look. There's Maria Dupree'. I really need to speak with her. Five o'clock Sunday, Logan. Don't be late. Ta-ta."

Ta-ta? That was it? Bring Sophie to dinner, and she leaves?

Was he fucking dreaming the past week of his life? What the hell was the matter with everyone? Was he the only one to see through Sophie to the fraud she was?

*"Vous êtes ainsi baisé, mon frère."* Aidan stepped around him to the bar, grabbed two glasses of champagne and winked. "See you and Sophie at dinner Sunday."

Yeah, he was screwed all right. Aidan's laughter echoed in Logan's ears long after his brother had sauntered away.

\* \* \* \* \*

Logan didn't look happy.

Did the man walk around with a perpetual frown? Sophie watched his determined approach with a mix of trepidation and intense, feminine interest. She even sighed appreciatively.

How could she not? He was beautiful, walking toward her with a stealth-like grace that caused her heart to tumble and her pulse to skitter.

She looked around, expecting to find at least the clean-up crew taking down the tables. There was no one left in the ballroom but her and a man who didn't look one bit happy.

"Stay away from my family," he said as soon as he stopped in front of her table.

She blinked. "Excuse me?"

"You heard me. I don't know what kind of game you're playing, but you're not going to play it with my family, or with my business associates."

"I was invited here tonight by Lissa."

"I don't care. I don't want you around my family."

"You don't want me around *you*, is what you really mean." She turned to finish packing the boxes containing the tools of her trade. "Really, Logan, you might as well

get used to the fact that I'm in your life now. As I mentioned before, we're destined to be together, and there really isn't anything you can do about that."

Too afraid to look up and see his angry reaction, she kept her head focused on the box, waiting for him to fire back a retort.

But he didn't. For awhile, she wondered if he'd turned heel and left the ballroom. If it wasn't for the fact she was so in tune to him, she'd think he'd done that very thing.

But he hadn't. She heard his breathing, smelled his unique scent, felt the vibrations of mixed emotions emanating from him.

"Get out of my life, Sophie, and stay out."

With a sigh, she folded the flaps of the box closed and turned to him. "I can't. You need me."

He jerked the table away so quickly she barely saw it. In an instant he had pulled her forcefully against him, his fingers biting into her upper arms.

"Get this straight, Sophie. I don't need you. I didn't before I met you, and I don't now. I will never need you or the brand of *magic*—and I use the term loosely—that you bring. You're nothing but a fake."

His anger should have frightened her. His insults should have angered her. His hands grasping her upper arms should have, too. Instead, they had the opposite effect, because she knew he'd never hurt her. Her body heated, her skin flushing, her panties moistening with a quick flash of desire for the man who was trying to freeze her out of his life.

"I understand this is difficult for you, Logan. After all, you don't really know me that well, and yet I know you better than you know yourself."

"You don't know a goddamn thing about me."

She took in his breath as it wafted across her face, delighting in the smell of cinnamon and fine brandy.

“Why are you fighting what’s between us? Don’t you feel it?” She reached up and covered his hands with hers, knowing that as soon as she did the jolt would hit them both.

He felt it, too. She knew he did. She could tell by the way his eyes quickly widened, then narrowed and darkened. “Stop that.”

“I didn’t do anything.”

“Yes, you did.” He dropped his hands from her arms, but she refused to let him walk away. She held tight to them, feeling the energy increase.

“I’m much stronger than you, *petite fille*. Don’t fuck with me.”

“Perhaps it’s you who wants to fuck with me, but you’re afraid to lose some of that careful control you possess.”

His eyes narrowed, his voice deepening. “You couldn’t handle me if I really let go.”

She sucked in her lower lip to keep from blurting out that she wanted him. Desperately wanted him, in a way even she didn’t understand.

She wasn’t promiscuous. In fact, she could count on one hand—okay, three fingers—the number of men she’d been with sexually. The last one had been two years ago.

This wasn’t just about having a sexy hunk of man fuck her until she screamed, although that would be a nice side benefit.

No, her relationship with Logan went way beyond the physical.

But right now, she craved the physical. And it was a place to start.

“Try me.”

## **Chapter Five**

Logan stilled at Sophie's words.

"You might not like it if I try you," he shot back, waiting for her to run, to shrug him off, do anything besides stand there with an eager expression on her face.

But God knew that was exactly what he wanted to do. He wanted to try her every way imaginable. His body ached to be inside her...now. No preliminaries, nothing else but sinking his already hard cock deep inside her tight cunt.

He balled his hands into fists, mentally tamping down the primal urges that compelled him to take her. Take what she so obviously offered, then walk away from her completely.

Treat her like shit, and discard her.

Dammit, he'd do exactly that.

He crushed her against him, watching as her eyes widened and she gasped, hoping he was frightening her and she'd run like hell. He tightened his arms around her back so she couldn't get away, then bent and took her full lips, thrusting his tongue inside her warm, wet mouth.

Any minute now she'd be revolted by his combination of passion and ice. He felt it coursing through him, the cold chill despite the feverish heat the touch of her lips gave him.

But she didn't run. She didn't try to get away. Instead, she whimpered into his mouth and wrapped her arms around him. Her breasts crushed against his chest and the points of her nipples scraped the thin material of his shirt.

He moved her backwards, keeping his mouth fixed on her lips, tangling his tongue with hers. When he had her back against the paneled wall, he ground his hard-on between her legs.

She moaned and clutched his shoulders, licking at his tongue as if she were desperate for a taste of him.

Her heat overwhelmed him, ignited him, threatening to melt his protective iceberg. That he couldn't allow.

A swirl of cold air encircled them. He'd warned her that she wouldn't be able to handle him unleashed. He had to freeze her now.

If only to protect himself from her fire.

Sophie tore her mouth away from his and leaned her head back, making eye contact.

"You can't chill me out, Logan. I'm on fire for you."

His breath came out in a rush when she palmed his erection, cupping him possessively and sliding her hand up and down over his hard cock.

"You're on fire, too," she whispered, rubbing her palm over his throbbing shaft. "Don't you realize how connected we are? When you flame, Logan, I burn. Hot, like an inferno."

Ah, fuck it. He couldn't get rid of her no matter how hard he tried, and he no longer even wanted to try.

"Is this what you want?" He pushed away from her, ripping down the zipper of his pants and pulling out his shaft. He stroked it slow and easy, taunting her.

Her eyes darkened a deep purple and she licked her lips, a silent invitation.

An invitation he could no longer resist. He moved to the chair where he'd tossed his coat, folded it over and put it on the floor in front of him.

"Get on your knees and suck me, Sophie."

Her cheeks flushed and she dipped to her knees, reaching eagerly for his shaft.

Slipping her fingers underneath, she cupped his balls, cradling and massaging them lightly as she fit her lips around the swollen head of his cock. She kept her gaze focused on his face so that he could watch her.

Watching her lips close over his cock was the most erotic thing he'd ever seen. He groaned and tangled his fingers in her hair, finding the clip and releasing the dark waves that spilled into his hands.

"Like silk," he murmured, though he wasn't sure if he meant her long, glossy hair or the slippery tongue laving the side of his shaft.

She sucked him masterfully, taking him deep into the back of her throat, then teasing him by withdrawing and stroking him. When she licked the droplets from the tip, the milky fluid gathered on her tongue before she swallowed.

His gut clenched at the beauty of her mouth surrounding him. He could watch her do this to him for a very long time; could spend hour after hour letting her pleasure him and then taking his time to please her, too.

But this wasn't a relationship, he reminded himself. They weren't a couple, and he wanted nothing to do with her. Sophie and he were not meant to be together.

He was trying to drive her away, not think about how they could do this forever.

Quickly withdrawing from her mouth, he grabbed her hands, forcing her to stand.

"I wasn't finished," she said, her throaty voice filled with passion.

He didn't answer her, just tugged down on her skirt until it puddled on the floor.

She wore a flimsy scrap of material for panties, a golden, lacy thong that did little to hide her bare pussy.

The exotic perfume of her scent surrounded him, the sweet smell of her arousal like an aphrodisiac to his senses. He bent over and removed her panties, wanting, desperately to linger at her sex and taste her.

But he refused to allow the intimacy of pleasuring her that way. It was too...personal, and he needed to keep this as impersonal as he could. But damn, he

wanted to tease her a bit, take her sweet flavor on his tongue and drive her mad for hours. Instead, he stood and reached for her buttocks, grasping them in his hands and hoisting her up and against him. She wrapped her legs around his waist, the contact immediate and electric. Grinding his pelvis against her protruding clit, he thrust inside her pussy, drinking in her soft cries with a deep kiss.

Her tight cunt squeezed him, milked him, urged him to come hard and deep. A heady mix of patchouli and cinnamon washed over him as if she'd purposely released her scent. He drove harder this time, and her moans grew louder, her face flushing. Pushing her back against the wall so he could free one hand, he jerked her top down and exposed her full breasts. Large, dark nipples pebbled under his searching gaze, and he couldn't resist dipping down and taking one tip in his mouth. He sucked it hard, pressing the nipple between the roof of his mouth and tongue.

The overpowering combination of her taste and scent drove him to fuck her harder, faster, deeper.

"Yes, Logan, fuck me like that," she cried, rocking her hot pussy against him, squeezing him with her tight muscles, pouring her juices all over his aching balls.

"You want more?" he asked, clenching his jaw tight, trying to hold back the impending torrent of come trying to release.

"Yes! *Mon Dieu*, yes! Give it to me, Logan! Now!"

He'd wanted this from the moment he'd seen her in the dark alley. Though he'd been fucking another woman that night, he'd wanted Sophie, imagined how hot and tight her cunt would be.

He was right. Her gravelly plea stripped away his control. He let some of the magic loose, holding a tight rein on the majority of its power. If he let it all go at once, neither of them would survive it.

The room covered in frost, ice pellets began to fall, and the water in the glasses around them froze solid.



A bitter wind blew through the ballroom, but did nothing to quench the heat that Sophie's body, her cries, her spasming cunt had fired up inside him.

Her orgasm tore through her and she screamed in ecstasy. Her body tensed, tightening, then quaking uncontrollably. Strange, unintelligible words spilled from her lips.

Suddenly, the ice melted around them, the water became liquid once again and the room dried and warmed.

The heat surrounding Sophie was forced against him, within him, and a raging orgasm soared through him.

Shocked, he could only roar as his release took over. He drove hard one last time and spilled his seed deep in her core.

It wasn't until he could breathe again, until he could focus on the here and now, that he realized he hadn't worn a condom.

Fuck. Shit. Sonofabitch.

He *never* fucked a woman without wearing protection. Yet with Sophie, being skin to skin with her had seemed as natural as breathing.

She lifted her head, tangling her fingers in his hair. "It's all right," she whispered. "You don't have to worry. We're both protected."

He didn't know how she was aware of his thoughts, and couldn't muster enough energy to ask. Nodding, he still felt more vulnerable than he wanted to, especially with her. The last thing he'd do is give her power over him.

Disentangling himself from her sweet, hot body, he retrieved her panties and while she dressed, righted his clothing. Now that he'd separated from her, whatever weird connection they had before dissipated, allowing him to recover his senses. He felt much more comfortable now that his protective outer shell was once more upon him.

Anger filled him. Anger at himself for being weak where Sophie was concerned. Anger at her for whatever magic she possessed, for weaving some kind of spell over him.

Logan was a born cold-hearted man. And he'd learned a long time ago, that the best defense was a good offense.

Releasing the knotted tie that seemed to choke him, he leered at Sophie, his gaze raking over her breasts and hips. "Great fuck, wasn't it?"

Her cheeks still flushed with passion, she blinked and shook her head. "Excuse me?"

"Sex, Sophie. It was great. You're good. Damn good. Thanks."

Regarding him warily, she stayed silent for a minute. No doubt trying to figure out a way to get out of the room with her dignity intact.

Ignoring the knot of guilt forming in his stomach, he firmed his mental resolve to treat her like a tramp, refusing to believe the shocked, innocent expression on her face.

"I don't understand, Logan. What we just did was..."

"Fucking great. I know. We do have chemistry. No denying that." Taking a quick glance at his watch, he grinned and asked, "Need help with that box?"

She looked confused. "Huh? Oh. Ohhh! I get it now! You're trying to brush me off. To protect yourself."

The woman was too goddamned insightful for his liking. "I don't need to protect myself from a little sprite like you, Sophie. But I do need to get upstairs and do some work before a big meeting tomorrow. So, if you don't mind..."

She gathered her box and hefted it into her arms, shaking her head. "I know the way out. Thanks."

Finally. He was growing more uncomfortable by the minute. The stupid, emotional part of him wanted to apologize for acting like a prick. No way was he going to let that part out.

She started toward the double doors leading to the lobby, but stopped and turned, her skirt swishing around her ankles, bells jingling at her wrists and ankles.

“Logan?”

He was ready to accept her anger at his treatment of her. Hell, he deserved at least that much. “Yeah?”

“Don’t forget to pick me up on Sunday for dinner at your parents.”

She grinned, turned around and headed out the doors.

“Well, I’ll be goddamned,” he said aloud, his voice echoing in the now empty ballroom.

What the hell was it going to take to drive her away? He’d fucked her, then he’d insulted her, basically treating her no better than a one-night stand, and still she smiled at him, seemingly eager to see him again.

On Sunday. When he had to pick her up and take her to dinner at his family’s home.

Maybe she wasn’t going to be as easy to get rid of as the other women in his life had been.

Time for him to develop a battle plan, because it sure as hell appeared that dumping Sophie was going to be one hell of a battle.

\* \* \* \* \*

Instead of heading straight home, Sophie stopped at Samantha’s house, knowing that her friend would be up doing what she loved to do most.

Cooking.

She knocked on the door to the tiny house Sam had inherited from her parents, stepped back and inhaled.

Cookies. Her mouth watered and she laughed when Sam opened the door.

White flour clung to the center of Sam's tiny nose.

"What?" she asked, brandishing a wooden spatula like a weapon.

"Flour. Nose. You busy?"

Rolling her eyes, Sam scrubbed her palm over her face and motioned Sophie inside.

"Very funny. You know me, Soph. I'm never busy."

"In other words, you're cooking up some magic potions. Eye of newt, wing of bat?"

"You're just full of jokes tonight, aren't you?" Sam said over her shoulder as she headed back to the kitchen. Sophie followed, snatching a freshly baked cinnamon cookie and slipping onto one of the barstools in front of Sam's baking island.

Sophie took a bite, her lips curling in a satisfied smile as the flavors overwhelmed her senses, making her think of home, family, and utter contentment.

"What brings you here so late?" Sam asked.

"Logan Storm," Sophie managed, her mouth full of cookie.

"Ah. That's right. You worked their Mardi Gras party tonight. What happened?"

"We had sex in the ballroom of the Rising Storm."

Arching a brow, Sam asked, "Really? In front of all those people?"

"No! It was later, after the ball was over and everyone left."

"Hot! Okay, so now what?"

Sophie grabbed milk from the refrigerator, poured herself a glass and snagged another cookie on her way back to the barstool. "I don't know what happens now. He seemed to be really into it, you know? Not just physically, either. There was a definite emotional connection. But after, it was like a wall slammed down between us and he was his normal, cold and remote self again."

"You know he's just trying to protect himself from you, right?"

"That's what I think, too."

Sam slipped the next batch of cookie dough into the oven and grabbed a chair.

"You got to him, Soph. Big time."

"You think so?"

"I know so. That was easy enough to tell when he followed you to the shop. And you know something else, he got to you, too."

"Not really. I mean I enjoyed the sex, of course, but I'm mainly concerned about the visions and dreams. I just want to help."

"You want a lot more than just to help his family, honey. You want Logan."

"That's not it at all."

"You're lying to yourself."

"Am not."

"This is like being kids again and arguing over Barbie dolls."

"We didn't argue over Barbie. We argued over Ken," Sophie said, remembering their childhood fondly.

Sam grinned. "True. But I still think there's more to your feelings for Logan than just a need to figure out what danger his family is in. Allow your heart to open, Soph. You'll see."

"Think you know everything, don't you?" she teased.

"You know I do," Sam answered with a wink.

"Witch."

"There you go, stating the obvious again"

By the time Sophie had slipped into the driver's seat of her car and headed home, she felt much better. Talking to Sam always helped.

Sam had insights as keen as Sophie's. Only Sophie couldn't see as far as her own heart. So she had to rely on Sam to point out what she couldn't see by herself.

Was she more involved with Logan than she thought? There was no doubt she'd felt the connection between the two of them, but she assumed it was because of her visions.

The fact he was attractive and desirable didn't hurt, either. Despite the fact she didn't engage in casual intimate encounters with near strangers, she'd done it with Logan.

Okay, so what? She was a grown woman now. What was wrong with a little sex between two consenting adults?

But was there more to it?

She'd been so focused on getting Logan to listen to her pleas about the danger his family was in that she hadn't taken the time to assess her own feelings about him.

The way he'd made love to her — fast, furious, almost in anger — had touched her in ways she hadn't expected. She'd fought through both his anger and his magic and had reached him on an even plane where both of them had felt the reality of the experience.

Even now she could still feel him inside her, a part of her in ways that had nothing to do with her visions, and everything to do with her heart.

A heart she'd have to guard very carefully around Logan Storm.

## **Chapter Six**

Logan headed up the long gravel driveway leading to Sophie's place. He quickly scanned the directions she'd given him, shaking his head as he stopped in front of a dilapidated old trailer. It looked to be at least twenty years old.

And tiny.

Jerking the car into park, he threw open the door and walked toward the front step.

Two cracked cement steps led to the yellow aluminum door. The screen was lying half open, having obviously been ripped.

Nice place. Maybe she was hoping to land a rich guy and move up in the world.

He rapped twice on the thin metal door and waited.

He didn't have to wait long. She opened the door and stood aside for him to come in.

"You're right on time. Welcome to my home."

The inside was nothing like the outside. Candles were lit everywhere, giving off the same sensual patchouli and cinnamon scent as her shop. Bright colors from throw pillows and blankets lifted the mood of the place. Shades were open, sunlight streaming into each and every room. It was bright, colorful and homey.

Flowers bloomed healthy and vibrant in various pots throughout the house. Sophie led him from the small living room into the equally tiny kitchen. It was clean and smelled like citrus. Her bedroom was very small, including the bed, but a colorful quilt and a row of colorful plants along the windowsill brightened up the room.

"It's small, but it's home and I love it to death. I know that's silly since it's not much..."

“You have a beautiful home, Sophie.” Surprisingly, he meant that. The place was a dump on the outside, but welcoming on the inside. And she wasn’t apologetic about it at all. For some reason that meant something to him.

“Let me go get ready. It’ll only take me a second.” She turned and stepped through the multicolored beads separating the kitchen from the bedroom.

Logan stood in the living room and listened to the sound of rustling clothing. And bells. Like the bracelets she wore around her ankles and wrists. Something about those tinkling bells was surprisingly arousing.

She hummed while she dressed, an upbeat oldies tune that made him think of summer, of being young and carefree.

He jammed his fingers through his hair. Hell, had he ever been young and carefree? Had there ever been a time when he wasn’t worried about his magic, how he appeared to others? As soon as he had been old enough to recognize that he had powers, that he was “different” than the other kids his age, he’d pushed his magic as deep inside himself as he could, and fought to keep it there.

Kids were so cruel. They’d pick on anyone who wasn’t “normal”. And he was as goddamned abnormal as they came.

Was there a time he hadn’t tried to mask who and what he really was?

At least with Sophie he never had to do that. She somehow knew of his magic, and because she seemed to possess some of her own, whatever weird powers he had inside didn’t seem to matter to her at all.

The beads flew to the side as she stepped through.

She’d pulled her hair up into a high ponytail, showing off sculpted cheekbones and smooth, perfect skin.

How could someone wearing faded blue jeans and a loose, white sweater look so damn sexy? He’d taken her so fast the other night he hadn’t had time to explore and



taste her. A compelling urge came over him. He wanted to undress her, revealing every inch of her body slowly, then lick her from her neck to her toes.

Sophie's gaze met his and she stopped, her eyes widening.

She knew what he was thinking. He could tell by the dark blush staining her cheeks. Did she feel the same intense desire? His cock rose and pressed against his jeans, clearly outlined for her to see.

He should turn away until he got his unruly libido under control. But he didn't. Instead, he waited until her eyes traveled down to his crotch.

When she looked up at him again, she smiled.

Shit. The sensuous curl of her lips only made his hard-on worse. This was going to be one hell of a long day.

"Why are you doing this?"

Frowning, she asked, "Doing what?"

"Coming to my parents' house today."

"Because your mother invited me."

"That's not the only reason and you know it. Give it up, Sophie. I'm not interested in having a relationship with you."

Her smile died. "I'm doing whatever is necessary to protect you and your family, Logan. I wish you could see that."

"I see plenty. What I see is you trying to wriggle your way into my family, thinking you can tap into some of our fortune." He advanced on her, stopping only inches away. "It's not gonna happen, sweetheart, so you might as well quit now."

He refused to be swayed by the hurt look in her eyes. She was the best con artist he'd ever come across.

