

ELLORA'S CAVE PRESENTS

ELLORA'S CAVE

Quickies

Naughty Nuptials

Tentacles

of

Love

Margaret Carter

An Ellora's Cave Romantica Publication



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Tentacles of Love

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TENTACLES OF LOVE

Margaret Carter

Chapter One

The house, weathered to gray-brown by more than a century of salt air, loomed over them. It had a wraparound porch and two stories plus a gabled attic. Lauren noticed one of the gable windows was boarded up.

She stepped out of the car and grasped Blake's hand. The setting sun cast their elongated shadows onto the front yard—a stretch of sand punctuated by patches of coarse grass. "You're sure you want to spend our honeymoon here?" His family's vacation home looked ready to crumble at any second like the House of Usher.

"Not a matter of what I want. I have to be here on the solstice. Family tradition." He reeled her into his arms and ran his hands over her back. "I wanted to give you an advance look at the place, at least."

Thank goodness for small blessings, I guess. This solstice thing must have some connection to the obscure pagan religion his folks practiced. He'd been vague on the subject but since he'd agreed to get married in her parents' church so her mother wouldn't succumb to a massive heart attack from sheer outrage, she was okay with it. *Just one more week and he'll be mine forever, so I'm not sweating details.* On the whole, Blake's family seemed nice enough, regardless of their odd customs. Even Uncle Dexter from Innsmouth, who bore an unsettling facial resemblance to a fish and Aunt Lavinia from Dunwich, a pale, white-haired woman who'd wanted the wedding performed at a prehistoric stone circle in rural Massachusetts. Well, all except Cousin Stella from Boston, who looked physically normal but had kept sidling up to Lauren during the engagement party, muttering about "strange ions" and asking whether she really planned to go through with the marriage.

Lauren hooked her arms around Blake's waist. "Going to carry me over the threshold?"

"Maybe we should save that for the wedding night." His gray-blue eyes clouded over. "I've got something to show you. After that, if you want to call everything off, I won't blame you."

She tilted her head back to scan his face. "Yeah, right. With the wedding a week away, a nonreturnable deposit on the caterer and my dress fitted and paid for? Sure, I'll give serious thought to dropping the whole idea."

He smiled but in a sickly, halfhearted way. He wasn't kidding!

"What are you raving about?" She switched her hands from his waist to his shoulders, half tempted to shake him. "If you want to back out, just say so. Don't put it on me."

"No!" He hugged her so tightly she had to gasp for breath. "Losing you is the last thing I want. But after you see – well, it'll be your choice."

Releasing her, he led her up the gravel driveway to the porch. Its floorboards creaked underfoot. Waves crashed on the rocky shore directly behind the house. "Let me guess," she said. "You brought me here to warn me we're spending our wedding night in the house of Frankenstein."

"Hang on, it's not that bad inside." He unlocked the door and flung it open with a flourish.

She sniffed the air. A little stale but not musty or mildewed as she'd feared. The foyer light, a lamp in an old-fashioned scone on the paneled wall, showed a worn but clean and waxed dark hardwood floor. No visible dust. Okay, maybe a honeymoon in a Victorian beach house on a New England coast miles from anywhere except a couple of farms wouldn't be a disaster after all. At least the sea air made the place almost cool for June and they'd have plenty of privacy.

Speaking of which, she snuggled up to him, wiggling her hips and silently gloating over the hard ridge she felt through his baggy cargo shorts. He'd been caressing her thighs at stoplights for the past twenty miles. "Going to show me the bedroom?" She

ran her fingers through his luxuriant black hair, only a little shorter than her own closely trimmed, honey-blond curls.

"Sure. With all that wedding hassle, it seems like forever since we had any time alone. I can't wait to get you horizontal." He kissed her forehead then her cheek and finally her mouth.

Her lips parted to welcome his tongue with eager thrusts of her own. Sparks zapped from that spot to her breasts and below. By the time he paused for breath, a pleasant flutter had started in the pit of her stomach.

"Especially when this might be my last chance. You might run screaming into the night and never come back." This time he tried to make the comment sound like a joke but the attempt fell flat. He actually thought something in this house would freak her out.

"Why? You're about to tell me insanity runs in your family? The way you're talking right now, I could believe it." Aside from Cousin Stella, they didn't act particularly weird, despite their looks. Even Great-Aunt Asenath from Arkham, who reminded Lauren of an anorexic frog, intimidated her with starchy New England manners, not eccentric babbling.

"Not exactly that," Blake said.

"Well, there's certainly nothing wrong with you." No trace of fish or frog in his appearance. Just tall enough to give her a pleasant shiver when he swept her into his arms and with a touch of the exotic in his olive skin inherited from some distant Portuguese ancestor, he provided a visual feast that only whetted her appetite for the main course. So far she'd only tasted the hors d'oeuvres and salad, so to speak. She'd savored the luscious expanse of his chest but she'd never seen him naked from waist to mid-thigh. Not for the first time, she wondered whether his insistence on reserving the entrée for the wedding night had some ulterior motive beyond his expressed desire to make that night "special". Her hands wandered to his belt and sneaked under the hem

of his shirt. "Wait a minute! You're not dying of some horrible disease, are you? If that's what you've been holding out on me, I'm going to kill you!"

He laughed. "No, I'm perfectly healthy." He shifted one arm to her shoulders, swept the other behind her legs and scooped her off the floor. She let out a squeak of surprise. "On second thought, I think we need to rehearse the carrying part." He strode along the front hall to the stairs.

Trotting up the steps, he said, "See? I'm in excellent shape."

With her arms around his neck, she thumped him on the shoulder. "I knew that already."

She scanned the shadowy upstairs hallway, lined with closed doors. "The house is haunted, right? I don't mind sharing space with a few ghosts if they're quiet."

"Nope, no ghosts."

"You'd better not have a mad wife locked in the attic."

"Come on, you know you're my first and only lover."

She had no reason to doubt that claim, considering his awkward shyness the first time he'd touched her intimately. At the far end of the corridor, one door opened into a bathroom and just opposite, another stood ajar. Blake shouldered that one open, carried her inside and placed her on a king-size bed. "This is where I sleep whenever I'm here. Okay with you for our wedding night?"

"Well, let's see." She frowned, pretending to mull over the question. "Does it have a bed? Check. It's fine." Obviously remodeled from its nineteenth-century origins into a modern master suite, the room had an attached bath big enough, from what she glimpsed through the door, to have started life as a smaller bedroom. Except for the huge bed, the furniture looked antique, including a free-standing wardrobe in lieu of a closet. "How about that thing? Are you hiding any skeletons in there? Or does it open into another world?"

With a wry smile, he said, "Not that door."

“Then I’m out of guesses. Let’s test-drive the bed.”