Her smile returned, but the pain in her eyes remained. "If there's nothing more you'd like to say, we should probably go so we're not late."

Irritated beyond the ability to think straight, Logan turned on his heel and mumbled, "Fine."

She followed him out to the car and slid in the passenger side, buckling her belt and looking out the side window the entire trip.

Although he didn't know her that well yet, what he did know proved that it was uncharacteristic of Sophie to be silent. He knew why, too.

He'd wounded her with his words.

And he fucking hated that he felt guilty about it.

Too bad. He'd said nothing that wasn't true. She *was* a fraud. He knew it, and she knew it. She was just frustrated because he, unlike everyone else, hadn't been fooled by her.

The show of hurt feelings was just an act, like everything else.

She was *not* hurt!

\* \* \* \* \*

Sophie forced back the moisture welling in her eyes, resisting the urge to put her face into her hands and sob.

She wasn't a baby and wasn't about to act like one. So Logan didn't believe her. She'd known that would happen. Convincing him was going to take awhile. Until then, she had to remain strong and not let him push her away. No matter how much he tried to hurt her, she would not waver from her goal. Her beloved Aunt Janine would never forgive her if she let her emotions get in the way of seeing a vision through to its conclusion.

She missed her aunt, though she still spoke with her. But it wasn't the same. Channeling the dead wasn't as easy, or as fulfilling, as sitting down across the kitchen table and looking at that person eye to eye. At most she'd be given brief glimpses into Janine's spectral aura, but they were mainly thoughts and feelings, not actual words.

Still, those forces continued to guide her. Her mother, her aunt, and those who had come before. They kept her strong.

And focused.

Which is what she had to be now. She couldn't afford to involve her heart in matters having to do with Logan.

Yeah right. Too late for that.

Despite his icy wall, there was a vulnerability about him that touched her deeply. She sensed that he wanted to love, but he didn't trust. And he'd have to learn to trust in love before he could truly experience it.

Love? Who said anything about love?

No. No way was she falling in love with Logan. She'd guarded her heart, made sure that she'd do her duty to him and his family and not get involved.

Liar.

Oh hell. Despite her own internal warnings, it had already happened.

And now that it had, she was bound and determined to be the woman to win his trust...and his love.

A definite risk to her heart, but who was she to attempt to defy fate?

They drove well out of town and into a densely forested area. The Storm house sat back from the road, down a long paved driveway.

The house was charming in its rustic simplicity, and she couldn't wait to go inside and explore.

"Oh, this is a beautiful home, Logan!" Without thinking, she grabbed his hand when he came to her side of the car to open the door and let her out. And she refused to let go of it as they walked toward the house, even though Logan's narrowed gaze indicated he didn't want to be holding onto her in any way.

Too bad. She was much too excited to pay attention to his frosty mood.

When they walked inside, Logan had to let go of her hand because she was swept into the room by Shannon and Kaitlyn and dragged into the kitchen, where a horde of family members were present.

She was introduced to Galen, Angelina's husband, a huge bear of a man with an Irish lilt to his voice and the most beautiful green eyes she'd ever seen. She also met Shannon's fiancé, Max Devlin.

Whoa, now there was a man with magic.

They sized each other up in a matter of seconds. It didn't take her long to sense that Max was lupine. He grinned and nodded knowingly when they shook hands, obviously as aware of her power as she was of his.

From what she sensed of Max in those few brief seconds, Shannon was one lucky girl.

Every single one of them made her feel welcome. At home. As if she was family.

All except Logan, who kept his distance, eyes narrowed as if he expected her to slip some of the family silverware into her pockets.

Determined to ignore his glaring looks, she decided to simply enjoy his family's company and forget he was even there.

The house smelled of Cajun spices. Angelina let her help out in the kitchen along with the rest of them. They all worked, either setting the table or fixing drinks. Even the men.

They laughed so much it was just like the times spent with her aunt and her friends. Bittersweet memories washed over her, reminding her that she was truly alone in the world now. Yes, she had Samantha and Joshua, who were more her family than anything. But eventually they'd both marry and have families of their own.

She'd be completely alone, then.

Would *she* ever marry? Would she ever have a family like the Storms embrace her and welcome her into their homes, their lives?

She wanted that more than anything. The scary part was, she wanted it with the Storm family, not just any family.

More importantly, she wanted it with Logan.

But wishing for something and having even the slightest hope of getting it were two different things. Clearly, Logan would never accept her in his life.

No, that wasn't quite true. He wasn't ready...yet. Which didn't mean she couldn't convince him. After all, she had set goals her entire life, and had always worked hard to reach them. Grades, college, her own business—every goal she had attempted she had reached.

Logan was a goal. Or, rather, Logan's heart was. If she put her mind to it and made him see what she saw, he'd come around.

She glanced out the back window, impressed by the massive size of the land the Storm family owned. A long stretch of grass and trees surrounded the fenced property. A narrow path led to a wooden dock where two good-sized boats sat on the huge lake.

"Your home is beautiful, Angelina," Sophie said.

Angelina wiped her hands on a towel and came to the window. "Thank you. We love it here. It's so quiet. In the summer you can hear the cicadas sing and watch the lightning bugs do their dances across the black night."

She loved her trailer, but it was surrounded by nothing but dust, gravel, and a sparse collection of very wimpy looking trees. Here there were fat willows sweeping the ground, so thick you could hide within their branches. She sighed, knowing it did no good to want what she couldn't have.

"I'll have Logan show you around later," Angelina said, patting her shoulder.

"I don't think he'll be very willing."

Angelina gave her an enigmatic smile. "You let me worry about that part. Come, dinner's ready. Let's take everything out to the table."

## Chapter Seven

There was too much food. Shrimp, crawfish, rice, beans and plenty to drink to go along with it.

Sophie stared wide-eyed at the plate in front of her, then looked over at Angelina, who'd filled it for her.

"Surely you can't be serious."

"It's not that much, *cher*. Enjoy it."

She ate, her mouth taking in the wonderful Cajun flavors as if it hadn't been fed for months. The Storm family definitely knew how to cook.

"Sophie, tell me a little about yourself."

Her gaze shifted towards Galen's strong voice.

Dilemma. How much should she reveal? She quickly looked to Angelina, who nodded and patted her hand.

"It's perfectly all right to be honest, *ma belle*. No one here will tell your secrets."

Such confidence Angelina had in her family. Sophie felt like this had suddenly become a very big deal.

"I come from a very long line of voodoo priestesses," she started, then paused as she waited for shocked or disbelieving expressions.

Surprisingly, no one batted an eyelash. No one but Logan, who arched a brow as if he was waiting for her to spew a stream of lies.

"Go on," Angelina prodded.

"When my parents died, I went to live with my Aunt Janine, who also practiced magic. She taught me to tap into the resources available to me. Turns out I listened pretty well, so after college I decided to open a shop in the Quarter. My aunt had saved

the inheritance money my parents had left, and gave it to me as a graduation gift so I had the capital to fund my business."

"Whoa, back up a second," Logan interrupted. "You went to college?"

"Sure I did."

"Did you finish?"

"Yes, Logan, I finished." Was that a big deal?

"What was your degree?"

"Am I being interviewed for a job? Would you also like to see my résumé?"

Aidan laughed so hard he spit out the piece of bread he'd just taken a bite of.

"Aidan Storm! *Mon Dieu*. Close your mouth!"

"Sorry, Mom," he said, still chuckling.

"No, you're not being interviewed," Logan continued, glaring at Aidan. "Just curious what you majored in."

Sure sounded like a job interview. "Psychology. And since you asked, I also got my masters and Ph.D. And yes, from legitimate, accredited colleges, not internet or mail order." Because she just knew that's what he'd think.

"Holy shit, you're a Ph.D.?" Aidan exclaimed.

"Aidan," Angelina warned.

"Sorry. Again. Shutting up now."

"Good idea," Lissa said, cramming another piece of bread in his mouth.

Sophie laughed.

"You've got to be in your mid-twenties, right?" Logan asked.

"Asking my age is illegal in a job interview."

Now it was Max's turn to choke.

Angelina rolled her eyes. "Boys. Really. Logan, you're browbeating poor Sophie. Leave her alone."

"I don't mind, Angelina." She looked at Logan again and said, "Yes, I'm twenty-five. I graduated high school at sixteen, finished my Bachelor's in two years, my Master's in a year and my Ph.D. the year after that."

"Dayum," Aidan said. Lissa threatened him by holding up an even larger slice of bread.

"Wow, Sophie, you must be a genius. Congratulations."

Sophie blushed at Shannon's comment. "Thank you. I just happened to do well in school."

"Do well?" Shannon exclaimed. "Hell, you're obviously quite gifted to get through school that quickly. I'm impressed."

"I'll be damned," Logan whispered as he stared at the wine swirling around in his glass. When he looked up, Sophie was mesmerized by his crystal blue eyes. They seemed to hold her transfixed.

"You have a doctorate in psychology, and yet you run a cosmic voodoo shop in the Quarter."

"It's not a cosmic voodoo shop. It's what I do and it's a legitimate business. I love my job."

"So, in other words, you could be *really* helping people, using your education and your intellectual gifts to aid those who are suffering, and instead you choose to practice bullshit magic."

"Logan, I'm warning you," Angelina said.

The sky darkened outside as Angelina glared at Logan, a rumble of thunder shaking the floor underneath her. Then just as suddenly, the clouds lifted. Angelina focused again on Sophie. "Why did you open the shop, *cher*?"

Conscious of everyone watching her, she kept her eyes on Angelina. "When I first began to learn about the magic inside me, I toyed with it, trying to figure out what I could do. As a child I was very curious. Then as I got older my magic grew more



powerful. I worked on it all the time and discovered I had a knack for foretelling—predicting the future, I guess you'd say. I could 'feel' people. Inside of them. Not only where they'd been, but where they were going." She rubbed her forehead. "It's kind of hard to explain."

"I think we know what you mean," Kaitlyn said. "Our magic is similar in a lot of respects, although I don't think it's as extensive as yours."

"Thanks." What a comfort it was to be around people who didn't think she was some kind of bizarre mutant. At least *most* of the people seated at the table felt that way. "Anyway, I discovered that I could accurately predict the future...at least as it related to people, not necessarily events. So don't ask me the lottery numbers for next week because I don't know those."

Everyone laughed. Everyone except Logan, who regarded her with an expression akin to utter disbelief. She refused to let him intimidate her.

"So you decided to set up your shop so you could tell people their future?" Lissa asked.

"Sort of. I also spent some time interning with a social worker and a practicing psychologist, so I try to blend a little magic and foretelling of the future with practical advice. Some people come to me thinking I can solve all their problems, when telling their future won't help them at all. I keep a list of social workers and licensed psychotherapists that I refer people to if I feel they need it."

"Aha, so in essence you *are* using your education to help people," Max said.

"I'd like to think so. I hope so. There are a lot of very lonely people in the world. People who just want someone to listen to them while they reason out their problems."

"It seems like such a waste," Logan said. "You open up a shop, dole out advice from your crystal ball for a few bucks a pop instead of really helping people."

Undaunted by Logan's viewpoint, she said, "I *am* helping people. People who don't have the money for mental or social health treatment, or those who are too afraid of modern medicine to go to the professionals for help with their problems. Those people

are the ones who come to me. And I spend a little time with them, talk out their problems, and by the time I'm finished I can usually get them to agree to seek professional help."

"I think what you're doing is admirable, Sophie," Angelina said. "And you're right. There are those who stay with the old ways. People who need the kind of help you provide. You're not so much telling their future as you are helping them understand how their pasts affect their futures."

Finally, someone understood her. She beamed under Angelina's praise. "Thank you. I don't know about admirable, but it fulfills me, if that makes sense."

"It does."

Satisfied that she'd at least managed to win over Logan's family, she relaxed and enjoyed the rest of dinner, listening to them argue and talk over one another. Logan stayed silent, but at least didn't challenge her further.

So Logan didn't admire what she did. So what? It wasn't like she'd ever needed his approval, anyway. She did what she did because it was her destiny. She had no other choice, and wouldn't change it even if she could.

At least his family had embraced her and didn't ridicule her for what she did.

It was times like these that Sophie wished she'd had brothers and sisters. She regularly shared dinner with Sam and Joshua, but it wasn't the same as real family. Her own family.

An intense longing came over her. The need to have someone to love, and a family that loved her.

The only thing that would have topped off the day would be if Logan had managed to unwind a bit and enjoy himself around her.

That hadn't happened yet. From the looks he shot across the table, it wasn't going to happen at all.

"You have something to say, then say it," she said to Logan, tiring of his glares and shaking head.

"I just don't get it, that's all. You're wasting your life."

Before she could respond, he got up from the table and grabbed his plate, mumbling something about needing air as he headed toward the kitchen.

Sophie moved to go after him, but Angelina laid a hand over hers and shook her head. "Let him be for now, *cher*."

She nodded. Angelina sent a pointed look to Galen.

"Time for us men to clear the table and leave the women alone," Galen said, getting up and taking plates into the kitchen. Aidan and Max followed him, leaving Sophie with Angelina, Kaitlyn, Shannon and Lissa.

After the men had vacated the kitchen, the women moved in to do the remaining dishes and put the leftover food away.

Sophie worked amiably beside the other women, once again struck with the comfortable sense of family.

Yet the entire time she wanted to go after Logan, to explain to him why she had made the choices that had led her to find him in a dark alley one winter night.

"Be patient, *ma belle*," Angelina said, taking the plates that Sophie offered and slipping them onto the stack in a cabinet. "Logan is...difficult."

Shannon snorted. "Difficult. Yeah, that's an understatement. Cold-hearted, stubborn, narrow-minded, opinionated...should I go on?"

Kaitlyn laughed. "If you did, we'd be going all night."

"All right, that's enough," Angelina said with a smile before turning back to Sophie. "Now, I'm not sure if you're aware of this or not, but Aidan and Lissa's wedding is coming up in a few weeks."

Sophie's gaze flitted to Lissa. "I didn't know it was so soon. Are you ready?"

Lissa shook her head, her long, blonde ponytail swaying back and forth. "I'm never going to be ready, and yet I'm as ready as I'll ever be. There are so many details."

"Details that I'm attending to, so quit worrying," Kaitlyn announced, wrapping her arm around Lissa's shoulders.

"Oh I know you are, Kait. I'm just getting jittery. My stomach is tied up in knots at the thought that something might go wrong."

Sophie let her eyes drift closed for a moment and let her magic surround her. She wondered if what she had seen in her visions had anything to do with Aidan and Melissa's wedding.

She felt the danger, but still couldn't pinpoint the time period.

"I'd like you to come to the wedding," Angelina announced.

"Oh yes," Lissa exclaimed. "Please come."

Shaking off the visions of impending catastrophe, she shook her head. "Oh, I couldn't. Thank you, but I'm sure you have more than enough people coming."

"Nonsense," Shannon said. "There's plenty of space in the main ballroom at the hotel. We'd love to have you there."

Sophie fought back tears. Silly, it was only an invitation to attend the wedding, and yet she felt part of this family.

Which was a dangerous feeling, because she *wasn't* part of the family. She wasn't Logan's girlfriend. She wasn't...anything to them.

Besides, it wasn't as if Logan had asked her to come with him. What if he had plans to bring another woman as his date? She'd feel awkward, or even worse, hurt. And she'd have no right to feel that way. "I don't know. What would Logan think? You know he doesn't care much for me."

Shannon snorted. "Logan needs a baseball bat to the head to knock some sense into his brain cells."

"Be patient with Logan, *cher*," Angelina said. "He feels something for you."

"No, he doesn't."

"Yes, he does. I know it. I feel the turmoil raging within him."

Oh great. Just what she hadn't wanted to do. Upset Logan, and now his mother.  
"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to—"

Angelina held up her hand. "Don't apologize. I know you sense something happening with our family. When you told me that the night of the ball, I believed you, because I felt something too."

"What are you talking about?" Lissa asked, her voice shaky. "Something bad about the wedding?"

Angelina motioned them to the huge table in the kitchen. Kaitlyn poured coffee and they all sat, staring at her.

"Go on, *cher*," Angelina encouraged. "Tell them what you know."

She sucked in a breath and said, "That's the problem. I feel danger surrounding your family, but I can't pinpoint a where and when."

"Is that why you sought out Logan?" Kaitlyn asked.

Sophie nodded. "Yes."

"I don't know the circumstances of your meeting, but I know he hasn't been the same since that day he chased after you. Lissa told us about that."

Okay, so maybe they didn't know about the night in the alley. "I've had visions about Logan for months now. He's in my dreams, in all of my meditative visions. But all I sense is danger, and it has something to do with your family. I wish I could offer more, but I feel it's my duty to hang around and see if the images get stronger. I don't know why, but I keep thinking that I might be able to do something to either change things, or stop whatever may happen."

"You've come into Logan's life for a reason, Sophie," Angelina said. "But my son is not easy. He is stubborn, refuses to acknowledge or use his gifts, and claims not to want anything to do with people who possess magic."

"I know."

"But he's conflicted, because he feels something for you."

"I'm sorry, but I really don't think he does." He may have felt a momentary physical attraction for her, but he'd scratched that itch at the ball. He'd been even more distant today, as if he regretted their encounter.

She hadn't, though. Making love with him, even in such a frenzied and passionate way, had been exhilarating. He aroused her in ways no other man ever had. He made her want things no man had ever made her want before.

"It's strange," she admitted, "but I feel that Logan is the man I'm supposed to be with. I know you probably think I'm crazy, but I can't help it." She let out a small laugh. "And of course I had to choose the one man who wants nothing to do with me."

"Don't be too sure of that," Shannon said. "I've seen Logan with women before. When it's someone he doesn't care for, he's solicitous, smiles a lot and is very pleasant. But there's no sincerity behind it. It's just part of his façade. With you, he's grouchy and almost jittery."

Sophie groaned and laid her head in her hands. "Oh great."

"No, that's a good thing," Kaitlyn said, tipping Sophie's chin with her fingers so they made eye contact. "You've gotten under his skin."

"Yeah, I've annoyed the hell out of him."

"You've captured his attention. If he didn't feel something for you, he wouldn't be so upset about it," Angelina said. "You will have to remain steadfast and determined if you want to win his heart, because Logan has built a nearly impenetrable wall around himself. It will take a strong woman to make it crumble."

Like climbing a steep mountain in an icy snowstorm. Nearly impossible to grab a foothold, let alone reach the top. "I've never forced myself on a man before."

"And you won't have to with Logan. You're the right woman for him, Sophie Breaux," Angelina said, her voice softening in a way that made her warm from the inside out.

"Thank you. I hope so. I can't seem to break away from him, despite his protests that he wants nothing to do with me."

"If you want him, kiddo," Shannon said. "And I have no idea why you'd want to put up with a pain in the ass like my brother—then you're going to have to work at it."

Kaitlyn nodded. "And if you're willing to butt heads with him and try your best, we'll do everything we can to help."

"Thank you, but I don't understand why you'd want to help me."

Lissa grinned. "Because we feel you're already family, Sophie. The same thing happened with me. I wanted nothing to do with Aidan, and yet fate continued to toss us together. It took me awhile to accept the inevitable. In fact," she added, sweeping her hand across the table, "they all knew before I did. It's the same with you."

"Very true," Angelina said. "You're the one for Logan. We all feel it. Now you just need to convince *him* of that. If you want to."

She did want to, for more reasons than just her visions.

"I'll give it my best shot."

"Great!" Shannon said. "Then you'll come to Lissa and Aidan's wedding, right?"

She had a feeling they weren't going to take no for an answer. Besides, she was family now. The thought filled her with giddy happiness. "I'd be honored."

"I'm glad," Angelina said, then frowned as she glanced outside the kitchen window at the late afternoon sky. "A big storm is coming. Girls, go fetch Logan and ask him to take Sophie home. The weather is about to take a bad turn."

When the women left, Angelina stood and hugged her. "Tonight will be a turning point for you and Logan."

How did she know that? Sophie hadn't felt anything. "I don't know what you mean."

"Your relationship with him will change tonight, and he won't like it. It may not happen right away, but eventually he'll try to hurt you. He'll do his best to crush your heart so you'll walk away. This won't be easy, but I can guarantee the end result will be worth any pain you have to go through."

"I appreciate that, Angelina, and I'm not afraid of Logan. I feel him inside me, as if he's already a part of me. I have to see it through, no matter the outcome."

She knew it wasn't going to be easy. In fact, she wondered if it wasn't impossible.

But she wouldn't give up on him until she'd tried her best. Yes, her heart was involved, but also the fear that her visions might come true and put his family in danger.

Somehow, whatever the mysterious danger, it revolved around Logan.

She had to make him see what she saw, had to make sure he understood the danger.

He might want to drive her away, but Sophie wasn't a quitter.



## **Chapter Eight**

Conscious of Sophie's gaze on him as he drove her home, Logan did his best to ignore her.

Dinner had been a disaster. They all treated her as if she were part of the family.

Despite his voiced reservations about Sophie, they accepted her. He'd never known his family to be so accommodating to a stranger that he'd warned them about. Couldn't they see through her smiling, friendly exterior into the devious liar she was underneath?