Here on his home turf, only a week away from the wedding, would he finally consent to bare it all? Respect was one thing and a refreshing novelty compared to the typical guy’s first-date groping but she would have doubted her own appeal or Blake’s mental health, if it weren’t for his talent with fingers and tongue. Not to mention the eager erection that always greeted her manual explorations. Thank goodness for zipper flies. As a twenty-nine-year-old male virgin, he probably ranked in rarity with unicorns and dragons. Sitting on the bed while he stood over her, she toyed with his belt buckle.

He grasped her wrists. “Not yet.”

She wondered whether he had ghastly scars from some old injury. If so, did he think she was so squeamish she couldn’t adjust? She was a grown woman, not a wussy little girl! With his hands skimming over her breasts, though, this wasn’t the time to ask. Her nipples perked up. When she reached for his shirt, he let go of her wrists and allowed her to undo the buttons.

At the same time, he pulled down the straps of her sundress and peppered light kisses on her shoulders. She squirmed at the tickling sensations that danced over her skin. While she worked his arms out of his shirt, his tongue flickered over her collarbone into the hollow of her throat and the V between her breasts. He sat beside her, pausing to remove his shoes and socks. Once his hands were free again, he reached around her to unzip the dress and bare her to the waist. He massaged her spine with long, sweeping strokes while his tongue encircled each breast in turn. She ran her fingers over the fine sprinkling of hair on his chest and the pebble-hard nipples.

He closed his teeth on the top of one breast, not painfully but hard enough to send a shock like static electricity straight to her clit. “There’s so much more I want to do with you,” he murmured. The heat of his breath sent paradoxical chills through her. “I can’t wait to feel you naked all over, skin to skin. I’m dying to get inside your pussy.” He raised his head, his face flushed. “Sorry, that just slipped out.”

A giddy laugh escaped her. "That's okay, it's not like I don't know what the word means." Lacing her fingers through his hair, she pulled his head down to her again. "I can't wait, either. So what's stopping us?"

He nuzzled between her breasts. "The time hasn't been right."

"When, damn it?"

"Soon."

She reclined on the pillows. His tongue swirled around one breast then the other. She arched her back, silently pleading for him to lick her nipples. Instead, he lapped a path down the center of her chest to her waist. Meanwhile, he unbuckled and pulled off her sandals. His fingers brushed the soles of her feet. The tickle scampered along her nerves and changed into a tingle by the time it reached the apex of her spread legs. She knew from past experience that there was no use begging him to hurry.

He flipped her skirt up to her waist then returned to her feet and skimmed up and down the insides of her legs. Liquid welled from her slit, dampening her panties. Blake hooked his thumbs in the elastic and stroked the outer edges of the triangle of hair.

She gritted her teeth, her head thrown back on the pillow, and reached down to dig her nails into his shoulders. His tongue flickered up the midline of her chest to sample the inner curves of her breasts. She let out a moan of impatience.

"Tell me what you want."

"Nipples. Lick them." Erect in the ocean breeze from the window, they ached with eagerness for his touch.

His tongue played over each nipple, skipping back and forth from one to the other, while he rolled down her panties and teased the hair just above her swollen clit. She couldn't help squirming. How had he learned these tantalizing techniques so fast? When she'd asked him once, he'd said he read sex manuals, tried out the instructions on her and modified his behavior according to her feedback. Which was more than either of her two previous guys had bothered with.

She ran her fingers through his hair, rubbed his shoulders and clawed his back. "Not fair. I can't reach low enough to do anything to you."

"You're doing it already." He sucked one nipple into his mouth and pulled her panties down, brushing his fingers over her mound on the way. "Tasting you drives me crazy." He eased her underwear off in a tangle of impatiently bending and stretching limbs.

"Prove it," she said.

He shifted one leg over hers so that his hard shaft pressed against her. "Feel how much I want you?" He kissed his way down to her waist again then skipped to her inner thighs. The moist heat of his lapping made her gush with wetness in response. She spread wider, arching her hips in invitation. Finally he reached her clit. It pulsed like a miniature heartbeat in time with the flicker of his tongue.

Fingers probed her slit. She contracted around them and rocked along with his thrusts. His mouth strummed her bud. Her sheath convulsed in ripples that echoed the throbbing of her clit. The sensations built in a swelling wave that surged through her whole body and wrung an ecstatic cry from her.

Blake moved up to lie on top of her, his erection firm against the melting cavity between her legs. Quaking with aftershocks, she clung to him.

"Now you," she said, almost too breathless to speak. "Are you ready?"

He strained against her, the cloth of his shorts rubbing the tender flesh. "What do you think?" He rolled to his side, reclining next to her. His palm skimmed over her breasts. "You're so hot."

She was—her skin flushed, yet prickling with goose bumps in the cool air from the window. She turned toward him and unzipped his pants to free his penis.

It sprang to attention. When her hand encircled the shaft, Blake hissed between his teeth. She pumped up and down and he matched his thrusts to her rhythm. She insinuated her other hand into the bottom of the fly to fondle his sac. Knowing how

he'd react if she tried to explore any farther, she didn't venture beyond the ridge behind his scrotum. *Scars, what else could it be? Why can't he trust me enough to show me?*

He'd said it would happen soon. Tonight, maybe? She could be patient a little while longer. Meanwhile, she scraped her nails over that spot and watched him go rigid with the intensity of the sensation. She squeezed his shaft and ran her thumb over the head. A droplet oozed out. She spread the liquid over the end of his cock.

He groaned, cupping the back of her head while his other hand kneaded her breast. "I'm so hard it hurts. I need your mouth in the worst way."

He sat up, leaning against the pillows, while she bent over him to close her lips over the tip of his penis. She swirled her tongue around it, luxuriating in his moan of pleasure. The salty taste confirmed how ready he was. She lapped up and down the shaft, caressing his balls in the same rhythm. Quickly his thrusts became sharper, faster, less coordinated. His hand crept to the back of her neck and silently urged her to take him deeper. She sucked him into her mouth, her tongue vibrating on the sensitive tip.

He growled deep in his chest. Feeling his release building, she pressed on the ridge behind his sac. He erupted into her mouth, plunging as deep as she could receive him while she swallowed and licked until he lay back, panting with relief.

She scooted up and rested her head on his shoulder. He hugged her and stroked her hair until both of them could breathe normally again.

"Gods, I can only imagine what it'll feel like to do that inside you."

"Tonight?" She glanced at the window. Twilight had yielded to dark, with the moon visible between the half-drawn curtains.

"If you'll let me."

Sitting up, she groped for her underwear and put it on. "If? Like I haven't been waiting for that for the last six months?"

"I hope you'll feel the same way fifteen minutes from now." He stood up, zipped his shorts and tugged her to her feet. "Get dressed. It's time to show you one of the things I brought you here for."

"One of them?"

"It's not exactly a thing." She noticed him swallow as he hesitated. "You need to meet my brother."