Ph.D., his ass. He'd check on that right away. No fucking way could someone with that level of education be wasting her life practicing voodoo magic.

Did she take him for an idiot?

Yet his family had fallen for her lies. And they were no fools.

He shook his head, more confused than ever, the truth blurring in front of him like the hard rain falling on his windshield. He flipped on the wipers.

"The weather is going to get really bad tonight, Logan."

"It's just rain."

"Are you sure?"

Hell if he knew. To be certain, he'd have to allow his powers to sweep through him. And he'd never let that happen. It weakened him, made him vulnerable, made him appear less than...

...normal.

"It's just rain," he said again.

Sophie pulled her light jacket around her. "It's getting colder. The rain may turn to ice."

He laughed. "Not in New Orleans, *cher*. We don't get ice storms here."

"Never say never, Logan. It does happen."

"Rarely."

By the time he pulled into the gravel driveway in front of her trailer, the rain had turned to sleet. He thought about just letting her get out and see her own way in, but somehow he knew his mother wouldn't approve of less than gentlemanly behavior. Turning off the ignition, he went around to her side and opened the door, then held on to her arm as he led her to the steps. The temperature outside was plummeting rapidly, colder than he could ever remember for winter in New Orleans.

Ducking his head down against the relentless ice pellets, he waited while she unlocked the door.

A goddamned ice storm. Just like she'd said. Shit.

When she had the door open, he started to thank her for coming to dinner so he could make a hasty exit.

But Sophie spoke first. "Logan, please come in with me."

He should have said no. But he didn't. Instead, like a man under some kind of spell he followed her inside, shaking the water from his hair and damning himself for not turning around and walking out right then.

"I'll get you a towel," she said, eagerly shrugging out of her wet jacket and heading into her bedroom. She returned with a towel and a hairbrush, motioning him to sit on the tiny, threadbare sofa.

"I'm fine here. I really don't need to dry off."

"Yes, you do. You're soaked. And the sleet is coming down harder now. So you might as well wait it out. I'll fix us some hot tea."

Grudgingly, he picked up the towel and dried himself off, allowing a bit of his magic out to dry his wet clothes. Sophie put water on to boil, then returned to the living room, dragging the brush through her long hair.

Watching her brush her hair was fascinating, though he couldn't pinpoint why. There was something so incredibly sensual about a woman touching her own hair, especially hers. She ran her fingers down each section, her slender hands smoothing the tendrils into waves. His cock reacted with a sudden twitch. Hell, he wanted her to touch him that same way!

Her hair hung almost to her waist. He could imagine the feel of the silky strands wrapped around his shaft as she bent over him, taking his cock between her full, tempting lips and sucking him deeply.

Now his cock roared to life, hard and pulsing. Despite his vehement mental objections, the damn thing wouldn't lie down and play dead like he wanted it to. His senses filled with her as she walked back and forth, her beautiful ass hugged by the worn jeans, her breasts caressing her sweater. Finally, she brought two cups of tea and sat on the couch next to him.

Her damp skin smelled so much like cinnamon and patchouli, those scents forever a part of his senses now. As her hair began to dry, curls formed from the ends upward.

A sudden desire to take the brush from her hands and finish the job himself had him nearly leaping off the couch. Anything to put distance between his barely leashed passions and the woman creating such havoc to his senses.

She put the brush down and reached for her cup, curling her legs underneath her as she settled in. When she turned to him, her violet eyes questioned, invited him. She licked the flavored tea off her lips. He wanted to follow with his own mouth on hers.

No. Abso-fucking-lutely no way. He had to get away from her, and now.

As nonchalantly as possible, he stood and walked to the small window to look outside. Icicles formed on the bare trees, pellets of ice hitting the roof of his car. Shit, sure as hell was one hell of an ice storm coming down.

"I should go before the weather gets worse."

"The roads are already icy and dangerous." She was silent for a few seconds, then said, "I think you should stay here tonight."

His throat went dry at the thoughts conjured up by her suggestion. "I don't think so. I'll be fine driving home."

"But I won't be. I'll worry about you."

He didn't want her worrying about him. He shook his head, refusing to turn around and look at her. "I hardly need anyone worrying about me, Sophie. I know how to drive."

In fact, he should already be on the road. A few steps and he'd be out the door and away from temptation.

Away from her. Her scent, her mouth, her long, silken hair, her full breasts.

Fuck. He had to go. Now.

He heard her shift and stand, smelled her as she approached him. Still, he wouldn't turn around. He wasn't sure he could trust himself if he looked at her.

Instead of touching him or speaking, she stopped inches behind him and inhaled, then sighed.

Christ, how much was he supposed to endure?

"I know you're aware of me, Logan," she whispered, her husky voice like a caress, torturing his already frayed nerve endings.

"Yes, I know you're there."

"Why won't you look at me?"

How was he supposed to answer that? He could imagine what she would say if he told her he was afraid to.

"It's enough that I feel your presence, Sophie."

"Why do you fight so hard against this?"

"I'm not fighting. I'm choosing."

"I think you've already chosen. You're just delaying the inevitable."

Now he did turn around, his pulse racing as he looked at her. Sophie possessed a beguiling innocence that tore his resolve to shreds. He'd never had to fight desire as hard as he was right now. "I get to choose who I fuck."

"I'm aware of that. As do I. But I'm drawn to you, Logan, in ways that I can't change. And you can't either."

"I don't believe in fate."

"I do. And I know you feel our connection."

"It's sexual chemistry, and nothing more."

She nodded and offered a half smile. "True enough. Biology plays a large part in any relationship. But what we share is much more than physical. Tell me, Logan, do you feel me, even when I'm not around?"

"No," he lied.

"Yes, you do. I know you do." She stepped an inch closer. He resisted the urge to back away. "Logan, please be honest with me, just once."

He should lie to her, but what was the point? In the end, the choice was his to make. And he wasn't going to do what his body screamed at him to do. "I've felt you from the first moment I saw you in the alley."

"And I've felt you. You're in my thoughts, in my dreams at night, and I can't get you out of my mind."

That revelation didn't help one bit. It only made his cock fully hard and strain against his jeans. A visual that wasn't lost on her as her gaze traveled down to his crotch, then back up again to meet his eyes. Heat dwelled within them, blatant desire that only made the situation worse.

"Does it make you uncomfortable?"

What? His dick? Hell yeah, it was uncomfortable. But he knew that wasn't what she meant. "Yes."

"Why?"

“Because everything about you makes me uncomfortable, from the way you so easily crawl into my mind to the way I want you whenever you’re around.”

He winced as soon as the words slipped from his lips. Shit. He hadn’t meant to reveal so much. Normally he was good at hiding how he really felt. What was it about this woman that begged for him to tell her exactly how he felt?

She slid her teacup onto the edge of the counter and stepped closer. No woman would make him run. He could handle his attraction to Sophie without compromising his principles or letting down his guard.

“Tell me how I make your body feel,” she said, so close he could reach out and touch the strands of curling hair resting on her breasts. But he didn’t touch. Wouldn’t allow himself to touch. He curled his fingers into his palms.

This wasn’t going to happen tonight!

Sophie watched the war raging in Logan’s eyes, and desperately wanted to comfort him, to offer him whatever it took to assuage the torment within him. But she also needed to push him into realizing that what they had went beyond a normal physical attraction.

Again she asked, “Tell me, Logan. How do I make you feel?”

She knew what it was costing him to restrain his urges, both magical and physical. And yet she couldn’t stop.

“I don’t think you really want to know the answer,” he said, his voice deepening, his breath ragged.

“Yes, I do want to know.”

He paused for a few seconds, arousal flaming in his eyes, darkening them like the storm had blackened the sky outside. “Hot, bothered, damned uncomfortable and aroused to the point of losing control.”

She sucked in a breath at his admission, her body flaming to life with desire more fierce than she had ever felt before. Her nipples beaded under the thin sweater. Logan watched it happen, then licked his bottom lip.

Sophie forgot how to breathe, and forced her next words through the desert in her throat. "I'd like to see you out of control, Logan."

He shook his head. "No, you wouldn't."

She stepped closer, the tips of her nipples brushing his chest. "Yes, I would."

He kept his hands at his sides, but she felt the tightly coiled tension in his muscles. He was fighting it, and she didn't want him to. "Give in to it, Logan."

"You can't handle me out of control, Sophie. I'm warning you. Don't push this."

Oh, but that's exactly how she wanted him. Out of control, both magically and physically. "I can handle more than you think. Give it to me."

His nostrils flared like an animal scenting a female desperate to mate. She was that female, anxious for his touch, for the joining of their bodies, for the magic they could share together. "Don't make me beg."

He clenched and unclenched his fists. His brows knit together in a frown, his eyes cloudy with desire. "If you want this, you'll reap the consequences. I can't hold back once I unleash it."

Wrapping her arms around him, she tilted her head up and offered her mouth to him. "I don't care. I want it all."

With a low growl he reached for her hair, winding it in his fist and tugging hard, tilting her head even further back. Then he bent and took her mouth in a kiss that sent flames shooting through her core.

Her sex was on fire, her pussy drenched with instant arousal. She whimpered as his tongue entered her mouth and licked hers, his teeth raking over her tongue as he sucked it into his mouth.

His body was cool, despite the heat of passion surrounding them. When he pulled away, his breath blew out in a white cloud as the temperature dropped in the room.

But the chill was like icy fire, burning her skin, sending her nearly over the edge before her pussy was ever touched. She held back her own magical response and immersed herself within his, knowing she was experiencing something rare, something that Logan had never shared with another woman.

His fingers were like icicles as he threaded his hand under her sweater, cupping one breast. The heat of her body mixing with the chill of his fingers was more arousing than she ever thought possible. She gasped when he found a nipple and rolled it between his fingers, then plucked at it until she cried out and arched against him.

"You smell like cinnamon," he murmured, licking her neck and nibbling the tender skin. "I want more of you to taste."

He pushed away and reached for the hem of her sweater, tugging it upward and over her head, then casting it to the floor.

The cold air surrounding them froze her, making her nipples tight and hard. He smiled and bent over, taking one bud into his mouth and licking it until she thought she might faint. Then he did the same to the other, not once stopping his hands from their roaming journey over her body.

"Logan, please," she murmured, not even aware of what she was begging for. She just wanted...more.

"Yes, *cher*." He kneeled and reached for the button of her jeans, flipping it open with one move, then pulled the zipper down, kissing her belly as he pulled the denim aside.

His lips were a fire on her belly as he touched her skin. Her womb leapt in anticipation, her pussy trembling with the desire to have him lick her there.

In short order he had tugged the jeans over her hips and down her legs, his hands following the trail of her clothes until he'd tossed them away from her.



Clad only in skimpy white panties, she felt way more underdressed than he. And last time she hadn't been able to see his body. Dammit, this time she would.

"My turn," she said, but before she could reach for him he pushed her backwards, controlling their direction until he had her in the living room. He scooted the coffee table out of the way, his height seemingly overpowering the room, making it seem much smaller. More intimate.

He laid her on the floor and reached for the quilt on the couch, spreading it out and rolling her onto it. Then he just kneeled over her and stared.

"We're doing this my way," he growled, reaching for the button of his jeans. "You need to understand this is just sex, and nothing more."

If possible, the cold wall of protection he'd built around himself was nearly visible. But he put it up in vain. It was already too late for him. He just hadn't realized it yet.

She nodded, resisting the urge to purr with utter contentment. "However you want it."

## **Chapter Nine**

Sophie watched intently as the button flipped open on Logan's jeans, followed by the slow slide of the zipper.

There was nothing sexier than seeing the shadow of dark, downy fur hidden beneath that zipper. But instead of pulling his jeans down, he reached for his shirt and drew it over his head.

She sighed. Pure, feminine satisfaction. What a magnificent body he had. Dark, curling hair spread across his well-muscled chest. His shoulders were broad, his arms defined and strong, his waist tapered and covered with the same dark curls that disappeared into his jeans. Her mouth watered, then went dry as he began to push the jeans off his hips.

The room heated with a warmth borne of heavy arousal. It hung thick in the air as she watched him unveil his nearly perfect body.

His cock sprang forward, hard and pulsing, the veins outlined against the tautly stretched skin of his shaft. The head was purple and engorged, and she wanted nothing more at that moment than to lick away the drops of fluid beading at the tip.

But Logan apparently had other ideas. He crouched down and kneeled between her legs, lifting her foot and massaging the arch. When he drew it upward and slowly took her big toe in his mouth, she arched off the floor, the sensation shooting to her sex as if his tongue had just touched her clit.

He sucked it, licked it, even nibbled a bit, then did the same with her other toes. When he was finished with one foot, he moved to the other.

Sophie dug her fingers into the soft carpet and held on tight, for the first time in her life feeling sensations in her cunt that had nothing to do with being touched there. She'd never realized her feet were erogenous zones.

Or the backs of her knees, which she quickly discovered when he raised her leg and kissed the spot behind her knee. She shivered and moaned, which only encouraged him to linger there until she couldn't bear it.

"Logan, please."

"Not yet. I've wanted to uncover your beautiful body. I have an urge to lick you. Everywhere."

He followed his urge, his tongue laving her skin, moving upwards to her thighs until she was whimpering with the need to feel that hot, wet stroke upon her sex. But he moved over her hips and toyed with her belly button for awhile.

This was torture. Endless, unnerving torment. The more she moaned and begged, the slower his strokes became.

Hell, he hadn't even removed her panties yet, which were now soaked with her arousal.

And if he brushed his hard cock against her leg one more time, she was going to find the strength within her to flip him over on his back and fuck him until neither of them could move.

"Logan, please, just fuck me."

He laughed as he licked her neck, then pulled back and looked at her. "I'm crushed. You're just using me."

Oh dear God. The man actually had a sense of humor. Only right now she didn't find him the least bit amusing. "Not funny. Fuck me, dammit, I'm dying here."

"Well, we can't have you dying, can we? Not until I've had my way with you." He leaned over and captured the hard peak of one nipple in between his teeth, then licked it, over and over again until she was ready to scream.

Maybe he'd stop if she did scream.

For someone who kept a chilly countenance, his body was burning as it rested against hers. She couldn't help lifting her hips and rubbing her throbbing pussy against his strong thigh.

"Uh-uh, *cher*. Not yet." He pushed her hips back to the floor and held her while he laved her other nipple.

This was some kind of game to Logan. Wasn't he the least bit turned on? By his hard cock, she assumed he was aroused, but she swore he'd licked every inch of her skin by now, and she was more than ready for release.

Wasn't he?

The man was simply inhuman.

She shuddered against him, raking her nails over his back when he settled his long shaft between her legs. Kneeling, he teased her panty-clad sex by rubbing the tip of his cock against her. His forearms bunched, the muscles bulging, tightening with the effort of holding himself above her.

"Dammit Logan!" She sensed he liked to be in control, to have the upper hand, even in sex. He'd soon learn that once she wanted something, it wasn't wise to mess with her. She'd had quite enough of this teasing.

She slipped her hand into her panties and caressed her throbbing clit. Logan sat back on his heels and watched the movements of her hand.

He wasn't going to stop her. Instead, he was content to watch. His gaze took her heat level up several notches, reminding her of the way he'd watched her that night in the alley.

The same way she'd looked at him. The same way she'd gotten off while he fucked that redhead.

Only this time he was much closer, and had his cock in his hand, stroking it as she brought herself closer to orgasm.

"Let me see it," he said, motioning to her panties.

“You want them off, you take them off.”

His eyes flamed dark and smoky. Reaching for the thin straps at her hips, he tugged hard, leaving nothing left of her panties but a discarded scrap of silk and lace.

The air cooled her hot sex, but his gaze inflamed her.

“Rub your clit for me, baby. Let me see up close how you do it.”

She did, anxious to feel the sparks that touching herself would provide. She petted the hardened nub gently, circling one finger around the hood, then pulling it back so she could stroke directly over the pleasure bud. Cream gushed forth as she brought herself ever nearer to the edge of reason.

When Logan slipped two fingers inside her cunt and began thrusting in and out, she knew she was going to lose it quickly.

Unable to hold back, she cried out as the orgasm hit. Her pussy clenched and gushed around his ever-moving fingers. She rode out the exquisite sensation until she was out of breath and shaking.

But still she managed to find the one word that would tell him what she needed.

“More.”

Logan sucked in a quick breath, unraveling at Sophie’s passion. If he wasn’t careful, he could easily be swept away by her fiery nature. That he couldn’t allow.

He had a tight leash on his control, but she made him want to break free and let everything out.

His cock thrummed with the need for release, his balls rising tight and hard against his body, filling with the come that he wanted to shoot within her tight sheath.

And he would, but he wanted to delay it as long as possible, knowing that every time he touched her he lost a little more of the hardened exterior he’d spent years perfecting.

The free and easy way she shared herself with him, so totally and without reservation, blew him away. No woman had ever given so much without asking for anything in return.

Logan was afraid he was weakening. He was afraid that he wasn't going to be able to rein in his magic once he merged with her. The last time it had taken sheer force of will, and even at that he'd had to let some of it loose.

She made him want more from a woman than he'd ever wanted before. Why couldn't he just be satisfied with fucking her, getting off, and leaving? What was it about her that drove him to want to give her everything?

Seemingly unaware of his internal torment, she smiled up at him, then sat up and took his shaft between her small hands. She rolled her palms over every inch of him, pulling his cock slowly toward her full, eager lips.

Sweat beaded on his brow and he swiped it away, willing a cold rush of air to swirl around them.

Her eyes widened, and then she smiled as her tongue snaked out and licked away the drops of pre-come that had gathered on the head of his cock.

"Christ, Sophie," he murmured, at once wanting to pull away from her, and at the same time wanting to drive his shaft deep into the moist recesses of her waiting mouth.

Desire won out over common sense when she took him inch by inch between her lips, licking at the skin of his shaft until she couldn't take any more in. Then she held her breath and swallowed him, the gulping action squeezing his cock until he felt the tremors in his balls.

He pulled back, forcing himself to breathe, needing some clarity to think his way through this. The magic boiled to the surface, pushing at him, demanding release.

A release he refused to grant. The only release he'd allow would be the elimination of the pent-up desire he'd felt for Sophie all day and all night. That much, he'd allow.

He cupped the back of her head and fed her his cock. "Suck me, *cher*. Take it all in and make me come."

Eagerly, she complied, until he couldn't hold back the rush of fluid. It catapulted from his cock with a rush, pouring into her eagerly sucking mouth. She took every drop, swallowing, massaging his balls until he had nothing left to give her.

And still, even after he'd withdrawn, he was hard for her.

He hadn't yet gotten what he wanted. To drive hard inside her wet pussy and make her scream.

That was the part he'd held back, this naked, body-to-body coupling that was more about emotion and a sharing of souls than it was about sinking his shaft into a willing cunt and getting off.

She knew it, and she wanted it.

Impossible. He couldn't give her that without sacrificing his control. What she wanted and what she was going to get were two different things.

He poised between her legs, inhaling the sweet musk of her arousal, gazing at the come pouring from her slit.

And he paused, gathering his resolve to hold back.

"Give me everything, Logan," she whispered, as if she knew his every thought.

"Once it starts, I won't be able to stop it," he warned, wanting her to know that what she asked from him might not be what she could handle. "You have to decide, right now, if you can take it all."

"Everything you give me, and then some," she answered, no uncertainty in her voice.

"I'm a cold-hearted bastard, Sophie. I'm incapable of loving you, so if that's what you're after, you're going to be disappointed. All I can offer you is sex."

Without hesitation, she answered. "I'm a grown woman, Logan, and capable of dealing with hurt. If my heart ends up broken, then it's my fault, not yours. But I want it all, and I want it now. Give me what you've never given another woman before."

He'd thought to push her away by telling her that he could never be what she wanted, what she needed, in a lover. He wasn't the candy, flowers and love notes kind of guy. No, that wasn't him at all. More like the fuck and run type. And that kind of man wouldn't suit Sophie at all.

She deserved so much better than him. Why couldn't she see that? Why couldn't she change her mind and make this easier on both of them?

"Please, Logan."

Christ! He should go. But goddammit, he *was* only human, at least most of him was. And what she offered, he could no longer refuse. The last of his restraint torn away, he nestled between her legs, desperate to possess her completely. He slid his finger into her cunt and took her clit between his lips, his body on fire from her heat, her scent, the way she bucked against his mouth as he suckled and licked her.

She melted all over him, juices flowing through his fingers. He withdrew and slid them against her anus, needing to feel this part of her, too. Keeping his mouth firmly against her clit, he broke the barrier of her back hole with his soaked fingers, sliding them into her ass and fucking slowly. Her shrieks of delight as she flew over the edge only propelled him further into a near-delirium of sensation.

Every damn thing she did drove him crazy. The taste of her sweet come, the way her ass squeezed his fingers as she orgasmed around them, the moaning sounds she made when he brought her close to climaxing yet again. He felt like he'd been catapulted into some surreal alternate universe, his sanity slowly slipping away

Withdrawing his fingers, he stepped away from her for the briefest of seconds to clean up, then drew her up and bent her over the sofa.

"Please, Logan, hurry," she whispered on a ragged breath, her passion leaving her drenched with sweat.



Nestling against her fine ass, he positioned his cock and plunged inside her, feeling at once how her pussy clamped down around his cock, milking him, coaxing a response he was more than ready to give.

"Fuck my dick, Sophie," he commanded, reaching for her hips and pulling her back against him as he thrust forward, needing to be embedded deep inside her as if the very act of sheathing himself inside her pussy could protect him from the magic pounding away at him.

She moaned and pushed back, drawing forward then slamming her cunt onto his cock again and again. He held on despite the torrents of wintry air swirling out of control around them. Her tight sheath squeezed him like a vise, milking him, commanding him to pour out everything he had within him.

"I'm coming, Logan!" she cried, then words weren't possible as she screamed and came all over his cock. He jettisoned come deep within her, digging his fingers into her hips as he rode out the frenzy that had overtaken them both.

She collapsed against the couch and took him with her. He turned her and cradled her in his arms, taking deep breaths until the world seemed normal again. Finally, he sighed in relief, satisfied that he'd managed to control the magic.

Perhaps what he thought he'd felt for her had been nothing more than pent-up lust. He had nothing to be afraid of. She couldn't tear away his careful control.

"Come with me," she said, standing and holding out her hand. Curious, he let her lead him into the bedroom.

"Lie down on the bed," she commanded, her voice still husky with passion.

He laughed. He'd finally met a woman whose libido was as strong as his. "You want more?" he asked.

One corner of her mouth curled in a sexy smile. "Oh yes. We're not nearly finished yet."

Now that he knew she posed no threat to him, he was more than eager to continue fucking her until she begged for mercy.

But when he moved to pin her to the bed, she shook her head. "Let me get on top."

Grinning, he lay flat on the mattress and said, "Ride me, baby." His cock rose and hardened to accommodate her. She straddled him, lifting her sweat-moistened hair and tossing it over her shoulders.

Inching upward, her sex brushed his cock. She rocked against his shaft, tossing her head back and whimpering as her hard clit caressed his erection. When she looked down at him again, her eyes were glazed dark with passion. She reached for his shaft and stroked it, cupped his balls and squeezed gently.

"Fuck me baby. Now."

Her gaze burned hot as she straddled his hips and inched down over his cock, embedding him deep within her tight sheath.

"Fuck, that's good," he groaned, lifting his hips and thrusting even deeper.

She let out a hoarse cry when he circled her clit with his finger, gently plucking at the distended bud.

"There is no fear in letting someone love you, Logan," she whispered, bending over him and taking his mouth in a gentle kiss.

He allowed her to penetrate his inner sanctum for the briefest of seconds, which was all it took for her to wrangle her way past his defenses.

Suddenly a light began to glow around her, starting out nearly black and then growing, until the entire bed was surrounded in a lavender glow that pulsed every time she thrust against him.

She moved her hands over his skin, stopping to finger his nipples to hard points. He felt the sensation in his cock and thrust hard against her.

A low, murmuring chant escaped her throat. Words he didn't understand, but knew instinctively were ancient and sacred. Unfamiliar vibrations settled over him, and

with each touch of her hands on his burning skin, he felt the warmth of a woman's love penetrating deeply, coaxing the magic free, hovering dangerously close to his heart.

Her body was beautiful bathed in the lavender light, her breasts thrusting forward as she rocked against him. She tilted her head back and rode him as if in a trance, and he was helpless against her power.

Sophie had no inhibitions whatsoever, leaning back and giving him access to every part of her as she continued to ride him relentlessly.

He thought he had the power? Hell, right now he had none. Unable to contain the magic, he had no choice but to let it free. Snow began to fall, slowly at first, then the wind picked up and swirled around them.

His magic needed to fight with hers. He had to show her he wouldn't give in.

Yet she continued to murmur strange words, comforting words, and squeezed his cock with her cunt until he couldn't do a damn thing with his magic, or hers.

Surrounded by a blizzard in her bedroom, she kept them safe within the warm cocoon of her aura.

Her energy began to enter him. Through every pore, she seeped bit by bit within him.

He pulled her close, driving his hips upward as he pierced her with pistoning thrusts again and again. Her tears spilled over his chest as she accepted what he gave her. A cry tore from her lips as she spasmed around him and came, the orgasm so intense it nearly rocked him off the bed. He let go and freed both himself and his magic, allowing a part of himself to enter her. For the briefest of seconds, they were suspended in time, their essence flowing one into the other.

Then it was over, and she collapsed against him. Equally spent, he could do nothing but hold onto her and stroke her back, her hair, and wish to all the heavens that he had never laid eyes on Sophie Breaux.

## **Chapter Ten**

The soft light of morning spilled into Sophie's tiny bedroom. She snuggled close to Logan's warmth, the blanket pulled down to her hips.

He admired the lines of her back, counting every vertebra with his eyes as he memorized her scent and the buttery feel of her dark skin.

Last night was like nothing he'd ever experienced. She'd exhausted him. So much that he'd slept better than he could ever remember. He'd never spent the night with a woman. Too intimate. And yet he'd fallen into satiated slumber with his arms wrapped tightly around Sophie.

He could still feel her pussy squeezing his cock, pulling orgasm after orgasm out of him. He'd never met a woman who could match his passions, and yet she'd been game for whatever he wanted last night, for however long he wanted it.

Like a strange psychic pull, he felt her embedded with him, a connection so close that it threatened to dissolve the wall he'd so carefully erected around his emotions.

No, that wouldn't happen, no matter how much his family liked her, or how much Sophie wanted it.

His life had direction and control. Since he'd met her, everything had begun to dissolve. To warm. Thoughts of her filled his days and long into his sleepless nights. Her aroma filled his senses like a snake charmer's spell. Her dark, exotic looks and her wicked smile called to him, bound him to her in inexplicable ways.

Hell. Everything about her intoxicated him.

Sophie shifted and moaned, scooting closer to his body heat. He pulled the cover up around her and let her move her head onto his shoulder.

Shit. He swore he'd never fall in love, and there was no way in hell he'd ever bring children into the world. A child might inherit his bizarre powers, and he'd never inflict that kind of burden on anyone, let alone an innocent child.

No, he'd remain alone, aloof, and impervious to falling in love.

Besides, Sophie wasn't the woman for him. She was warm, had a generous heart and cared deeply. She'd want a home with a husband who adored her, and probably a ton of kids. He'd have to let her down gently, because he could tell she was falling in love with him.

Dammit, he never wanted this to happen. How the hell could things have gotten so madly out of control so fast?

He hadn't led her on; he'd been totally honest with her about his feelings.

And she'd claimed she could handle it. Now she'd be forced to prove it.

"Don't you ever turn that incredible mind of yours off?"

He looked down into sleepy violet eyes as she smiled up at him. And suddenly found himself unable to speak.

"Good morning. Would you like some breakfast?"

Yes, he did. Starting with her sweet pussy, and moving on from there. His cock hardened against her belly and she grinned. "Or maybe you'd like to put off breakfast for a little while?"

He still couldn't manage words, especially when her head disappeared under the blankets and her hot mouth surrounded him.

No, he definitely couldn't form words then. He could only close his eyes and put off the inevitable until much, much later.

She took him deep, his cockhead banging the back of her throat. His balls tightened with the need to release again, a fact that surprised him despite the delirium of pleasure Sophie weaved around him.

"Suck me, Sophie," he said, clenching his teeth as the pressure built to a crescendo. He dug his fingers into the sheets and held on while she wove a wicked spell on his cock.

Her hair slid across his thighs as she threw off the covers and leaned over him, moving her mouth up and down over his shaft.

Watching his cock disappear between her lips, feeling and seeing the way she swallowed him, had him lifting his hips and driving deeper, wanting more of the torment.

When she cupped his balls and tugged, he groaned, held her head with his hand and shot a stream of come down her throat. She milked him, and he gave her everything he had, finally collapsing back on the mattress and fighting to regain a normal heart rate.

He could grow to like this. Hell, he already liked it. And her. Way too much to let it go on without telling her that it was over.

She looked up at him and grinned, then licked her lips. He shuddered, knowing how much he wanted to fuck her ten different ways. He could spend the entire day buried inside her.

"I need to go."

She frowned. "Um, I was going to fix you breakfast."

He slipped off the bed and reached for his clothes. "No time for that. I have things to do today."

She sat up, her hair falling over her breasts. One dark nipple peeked out between the raven curls, and he quickly turned away. She looked way too damn sexy sitting there with the sheet wrapped around her hips, her lips swollen and moist from sucking him.

"Okay," she finally answered, rising and tossing on a pair of sweatpants and an oversized sweatshirt. She wound her hair up and grabbed a clip from the dresser, pinning her hair loosely.

Fuck, even dressed like that with her hair a tumbled mess she still looked desirable. His cock fired to life again, and he all but ran to the door.

"Logan, wait!"

He cringed, but stopped and turned around. She approached and paused a few inches from him.

"Thank you. For yesterday at your parents. For last night, too."

He nodded, unable to say what he needed to say to her. Tell her it's over, you moron. How fucking hard is that?

Instead, he grabbed her and planted a passionate kiss on her lips, then quickly pulled away and stepped outside before he did something incredibly stupid.

Like walking back in there and making love to her.

Forever.

\* \* \* \* \*

"He hurt you, didn't he?"

Sophie looked up at Josh. "No, he didn't."

She wouldn't let Logan push her away. She wasn't going to leave things between them unsettled, no matter if Logan was avoiding her.

"When did you see him last?" Samantha asked, handing Sophie one of the new crystals they'd received in today's shipment.

"Sunday." Four days ago. No calls, and he hadn't come by. Not that she'd expected him to.

Okay, maybe she had expected him to.

"You slept with him, didn't you?" Josh said, his voice accusing.

"That's none of your business, Joshua."

"Since when? Everything about your life has been my business, Soph. For years. Now you can't confide in me anymore?"

She rubbed her temples, more confused than ever. No man had ever mattered enough to her to withhold how she felt, but she knew if she told Josh about Logan, it would only hurt him more than she already had.

"Josh, look. I know how you feel about me, and I just don't think it's a good idea if I tell you about my sex life."

He inhaled sharply, jaw clenching. "Well, there's my answer, then. You did sleep with him."

Before she could say anything else, he left the shop.

Sophie felt horrible. She'd never led him on, but she still hated hurting him.

"He's working on it, Soph," Sam said, patting her hand. "He told me he's been dating this girl who teaches at the college."

Sophie stared wistfully at the closed door, wondering if she should go after Josh. "Really? He didn't mention her to me."

"And he probably won't. You know how he is—how he's always been. He hides his feelings from everyone, and the one time he—"

She paused, and Sophie nodded. "I know, I know. The one time he bared his heart, I stomped all over it." Burying her head in her hands, she mumbled, "I'm between a rock and hard place with Josh. I don't know what to do to make it right with him."

"There's nothing you can do. He has to find his own way. He's still young, for a man, Sophie. This burning torch he's carried for you since elementary school will pass once he finds the woman of his dreams."

And no one would be happier to see him find a woman who would love him like he deserved to be loved.



"I'll talk to him," Sophie said.

"Do whatever you think is best. Now, tell me what's going on with Logan."

She groaned. "I don't know. Sunday was...magical. Perfect. Hot, passionate, we even shared magic."

"But?"

"But he hurried out of there so damn fast Monday morning that you would have thought his pants were on fire. And I haven't heard from him since."

Not that she'd called him, or tried to see him. She wanted to give him space to think, and maybe that had been a mistake.

"Go after him. You already know he's not going to come to you willingly. If you want him, search him out."

She was just cowardly enough to not want to have the door slammed in her face if she did just that. "I don't know. I haven't had a vision in a few days. Maybe the danger to him and his family was false."

"Maybe you're just a coward and this has nothing to do with the visions and you know it."

Sometimes it sucked to have a best friend who knew her so well. "You're right. But really, Sam, how many times should I let him get close and then run away before I give up?"

"Depends on how you feel about him."

Sam gave her a pointed look.

"I don't know how I feel. No, wait, that's not true. I'm crazy about him, Sam. He makes my heart pound, and oh God the sex is amazing, but there's also something so vulnerable about him, as if he's got this huge fear of not measuring up. It's odd, because that's so not like his outward persona."

"Look. This is going to sound hokey as hell, but I really believe true love only comes around once in a lifetime. And if you don't grab it when you see it, it's lost forever. If you love him, honey, then grab it."

She nodded, contemplating her next move. First she needed to talk to Josh and smooth things over with her friend. Then she'd work on Logan after that.

\* \* \* \* \*

She found Josh at the park, knowing that when he needed to brood, that was where he'd go. It's where he always ran off to, even when they were kids and his mom had left for one of her overnight or several night jaunts, leaving Josh alone with his alcoholic father.

If anyone needed love in his life, it was Josh. She sat next to him on the bench, not speaking, just staring at the trees and the playground, remembering their laughter, how easy it had been for the three of them to bond as children.

How tight that bond had always been. Until lately.

"Josh, I miss you."

He didn't turn to look at her. "He's going to hurt you, Sophie. You're chasing a fantasy. Logan Storm is never going to give you what you want and what you deserve."

"I wish it were you, Josh. I really wish I could —"

"It's not that," he interrupted. "Not anymore." Then he did turn to her, his eyes the same gentle brown that had made her feel his warmth. "Despite the fact that you and Sam seem to think I'm pining away over you, you're wrong. I've found someone, and I like her. A lot."

She smiled and reached for his hand. "I'm happy for you, Josh. That's all I ever wanted for you. For all of us. To love and be loved in return."

"I know that now. Hey, I'm a guy," he said with a sharp grin. "I like to think I'm irresistible to the ladies. When you didn't want me, I had...ego issues."

Giggling and feeling much more lighthearted than she had in awhile, she asked about his new girl.

"She's a professor at the college. New to town. She's from Nebraska. Such a sweet thing, too, Sophie. You and Sam would really like her."

The animation in his face, the excitement in his eyes, told her she'd gotten her friend back. She hugged him. "Bring her around the shop sometime soon, okay?"

"I will. Now, about you and Logan. You gotta listen to me, Sophie. I only want you to be happy. And pining away for a man who clearly doesn't love you is a lot like...well, a lot like what I was doing with you."

How could she explain that it wasn't the same at all? "I'll give it some thought, Josh." She kissed him on the cheek and headed toward the shop. She had a lot of thinking to do. About what Josh said as well as Sam.

And about what the next step was with Logan.

## Chapter Eleven

One week. One fucking entire week and Sophie hadn't called or tried to see him.

*She'd* seen plenty of *his* family, though. How the hell she got involved in helping with the wedding planning for Shannon and Aidan was beyond his ability to understand.

But, oh no. She wasn't just helping with the wedding, now she was *in* the wedding, too.

Just because one of Lissa's college friends had to beg off due to a difficult pregnancy, leaving an opening for a bridesmaid.

How fucking convenient. And Lissa just had to ask Sophie to take her friend's place. To which, he'd heard, Sophie had readily agreed.

Now he had to avoid his own family to keep from running into her.

Why couldn't she stick to her own life and her own friends?

He knew why. Because she was trying to ingrain herself into the Storm family and become part of them. And nothing he said to his family dissuaded them from accepting her.

"You look like a grumpy, old bear."

He looked up to see Kaitlyn leaning in the doorway. She strolled in and slipped into one of the chairs across from his desk.

"What do you want?"

Her lips curled into a smile. "And you sound about the same. What's wrong with you lately?"

As if she didn't know. "Are you here for a reason?"

"Not that I need one, but yes, as a matter of fact I am. I need you to sign these contracts."

She slipped a folder in front of him. He scanned the contracts and applied his signature, then slid them across the desk. "I have a secretary, you know. You could have just handed these to Delores."

"I could have, but then I wouldn't get to visit with you, since you've been in hiding the past few days. Care to talk about it?"

"With you? Hell, no."

"Want to hear about the wedding plans?"

Like he had a choice? "Not particularly. I know when the wedding is. I'll show up on time."

Rolling her eyes, she said, "There's a lot more to it than just showing up and you know it. The rehearsal dinner is tonight."

"Do I need to be there for that?"

"Logan, you're the best man. Not only do you have to show up for the rehearsal so you know what to do, you also have to give a toast at dinner tonight."

"I'm busy."

"You're being a dick. Now stop it and tell me why you're avoiding all of us."

He shook his head and looked down at his paperwork. "I'm busy."

Kaitlyn crossed her arms. "You're avoiding Sophie."

His gaze shot up at that remark. "No, I'm not."

Relentless, she said, "You like her. Really like her."

"No, I don't. I really don't. And I wish all of you would quit trying to throw us together."

"If you'd pull your head out of your ass, you could see she's in love with you. And the reason you're so grumpy is because you're in love with her."

There were times he regretted working in the family business. This was one of those times. “Kait, I’m not in love with Sophie. In fact, I’d be really happy if I never had to see her again. And the more that the rest of you parade her around in front of me, the worse it’s going to get, especially for her.”

“Aww, you’re trying to spare her from the heartbreak, aren’t you?”

“Yes, actually, I am. If you’d let me.”

Kaitlyn snorted. “Your ego is as huge as the planet, Logan. How can you let someone down that you’ve never even given yourself the chance to know? If you did, you’d see what the rest of us see.”

He leaned back in the chair. “Okay, tell me. What would I see?”

“Sophie has a beautiful heart. She’s kind, unselfish, sympathetic and genuinely honest about every aspect of her life. She accepts those around her, especially us, and you know what I mean by that. Plus, she has a keen insight into human nature and a magic that’s as strong, if not stronger, than ours.”

That was quite a testimonial, but he wasn’t going to bite. He already knew the great things about Sophie Breaux. Didn’t mean he had to follow formula and fall madly in love with her.

That, he refused to do. “Which is precisely why she’s not the right woman for me. You know how I feel about our powers, Kait. I don’t acknowledge them, I don’t use them, and I sure as hell don’t want to be with a woman who has her own.”

“I never knew you to be so afraid, Logan. You’re one of the strongest men I know, second only to Dad. The fact you’re turning tail and running because a woman interests you...well, frankly, it surprises me.”

He refused to allow Kaitlyn to bait him into doing something stupid. “Don’t you have work to do?”

"Everything's ready for the dinner." She shook her head and stood. "If you keep acting the way you've been, Logan, you're going to end up alone and miserable. Give Sophie a chance. I know you feel something for her."

Glaring up at her, he said, "Do you know how tired I am of people telling me how I feel?"

She stepped toward him and reached for his hands. "Who and what we are should be embraced and celebrated, Logan. We've been given a very special gift."

"More like a curse."

She hugged him, then stepped away. "There are times I feel very sorry for you, *mon frere*. I love you, and you know that. But you're passing up a chance at love, at happiness. Opportunities like that are rarer than you think. You are as deserving of love as anyone, Logan. Open your heart, before it's too late."

She turned and grabbed the folder off his desk, then left, shutting the door behind her.

Silence surrounded him, her words echoing over and over in his head.

Madness. He dismissed Kaitlyn's lecture. Kait loved the idea of love. She lived for romance and everything magical about it and the family's powers.

That wasn't him, and no one could make him be someone he didn't want to be.

Or feel something he didn't feel.

Returning to his paperwork, he tried to study the budget numbers, but finally gave up.

So his family didn't understand him. No surprise there, since he didn't understand himself.

If he was honest, he'd realize that he'd missed Sophie these past few days. Despite his objective of getting rid of her, the fact that she hadn't tried to see him...was damned irritating.

Several times over the past few days he'd had to stop himself from walking by her shop, or driving out to her place at night.

What the hell was wrong with him anyway? She was doing exactly what he hoped she'd do—staying away from him. And now that she had been, he wanted to see her.

Disgust filled him.

What the fuck was it going to take to satisfy him?

Would he ever be happy?

\* \* \* \* \*

Sophie took a deep breath and walked into the church, bowing and making the sign of the cross with the holy water before walking up the aisle toward the group assembled there for rehearsal.

She still couldn't quite believe she had been asked to participate in Lissa and Aidan's wedding. She'd felt so incredibly honored when Lissa had asked her to step in for her friend who was too ill to make the trip. Lissa had even apologized profusely for asking at the last minute, but Sophie had been thrilled.

She'd never been a bridesmaid before, and was really looking forward to it.

Although walking down the long church aisle right now while Logan glared at her wasn't exactly a great start to the evening.

She hoped she'd dressed appropriately. Lissa had told her they'd be having dinner at the hotel afterward, and it was a semi-fancy event.

Of course, Sophie had nothing semi-fancy in her wardrobe, but Shannon had come to her rescue and loaned her a formfitting cocktail dress. The halter-style dress fit her snugly, though. She couldn't even wear anything underneath it or else lines would show.



Nothing like wearing a dress, high heeled shoes and nothing else. At least she had a long coat on to ward off the chill in the air tonight.

So why was she trembling as she made her way down the aisle?

"Sophie!"

Lissa ran up and hugged her. Shannon followed suit, drawing her raincoat open and whistling. "Wow. Now that dress fits you, honey."

Flushing, she chewed on her bottom lip and glanced at Logan. His gaze raked over her, starting at her face and ending at her feet. She felt the heat from his eyes even though more than ten feet separated them.