Chapter Two

"What? Who? Since when?" Hitching up the straps of her sundress, she glared at him. "All this time, you somehow forgot to mention you had a brother?"

He flinched at her accusing tone. "We're twins but he looks more like our father than I do." He hardly ever talked about his parents. His mom, who'd died before Lauren had met him, had been a single mother. Other than mentioning that the pregnancy had resulted from a brief fling, he'd said nothing about his father. "Wilbur lives here. He never goes out."

"Wilbur?" She couldn't help associating the name with a pig in a children's book.

"Named after one of my mom's relatives a couple of generations back." He stepped behind her to zip up the dress.

She dug a comb out of her purse and hastily whipped her hair into shape. "You're saying he's in the house now? Good grief, why did you let me scream?"

"Don't worry, the walls are thick."

"Why doesn't he go out?"

"He's—not like other people," Blake said with a nervous clearing of his throat. "One thing I love about you is how open-minded and compassionate you are. Nothing seems to faze you."

"Such as the fact that your family's a little strange? No biggie. My aunt collects velvet Elvis paintings. I've had plenty of practice in open-mindedness."

"Seriously, you rescued me from terminal geekhood. Miskatonic University alumni aren't noted for our social graces."

"Hey, before you, I'd never met a guy who could quote Plato in the original Greek and Olaus Wormius in medieval Latin. Major turn-on." Although she still didn't know Olaus Wormius' claim to fame, the quotations had sounded impressively ominous.

"See, you have a talent for taking weirdness in stride. That's why I thought you might be able to accept us. Even Wilbur. But I was still scared enough to put off introducing you."

She folded her arms. "So this is the big secret you've been hiding? You thought I might break our engagement because you have a brother who's a little different? God, do you really think I'm that shallow?"

"No way!" He strode over to her and clasped her shoulders. "It's not that simple. You'll see. But I have faith in you."

Retreating from him, she said, "Okay, let's get this over with." She still simmered with indignation that he had hidden such vital information.

"Guess I can't blame you for getting angry. Just bear with me 'til you know all the facts, okay?"

She responded with a grudging nod.

"We have to go upstairs." He led her to a door where the hall dead-ended and opened it to show a narrow flight of steps. He flipped on a light switch.

"Your family makes him live in the attic?"

"He likes it up there. It's arranged to suit his special needs."

Still barefoot, she followed Blake to the top of the stairs, where a bare bulb on the ceiling showed a long, well-swept room lined with stacks of boxes, miscellaneous furniture and the gable windows she'd noticed from outside. At the far end a wall with a closed door blocked off part of the space. "Hold on, does that lead to the window that's boarded up?"

"Yeah."

"So you don't keep a wife locked in the attic, just a brother?"

“Before you go all ballistic about how we’re mistreating him, wait until you’ve seen the whole picture. His room is customized for him and part of that involves covering the window.” Knocking on the door, he said, “Wilbur? I’ve brought Lauren to meet you, the way I promised.”

A whistling noise, like wind howling through a cavern, emanated from the other side. “Well, here goes.” He clasped her hand and opened the door.

Splinters of rainbow light, like the inside of a kaleidoscope, struck her eyes. After blinking a couple of times, she realized she was seeing the colors through a shimmering curtain of mist. Blake stepped across the threshold, pulling her with him. A chill shuddered through her at the moment she entered the room. The floor tilted then straightened. She clutched Blake’s arm and waited for the vertigo to fade.

Why did the room seem to stretch twenty feet or more ahead of them? “There can’t be this much space up here. Is it some kind of optical illusion?”

“This room isn’t exactly all here. All in this world, I mean. That’s one reason we covered the window. People got too curious about the weird lights.”

She stared at the—object or creature?—that occupied the other end of the chamber. A floor-to-ceiling translucent mound of rainbow-colored bubbles filled the space, emitting blue and violet sparks whenever its surface rippled. A pseudopod oozed outward for a second then withdrew into the mass, leaving a glittery trail on the floorboards.

“What is that? Is it alive?” The thing struck her as beautiful in an alien, mind-wrenching way. Maybe the family secret was that the mysterious Wilbur performed mad-scientist illicit DNA experiments.

Blake put his arm around her waist. “That’s my brother.”

“What?” she yelped. “Where?”

The mammoth rainbow-bubble cluster extended six tentacles like the tendrils of a jellyfish and four eye-stalks popped up at random spots on its surface. “Welcome,

Lauren." The voice vibrated through the floor and resonated in the pit of her stomach like organ music. "I'm so happy to meet my new sister."

Gray spots clumped in front of her eyes. Her head reeled, her knees wobbled and the floor lurched up to meet her.

When her vision cleared, she found herself leaning on Blake with only his snug embrace holding her upright. The conglomeration of bubbles and tentacles hadn't disappeared.

She screamed and hid her face on Blake's chest.

He patted her on the back. "Calm down, love. He'd never hurt you. You see why I tried to prepare you for a little shock?"

"Shock?" she shrieked. "Little? You've just told me your brother is a giant, glowing blob."

"I did warn you he was different. Like I said, he looks more like our father."

She sneaked another peek. The thing was still there. Again she closed her eyes and tried to burrow farther into Blake's arms. "I'm ready to wake up now. Anytime."

"Sorry, Wilbur," he said. "Just give her a minute."

The voice burbled, echoes bouncing off the walls, "I apologize, Lauren. I didn't mean to frighten you. I don't often meet people outside the family."

"I can understand why," she muttered. "You're a little scary at first glance." She forced herself to turn around and look.

Eyes and tentacles erupted from the bubbling surface, sank out of sight and reformed. "Please don't run away." The plaintive tone surprised her. "I don't know how to make myself not scary."

"Uh...well." Dizzy, she leaned back against Blake. If not for his arm around her waist, she'd probably collapse. *I can't let him down. Not after he trusted me this much.* She swallowed. "Your voice kind of hurts my head. And it would help if you didn't change your number of eyes every second."

"All right, I'll try." The reverberation toned down to a faint echo. All the appendages sank into the scintillating mass. Five eye-stalks then appeared in a pentagonal outline, with a cluster of five tentacles underneath. "Does this arrangement strike you as aesthetically pleasing?"

"That's fine," Blake said. He snagged a pair of velvet-covered cushions lying next to the door beside a set of bookshelves, plopped down on one of them and patted the other. "Have a seat and try to relax. You're making him nervous. That's why he's so unstable."

"Me? Making *him* nervous?" She lowered herself onto the pillow without letting go of Blake's hand. "Who the hell was your father, anyway? A creature from another planet?"

"Not exactly. One of the Great Old Ones who dwell in alien dimensions between the spaces we know. Mom offered herself to him in the solstice ritual and conceived us."