Lissa made introductions. Of course she already knew most of the wedding party, since Shannon, Kaitlyn, Logan and Max were part of it. Her partner down the aisle was Brett McGregor, Aidan's best friend from college.

Brett was very attractive, with dark, brooding looks that made her think of Heathcliff from *Wuthering Heights*. She sensed a tortuous soul within him, and felt guilty for her magic invading his emotions.

Sometimes what she tuned into couldn't be helped.

"Nice to meet you, Brett," she said, wondering what it was about him that made him hurt so deeply inside. He masked it well, though, offering her a bright smile that didn't quite reach his whiskey-colored eyes.

"Great to meet you too, Sophie. Aidan didn't tell me I'd be partnered with such a knockout."

Determined not to spend the entire night blushing, she laughed. "Now why do I have the feeling you say that to all the girls?"

"Because he does," Aidan said, peering over Brett's shoulder. "Or at least he did in college."

Brett arched a brow and sniffed, feigning shock. "Have no idea what you mean. But now that you mention it, I haven't hugged your sisters yet."

She grinned as he hugged Shannon and shook hands with Max. Her eyes widened when his hug for Kaitlyn was much more subdued. Kaitlyn cocked her head to the side and studied Brett as he walked away, her brows knit in a tight frown.

Sophie wondered if Kaitlyn sensed the same things within Brett that she had. Kaitlyn seemed very astute and in touch with people's emotions. In that, they were kindred spirits.

But it wasn't her place to pry. She didn't even know Brett McGregor, and she'd make sure to keep her instincts closed where he was concerned. Whatever it was he bore within himself, it wasn't something he wanted people to know about.

She also met two of Lissa's cousins, Sean and Loretta, also part of the wedding party.

"Where are your parents?" she asked Lissa.

"Aidan's mom and dad are picking them up at the hotel. They flew in just this morning."

"How long are they staying?"

Lissa rolled her eyes. "I'm actually surprised they even came, being the busy professional couple they are. They're just going to be here until right after the wedding. Mom has to finish her dress fitting and such, so that's why we're having the rehearsal a couple days before the wedding instead of the night before. So many details and Dad just couldn't get away from the firm soon enough to get them out here too many days before."

"And how are you doing?" she asked Lissa.

"Perversely calm, actually," she said, her gaze flitting to Aidan. "Everything is as it should be."

Sophie felt that, too. "You're right. It's all going to be fine."

Lissa hugged her. "I can't thank you enough for stepping in for Susie. She felt awful about having to drop out, but she's having a really tough time with morning sickness and just didn't think she could handle it."

"It's no problem, as I've told you a hundred times. I'm just honored you thought to ask me."

"Well, you're practically family already, Sophie."

If only that were true. Judging from the daggers shooting from Logan's eyes, she'd never be officially family. She'd done her best to keep her distance from him the past week, despite the intense desire to see him.

Hoping that he'd see the light and come to her, she'd been disappointed when he hadn't called or come by the shop. Her nights had been fitful at best, and she hadn't slept well.

The visions had returned, and were growing stronger. She hadn't shared that with anyone, especially Angelina. The last thing Angelina needed to worry about was some impending disaster right before her son's wedding.

Speaking of Angelina, she strolled through the doors of the church, laughing gaily with a lovely woman about the same age. Introductions were made and Sophie met Lissa's parents.

She'd been there thirty minutes and had spoken to everyone...except Logan, who avoided her like she had some communicable disease. When she moved over to one side of the church, he went to the opposite side.

Really, this was getting ridiculous.

Father John, the parish priest, called everyone to attention and began to give instructions.

"Come on, *belle femme*, let's dazzle them together up the aisle."

Sophie turned and smiled at Brett, then linked her arm in his and walked down to the foyer. Logan, as best man, would be paired with Shannon, the maid of honor. She felt his eyes on her back as they made their way to the church entrance.

Father John explained who would walk first and when, and they began to practice as the organist played music. The men would walk down the aisle with the women, except for Lissa, of course, who would be accompanied down the aisle by her father, while Aidan waited at the altar.

The music began and the parents went down first. Lissa's cousins followed, then Max and Kaitlyn.

Sophie met Brett at the door. He lifted her hand and kissed it, then graced her with a dazzling smile. "Ready, beautiful?"

A quick glance at Logan showed him to be less than pleased with Brett's flirting.

Good. She winked at Brett. "I'm all yours."

They walked slowly down the aisle, then parted as they reached the entrance to the altar. Sophie turned and watched Logan and Shannon walk together.

His jaw was clenched tight and she felt the anger simmering underneath.

But was he angry at her? And why? Because Brett had flirted with her?

Maybe there was hope after all.

Once rehearsal was over, they piled into their cars and headed over to the hotel for dinner.

A private ballroom had been set aside for dinner. She was assigned to sit in between Brett and Max, as they were seated according to their pairings for the wedding. Logan ended up sitting directly across from her at the long table.

Brett held out her chair and she scooted in, trying for a smile in Logan's direction.

Nothing. No smile, barely a nod to acknowledge her.

Yes, he was definitely pissed off.

Well, let him be. She'd done nothing wrong. She'd stayed away from him and he hadn't made a move to see her, which meant he wasn't interested.

And she wasn't the kind to play games to make him jealous, so she was pleasant throughout dinner with both Brett and Max.

"Do you live in New Orleans, Sophie?" Brett asked, refilling her wineglass.

"Yes. I live right outside the city, actually. How about you?"

"Yeah, I live in New Orleans. So, tell me, what do you do for a living?"

She heard Logan's snort and refused to look over at him. "I own a shop in the Quarter. I tell fortunes and provide various items to those who practice magic."

Brett's brows lifted. "No kidding? That sounds great. So, are you magically inclined?"

"You could say so. Do you believe in magic?"

His eyes darkened. "I used to. I don't anymore."

Again, there was the pain she'd sensed within him earlier.

"That's because there's no such thing as magic," Logan added.

Shannon elbowed him in the ribs and Kaitlyn coughed. Sophie didn't respond at all. He was trying to bait her into an argument, and there was no way she'd let herself fall for it.

Fortunately, Galen stood and tapped his water glass with his spoon, gathering everyone's attention.

"To my children, Aidan and Melissa. I wish you happiness, health, and please give me grandchildren before I die."

They all broke out into laughter. Then Logan stood and raised his glass to the couple.

"It is said that love is all sustaining, in both good times and in bad. I know that we've all seen that with the love our parents have for each other. The unconditional

love they gave to all of us and have taught us to share with others. May your home be filled with never-ending love, and may the circle of your hearts never be broken.”

Sophie was in awe of his words and near tears from the sincerity in his voice. What he’d said felt to her as if he’d spoken from his heart.

Was he acting, or did he truly believe in the power of love? He certainly hadn’t yet demonstrated a profound belief in love.

At least not with her.

Maybe that was the problem. Maybe she was the problem. Was she beating her head against an icy, impenetrable wall?

“You’re second-guessing yourself again,” Angelina whispered when she hugged her.

“Probably. I just don’t know, Angelina. He’s so...angry.”

She shook her head. “A defense mechanism. He’s trying to convince himself that he doesn’t need you, and to do that he has to find some kind of fault with you. Be patient.”

“I’ll try.”

“Try harder. Go talk to him. You look beautiful tonight.”

She grinned. “Thank you. Okay, I’ll give it a shot.”

Logan didn’t see her approach as he listened to Max and Brett engaged in conversation.

She stopped behind him, not sure how to begin or what she’d even say to him.

This was a really bad idea, and she felt stupid.

But then Max and Brett moved away and he turned to her, arching a brow.

“Hey,” she said, then mentally kicked herself. *Brilliant opening line, Sophie.*

“Hey. You look...nice.”

“Thanks. So do you.”

Okay, now they were reduced to polite pleasantries. She had to think of something, and fast.

"I'm surprised you aren't hanging out with Brett. You two seemed to hit it off tonight."

She tilted her head, unsure of what her next move should be. She decided to go with honesty. "Would it matter to you if I did?"

"Do you want to?"

"I asked you first. Would it matter if I did?"

He opened his mouth to speak, then shut it quickly. Finally, he said, "I don't know. Maybe. Brett's not for you, anyway."

"You don't get to decide who's for me and who isn't."

"Trust me, Sophie. He isn't ready for a woman in his life."

"Why not?"

"I can't say. Just trust me. Brett isn't the right man for you."

"Then who is, Logan? Or do you just want me away from everyone you know?"

"Frankly I don't care who you go out with. Just leave Brett alone."

Really, the man was insufferable. "I'm not stalking Brett. I only met him tonight and I was being friendly. Which doesn't mean I want to sleep with him." She stuck her finger in his chest, growing more and more frustrated by her inability to reach him. "But, if I so chose to sleep with him or any other man, it's none of your business."

"Bullshit. I'll make it my business."

Appalled that he'd raised his voice, she quickly glanced around wondering if anyone had heard.

No one had, because they were alone.

Not good. And this was going nowhere fast. She grabbed her purse and coat and headed for the door.

"We're not finished," he said, walking after her.

"Oh yes we are. I'm not going to stay and listen to you insult me, ignore me, then tell me you have a say-so in what men I have in my life."

"I just told you to stay away from Brett."

She stopped and glared at him. "Something you have no right to do."

"I don't want to see any of my friends hurt."

"Do you really think so little of me? Oh, what's the point? You go live your life, Logan, and I'll go live mine. Just stay the hell away from me."

She'd never been so insulted, or so angry. Logan really thought she could do harm to one of his friends. And the whole topic was ridiculous anyway, since she had no attraction or interest in Brett, anyway.

Logan went after her and grabbed her arm, then pulled her toward the elevators. She tugged away from him, but he reached for her again, determination evident in the steely strength of his hold on her upper arm.

Anxious to avoid a scene, she allowed herself to be led along, but whispered her displeasure. "What do you think you're doing?"

"There are a few things I want to get straight with you before you leave tonight."



## **Chapter Twelve**

Logan slipped a key into one of the private elevators and pulled her inside, pressing the button for the penthouse suite.

"I'd really just like to leave now."

"No."

She tapped her foot and crossed her arms, waiting silently while the elevator made it to the penthouse floor. He got out, she didn't.

"Get out, Sophie."

"No. I'm going home." She pressed the button for the lobby, but he stepped back inside and stopped the door from closing. Grabbing her hand, he dragged her off the elevator, his fingers like a steel band around her wrist as he led her inside his suite.

She stood just inside the door as he flipped on the light, then inhaled sharply as she surveyed his apartment.

Wow.

It was huge, and opulent. Fully furnished with antiques of dark cherry wood and rich carpeting like a blanket under her feet.

She was way out of her league here. She couldn't even make herself step out of the foyer and into the living room.

"Quit standing there like you've never seen a penthouse before. It's just a place where I stay because it's in the hotel."

He stepped to the bar and fixed them both a drink, handing one to her as he took a long swallow of his.

Forcing her feet to move, she took the drink from his hand and sipped the brandy, letting it weave a trail of fire into her belly.

"Why am I here?" she asked, desperately trying to understand what he was doing.

He removed his tie and shrugged out of his jacket, tossing them both onto the couch as they stepped into the sunken living room.

She sat on a well-cushioned sofa. Logan positioned himself next to her. Close. So close, in fact, she could smell him, her senses recalling the feel of his skin as he moved against her, the taste of sweat beading on his lip as he took her mouth during a hot, passionate coupling. Her heart began to pound like a driving ocean wave crashing against the shore.

"I just think we need to...finalize things between us. Make sure there's no misunderstanding."

"I agree." She shifted and crossed her leg, then noticed Logan frowning as he watched the movement.

Quickly looking into her eyes, he said, "I want to clear the air between us. I think there are a lot of things that haven't been said, that need to. Especially by me."

"Okay, I'm listening." She inhaled deeply and braced herself, knowing that whatever was coming wasn't going to be pleasant.

Logan's gaze flitted to her breasts, where the deep vee of the halter revealed her cleavage.

This time, his gaze left her breasts slowly, lingered on her neck before meeting her eyes. And this time, his eyes had gone a dark, stormy blue.

In turn, her body began to heat from the inside out. She felt the connection, his growing arousal, and her desire flared to life.

He may not want to be with her, but he *did* want her. That much he couldn't lie to her about. Not when it was so obvious. His erection was outlined clearly against his pants, and she couldn't help the slight smile that curled her lips.

There was nothing more arousing to a woman than a man who clearly desired her. She had no power to make him love her, but she wielded a considerable amount of power as it related to sex.

It wasn't everything she wanted, but it was a start. A very good start.

"Okay, granted, we have chemistry," he said, draining the brandy from his glass. "But..."

She waited, giving him her complete attention. He swallowed, his Adam's apple jutting out as he struggled with the function.

"But, as I was saying..."

"Yes?" She inched closer, closed her eyes, and inhaled his scent. It flowed over her like a warm summer shower. Cool, refreshing, and utterly intoxicating.

"Stop that, Sophie."

Quickly opening her eyes, she asked, "Stop what?"

"Stop doing...that."

"That what?" She'd moved close enough now that their legs brushed. The bottom of her skirt had risen to her thighs. She made no move to adjust it.

He noticed, and swallowed again. Hard.

"Stop...stop...oh, hell." He gathered her in his arms, his movements jerky and rough and filled with desperate passion. A passion he poured into her mouth when his lips ground over hers.

She whimpered and leaned into him, her breasts crushed against his chest, her raging heartbeat keeping time with his.

Sophie moved her arms up over his biceps, feeling the tension, the hesitation, that held him removed from her.

But why? Was he afraid of letting go?

"Don't...hold...back," she murmured against his lips, repositioning herself so that she straddled him.

His eyes had turned dark, icy, filled with a tempestuous storm of emotions as he looked his fill of her. He gripped her hips and thrust upward, driving his erection against her wet pussy.

He shoved the dress over her thighs, over her hips, exposing her naked sex.

"God, I love the way you smell when you're turned on," he said, untying the halter and pulling the dress down. He let his eyes drink in her breasts before taking one hard nipple into his mouth. He swirled his tongue over the inflamed peak, licking at her furiously until she was moaning and tangling her fingers in his hair to draw him closer.

And yet, she still sensed a tension about him.

Her gaze met his. "Logan, give it all to me. I can take it. I need it. Please."

"Anything?" he asked, the heat and promise in his husky voice nearly making her insane.

"Yes. Anything."

With a low growl he lifted her and stood. She wrapped her legs around him and held on tight, breathing him in as he strolled down a long hallway and kicked open a door.

The light came on automatically, soft and muted from the wall sconces.

The bedroom was decorated in golden creamy colors, the bed huge and inviting.

But he didn't deposit her on the bed. Instead, he went into the bathroom and sat her on the expansive marble counter, then flipped on a light.

The room was bathed in mirrors, and she saw herself in various angles.

Logan cast her a hot grin. "I want to watch my cock slide in and out of your pussy. I want everything, Sophie. Are you ready?"

She nodded, her throat gone dry with the thought of what "everything" would encompass. Whatever it was, she'd gladly give it to him.

He stripped the dress from her body, then quickly removed his suit. When he pulled her off the counter, her feet slid into soft, warm carpeting.

Logan took her into his arms and kissed her deeply, his hands roaming over her back. He grabbed her buttocks and drew her against his erection, rubbing his cock against her throbbing clit.

“Logan, please.”

“Not yet,” he said gruffly. “Watch.”

Dropping to his knees, he spread her legs, reaching between them to stroke her slit. Juices poured from her, wetting his questing fingers. He slipped them into his mouth and tasted her, then looked up and smiled.

“Watch me eat you, Sophie.”

She glanced at the mirrors, her gaze transfixed as his tongue snaked out and licked her bare sex. When he took her clit in his mouth, she couldn’t hold back the whimper of need that filled her.

Being able to see what he was doing took her arousal even higher. Her womb clenched with the need to feel him inside her, to sail over the edge of reason with him.

She stroked his hair, caressing it softly, gently, as his tongue caressed her clit. Resting her feet on his shoulders, she gave him complete access to the most intimate part of her, spreading her legs wide and lifting her hips to feed her pussy to him.

Then she couldn’t think any longer, could only watch in rapture as he thrust his tongue inside her slit and lapped up her juices. When she thought she couldn’t take any more, he moved to her clit, enclosing his lips around it and sucking the nub into his mouth, at the same time slipping two fingers into her cunt.

“Oh, God, Logan. Oh, God.” The first tremors of orgasm built. He thrust his fingers faster and deeper. Her pussy grabbed and held, squeezing them as she fell into oblivion.

She cried out her pleasure and ground her sex against his mouth, offering him her release, which he lapped up greedily.

Before the spasms had completely settled, he flipped her around to face the mirror of the bathroom counter.

Bending forward, she braced her palms on the cool marble, still feeling the aftereffects of her climax pulsing through her.

"Watch," he whispered, then settled between her outstretched legs and plunged his hard cock inside her.

She whimpered, tensed, cried out, then came again at his first thrust.

Snow began to fall. Lightly at first, then harder, cool wind swirling around them as the bathroom became a wintry spectacle of snow, ice and sleet.

Yet she felt no cold, only a blissful relief from the heat surrounding her.

She gasped as Logan filled her, the walls of her cunt clamping down around his shaft.

If she looked to the mirrored side of the wall, she could watch his long cock sliding in and out of her. When he withdrew, his shaft was covered with her slick juices, making it easier to slip back inside, burying himself to the hilt.

Her belly clenched in a spasm of painfully sweet need, the visuals intensifying her pleasure. To be able to see what she felt was an amazing experience. She'd never watched herself get fucked before. It was the most erotic thing she'd ever seen.

Logan reached for her breasts, pinching her nipples, drawing out need that racked her body with spasms so powerful they made her legs quiver.

Who was that woman in the mirror? Her face was flushed, her hair mussed. Snowflakes lay like sparkling glitter in her hair and on her body. It was like being fucked outside.

His face was tight, drawn with intense passion and heat as he drove harder each time. He moved one hand over her hips and lower, teasing between her legs.

His cock filled her, and yet he still slid two fingers inside, pistoning them alongside his shaft, something she'd never felt before.

It felt like two men were fucking her at the same time. She'd never been so filled before, never experienced the heady sensation of having a man's fingers tunnel inside next to his shaft, completely stretching her until she thought she would scream from the exquisite sensations. Her cunt squeezed, her vaginal walls clamping down around his cock and his fingers, readying for a burst of orgasm.

Just as she was primed to fly over the edge, he withdrew his fingers and moistened her anus with her fluids. She glanced at his face, his expression concentrated, determined. He met her gaze and one side of his mouth curled in a wicked grin.

His fingers poised at the entrance to her anus, he asked, "You want this?"

Without hesitation she answered. "Yes."

Logan gently probed the rosette, pushing one finger inside her. She was tight, yet well lubricated with her own juices as he worked his finger in and out, stretching her, readying her. Not once did he stop the thrusting movements of his cock.

The sensation was indescribable as he buried his finger to the hilt in her ass while powering his cock against her in forceful thrusts.

She panted, gripped the sink edge and pushed back against his finger, rewarded with his guttural groan of pleasure.

"Yes, Sophie, I think you like this. Have you ever been fucked in the ass before?"

"No."

"You like my finger in there?"

"Yes," she whimpered, showing him how much she liked it by pushing her ass against his probing finger.

"How about two?"

He withdrew from her anus and reached inside a nearby drawer, fumbling around the condoms until he found the rarely used bottle of lubricant. He spread it on two of his fingers and around her anus, then slipped gently inside her again.

She shrieked and he drove his cock deep. Her legs trembled and she could barely stand.

Still she watched, unable to tear her gaze away from the sight of his cock plunging in and out of her pussy and his fingers disappearing inside her ass.

Snow began to fill the room, creating mini-mountains and slopes along the wall and around them. Thankful for the blissful relief from the burning pleasure scorching her, she scooped a handful and spread it over her breasts, shivering when her nipples puckered.

Logan laughed and did the same, covering his cock with a handful of the white cooling flakes. When he reentered her cunt, she nearly died from the sensations of his cold shaft inside her steaming pussy. She could imagine steam pouring from her as the icicle melted inside her volcano.

Lord, the man made her hotter than she'd ever thought possible.

Now she was filled completely. He pulled his fingers back then thrust again, pushing further and further until he'd slid past the tight barrier, and began to fuck her ass in earnest, rearing back with both his cock and his fingers and driving harder and harder each time.

"Touch yourself for me, Sophie. Let me feel you come."

She reached between her legs and found her clit, circling the bud, swirling her fingers around the tortured button as Logan continued to pummel her with his thrusts.

The tightening began low and intense, then spiraled out of control.

"I'm coming, Logan," she warned, sparks shooting off in her womb as the exquisite sensation burst inside her, flooding his cock and squeezing his fingers as contraction after contraction sent her into a climaxing frenzy.

Tears filled her eyes at the amazing sensations. Logan stopped for a moment, then groaned and spilled shot after shot of hot come into her cunt.



Sophie's legs were shaking, the enormity of what Logan had made her feel washing over her. He withdrew and pulled her into the shower with him, turning on the multiple spraying heads and soaking them both.

He soaped himself and then her, pulling her against his chest and kissing her with heat, with passion, with emotion that brought the tears anew. The slippery soap slickened their bodies until they were gliding against each other, his cock hard against her throbbing sex.

The water turned cold, then icy, as if they bathed in a mountain stream. His hands were icy magic over her breasts, teasing her nipples into tight peaks just begging for his mouth.

Whatever control Logan thought he had over his powers had completely disappeared. Winter surrounded them, and Sophie reveled in it.

Shock filled her as her own desires reignited, and he pushed her against the cool tile wall, lifted one of her legs over his hip, then slipped his cock inside her.

This time he fucked her slowly, his gaze never leaving her face. His eyes grew darker and darker with each climb up the hill of desire.

"Everything, Sophie," he said, dipping down for a kiss, drinking her cries as she climaxed around him, squeezing another orgasm from him as the spasms continued long past the point of reason.

When it was over, he turned off the shower, grabbed one of the oversized bath towels and dried her body and her hair.

The snow was gone, the room enveloped in steamy warmth.

He grabbed a brush and drew it through her wet tendrils, the movements of his hands so gentle over her hair that she relaxed completely. She yawned, finally completely sated.

They stepped toward the bed holding hands, just the way a couple in love would do. Logan pulled the satin coverlet down and slipped underneath the sheets, drawing

Sophie against his chest. She wrapped her leg over his hips and within seconds, she was drifting off, more contented than she'd ever been in her life.

She loved him. No matter what happened after tonight, she admitted that she'd completely given her heart to Logan. Nothing would ever change that.

## Chapter Thirteen

Sophie weaved her way down the long corridor. A ghostly mist clouded her vision, forcing her to hold on to the wall to feel her way.

She didn't even know where she was going, only that she had to go this way.

*Hurry, Sophie.*

She heard the words, but didn't know who spoke them. But she knew them as truth.

There wasn't much time.

She made a right turn, then a left. The doors were all white, and the mist prevented her from reading room numbers or even what floor she was on.

Yet she knew where she was going, and followed that instinct.

Her feet were cold. When she looked down, she realized she was only wearing Logan's T-shirt. A hysterical giggle escaped her lips.

What if someone came out of their room and found her like this?

What time was it, anyway?

The pull was stronger now, drawing her toward the end of the hall.

*Not much time left, Sophie. Not much time. Hurry.*

Faster, that was it. Why wouldn't her legs move faster? She had to get there before it was too late. She had to.

Logan was counting on her. His family was in danger, and this was the moment she'd dreamed of for so long.

*Logan, why aren't you here with me?* Rubbing her temples, she pushed past the throbbing pain.

Where was Logan?

And how the hell did she get in this hallway?

She swiped at the mist with her hands, as if the very act could clear her vision.

But it didn't.

The floor was cold. Ice cold. Not carpeted. Not comfortable.

And she smelled something. Something that burned her nostrils.

Bleach, maybe?

Her foot connected with something solid, bruising her toe.

"Shit!" Limping along, she followed the trail, refusing to acknowledge the pain in her toe.

Soon, it grew numb, although for some reason she couldn't walk very well.

*Straight forward. That's it, you're almost there.*

*Look down, Sophie. Look down.*

She did, but all she could see were the clouds in front of her. Everywhere around her.

Dammit, she needed a fan. Something to blow the white mist away so she could find it.

It.

What was it?

*Stop! Now look to your right!*

There it was! With a giddy excitement she crouched down and reached for the white box.

*No, don't touch it!*

Quickly snatching her hands back, she railed in frustration, looking around as if she actually expected someone to be there.

"What the hell am I supposed to do? I have to touch it. I have to stop it."

But nothing was said in response.

Screw it. She was going to find out what it was.

"Stop what?"

Her heart slammed against her chest as the mist cleared and she found herself looking into Logan's confused face.

"Sophie. What the fuck are you doing down here?"

"Huh?" Down where? Where was she? Think, Sophie, think. "I...I don't under...Logan! The box!"

He tilted his head. "Sophie, you were dreaming. Sleepwalking or something. Come on, let's go back upstairs.

His voice was a soothing lifeline, offering her reality and something solid, instead of the dream...

The dream!

"Logan, we have to stop it!"

He gripped her by the arms and hauled her into a standing position. "What the fuck are you talking about? Stop what?"

She tried to pull away, to get to the box. Finally, she heard it. "Dammit, let me go! It's ticking!"

"It's what? What do you mean it's ticking?"

She tried to reach it, but he got to it before she did.

It wasn't even enclosed, just sitting in a plain white box.

And ticking.

"Holy shit. It's a bomb of some kind."

From the hushed tone of his voice, she knew he was right. "Let me see it."

"Fuck no, get back."

She pulled away from him and dropped to the ground. "Don't pull me away! I can stop this!"

"Sophie. Goddammit, we have to get out of here. Christ, my parents, my family is staying here. We have to evacuate the hotel! Now!"

He tried to drag her away. He didn't understand that she knew. She could stop it.

Summoning forth her magic, she pushed him away, putting up an invisible wall so he couldn't try to stop her.

"Sophie! Shit, Sophie we have to get out of here now!"

"No! Don't move!" Without even looking at him, she froze him to the spot.

Thirty seconds. She read the numbers on the clock attached to the bomb.

What was she doing? Logan was right. She didn't know a damn thing about bombs. Her hands began to tremble and nausea rolled within her stomach, threatening to erupt.

*Not now. Stay calm. Use your psychic strength.*

She heard the voice and nodded, reaching for the wire she knew would be there.

The red one. She had to pull the red wire.

"Sophie! Stop that! Don't touch it, for Christ sake!"

She couldn't listen to him. Closing her eyes and muttering a quick prayer to all that was holy, she yanked the red wire with fifteen seconds to spare.

The clock stopped ticking and she collapsed to the ground, sweat pouring from her body as she realized how close they had come to dying.

All of them.

"It's okay," she managed through shaky breaths as the wall dissolved and Logan dropped to his feet beside her.

She had no strength left. "It's okay, Logan. I stopped it in time."

But she'd almost been too late. "I'm so sorry, Logan. I'm so, so sorry." She'd almost been too damn late to save them.

Blissful darkness enveloped her.

\* \* \* \* \*

Logan paced the confines of the bedroom, his mother's assurances that Sophie was all right unable to still the anger, the outright fear at what might have happened.

He still didn't understand it, least of all what Sophie had been doing downstairs in the laundry room in the middle of the night. Crouched over a bomb.

The doctor had examined her, pronounced her just fine, but suffering from shock. He'd assured Logan that Sophie would wake soon.

His mother had sat with them for an hour, until he finally convinced her to go back to bed. The rest of the family followed suit.

Fortunately, he'd managed to keep the situation contained. The bomb squad closed the laundry room and removed the box.

He'd answered every question he could for the police, but he had no answers. Tomorrow, the staff would have to be interviewed. He'd given the list of every hotel employee and guest to the police. No one was allowed to enter or leave the hotel until everyone had been interrogated.

Shit. Great PR for the hotel. A bomb nearly exploded. He needed to get Shannon and Max on public relations as quickly as possible. Another mental note to add to the hundreds already fighting for space in his weary brain.

But he still didn't know how a bomb had gotten into his laundry room.

Or who had put it there.

Or how Sophie had managed to find it.

He stared down at her, sleeping like a beautiful angel, her raven hair strewn across her pillow, her lips together in a sleeping pout that he found sexy as hell.

She looked so innocent.

Was she? Or was she as guilty as she'd looked when he'd discovered her downstairs?

Confusion filled him. That, and fear that maybe he didn't want to know the answers she held inside.

She'd tried to stop it, he reminded himself. No matter what, she'd tried to stop it.

Hell, she'd done more than try. She'd done it. She'd known which wire to pull, and she sure as hell was no bomb expert.

Or was she? For all he knew, she was a bomb expert. Or maybe the whole thing had been faked. Maybe the only reason she'd tried to stop it was because he'd caught her in the act of setting the bomb.

Christ, what the fuck did he really know about her?

Not nearly enough. Shit. Not nearly enough.

"Talk to me, Sophie," he whispered, collapsing into a chair next to the bed. "I need some answers. I need the truth."

He needed sleep. And a clear head.

"Logan?"

Sophie's sleepy voice registered and he opened his eyes, wincing at the crick in his neck.

How long had he been asleep?

He blinked, frowning at the full sunlight streaming into the room.

"Hey, you awake in there?"

The sound of his mother's voice registered, too.

She smiled as she entered, then her face beamed as she looked at Sophie.

"You're awake, *ma belle*! *Bonjour*! We were all so worried about you."

Sophie reached for her forehead. "I get a bit forgetful after...after..."

"A vision?" his mother finished for her.



"Yes. Sorry." She sat up and stretched, her breasts outlined against his T-shirt. Logan tried not to notice.

"Give me a minute and it'll come back to me."

"Nonsense. You have plenty of time." His mother turned to him. "I've ordered coffee and croissants. They're out in the kitchen."

"Thanks, Mom," Logan said, wondering if Angelina had the same suspicions as he had.

His mother sat on the bed. "You saved my family, this hotel, and everyone here. Thank you."

Sophie's eyes widened. "The bomb. Oh my God, the bomb! Is it disabled?"

"Yes, it is. You did it."

"I did?"

"Yes, *cher*. You did it."

Tears streamed down Sophie's cheeks and she threw her arms around his mother. Then they both cried tears of joy.

Logan didn't feel joy, though.

He still had questions. Questions he couldn't believe no one had thought to ask.

"How did you know the bomb was in the laundry room, Sophie?"

She stilled, and both she and his mother turned to gape at him.

"What?"

"You heard me. How did you know?"

"Logan, I've told you about the visions."

"Uh-huh. Which doesn't have a damn thing to do with the fact that not only did you slip out of my bed in the middle of night, but I followed you to the laundry room and watched you disable the bomb. What, did you have second thoughts about blowing up the hotel?"

His mother's eyes turned a stormy black. "Logan Storm! How dare you!"

"Oh come on, Mother," he said, refusing to believe Sophie's wide-eyed look of shock. "Didn't anybody wonder how she knew the bomb's location, or how she knew that pulling the red wire would disable the timer? Or am I the only one who made that connection?"

"Logan, I had nothing to do with that bomb. I wasn't even awake when I went downstairs. At least, not in the way you think. My visions, my magic, told me where it was, led me to it, and showed me how to disable it."

He crossed his arms, more convinced than ever that he was right. "Right. How convenient. Your magic."

"Logan, this is outrageous!" his mother objected. "How dare you treat Sophie this way! She saved our lives!"

"Yeah, she did, and wasn't that convenient? Here she is now, the family hero, ingratiating herself even further with the entire Storm clan. You played it perfectly, didn't you?"

Sophie didn't respond, just stared at him, open-mouthed, as if she couldn't believe what he'd said.

"My family might be blind to your lies, Sophie. But I'm not. In fact, I'm sure the police would like to know what a little bomb-maker you really are."

"Bomb-maker?"

"That's right. You made the bomb. You were going to blow up the hotel, or at least made sure I'd find you just as you disabled it. Yeah, your dramatic show was pretty good. I'll give you that much. But I think you orchestrated this whole thing, from start to finish."

"That's enough, Logan," his mother warned, then turned to Sophie. "Please do not think for a moment that any of us believe what he says."

"It's okay, Angelina," Sophie said, her voice so soft he barely heard her. "I think I know exactly what Logan means."

She slipped off the bed and reached for the black dress. "If you'll excuse me, I'd really like to go home now. Angelina, would you mind calling me a taxi?"

"Of course, *cher*." His mother glared at him, and stormed from the room muttering about how she didn't blame Sophie for not wanting to spend another moment in Logan's apartment.

He stood there, unable to believe his mother was simply going to let her walk.

When she came out of his bathroom, she smoothed the dress and stopped in front of him. "I'll be at my shop if the police are looking to talk to me."

She turned away and left, shutting the door quietly behind her.

His mother hadn't left, though. In fact, his father had entered the apartment and was engaged in quiet conversation with her. Galen looked up and glared angrily at Logan.

"Are you daft, boy? What possessed you to accuse the little colleen of trying to harm us?"

Even his father had fallen for her lies. "The evidence is clear."

"Evidence. Bah! She saved your ass, son. Hell, she saved us all."

"Your father is right, Logan," Angelina said, anger clear in the dark fury of her eyes. "I understand your reluctance to let anyone into your heart. God knows I've tried my best to help you understand and embrace your magic. If you were open enough to the gift you have, you'd know already that Sophie was innocent. We all know it, because we feel it. You keep yourself closed off and remote from us as if we're all lepers and you're afraid you'll be infected. Well, no more, Logan. I'm ashamed to call you my son."

Tears pooling in her eyes, Angelina hurried from the room.

His father stepped toward him and shook his head. "And I'm ashamed to call you a Storm. Grow up, son."

His father didn't leave as quietly. The sound of the door slamming echoed down the empty hallway.

Shit! How had he become the bad guy here?

And he still hadn't gotten any goddamn answers. She'd left fast enough, no doubt because she hadn't developed her lies yet.

Well, he'd see her, and demand the answers he sought.

Because he wasn't wrong here. He wasn't, no matter what his parents said.

## **Chapter Fourteen**

"Good lord, Sophie, you could have been killed!"

"No shit, honey. What the hell were you thinking going after that bomb?"

Sophie looked to both Sam and Josh and shrugged. "I did what I had to do."

She hadn't told them about Logan, about his accusations that she had planted the bomb.

It just hurt too much to even think about it, and yet his angry words resounded over and over in her mind. Swiping away the tears, she tried for a smile.

"Honey, what's wrong?" Sam asked, wiping a tear away with her thumb.

What would she do without her two best friends?

"I...I can't talk about it."

"Come on, Soph," Josh urged, wrapping his arm around her shoulder. "You can lean on us. That's what we're here for."

The tears flowed freely as she allowed herself to feel the miserable sensations living within her. "Logan," she managed. "He thought I did it."

"What?" Sam said, her eyes widening. "That's insane!"

"Why in the hell would he think that?" Josh asked, his words biting, anger evident and growing. "I told you he was an asinine prick."

"Well he did find me in the room with the bomb. And I knew how to disconnect the timer. In some ways I can understand that."

"But if he loved you, if he knew you like we do, he'd know there's no way you could do something like this," Sam said.

They were right. He should have known. But he didn't believe her, didn't believe in her.

Didn't love her.

Both Sam and Josh accepted what she'd done without asking for explanation. Because they knew her. More importantly, they trusted her.

She'd never had Logan's trust. And she never would. From the first time he'd met her, he thought she was trying to deceive him and his family, and he'd go on thinking that no matter what she said or did.

"I need to go home." She wanted a shower, a change of clothes and needed to spend a few hours letting out the pain she'd been holding inside since she left the hotel.

She stood, but Josh wouldn't let her go. "I'll take you home. Sam, can you watch over the shop today?"

"Of course." Sam hugged her and said, "Go, get some rest. We'll talk later."

She nodded and let Josh lead her out to his car. The drive home was quiet, and fortunately Josh didn't press for details of her conversation with Logan. He followed her inside and said he'd make some tea while she took a shower.

It felt good to wash away the day before, at least physically. Mentally and emotionally...that was going to take some time and effort. Donning a pair of sweats and a loose shirt, she slipped through the beads and curled up on the sofa. Josh had a hot cup of herbal tea ready and sat down next to her.

She sipped the tea, knowing he was expecting her to talk about Logan. But she couldn't. Talking meant thinking about it, and his accusations were still prominent in her mind. What she needed was to push them away, not talk about them so they'd hover nearby.

Josh smoothed the wet tendrils of her hair and pulled her closer. Admittedly, it felt good to be comforted, to know that she had at least two people in her life who truly believed in her.

"I warned you about him," he said, kissing the top of her head.

She let out a small laugh. "That you did."

"I could kill that sonofabitch for hurting you like this, Soph."

Holding the tears at bay, she looked up at him. "I appreciate that, Josh. But I knew what I was getting into with Logan. He was honest with me, told me he didn't trust me, didn't care for me. Yet I stupidly believed I could change his feelings."

"Just because you knew where the bomb was, and how to cut the red wire doesn't mean you planted it there. God, doesn't he know about your magic?"

"I guess not. He just assumed..." Wait. Something was wrong here. Sophie stilled, her mind trying to process what Josh had just said.

No, she was wrong. She must have mentioned the red wire somewhere in her explanations, right? Forcing herself to remember the short conversation she'd had with both Josh and Sam at the shop, it occurred to her she'd never really given details to either of them, and it was way too soon for any police or news reports to be out.

She gently pushed away from Josh's chest and sat up, not wanting to ask the question, not wanting the suspicions that had crept into her mind. "Josh, how did you know about the red wire on the bomb?"

He frowned. "Huh?"

"The red wire. You said that I had known to cut the red wire."

"Right. So?"

"I didn't tell anyone about the wire, or the color. So how could you know?"

He smiled. "Honey, you must have told us. Otherwise, how could I have known?"

"I don't know." She was being silly. What the hell would Josh know about any of this?

"Trust me, Sophie. I didn't know a damn thing. You must have told us."

"I guess so." She rubbed her forehead, a giant-sized headache forming. "I'm sorry, Josh. I'm just wigged out by all of this, I guess."

"Delayed shock, probably. Go get some rest. I'll hang out here and we can talk when you've had some sleep."

She nodded, grateful to have him here watching over her. Climbing into the bed, she pulled her favorite blanket over her and stared out at the bright sunlight pouring through the window.

Figured. She couldn't sleep. She slipped out of bed and peered through the beaded drape. Josh had settled in on the couch, turned on the television and was sound asleep.

Something she should be doing.

But for some reason she couldn't shake the fact that she knew she hadn't mentioned the red wire. Why was she obsessing over this, anyway? She'd known Josh since they were kids, trusted him and Sam above everyone.

It had to be shock.

Still, the niggles of doubt wouldn't go away. Giving up, she picked up the phone in her bedroom and dialed the shop. Sam answered.

"Hey, quick question. What details did I give you about the bomb I found?"

"Details? None, other than you disabled it. And I'm dying to know. Why? Are you ready to tell me about it?"

Her hands began to shake as the realization hit.

No. Oh, God, no.

"Soph? What's wrong?"

She wasn't going to tell Sam about this. Not yet. Not until she'd had a chance to talk to Josh. "Nothing. I'm just tired. I'm gonna get some rest, Sam. Talk to you later."

Before Sam could ask any more questions, she hung up, curled into a ball on the bed and closed her eyes, wishing she could shut out the knowledge that pounded at her.

Josh knew. There was only one way Josh could know.

"Why couldn't you have just left it alone, Sophie?"

She shrieked at the sound of Josh's voice. Quickly sitting up, she saw him leaning in the doorway to her bedroom.



He'd heard her on the phone with Sam!

"Josh, I—"

"Save it," he said, stepping into the room and stopping at the foot of the bed. "You don't understand."

"Don't understand what?"

Jamming his fingers into his long hair, he moved to the side of the bed. "What it's been like to stand by all these years and wonder when you're going to open your eyes and see what's right in front of you."

He crouched on the floor and took her hands in his. His felt heated, hers were like ice.

"I don't understand. Please tell me what's going on."

A madness glimmered in his eyes. Madness, and a dark magic she'd never seen within him before. How could she have missed it all these years?

"What's going on? Sophie, I love you. I've loved you since we were kids. I'm the right man for you, but you keep making stupid mistakes with men who don't deserve you. Then I have to help you pick up the pieces when pricks like Logan Storm stomp all over your heart."

This wasn't the first time Josh had opened his heart to her. "Josh, we've been through this before."

He squeezed her fingers, pain shooting in them as he tightened his grip. She winced, but he didn't notice, his gaze never wavering from her face. "You don't listen, Sophie. I had to do something to save you."

"Save me?"

"Yeah. Logan was all wrong for you. And his family, too. You don't need them. You only need me."

She closed her eyes for a second, summoning the courage to ask the question she was afraid to get the answer to. "Josh, did you plant that bomb?"

He smiled. "Of course I did."

Every drop of blood in her body drained away, leaving a cold emptiness inside. "Oh Josh, how could you? Do you realize what could have happened if that bomb had gone off? Everyone in that hotel could have died!"

He smirked. "I know. That was my intent. That was the vision you've been thinking about." He tried to pull her closer, but she recoiled, scooting away. His hands clenched into fists. "Soph, you have to know that I didn't plan on you being there. You know I'd never hurt you, honey!"

Nausea rolled her stomach and she wrapped her arms across it, hoping she wouldn't throw up. Tears pooled and splashed onto her cheeks. "I don't understand, Josh. This isn't like you. God, what were you thinking?"

Suddenly the Josh she'd known all these years vanished. He stood, straightening, seemingly growing taller before her. Light shone in his eyes. Evil light that seemed to travel slowly from him to her, reaching out in ways that made her fear him for the first time in her life.

"You really have never taken a look inside me, Sophie. All these years, and you never bothered to figure out who and what I am. It's about damn time you opened your eyes, don't you think?"