Lauren tried to visualize a woman giving birth to a miniature version of Wilbur. Her mind wouldn't twist enough to wrap around that image. All she could think of to say was, "I guess she must've had a home delivery."

Blake smiled. "Yeah. I'm glad to see you taking this so well. I knew I could count on you."

"The jury's still out on that," she said. "I'm not convinced this isn't a nightmare."

"Am I so repulsive, new sister Lauren?" Now that the creature's voice didn't boom inside her skull, she could hear a hint of sadness in it.

"No, you're the most beautiful globe of talking bubble soap I've ever met. You just take a little getting used to."

"Like this room, I exist partly in higher dimensions. But if you will, you can touch the corporeal part of me and assure yourself that I'm real."

"Touch?" she squeaked. She threw an appealing glance at Blake.

"Go ahead, it's safe." He pried her hand loose from his and gave her a gentle push.

She stood up on shaky legs. "He won't eat me?" She couldn't help remembering that vintage horror film where a giant lump of glop oozed out of a movie theater and devoured half the town.

Wilbur's surface quivered and the eyes retreated until they floated directly on the glistening membrane. "I haven't done anything like that in many years." He sounded hurt.

She spun around to challenge Blake. "Like what?"

"He means the cattle mutilations and disappearances. But like he said, that stopped when we were teenagers."

"I couldn't help it," Wilbur said. "The goats weren't always adequate. I've said I was sorry."

"That didn't help much when the neighbors started getting suspicious. But it's all in the past now." Blake gave Lauren's arm what he apparently meant as a reassuring pat. "When my brother was growing so fast, he needed blood from lots of animals. Sometimes Mom miscalculated and didn't buy enough goats. Hey, don't look at me like that. We ate the meat or donated it to charity. And she always paid for the damn cows."

"I haven't fed on animal blood for a long time," Wilbur said. "Now that I'm full-grown, I live on the energy emanating from the other space-time continua I'm in contact with."

"In that case, I guess I don't have a thing to worry about." Gulping down the acid in her throat, she took a couple of steps toward it—him.

The tendrils quivered like vines rustled by a gust of wind. A glistening pseudopod stretched toward her. She forced her feet to propel her close enough to reach it. It felt smooth and cool but not slimy. A loop of it coiled around her wrist. "You feel very warm," Wilbur said. A new tentacle formed and snaked up her front to brush the hollow of her throat. "Your heartbeat is strong and rapid." Violet sparks danced up her arm. "I've never touched a human female other than my kin."

She pulled back. To her relief, the appendages withdrew into the amorphous mass. "Just remember, I'm going to be your sister." She retreated to her cushion next to Blake.

"May I ask you for a great boon, Lauren?" Wilbur said in a strangely diffident tone. "Can you find a woman for me?"

"Say what?"

"Our mighty sire descended from the interstellar void to mate with our mother. Now that my brother has found a mate, why shouldn't I have one?"

"I'll have to give it some thought." Recognizing how lonely he must get, stuck in this room, she had to feel sorry for him. On the other hand, a quick mental review of her girlfriends didn't turn up a single one who'd react well to being introduced to a sex-starved giant amoeba. "Do you really stay here all the time? I can see how you'd get awfully bored."

"When I started to grow large, I couldn't go outside without attracting attention. But I'm content enough. Between Blake's visits, I project my mind onto the astral plane and visit higher dimensions, so I never become bored. Also, Blake brings me entertainment." He flapped a pseudopod toward the wall behind Blake and Lauren.

Turning her head, she saw, next to the floor-to-ceiling shelves full of books and disks, a TV, stereo system and computer station she'd been too upset to examine before. "You use all that stuff?"

"Why not?" Blake said. "We get high-speed cable here and I buy him CDs and DVDs. He likes to listen to jazz and watch Japanese anime."

A wave rolled across Wilbur's surface. "Especially the giant robots and the creatures with tentacles. Did you bring me anything new this time?"

"Yeah but I accidentally left it in the car. I'll get it later." A flush spread over Blake's face. "You and your tentacle porn."

Interesting reason to blush, Lauren thought. Even aside from the inhuman twin brother revelation, she was learning things about Blake she'd never imagined. "What's tentacle porn?"

"You don't want to know," he muttered.

"He is a very kind brother," Wilbur said. "He also reads to me. It's more pleasant than listening to audiobooks. Will you do that too?"

"Sure, sometime," Lauren said. Anything to get her off the hook from fixing him up with a date.

Blake rose to his feet and clasped her hand to help her up. "Look, why don't we go get your new DVD now?"

"Sounds like a plan." Lauren welcomed his consideration in coming up with an excuse to get her out of that room. Not that Wilbur wasn't much nicer than she'd expected, for an iridescent half-alien but she needed time to process him.

"Thank you, Blake. I'm pleased to have met you, Lauren. Will you visit again soon?"

"No problem. After the wedding, for sure."

Again a wave of vertigo stunned her as they stepped across the threshold. After Blake closed the door, the attic seemed twice as dim as it had when they'd first entered it. He held her hand all the way back to the bedroom.

In the middle of the room, he wrapped his arms around her. She closed her eyes and leaned on him, her head still spinning. He massaged her back until she stopped trembling.

"Okay," she said, looking up into his troubled eyes. "I can see why you weren't in a hurry to tell me this. But you should have done it a long time ago."

"I'm bending the rules to tell you now. Only members of the family are allowed to know. You won't officially be family for another week." He turned on the dresser lamp

and drew her over to the bed, where they sat side by side. "Do you want to cancel the wedding?"

The desperate anxiety on his face touched her. She brushed a hand over his hair. "No way. I love you. A little thing like a blob for a brother-in-law won't change that. Just give me a decade or two and I'll hardly notice he's different at all."

He hugged her until her ribs hurt, his lips grazing the top of her head. "Thank all the Powers for that. I don't know what I'd do if I lost you."

"Don't expect me to invite him for Thanksgiving with the family, though. My folks wouldn't adjust quite so well."

With a shaky laugh, Blake said, "That's okay. As long as I'm here around the summer and winter solstices, other holidays are negotiable. He's most vulnerable at those times, most fully in this world. It's my job to protect him."

"I can live with that."

"Why don't you relax here for a minute? I'll get Wilbur his new movie and be right back." He let go of her with a final squeeze of her hand. "Then I'll show you the rest of my secret."

"Rest? What rest?" Her skull felt about to explode. "There's more? What could be worse than this?"

"Not worse. I figured if you could meet Wilbur without totally freaking, you wouldn't have any trouble with the other part."

"Enough with the mystery. Just tell me!"

"I'd rather show you. Please wait. I'll hurry."

After he'd left, she turned down the sheets, fluffed up the pillows and lay back on the bed. A series of long, deep breaths quieted the gibbering in her brain. If she didn't know Blake so well, she would have suspected him of dosing her with some drug that caused hallucinations. Since he would have no reason for such a cruel trick, this whole evening must be real. Wilbur was real.