No. She didn't want to see, didn't want to know *this* Josh. She wanted the old Josh back, the one who had been her friend for life. Hell, he'd been her family. How could she have been so wrong about him?

How could she not have seen what he was? Where had her magic failed her?

He curled his finger under her chin, forcing her gaze to meet his. "Don't beat yourself up about me, love. You didn't know because I didn't let you know. My magic is much stronger than yours."

That she refused to believe.

"Oh, believe it," he answered as if he'd dipped into her thoughts. "I thought I was exactly what you needed. So I waited. Waited, for you to come to me, to love me. Instead, you told me you didn't feel 'that way' about me. Do you know how hard it was for me not to take you right then and there? To force the issue and make you mine whether you liked it or not? Do you know how goddamned long I've been waiting for you to realize you're meant to be with me?"

His grip on her chin tightened. She closed her eyes and summoned her magic, needing to put a wall between them, to get away from him.

Nothing happened. She tried again, forcing herself to concentrate.

"Give it up, Sophie. Your powers aren't shit compared to mine."

Her eyes whipped open and she glared at him. "You're sick, Josh. You need help."

He laughed and dragged her up against him. "I don't need help, Sophie. I love what I am, what I've always been. And I've given you years to come to me. I'm not waiting one fucking minute longer."

Wrapping his arms around her, he crushed her to him, his mouth descending on hers.

He grabbed her buttocks, grinding his hard cock against her sex. Revulsion filled her.

She gagged at the invasion of his long tongue, feeling his evil entering her. She fought, putting up a wall of resistance, using every aspect of her powers to fight him off.

He growled low in his throat, rocking against her, mimicking the sex act.

Sex weakened a man, no matter whether he was mortal or something else. She couldn't quite put a finger on his evil, but she knew if he pushed her like this, if he tried to rape her, he'd have to give up some of his power.

And she'd continue to fight him. This wasn't the Josh she had known. Whoever he was now, he represented a danger. Not just to her, but to Logan, to the entire Storm family.

To everyone.

Josh had to be stopped, starting with her. And no matter what she had to give up, she *would* stop him.

He might take her physically, but he'd never get what he really wanted.

Her soul.

## Chapter Fifteen

Logan fought internal demons as he stood outside Sophie's shop. Passersby bumped him in their hurry to move down the street, but he didn't budge. Just stood there and looked at the store window, wondering for the hundredth time in the past fifteen minutes what the hell he was doing there.

He should just let it go, but he couldn't. There was something about what happened that didn't sit right with him, and he needed answers.

Answers from Sophie.

The bell over the door jingled as it opened. His gaze flitted to the doorway, expecting to see Sophie's face.

But it was her partner, Samantha.

"What are you doing here?" she asked, frowning.

He didn't know. What *was* he doing there?

"You gonna stand there and stare at the window all day or what?"

Maybe.

Okay, maybe not. He walked toward her, feeling her heated anger the closer he drew toward the door. "I need to talk to Sophie."

"Tough shit. She doesn't need to talk to you."

"I didn't ask you." He stepped as close as he could without actually touching her. "Get out of my way. I need to talk to Sophie."

"She's not here."

While he admired Samantha's protective nature, she was in his way. "Bullshit. Now move, please, or I'll move you myself."

Heaving a disgusted sigh, Samantha turned and headed back into the shop. Logan stepped in and looked around.

No sign of Sophie. She wasn't there. Obviously she didn't want to talk to him.

Too bad. He moved through the beaded entrance to the magic room, but it was empty, too.

So was the storeroom.

Hell, she really wasn't here.

"Where is she?"

"You lost the right to know anything about her when you accused her of trying to blow up your hotel. Were you born a moron, Logan, or did you have to work extra hard to perfect it?"

"Look, Samantha, I can appreciate your 'protect the friend' persona, but I really need to talk to her. So cut the crap and tell me where she is."

"She's with Josh," Samantha said, a perversely satisfied smirk on her face.

"Josh. That...boy who works here?"

"If you say so. But then again, she's with him right now, not you, and he'll take good care of her. He always has and always will."

Always has and always will. Logan shook the feeling of dread from his head. Bullshit magic anyway. "Never mind, I'll find her later."

"Not if Josh has anything to say about it."

He pulled hard at the front door and stormed out, heaving a breath as he stood at the sidewalk trying to get his bearings.

Something was wrong.

Danger.

*Help me, Logan, please.*

Logan flinched as pain rocked his stomach, fire burning within him.

Shit! What the hell was going on?

Something *was* wrong.

With Sophie.

She was in danger.

How the fuck he knew that to be true was beyond his ability to even want to fathom. But he knew it.

Trouble.

Josh.

Her trailer.

Goddamit! He tore down the street and jumped into his car, throwing it in gear and speeding away from the curb as if his life depended on it.

His didn't.

Sophie's did. He had to get to her trailer fast.

\* \* \* \* \*

Sophie finally managed to summon enough magic to fling Joshua away from her.

But he only laughed.

"Nice try, babe, but I'm way stronger than you."

Anger filled her as she leaped across the bed trying to avoid his advance. She summoned up her ancestors. Their strength was needed. She couldn't do this alone.

*Please, please help me. I need your power, the power of what is right, what is pure. I need the light of the moon to defeat this darkness, the might of the heavens to send it back to hell where it belongs.*

"I'm taking what's mine, what I should have taken years ago." Josh held up his hands. "The fires of hell surround me, their power and might stronger than light."

He had her backed into a corner with no way out. This was really, really bad.

And bad had just gotten worse. Flames shot out from his fingertips, lighting the ends of his hair, and burning his clothes as he burst into an inferno.

The heat blasted against her. The room was so small, the trailer so small.

They'd be toast in no time.

Her blankets blazed, the trail of flames inching toward her.

She closed her eyes, refusing to give in to the fear, knowing she needed her strength now more than ever.

A wall of protection surrounded her, but Joshua's power beat against hers. She had bought herself a little time, that's all.

Very little.

\* \* \* \* \*

Logan barely tapped on the brakes before he threw the car into park and leapt out. Smoke filtered out through the kitchen windows.

He tasted fear.

And angry hatred.

Time was running out.

He flung open the door and hurried inside. A blast of heat and flame barricaded the bedroom.

Without another thought he called forth the elements, bringing a blinding rain into the trailer, dousing the flaming wall and allowing him entry into the room.

Sophie was in a corner, her face pale, her eyes closed. He sensed her concentration as her magic protected her from the whirling blaze that he assumed was Josh.

The flame turned, angry bursts of fireballs shooting in his direction as loud piercing wails followed suit.



Obviously Josh was not happy to see him. Logan held up his hands and washed away the fireballs. "Let go of her motherfucker – now – and I might just let you live."

A sick, twisted laugh greeted him. "You're too late, Storm. She's mine!"

"I don't think so." Undaunted, he brought his full powers into the fight. Ice, rain, sleet, snow, and biting, arctic winds. Once he'd summoned them all, he stepped into Joshua's circle of fire, determined to come out of this the victor.

The ice of winter mixed with the hottest fires of hell as they battled within an invisible circle. Logan lost sight of reality and his surroundings, concentrating only on making sure he pulled every ounce of magic he possessed into the fray.

Josh was strong. Very strong.

But Logan was strong too, and had years of pent-up magic to release. Anger, frustration and a desperate fear for Sophie's life spurred him on. He hated his magic, had always hated that it made him different. But right now he was damn glad he possessed it, because it just might save them both.

Despite the burning hands reaching for his throat, trying to squeeze his life away, he held on, refusing to give up.

"You sonofabitch!" Josh cried, then the flames began to dissipate. Slowly, at first, and then rapidly as Josh became human again and collapsed, shivering as an icy cube surrounded his charred body. He was still alive, barely.

But not for long.

Logan raced to Sophie, heedless of the flames tearing through her trailer.

Whatever barrier she'd put up collapsed as soon as he approached. Her eyes widened and she began to cough, tears streaming down her ash-streaked face as she sucked in the smoke.

Logan didn't pause to say anything to her, just picked her up into his arms and carried her through the fire, dousing it around them with a cold, protective rain.

She hung limp in his arms. As he stepped outside, she closed her eyes and lost consciousness.

He felt her pulse, which was thready, rapid one second, slowing the next. He had to get her to a hospital.

Gently depositing her in his car, he backed away from the inferno that was once her trailer, his fierce anger fading somewhat as he took comfort in the fact that Josh was still inside.

The evil was gone. He felt it. Back to hell or wherever it had come from. Now he had more pressing things to worry about, like making sure Sophie survived.

\* \* \* \* \*

Sophie woke to the sound of voices. Unfamiliar voices. She was cold, her body trembling violently.

And her throat hurt so damn badly it brought tears to her eyes. The fact she really needed to cough didn't help either.

Forcing her eyes open, she blinked against the harsh lights, taking in her surroundings.

The hospital. Emergency room. A nurse came over and smiled, adjusting the mask that delivered sweet, pure oxygen to her lungs. "Miss Breaux. You're going to be fine. A little smoke inhalation and a few small burns, but otherwise you were very lucky."

Lucky. Right. It all came back to her. Joshua, her trailer, the fact that he was some sort of demon and she'd never, ever known that. How stupid could she be?

Tears pooled and fell and she shamelessly wept for the man who had been her friend since childhood. There had to have been goodness in Joshua. He couldn't have been completely evil, or she would have felt it. She was sure of it. But something happened to him along the way, something that triggered this. Sadly, she knew what it was.

Because she couldn't love him. Not like she loved Logan.

Lying there on the bed and staring up into the lights, Sophie had to smile at the irony. Josh loved her, but she couldn't return that love. And she loved Logan, who didn't love her back.

What a mess.

No, a nightmare.

"You have a few people waiting outside to see you," the nurse said. "Feel up to visitors?"

She nodded while the nurse pressed the remote and moved the bed so she could sit up. Waiting, hands clasped, she wondered if Logan was still here. Her memories were still a little fuzzy, but she did recall him carrying her out of the fire.

Blinking the tears back, she refused to dwell on what she couldn't change.

The curtain drew aside and Logan stepped in, followed by his parents and Samantha. Samantha ran over and hugged her.

"Oh, God, Soph, I had no idea," Samantha said, tears streaming down her face. Her friend squeezed her tight.

Sophie coughed and shook her head. "I didn't, either. None of us did, Sam. It's nobody's fault. Joshua just hid it well."

Angelina pressed a kiss to the top of her head and held her hand. "Some magic is discernable. Some isn't. Your friend was very powerful. You're lucky to be alive."

"I know." If it wasn't for Logan's heroics, she wouldn't be. She turned to him, offering a smile. "You saved my life. Thank you."

His expression was unreadable, but she sensed a tension within him. "And you saved my family's life. I'm sorry I couldn't save your trailer."

She didn't care about possessions. Things meant nothing to her. "Is Josh..."

"Dead? Yeah. And I've talked to the police, explained that Josh set the bomb in the hotel and then went to your trailer and tried to kill you, but we fought and he died in the fire. That's all they know."

She bent her head, studying her fingers, unable to even summon up a happy response that Logan finally believed she hadn't planted the bomb. "Thank you." Then she turned to Angelina and Galen. "I'm so sorry about Josh and the bomb. I had no idea."

Angelina rubbed her arm. "Quit worrying about that, *cher*. Everyone is fine. You meant us no harm, which we knew anyway." She pointedly glared at Logan. Obviously Angelina was still angry that Logan thought Sophie had planted the bomb. "Now, we want you to stay in one of the suites at the hotel until we can find you a new place to live."

"She can stay with me," Sam said, inching onto the edge of the bed and taking Sophie's other hand.

"No, she stays at the hotel."

They all looked at Angelina. "I wouldn't sleep if I couldn't repay you in some way for all you've been through. We have a doctor on staff at the hotel who can check in on you regularly, and we'll all come and visit."

"Thank you, Angelina, but I couldn't take up space for one of your paying guests."

"Don't be silly," Galen added. "We'd really like you to stay at the hotel."

Angelina nodded. "You'll be pampered. Sam, you can come stay with her. Think of it as a vacation."

Sophie looked to Sam, who shrugged. "Sure, why not? Change of scenery is always a good thing."

"Good. It's settled then. Logan, bring her to the hotel when she's released. Now you rest and we'll get out of here." Angelina kissed her, as did Galen, then they left.

Sam said, "Are you sure this is okay with you?"

Sophie nodded. "It's fine. We'll have fun together."

"Okay, honey. I'm going to go finish up things at the shop. When Logan called and told me what happened, I just ran like hell out of there and only locked the door. It's a mess and I need to close up. I'll pack some clothes. You and I can wear the same stuff until we can get you some new ones."

Sam hugged her, then stopped in front of Logan, taking his hands in hers. "You saved my best friend's life. I'm in your debt."

Logan nodded and Sam left.

Uncomfortable silence filled the small room. Sophie laced her fingers together and stared at them, not sure what she and Logan had left to say to each other.

"Doctors say you can be released in about an hour. I'm going to go make arrangements. I'll be back soon."

She nodded and watched him leave. A strange emptiness filled her.

She'd lost Josh, someone she had thought of as family.

And she never had Logan to begin with, but his polite, amiable manner towards her told her that he wanted nothing more to do with her.

In the blink of an eye, she'd once again lost two people she loved.

Life would never be the same.

\* \* \* \* \*

Logan had been wrong, on so many counts.

He flipped the cell phone closed and slid it into his pocket, pacing the hallways of the hospital like a caged animal desperate for release.

Yeah, he was desperate to get away all right. Desperate to get away from himself.

He'd been wrong about Sophie's motives, her magic, her reasoning for seeking him out. Then, instead of gratitude he'd accused her of criminal acts. Acts that she hadn't been responsible for.

Which had led her right to Josh. And Josh had almost killed her. If Logan had taken her, claimed her, he doubted Josh would have done anything to stop him. While the bastard was powerful, he wasn't stronger than Logan, and Logan would bet that Josh knew that from the moment they met.

Then again, if it hadn't turned out this way, then his family would have continually been in danger.

What a goddamn clusterfuck.

Which was why they shouldn't be together. He didn't trust her, and didn't trust his own instincts around her. She could have died because he was more worried about protecting his cold heart than he was about protecting Sophie.

That ended here and now. After she recovered, after she'd had some time to rest, he'd go to her, reason with her and tell her they could never be together.

He laughed. Right. Like she'd even want anything to do with him after what he'd put her through. After accusing her of trying to blow up the hotel, she probably hated him right now, which really solved all their problems.

Or at least would solve hers. She needed much more than what he could give her. She needed a man's trust, someone who embraced her magic, the wonderful gifts she gave to those she loved. She'd tried to give those gifts to him and he'd thrown them back in her face.

He didn't deserve her.

If she despised him, she'd no longer insist they were meant to be together. She'd stop seeing him, hounding him, making him want her, need her, desire her in ways he'd never desired another woman.

She'd go her way, and he'd go his.

And he'd never see her again.

Why did that thought offer no comfort?

## **Chapter Sixteen**

Sophie adjusted the pearls around her neck and tried to focus on the bride, not her nervousness at seeing Logan today.

It had been a week since the fire, and she hadn't seen him once. After her release from the hospital, he'd driven her silently to the hotel and delivered her into the arms of his mother. Between Angelina and Sam, she'd kept busy, mostly trying to convince both of them that she was fine and felt no harmful effects from the fire.

Her healing powers were above average anyway, and with the herbs and potions from her shop, the minor burns were already gone.

Yes, she'd lost her trailer and all her possessions, but what did stuff matter, anyway? Although she felt guilty staying at the hotel without paying, something Angelina assured her was no problem at all. In fact, if Angelina had her way, she'd move into one of the penthouse apartments at the top of the hotel.

Permanently.

Which wasn't going to happen, of course. She was surprised Logan hadn't already tried to evict her.

"You're not supposed to be frowning on my wedding day."

She looked up into Lissa's smiling face. "I wasn't." At her pointed look, she said, "Okay, maybe I was. And you're right. How are you feeling?"

Lissa grinned. "Ready as I'll ever be. Lord, this has been a whirlwind. I'll just be glad when it's over. I'm ready for some warm sand, ocean-lit water and five days worth of sex and mayhem."



Sophie laughed, her heart filled with joy and love for Lissa and Aidan. Much as she'd rather begin the process of distancing herself from this family she'd grown to love, today was not the day.

Regardless of Logan's determination to keep his distance, they'd have to occupy the same space today. She had to deal with it, he could too.

"You look beautiful."

"Thank you," Lissa said, a blush staining her cheeks.

Lissa was gorgeous in her full white gown; satin, pearls and tulle took up at least half the room. Her blonde hair had been swept into an updo, and small ringlets framed her face. Her blue eyes sparkled with love, brightening her whole face. Truly, she was a beautiful bride. "Aidan is one lucky man. I hope he never forgets that."

"Not that we'd let him," Shannon said, coming up and giving Sophie a quick hug. "And you don't look too bad yourself."

Sophie laughed. She actually felt pretty today. Being in the company of the Storm family always made her glow with happiness. Besides, who wouldn't feel gorgeous in the bridesmaid's dress? Off-the-shoulder lavender velvet hugged her body, the sleeves ending in a wide bell at the wrist and the straight skirt slit up one side. She just hoped the low neckline wasn't too low. The long string of pearls dipped into her cleavage. Then again, Lissa picked out the dresses, so they had to be okay. She just wasn't used to showing as much skin as she was in this dress. They'd barely had to alter the dress since she was the same size as the girl who was originally going to be in the wedding.

The next hour was spent in preparation for the event. The church was beautifully decorated, and Lissa peeked out now and then to see the people piling in. Sophie felt way out of her element here, and more than a little nervous at seeing Logan again.

Finally, it was time. They gathered in the lobby of the church. Bridesmaids, groomsmen and Lissa's father all arrived.

Sophie caught sight of Logan and her breath halted. Lord, he was beautiful in a tux. The man looked like a born and bred aristocrat no matter what he wore, but when he dressed up like this, he literally took her breath away.

As if he felt her staring at him, he turned his head. He didn't smile, didn't frown, his expression giving nothing away of his feelings.

He'd gotten pretty good at masking them, too, because she couldn't feel him. Maybe too many other emotions swirled through the lobby right now.

It didn't matter anyway. Today was Lissa and Aidan's day, and she'd simply have to push her feelings for Logan aside.

The music started and the long walk down the aisle began.

"You ready, partner?" Brett asked as he stepped next to her.

Refusing to dwell on the pain, she smiled brightly. "Ready as I'll ever be."

The wedding went off without a single mishap. The glowing white aura around Aidan and Lissa was so bright she almost had to turn away. Love filled the church. Sophie shed a few tears as Aidan and Lissa recited their vows, promising to love each other forever.

She couldn't help but glance at Logan while those words of love were exchanged, wondering why commitment came so easily to some while it was so incredibly difficult for others. In her heart, she knew she and Logan belonged together. But she couldn't do anything about the fact that he didn't return her feelings.

Unrequited love sucked. Even though Josh wasn't who she thought he was, she felt a new sense of empathy for how he'd felt about her. He had loved her, back when he was a different person, and she hadn't been able to love him back.

Would she feel this miserable for the rest of her life?

Shaking off the melancholy, she smiled brightly when Father John pronounced Aidan and Melissa husband and wife. Aidan swept his new bride into a passionate kiss, lingering so long that Father John had to clear his throat to pull them apart.

"Ladies and gentlemen," Father John announced. "I'd like to introduce you to Mr. and Mrs. Aidan Storm."

A huge round of applause echoed throughout the church. They stayed afterward and took what seemed like hundreds of pictures. The entire time, Sophie felt Logan's gaze on her, yet she refused to look at him again.

What was the point? After the wedding reception she'd go back to her job, find a new place to live, and start her life again. She wasn't the type of person to pine over someone who didn't care for her, and there was no reason to beat her head against an impenetrable wall.

She'd tried to win his love, and failed. It was time to move on.

They left the church and rode in limos to the hotel. The main ballroom was decorated in lavender and cream, paper bells, balloons and streamers draped along the rafters and walls. The band began to play as Aidan and Lissa entered. Sophie walked in with Brett, and they were required to dance the first official bridal party dance.

Brett held her close, smiling at her the entire time. Yet she sensed turbulent emotions flowing through him. Happiness, yet a tragic sadness that tugged at her heart.

"You like weddings?" she asked.

He shrugged. "They're fine for other people. How about you?"

"Yeah, I have to admit that I really do like them. But I'm a sucker for romance."

Brett laughed. When he laughed, he relaxed, and some of that dark aura that surrounded him dissipated. She wished she could help him, but there never seemed to be a right time to ask him what made him seem so unhappy on the inside.

*Quit trying to save everyone, Sophie. You can't do it. Leave him alone.*

Deciding to take her own advice, she let Brett whirl her around the dance floor and tell her jokes. Laughing out loud made her feel much better anyway.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Logan, you're squeezing the breath out of me!"

Logan blinked and looked down at a glaring Shannon. "Sorry."

He'd been so busy keeping watch over Sophie and Brett that he'd hardly been aware he was dancing with his sister. The way Brett held her close, the easy way he made her laugh out loud, shouldn't irritate him.

But it did. Big time.

"Why don't you just go talk to her? Ask her to dance."