Trying to put the revelation into perspective, she reminded herself things could be worse. Blake didn't have a terminal disease or a secret wife. Wilbur didn't rampage over the countryside eating people. He would be much easier to take as a relative, come to think of it, than if he were a mob boss or a presidential candidate.

Wait a minute, what about kids? She snapped to a sitting position. Would their babies look human? Or would she have to consider getting her tubes tied? That decision was a long way off. Since she'd gone on the Pill in preparation for the wedding night, she didn't have to worry about motherhood yet. One thing at a time. Right now, her main worry was Blake's other secret. Lying down, she forced herself to relax.

She heard Blake's footsteps clatter along the hall and up to the attic. A couple of minutes later, they approached the bedroom.

He paused in the doorway and set down her overnight bag that he'd fetched from the car. "How are you doing?"

"Aside from my brain registering a fatal disk error, I'm okay."

"Then you might be up for making love again? The conventional way this time?"

Was he actually offering to strip down and dive in, finally? Sitting up, she flung her arms wide. "About time! Are *you* up for it?"

Blake strode to the bed and sat beside her. "Check for yourself." He guided her hand to his zipper.

She purred at the feel of his hard shaft through the cloth. Now she had a clue where he got his extraordinary staying power. Three or four climaxes per night were routine for him. It must have something to do with his nonhuman ancestry. *Am I accepting that without a struggle? I actually believe he's twin to that creature I just met?*

On the other hand, why would he lie about having an alien entity for a father? If anything, she'd expect him to lie in the other direction and claim he had no genetic relationship with Wilbur.

She wrapped her arms around Blake and nipped his neck. His lips grazed her earlobe then browsed along her jawline to her lips. She welcomed the kiss, his tongue probing for hers. The heat of his mouth ignited fresh heat lower down. She couldn't get enough of him. Thank goodness he seemed to feel the same way.

When they paused for breath, Lauren cast a nervous glance at the ceiling. "You're sure he can't hear us?"

"Like I said, his room isn't completely in this world. That's why crossing through the portal feels strange. Among other things, the barrier mutes sound. He can't hear anything beyond the attic."

"Then bring it on." She raked her nails down the center of his chest. In the dim light, Blake's eyes widened and darkened with undisguised hunger.

His mouth covered hers again. A delectable shiver rippled through her. Sighing, she lay back and he reclined over her. One hand roamed over her breasts while his other arm slipped under her shoulders. Her nipple stiffened in his palm and the other one peaked in sympathy.

Again she ran a hand over his chest, smoothing the finely curled hairs and stroking the nipples until they pebbled. Her brain buzzed with the competing sensations of his fingers teasing her nipples through her dress, his tongue exploring the inner lining of her lips and the tickle of his chest hair in the center of her palm.

"Incredible. I've waited so long to have you like this." His breath against her lips made her burn and shiver all at once. His mouth wandered to her neck. "Take everything off," he said hoarsely. His voice thrummed against her skin.

Propping herself up, she reached behind for her zipper. Blake finished the task, pulled the straps off her shoulders and stripped her of the dress. He lightly kissed each shoulder and the hollow of her throat. With his help, she wiggled out of her panties. His tongue flicked downward from the vee between her breasts to her navel. The agonizing tickle made her squirm with anticipation.

"What about your clothes?" She unsnapped his shorts.

A flush spread over his face and chest. His breathing quickened. He caught her hand. "In a minute. Lie down."

She lay back and waited. Kneeling between her spread legs, he massaged her shoulders, sending waves of heat through her while he nibbled her neck and darted his tongue between her parted lips. He stroked down the front of her body from breasts to thighs, back up and down again, over and over, in long, sweeping motions. His palms barely skimmed her nipples though she arched her back trying to increase the contact.

His thumbs lightly brushed her mound on each pass. Liquid welled up with each slight touch. She tried to clamp her thighs together but his bent legs held them apart. Her hips involuntarily thrust into the air, her channel begging to be filled.

He grasped her thighs with his fingers almost touching the swollen, burning flesh. "I want you to be completely ready when I enter you."

"I'm ready now." She groped for his zipper, pulled it down and ran her nails down his shaft. It twitched in response.

Grabbing her wrists, Blake raised her arms above her head and pinned them together with his left hand. Lauren gasped in surprise. He'd never restrained her before. Though she knew she could probably break loose if she struggled, she yielded, eager to find out what he planned.

With his right hand, he traced circles on her breasts and strummed the erect nipples. She wrapped her legs around his and rocked her pelvis but he wouldn't lean close enough to give the pressure she craved. His fingers trailed down her front, swirled around her navel and stroked the triangle of hair. A caress as light as a breath drifted over her slit.

"Harder," she whimpered.

"Let's see if you're wet enough." He stroked between the folds, evoking a gush of heat. "Oh yeah, definitely," he said.

His fingers seemed to sear her as they spread juices over her clit and rubbed the tight bud, first gently then faster and more vigorously. Her hips arched into his touch.

While her excitement soared to its peak, his breathing grew harsh and rapid and he pumped his own hips in sync with his rubbing. She screamed and convulsed in release.

"Again," he said in a voice husky with need as his fingers penetrated her sheath and swirled over her clit with tormenting finesse. He teased her until she began swelling toward the peak and whimpering his name. Heat flooded her while she shuddered in release and went limp in his arms.

"You're ready," he growled. "Roll over."

"What?" With her head still reeling, she could hardly whisper the question.

He let go of her wrists and clasped her waist to urge her onto her stomach. "Facedown. And close your eyes."

Obedying, she buried her face in the pillow. "Why?"

"Just do it. Get on your knees and don't look around."

She drew her legs up beneath her with her thighs apart. She heard the rustle of cloth and a second later, his fingers dug into her buttocks. The head of his cock nudged her slit. With a gasp, she raised her bottom in welcome.

Inch by inch, he slid into the cavity that yearned for him. Her channel twitched with tiny sparks of electricity. She contracted her inner muscles, delighting in how he filled her. She'd known from their first night together that he had an unusually long penis but now he entered her with such agonizing slowness that he seemed to penetrate impossibly deep.

When he was lodged to the hilt, something featherlike brushed her skin. Was he wearing some odd style of underpants? Didn't matter. He started to plunge in and out, filling her with the hardness she'd been craving.

"That's incredible...can't stand it much longer." His voice rasped in her ear as he covered her, his mouth on the nape of her neck. He reached between her legs and found her clit. His fingers dancing as frantically and lightly as a hummingbird's wings, he

urged her to another shattering orgasm while he drove into her utmost depths and roared aloud in his climax.

He lay on top of her, both of them trembling and panting for breath but only for a minute. When he pulled out, she protested with a soft whimper.

"All right," he said. "You can look now."

She rolled over, opened her eyes and sat up. Blake knelt at the end of the bed, his cock still half erect. At first she couldn't process what she saw. Was he wearing a decorated loincloth? Evenly spaced clusters of fringe or ribbons hung from just below his waist to the tops of his thighs.

Then a couple of the "ribbons" curled up like the heads of curious snakes.

She covered her mouth to stifle a shriek. He had tentacles.

"You...that's part of you? Part of your body?" She pointed with a shaking hand.

"You see why I've waited this long to show you." Sadness clouded his gray-blue eyes. "If you don't want to marry a monster, I understand."

"Give me more credit than that." But she couldn't keep the tremor out of her voice. *Okay, I can deal. He's still himself, just with a few enhancements added. Compared to a blob for a brother-in-law, this is a piece of cake.* "I'm not afraid of you. Just shocked." She needed a stronger word than that but her brain was too frozen to produce one. "Is it okay to touch them?"

"Please do. I've been dreaming about that for months."

He sat completely still while she scooted across the mattress to him. The tentacles were flat, like the ribbons she'd mistaken them for and about half an inch wide. Prismatic colors rippled over them, shifting with each movement of the prehensile organs. She ran a hand around his waist, finding six clusters, two each in front and in back and one on each side. The side sets, unlike the others, dangled to mid-thigh. Venturing to touch one of the appendages, she felt silken smoothness. Two of them coiled around her fingers. Their lower surfaces felt like velvet.

Sighing, he placed his hands on her shoulders. "That part's supersensitive. I've been waiting so long to feel you touch me there."

"But what are they for?"

"They're meant as an additional source of sensory input. Ahh." The tentacles whose undersides she was stroking quivered. "But I don't get to use the tactile function much, having to keep them covered in public. They also register magnetism and heat. I can't get lost and I sense when somebody's behind me without seeing them, for all the good that does."

"It would be handy if a mugger tried to sneak up on you in a dark alley."

"Good point. But mainly they're a liability, something I have to hide. It seemed so impossible that I'd ever find somebody like you who could live with my abnormality."

"You won't get rid of me that easily." She had to justify his faith in her. She sifted the tendrils through her fingers and watched, intrigued, as his erection expanded.

Cupping her face between his hands, he scattered gentle kisses on her cheeks and forehead. "I can hardly believe you're accepting me. That you still love me."

The wonder in his voice made her vision mist up. "I haven't seen anything to change my mind." Her lips brushed his for a second before she drew back and gazed into his eyes. "Just tell me now that you're not hiding any other anatomical details, are you? Like a third eye or a forked tail?"

With a shaky laugh, he said, "No, nothing that shows. My heartbeat and metabolism aren't quite like the human average but I live a normal life, as you've seen." He twined a few more tentacles around her wrists and flexed them.

"Do you, well, use these when you're in bed alone?"

"You mean to jerk off with?" His face reddened. "Sure."

"Show me."

"You're kidding, right?"

"Nope." She withdrew her hands and folded them in her lap. "I want to see."

He extended a pair of tentacles from each of the clusters in front and wrapped them around the base of his penis. All four appendages slid upward, swirled around the tip and moved down in a flowing spiral. "That's what I do while I think about you sucking on me."

She noticed his hard-on becoming even firmer. "Well, don't stop now. Doesn't it feel good?"

"Not as good as your mouth."

A trickle of moisture seeped from her slit. "I want to watch you excite yourself."

The tentacles were already creeping up his shaft, as if of their own volition. They coiled and squeezed then slid up and down more rapidly. One of them circled the tip, while another nested around his sac and still another snaked between his thighs.

Lauren clasped one of her breasts, the nipple pebbling in her palm, while her other hand pressed against her mound. Blake closed his fist around the base of his shaft and stimulated the rest of it more vigorously with a cluster of tentacles. His hips pumped as if thrusting into her.

"Enough," he gasped. He withdrew the tendrils to their resting place and clenched his hands in the sheets. "I don't want to come again yet. Not until I'm inside you."

"So come in!"

"Wait." He stood up and grabbed her hand. "Take a shower with me. That's one of my top fantasies."

He led her into the huge bathroom, supplied with a whirlpool tub as well as a super-size shower stall. After switching on the faucets and adjusting the temperature, he drew her under the spray. His tentacles fluttered in the stream like seaweed in an ocean current.

She flicked a tentacle with one finger. "Does that turn you on? The water running over them?"

"Oh yeah." Filling his hands with liquid soap, he massaged her neck and upper arms then lathered her breasts and stomach. She soaped him in turn, her palms sliding down his body, inch by inch, toward the coiling tentacles. His erection jutted out and nudged her mound.

"It's better than I imagined." His slippery hands circled around her waist and gripped her bottom. "Seeing you naked and wet, having you touch me like this." Her fingers stroked the undersides of the questing tentacles. He tilted his head back, eyes shut, and groaned. He reached under her thighs to hoist her up. "Want you now."

The guttural demand sent a lightning bolt of excitement through her. She clamped her legs around his waist and rocked her hips against him. With no apparent effort, he supported her full weight as he impaled her on his cock.

"I want to look into your eyes this time." He opened his own and captured her gaze. He lifted and lowered her, first slowly then gradually picking up speed.

The sensation of his shaft pumping in and out drove her to the peak faster than she'd imagined it could after the passion they'd already shared. His tentacles roamed over her skin, slick with soap and water. One of the elongated side tendrils crept around back to tease the hollow between her buttocks. Another tentacle caressed her clit.

"So hot," he murmured, still thrusting. "So thick. I feel the blood pooling here." His tentacles too, became flushed with blood, glowing pink. Water sparkled on them like dewdrops on leaves.

The tentacle-tip vibrated on her engorged bud. "Don't stop!" She buried her face in his neck. Contractions rippled through her clit and spread to her sheath.

Uniting his cry of ecstasy with hers, he plunged into her depths and stood rigid and trembling while they climaxed together.

Long minutes later, he eased out of her and lowered her feet to the floor. Still shaking, she clung to him with the water pouring over them. He turned it off, helped her out of the shower stall and dried her, then himself.

Still panting, she stumbled into the bedroom and collapsed, watching him through the connecting door. His erection hadn't completely receded yet. If his half-human genes were the source of his orgasmic capacity, she decided to be grateful for them. *Will his children turn out more human-looking than he is?* She'd have to ask him when she'd had more time to digest his revelations.

"Are you hungry?" He hung up the towel and dug a pair of shorts for himself out of a dresser drawer. Now she understood why he always wore the relaxed-fit style. "I ordered some Brie and crackers plus a bottle of Riesling—fruity but not too sweet. They should be in the refrigerator."

"Sure, I could eat." They'd stopped for a fast-food meal shortly before reaching the house but a snack sounded appealing.