"She's dancing with Brett."

"So what? Go cut in. You two have unfinished business."

He rolled his eyes. Like every member of his family hadn't already told him that. Twice. "Leave it alone, Shannon."

"Oh, please. Look who's talking. As if I'd had any choice when the family was trying to push me into Max's arms."

"Seems to me I recall you going quite willingly."

He winced when she stomped on his foot. "Dickhead."

"Love you too, Sis."

She laughed. "Seriously. You love her. She loves you. You belong together. What's the big damn deal?"

He turned his gaze from Sophie to his sister. "I hurt her, Shannon. Do you know how much I hurt her by not believing in her? What kind of a man does that make me? Do you think she even wants me in her life after the things I said to her?"

"We women can be extremely forgiving. Look at all of us. We love you, despite the fact you're an overbearing, cold-hearted, anal-retentive pain in the ass."

He arched a brow. "You're so sweet. Stop. I'm blushing."

Grinning, she said, "That just means I love you and you know it. Now quit acting like such a baby and go talk to her."

"When I want advice, Shannon, I'll be sure not to ask you. Now let it go."

She shook her head. "You're going to end up old and alone, Logan. And cranky as hell. I swear to God if you get any grouchier with old age, one of us will have to smother you in your sleep."

"Ah, nothing like seeing my children get along so well."

Logan turned to his mother, who looked radiant as usual. "Shannon started it."

Angelina laughed. "Uh-huh. I'm cutting in."

Shannon stepped back. "It's not going away until you deal with it, Logan," she said, then headed toward Max, who grinned at her approach. His mother slipped into his arms.

"Want to talk about it?" she asked.

"Does it seem like I want to talk about it?"

"No. Which means you should. At least to me. I know how you feel, Logan."

He started to object, but it was pointless. His mother knew how each of her children felt. All the time, every day, year in and year out. It was damned disconcerting not to be able to hide anything from her. "Doesn't matter how I feel. Or how she feels. It's not right, Mother. Despite what you say, we're not meant to be together. We share no destiny, and if we did and you set this entire thing up between the two of us, it was only because you sensed the danger to our family. I give her all the credit for saving us, but there was nothing else between us."

Angelina frowned. "I set this...wait a minute. What are you talking about?"

He whirled her from the room and out into the lobby, taking her aside. "Look. I know that you and Sophie cooked this whole thing up. You arranged for us to meet because you got some wacky vibe that she and I were meant for each other."

"I did not."

Exasperated, he said, "It's okay. I understand why now, though I didn't at the beginning. You know how I feel about the magic, Mother. You know I don't want any part of it. Look at the havoc it created. Look at what I did to Sophie."

Angelina crossed her arms and tapped her foot. "You think I put you and Sophie together? Well, you're wrong. I met Sophie for the first time the night of the Mardi Gras ball. And yes, at that moment I sensed your destiny, but not before then. As far as your magic, it creates no havoc whatsoever. Only your bullheaded refusal to accept who and what you are generates problems in your life, Logan. I'm sorry you're ashamed of us, but we are who we are and can't change that."

"Wait a minute. You didn't orchestrate my meeting with Sophie?"

"No."

"Then how..."

"Perhaps she knew where to find you. Perhaps you called to her in a way that had nothing to do with manipulation and everything to do with the fact that you were destined to meet, destined to fall in love, and destined to spend eternity together."

He felt the tension boiling within his mother, unable to recall ever seeing her this angry.

"Pull your head out of your ass and grow up, Logan. You aren't the only one in the world learning to deal with magic. Most of us get past it and learn to accept who we are, learn to embrace the wondrous gifts God has bestowed on us. You seem to be the only one fighting it, and it's way past time. Accept it, or not, it's up to you. But I'm tired of placating you and trying to apologize for giving you this gift. I won't do it any longer."

Tears welled in her eyes. He reached for her but she pushed away from him and fled down the hallway to the elevator.

He stood there, stunned and unable to move.

What the hell had he done? He'd alienated his family, especially his mother, the woman he loved more than anyone else in the world. Had his refusal to accept his magic hurt her that badly?

He stepped outside the hotel and took a walk along the river. The night was cool and foggy, yet he didn't even feel it.

It had never occurred to him that his mother might be hurt by his refusal to acknowledge his power. How the hell had it taken him so long to see that?

He knew why. Because he'd spent most of his adult life running from who he was, trying to hide the fact that what lived inside him was a gift from both his parents. Instead of thanking them and celebrating his power, he'd led his mother to believe he was ashamed of the entire family.

And his tunnel vision had extended to Sophie, who had never done anything wrong. She'd offered him kindness, magic and love, and he'd tossed them back at her as if her gifts meant nothing.

Fuck! What the hell was wrong with him? He was thirty-five years old and hadn't learned a goddamned thing his entire life. The truth had been there, staring at him, since he was a kid, but he'd stubbornly refused to see it.

His mother was right. It was time to grow up and face his responsibilities.

Time to open his mind and his heart to the possibilities around him, before he lost everything he loved.

He went in search of his mother. She'd reentered the reception and was busily playing hostess, making sure all the guests had been warmly greeted.

"Mother, may I have a moment?" he asked.

She looked at him warily, but nodded, allowing him to lead her to the corner of the room.

He could have spent an hour apologizing for being an asshole for thirty-five years, but he knew they'd have more time to talk later. Instead, he did the one thing he knew would convince her of his sincerity.

Letting the magic surround him, he created a tiny ice sculpture and placed it in her hands. Two lovers were intertwined in a loving embrace on a crystal rock. They looked a lot like him and Sophie. "You were right."

Smiling at her stunned expression, he kissed her on the cheek and went in search of the other woman he loved.



## **Chapter Seventeen**

Sophie warily watched Logan's determined approach across the room. She maneuvered herself a bit behind Kaitlyn so he wouldn't spot her.

"He already knows exactly where you are," Kaitlyn said, moving away so that Sophie was once again in Logan's line of sight.

"I don't want to talk to him."

"Yes, you do. And that's what scares you."

She turned to Kaitlyn and shrugged. "What else is there to say? Is he going to apologize? That's not what I want. He might even tell me to stay the hell out of his family's life."

Kaitlyn took her hand. "He's not going to say any such thing. And if he did it wouldn't matter. You're family to us, Sophie. Whether Logan pulls his head out of his ass long enough to realize that or not doesn't matter. You'll still be a part of our lives."

Her soul warmed at the acceptance she'd received from the Storm family. She'd miss them, but there was no way she could continue to be around them if Logan wasn't in her life.

And no way was Logan going to be in her life. He'd made that abundantly clear to her.

"I'll bet you that he does want you."

"You're on. No way could he ignore me like this unless he wanted me out of his life."

Kaitlyn waved her hand. "Logan doesn't know what he wants unless you bash him upside the head with a two-by-four."

Sophie laughed. "I'm not the bashing type. I tried and failed, and I'm not going to ask for his heart again."

"You won't have to."

She whirled around, heating in embarrassment as she found Logan standing in front of her. Obviously, he'd heard what she said.

*Idiot.* When would she learn to keep her thoughts to herself?

"Excuse us, Kait," he said, taking Sophie by the hand and pulling her onto the dance floor.

A slow, seductive jazz song began to play. Logan wrapped his arms around her and pulled her against him. Unless she was determined to cause a scene, Sophie had no choice but to dance with him. Her heart began to pound when he rested his palm on her lower back.

He smelled so good, looked so fine, this just wasn't fair! How would she ever get Logan out of her mind, her heart, her very soul?

"You look beautiful."

Comments like that didn't help at all. "Stop playing with me, Logan. Please."

He frowned. "I'm not playing with you, Sophie. You do look beautiful."

"You can't turn on the heat and charm one minute, then freeze me out the next. I'm sorry, I just can't deal with this any longer."

She pushed firmly at his chest, disentangling herself from his embrace. With as much dignity as she could muster, she hurried from the ballroom and ran toward the elevators, mindful of people watching her.

But she had to escape. She couldn't deal with this any longer. Pain stabbed at her, regret filled her, and the sense of loss nearly sent her to her knees.

Logan caught up with her just as the doors were closing. He slipped inside the elevator and pushed the button to his suite.

"Go away," she said, refusing to let him see her with tears in her eyes.

"No. I'm not going away. Not until you listen to me."

When the doors opened to her floor, Logan moved in front of them, blocking her exit.

"Let me go."

"No. Come up to my suite with me."

She crossed her arms and shook her head. "No."

"Yes."

She pushed past him, but a wall of ice appeared in the doorway. Turning her head to glare at him, she said, "Remove it."

"No. You won't cooperate, so I'm kidnapping you."

The doors closed behind him, and Sophie figured she'd just let him get out at the penthouse, then she'd ride back down to her floor.

She wasn't going to continue this charade with him. After completely ignoring her, now he wanted her attention? And they said women were difficult to understand.

When the doors opened at the penthouse floor, he took her hand. She pulled it back. He reached for her again, but she pushed at his chest. "I'm not going with you, Logan."

"Yes, Sophie. You are. We have unfinished business, and by God we're going to finish it tonight."

Before she could object he'd tossed her over his shoulder like a sack of grain.

"Put me down, Logan!"

He didn't answer, just moved to his suite and slid the key in the lock.

He didn't put her down when he walked inside and shut the door, either. Instead, he moved into the bedroom and placed her on the bed.

"What? You want one last fuck before you tell me to get lost? I'm not *that* easy, Logan."

"No, in fact you're one of the most difficult women I've ever known."

Ha! He thought *her* difficult? He should have been looking in the mirror when he said that. "This is ridiculous. Why prolong this? It's over. You've made that more than clear enough that even a fool like me can see it."

She started to scramble off the bed, but his words stopped her.

"I was afraid."

"What?"

"I was afraid. Afraid of myself, my capabilities. Afraid of your magic, too. Mostly I was afraid of how you made me feel."

Instead of bolting, she sat. "Go on."

"I was also so afraid of losing you that I walked away." He ran his fingers through his thick, dark hair. "I've screwed up my whole life, Sophie. I've been afraid to use my magic, afraid what would happen if I found a woman to love. And when I found her, I hurt her, badly."

Sophie's throat went dry. "I'm not sure I understand what you're saying, Logan."

"Of course you don't understand, because I'm not very good at this."

"You're not very good at what?"

"At telling a woman that I love her. I've never done it before."

Her entire world turned upside down. Her chest tightened. How could sweet words of love hurt so damn bad? "You...you love me?"

Logan kneeled beside the bed and took Sophie's hand, cradling it between his palms. "Yes, Sophie Breaux. I love you. I have never loved another woman before, so this is unfamiliar territory for me."

She knew the feeling. "Logan, I—"

"Wait. Let me finish first. When I met you, you stunned me. Your sexuality, your free spirit, your acceptance of who and what you were. All of those things were polar opposites of me. I purposely kept myself removed from romance, from love, because I

was afraid of falling in love with someone, then bringing children into the world who would inherit my powers."

"Your powers are magical gifts, Logan."

He nodded. "I finally understand that. But I didn't before. And there was no way I would allow someone into my heart. Then I met you."

The way he looked at her melted her from the inside out. Heat, passion, those things she loved so much about him, but also something new in his eyes that she hadn't seen before.

Warmth. And love.

"I love you, Logan Storm. I've loved you since before I met you, when you were nothing but a vision in my dreams."

"I know you do. And I'm not worthy of your love. But if you'll give me a second chance, I will right all the wrongs, and spend the rest of our lives trying to make up for hurting you."

She kneeled and opened her arms. Logan pulled her tightly against him, crushing his mouth to hers. He stole her breath with a kiss that poured out his heart to her. She accepted it willingly, feeling his powers mingle with hers.

When they broke apart, she searched his face, touching his jawline and tracing his lips. "There is nothing to forgive. You needed only to realize who you were."

"And I hurt you during that journey."

"I'm strong, Logan. I can take it."

"I hope so. I'm not easy to get along with. I can be cold, forgetful of others' feelings."

"Tell me something I don't know," she said, grinning and kissing him.

"Marry me, Sophie," he said. "Teach me how to be a good partner. Help me learn about my magic, and give me children before I'm too damn old."

She laughed. "Gladly. Would you like to start on the children part now?"

His gaze went from hopeful to smoldering in an instant. "Hell, yeah. Let's make some babies, *cher*."

Clothes were removed quickly, her dress floating to the floor to rest on top of Logan's tux. When they came together, their naked bodies touching, Sophie soared, feeling the magic leave her body and swirl in the air above them. It mixed with the heady frost of Logan's powers, and she blinked as the first snow crystal fell against her face.

Laughing, she reveled in the storm of flakes falling around them, realizing it meant a release of Logan's inhibitions about his magic. She wasn't cold at all, in fact she was heating up steadily by the second.

It came down harder and faster until the room was blanketed in a winter wonderland. Sheets of snow piled against the walls. The furniture surrounding them dripped in icicles as the snow continued to fall so heavily she could barely see Logan.

She pulled him on top of her, loving the feel of his body covering hers, their skin touching in every place possible. Cold mixed with heat as they slid over each other, their breath a thick fog as they stared into each other's eyes.

"I missed this, *cher*," he murmured, nuzzling her neck with cool, tingling lips.

She shivered at the contact of his tongue against her skin. "Me, too. When you're not around, I feel cold."

He raised up to gaze into her eyes. "You'd think you'd feel cold when I'm around."

"Oh, no, Logan. You bring warmth to my life."

An indescribable emotion showed in his eyes. "I love you, Sophie. Thank you for not giving up on me so easily."

Reaching up to caress his face, she said, "I couldn't. I wanted you, and I felt we belonged together."

"You're much better at this than I am."

"I'll teach you everything you need to know."

"You do that."

Laughing, he reached for a pile of snow and covered her breasts. She squealed and tried to move away, but he pinned her arms, watching the snow melt, drawing her nipples into tight peaks. She shivered with delight and waited impatiently for his mouth.

Shock made her tremble at the first contact of his heated lips against her icy nipples. Where once he was cold, he now burned her alive.

He slipped his knee between her legs, his cock brushing her aching sex. She arched her hips toward him, needing him inside her more than she needed a breath. "Please, Logan, hurry."

"Ever feel something cold inside your hot pussy?" he asked, bracing his arms on either side of her and rocking against her clit.

Showers of pleasure rained down on her body. "No."

"Good." He slid into her, his cock like solid ice.

Sophie gasped at the sensation of cold within her heat. Her juices melted all over his frigid cock and she cried out as an orgasm tunneled through her, leaving her trembling.

"Damn, woman," Logan muttered. "You're so fucking hot on my dick." In response, he thrust hard and deep, pulling out and thrusting again, taking her back to a frenzied state of arousal.

Wrapping her legs around his waist, she fucked his shaft, grabbing it, squeezing it, its frigid temperature slowly warming until he was burning her on the inside. She was going to come again!

"Not this time, *mon amour*. This time, let's make you wait a bit."

She could have sobbed when he withdrew from her, but then he pulled her off the bed, dragging her into the living room.

"Logan, where are we going?"

"You'll see." He took her to the chair built for two, a wider version of a single, well-cushioned recliner. "Bend over."

He directed her to lay her stomach over the top of the snow-covered cushions. Grateful for the cooling relief of the icy flakes, she braced her hands on the arms of the chair and waited while he probed between her legs. Anticipation filled her and she rocked back, searching for his body.

"Beautiful, baby. Just beautiful," he said, then settled firmly against her and drove his cock deep.

She couldn't help it. The position was so intense and allowed him a deeper penetration than anything she'd ever felt before. She screamed, digging her nails into the cushions of the chair as he rocked against her. She met his thrusts with equal fervor, lifting her buttocks to drive her pussy harder against his cock.

"Keep doing that and I'm going to come," he said, his voice tight with barely leashed control.

"Then come in me, Logan," she pleaded. "Come now."

"Touch yourself for me, Sophie. Let me feel that sweet cunt squeeze the life right out of my cock."

She did, sliding one hand between her legs and massaging her clit with rapid strokes. Coupled with Logan's pistoning thrusts, she was close. So very close.

In the back of her mind was the thought that they could make a baby tonight. What better way for two people to share their love?

"Harder," she moaned, needing more. She quickened the strokes along her clit, reaching further to feel his shaft pulling out and sliding inside her again. It was wet with her cream, her juices flowing over his balls and between her legs.

"Ah, yes, touch my cock, Sophie. Feel how wet you make it."

He joined her, tangling his fingers around the shaft, sliding them inside her to couple with the driving thrusts of his cock. Then he took the juices from his fingers and



spread them between the cheeks of her buttocks, working his finger slowly and gently into her anus.

Sweat poured off his chest, spilling onto her back and mixing with her own heated perspiration.

In response to her heated state, Logan called forth a new deluge of icy rain, hammering it over their bodies in cooling relief.

"So hot," he murmured, tunneling his finger all the way into her ass. She closed around him, squeezing him, but he was relentless, driving in and out of her anus while his shaft continued to pummel her repeatedly. "So fucking hot."

A strong gust of chilled wind swirled around them, pellets of ice dropping onto her back, cooling her fiery skin.

This was either heaven or hell, and she no longer cared. Her womb clenched in spasms, driving her climax and shattering her last vestiges of control.

"I'm coming, Logan!" she cried, wanting him to come with her.

He reared back and plunged deeply inside her once, twice, three times. Then he stilled, letting her ride out her orgasm while he spilled his seed inside her.

The ice stopped falling, the wind died down, and Logan's heated body rested on top of her back. His heart pounded a staccato beat against her, mirroring her own rapidly panting breaths.

When reality came back to her, he straightened, turning her around in his arms and kissing her with love, passion, and a promise that tasted oh-so-sweet on his lips.

"I hate to tell you this," he whispered against her lips. "But we're supposed to be at a wedding reception."

She laughed. "Oh yeah. I somehow forgot about that. You think they'd miss us if we didn't come back?"

"Probably. But I'd rather stay holed up in here the rest of the night and make love to you."

She closed her eyes, absorbing the love that he now gave so freely. When she opened them again, she reached for his cheek and caressed it softly. "I'd like that too. And we will. But let's go downstairs and celebrate with your brother and your new sister-in-law."

They cleaned up and dressed quickly. Sophie stood in the bathroom fixing the tendrils of hair that had come loose. When she looked in the mirror, she couldn't believe her own face.

A blush stained her dark cheeks and her eyes were filled with liquid warmth.

She felt almost giddy, like a child who'd just been given a wonderful gift.

Logan held her hand as they took the elevator downstairs to the lobby and made their way to the ballroom. He didn't let go even after they walked through the double doors to the reception.

Sophie watched the people looking at them. Some arched brows in surprise, some just grinned. Especially his family, who surrounded them when they got to the table.

"So, my brother finally grabs a clue," Shannon said, squeezing his arm and kissing his cheek.

"Apparently," Logan said, seemingly not the least bit insulted.

Angelina and Galen nodded at both of them, their faces shining with happiness.

Logan picked up a glass of champagne. "While I have you all here, I have an announcement to make. I'm only saying this in front of family right now, because this is Aidan and Lissa's day, but it's important for you to know."

He paused, looked at Sophie and said, "I love this woman, with all my heart. I've asked her to marry me and she's foolishly agreed to put up with me for the rest of her life."

"About damn time," Aidan said, clapping his brother on the back and reaching for a glass of champagne.

Congratulations were offered and they drank a toast to the newly engaged couple.

"Welcome to the family, Sophie," Angelina said with a fierce hug.

"Thank you." She fought back tears of joy, her heart swelling so much that she felt it might burst inside her.

After they celebrated with a drink, Logan pulled Sophie onto the dance floor and held her close, his lips pressed to her temple as they danced to a slow, romantic song.

"I'm never letting you go, Sophie," he said. "I have a lot to apologize for."

She pulled back so she could see his face. "No. No more apologies. Today we start fresh, okay?"

He paused, then nodded and smiled. "Okay. Tomorrow I'm going to pick out a ring that'll knock your socks off."

She laughed and shook her head. "You knock my socks off."

"You're not wearing socks, but I'll be happy to knock off this dress and show you how much I love you."

The fires of desire burned hot as she looked into the eyes of the man she loved.

"Forever, Sophie," he murmured against her mouth, teasing her bottom lip with his tongue.

"Forever, Logan," she replied, grateful to the heavens, to the magic around them, and to destiny, for bringing her the man of her dreams.

### **About the author:**

Jaci Burton has been a dreamer and lover of romance her entire life. Consumed with stories of passion, love and happily ever afters, she finally pulled her fantasy characters out of her head and put them on paper. Writing allows her to showcase the rainbow of emotions that result from falling in love.

Jaci lives in Oklahoma with her husband (her fiercest writing critic and sexy inspiration), stepdaughter and three wild and crazy dogs. Her sons are grown and live on opposite coasts and don't bother her nearly as often as she'd like them to. When she isn't writing stories of passion and romance, she can usually be found at the gym, reading a great book, or working on her computer, trying to figure out how she can pull more than twenty-four hours out of a single day.

Jaci welcomes mail from readers. You can write to her c/o Ellora's Cave Publishing at 1337 Commerce Drive, #13, Stow, Ohio 44224.

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