After she'd dressed in a fresh outfit of shorts and a blouse from her bag, Blake said, "Let me show you around the rest of the house first. I don't want to leave any more surprises for you."

He led her up and down the hall, opening doors to reveal bedrooms containing furniture of varying vintages from late Victorian to mid-century modern, mostly coated with dust. "We don't use them often. See, no more secrets. Well, except in here."

He drew her into a room empty except for a table against one wall and guided her to the window.

"Why don't you turn on a light?" she asked.

"It would interfere with the view of outside." He opened the curtains.

She expected to see a night sky with stars and a beach with moonlight reflected on the water. Instead, the window showed a desolate landscape of jagged hills bathed in violet light. She squeezed Blake's hand. "That's a trick, right? A special effect?"

He shook his head.

"Darn. I didn't really think so."

"It's a side effect of my grandfather's dabbling in magic. He and my mother used this room for their rituals. You never know what you'll see through the window." He closed the curtains then reopened them. This time, she glimpsed clouds whipping through a dark void and heard the howl of hurricane-force winds.

"I think I've seen enough for now."

"Okay, let's tour the downstairs."

The ground floor consisted mainly of reassuringly ordinary features such as two parlors, a dining room and a large kitchen. On one side of the front hall, he showed her a library redolent of the enticing scent of old books. "They're all harmless," Blake said, "except for the ones we keep locked in that chest in the corner."

"Then I won't even ask where the key is."

They went back to the kitchen, where he showed her the basement door. "It's unfinished and there's nothing unusual down there. Just things like the furnace, the water heater and tools."

"No monsters? No portals into alien worlds? That's a nice change."

He asked her to set the table in the other room while he got out the snacks and opened the wine. She walked down the hall to the dining room and left him to his tasks. All the lights worked fine. Lauren didn't feel one bit nervous about roaming around this house alone after dark. Not at all.

She found silverware and other supplies in the drawers of the dining room sideboard. As she started to light the candles already arranged on the table, she heard the pounding of the knocker on the front door. Jumping, she cursed herself for being skittish for no reason. If burglars broke in, she could lure them upstairs and have Wilbur scare them into the middle of next week. She hurried to the foyer, switched on the porch light and peeked between the curtains of the bay window. A slender, dark-haired woman in jeans and T-shirt stood on the porch. Blake's cousin Stella.

Chapter Three

Opening the door, Lauren said, "Hi. Nice to see you but we weren't expecting anybody." That was the closest she could politely come to saying, "Why are you here? Go away."

"Thank all the Powers, I'm not too late." Stella shoved her way past Lauren into the house. "I'm here to save you."

"Huh? From what?"

She turned her dark, intense eyes on Lauren. "You don't know what your fiancé keeps hidden in the attic?"

"Wilbur? Yeah, we've met."

Stella shuddered. "Then you see what I mean. Do you want to spend the rest of your life babysitting that monster?" She marched to the stairs and started up them.

Lauren scurried after her. "Where are you going?"

"Like I said, to get rid of that thing once and for all."

"He's okay. I don't want him gotten rid of."

"Great Yog, does Blake have you brainwashed already?" Stella walked briskly to the door at the end of the hall, opened it and headed up to the attic. "Finally we have a chance to get some new blood into this family instead of all these second-cousin marriages and matings with eldritch entities. Not to mention what a relief it'll be to have at least one normal relative. I don't want that screwed up."

Lauren followed her to Wilbur's room. Flinging the door open, Stella took something greenish out of her jeans pocket. A chill coursed through Lauren as she stepped through the portal, fighting the momentary dizziness. She noticed the TV playing in the background.

Wilbur dropped the TV remote from the tentacle that held it and quivered like a mound of gelatin. "Cousin Stella! It has been a long time since your last visit."

"Don't 'cousin' me, you unspeakable abomination." She brandished the object and charged forward. It looked like a jade-green, star-shaped stone about the size of the palm of her hand.

Lauren kept pace with her. "What is that? What do you think you're doing?" She remembered Blake had said something about Wilbur's being especially vulnerable at this time of year.

"Trying to give you a chance at a normal marriage. This is one of the few weapons effective against those creatures."

Okay, it's official. She's the crazy one in the family.

Stella lunged at Wilbur. He shrank into a glowing sphere. When she bashed him with the carved stone and disgorged a stream of syllables in some language Lauren had never heard, he emitted a siren-like screech that stabbed through her head like an ice pick.

With her ears still ringing, Lauren grabbed Stella's arm and slapped her in the face. She squeezed the other woman's wrist until the fingers relaxed then snatched the object.

"What's wrong with you? Give that back!"

"No way, it hurts him." *What if next month she decides Blake is an abomination and tries to exorcise him too?* She patted Wilbur's cool, slippery surface, marked by a fresh star-shaped brand. "Are you okay?"

He extruded a couple of eyestalks. "I believe so."

"Duh, of course it hurts him. That's the idea," Stella said. "It's supposed to exile him to the alien dimension that spawned him. Do you have any idea how many hours of research in the Miskatonic library and how many years of hunting through musty antique collections it took me to find that artifact? It's the only way to save you."

"I don't want to be saved. He isn't doing any harm." She clutched the stone to her chest to keep Stella from grabbing it.

At that moment Blake rushed in. "What's going on? Stella, what are you doing here?"

Lauren held up the green star while fending off the other woman with her free hand. "She attacked Wilbur with this thing."

"I'll take care of that." He took the stone from her and tossed it into the air. It vanished.

She stared, waiting for the object to reappear. "How did you do that?"

He draped a protective arm around her shoulders. "I diverted it into another dimension at right angles to the four we know."

"Four? Not three?"

"Including time," he said.

"Oh, yeah, silly me. Useful talent."

Stella, looking stunned, opened and closed her mouth silently a couple of times before blurting out, "Since when have you been able to do that?"

"I've been practicing for years. Wilbur taught me. Sometimes he got rid of dead animals that way so they wouldn't lie around to attract attention." Glowering, he pointed an index finger at his cousin. "That was a hell of a thing to do, just because you think the family scared off your ex-fiancé." Stella's face reddened. Blake went on, "I've never tried banishing anything as big as a person but I'll bet I could make it work on you."

Lauren seized his hand. "No, don't! She's a bridesmaid and there isn't enough time to get the dress altered for somebody else."

He gave her a thoughtful frown then turned to Stella again. "Can I count on you not to cause any more trouble?"

She shook her head in obvious disgust. "Why bother? You're both hopeless. I thought you'd want to be free of your ties to that monster." She cast a pitying glance at Lauren. "And you. You struck me as a nice, normal woman. I didn't think you'd want to marry into a burden like that."

Lauren shrugged. "I'm sure I can handle it."

"Including babies with monster genes?"

Shaken by the echo of her own qualms, Lauren folded her arms and answered in the firmest tone she could manage, "I'd be happy to have a son who looks like Blake."

"Then don't blame me for what happens when the stars come right and the Old Ones return." Stella stalked out through the shimmering portal. They listened to her footsteps cross the attic and fade into silence.

"Wait," Blake said as he left the room too. Lauren glanced at the muted TV screen, where a scene from an animated movie was paused. It showed a nude, big-breasted girl wrapped in the tentacles of a giant squid-thing. A rosy pink wave undulated over Wilbur's surface. He extended a tendril to pick up the remote and switch off the DVD.

Blake returned in a couple of minutes.

"Is she gone?" Wilbur asked in a voice too small for his physical bulk.

"Yes, I watched her drive away." Claspng Lauren's hand, Blake said, "Come on, we don't want that bottle of wine to go to waste. See you tomorrow, Wilbur."

"Goodnight," his brother burbled. As they left the room, Lauren heard the TV restart.

"Stars come right?" she said on the way downstairs. "Old Ones return?"

"Don't worry about it. Wilbur and I both like this world pretty much the way it is. We have no intention of opening a gate for primal, eldritch forces to invade our space-time continuum. I don't care what our sire had in mind when he begat us."

"Glad to hear it. Why should you have to take over the family business if you don't want to?" In the dining room, she settled with a grateful sigh into the chair Blake held for her.

He lightly kissed the nape of her neck. "Just rest, I'll take care of everything." She heard him walk to the front door and fasten the bolt, after which he brought the wine, cheese and crackers from the kitchen. He filled their glasses then spread Brie on a cracker and raised it to her lips. She nibbled the tidbit and licked his fingertips.

"Unfair tactics." He pulled his hand away and took a sip of wine.

She drank from hers, savoring the cool, crisp flavor. "Okay, your turn." She put a dab of cheese on another cracker and offered it to him. After eating it in one bite, he captured her hand and sucked a fingertip between his lips. Electricity zapped down her arm, through her breasts, all the way to the pit of her stomach. "Fine, now we're even." The words came out in a breathless whisper.

"After all these months of torture, waiting to get inside you? Hardly. So don't expect me to stop."

"Never said I wanted you to." Tender though the flesh between her legs was, she tingled with anticipation at the hint of another round.

He took a sip of wine, leaned across the table and kissed her. When her lips parted to welcome him, she almost choked in surprise. The chill of the wine flowed from his mouth to hers. She swallowed it and shivered as a titillating blend of cold and heat flowed through her.

She clamped her hands onto his shoulders and levered herself up. "I'm not hungry after all—for food. How about we take the bottle to the bedroom? I'll bet you have more secrets you haven't shown me yet."

"Oh, I could probably think of some."

They strolled upstairs with arms around each other's waists. In his stride and the firmness of his embrace, she sensed a new confidence. Once they reached the bedroom,

he let go of her long enough to light a vanilla-scented candle and turn off the lamp. The aroma and the soft glow bathed the room in a sensual haze.

Sitting in the middle of the bed, they passed the bottle back and forth a couple of times. Between sips, they kissed, savoring the wine on each other's lips. Lauren's heart raced. Lightheaded, she leaned against Blake's chest and unfastened his shorts. "What are you wearing these for?"

He shucked them onto the floor and knelt in front of her. "You wanted another demonstration?"

"You bet." She laced her fingers among the tendrils on either side of his waist.

His front tentacles drifted across her stomach with a fleeting brush against her inner thighs just below her shorts. "We'll start here." He unbuttoned her blouse, branding each exposed area of skin with his lips. Since she hadn't bothered with a bra, that process included tracing a circle of kisses around each breast. The nipples perked up as soon as the air wafted over them. Several of the side tentacles looped around her wrists. "I can feel your pulse throbbing. It tells me you like this."

She nipped his shoulder. "You already know I do."

Pushing her sleeves off her shoulders, he bent to lap her nipples. She stopped caressing him for a second to help him take off the blouse. The warmth of his tongue in contrast to the cool air sent shivers through her. His palms swept down her sides again and again, spreading those shudders of pleasure over every inch of bare flesh.

She squirmed and pressed her thighs together. Blake unzipped her shorts and helped her wiggle out of them. Two tentacles slipped inside the elastic at the tops of her legs, while two others skimmed the waistline of her underwear. Tremors shook her as she struggled to focus on all the different sensations at once. With his hands, he peeled off the panties while the tendrils grazed the curls on her mound.

When she started to lie back, he placed her hands on his shoulders to anchor them. "Stay like this." His fingers then traveled downward to fasten on her rib cage and stroke the undersides of her breasts. He moved closer, parting her knees with his so that

he knelt between her open thighs. The tip of his cock nudged her mound. While he caressed the arc of her breasts, his tongue pleased her nipples and the tentacles glided over her stomach and hips.

She couldn't do anything but cling to him while her head spun. A tentacle flicked her clit, while another slid inside her sheath and a third probed the cleft of her bottom. Still others wandered over her exposed skin, striking sparks in every nerve. Her whole body vibrated as if supercharged with the electricity of his passion.

"You're so hot," he whispered. "I want to feel you erupt like a volcano."

"Yes!" she cried. "Right now!" The next moment, the eruption overcame her. She screamed aloud as she shuddered through it, anchoring herself with her nails in his shoulders.

"Now you can lie down." His hoarse voice thrummed against her breast.

She lay back and his cock invaded her still-pulsing channel. Tendrils insinuated between the two of them stimulated her clit while he drove toward his climax. Again she screamed as she soared to the peak with him.

With his arms enfolding her and his tentacles languidly caressing her stomach and hips, she rolled to her side. Her chest ached for air. He fluttered kisses over her cheeks and forehead and stroked her back until both of them could breathe again.

"Mmm." She gazed at the ceiling and stretched her arms above her head. "Considering what you can do with those tentacles, I'll bet Wilbur's even more versatile. His idea about finding a mate might not be as farfetched as I thought."

Blake laughed softly. "It's not like he could go on dates."

She sat up and wrapped her arms around her knees. "But we could at least invite him to the wedding. It's not fair to leave him out of the celebration."

"Say what? He can't let most of the guests see him."

"He can leave that room, can't he?"

Blake nodded.

"So we'll disguise him as an ornamental abstract sculpture. He really is beautiful in a way. All he'll have to do is keep the tentacles and most of the eyestalks retracted."

Squeezing her hand, Blake said, "I'm sure my folks would like that."

"Then it's settled." She lay down to snuggle against his shoulder. "Maybe I should consider hooking Wilbur up with one of my girlfriends, after all."

About the Author

Marked for life by reading DRACULA at the age of twelve, Margaret L. Carter specializes in the literature of fantasy and the supernatural, particularly vampires. She received degrees in English from the College of William and Mary, the University of Hawaii, and the University of California. She is a 2000 Eppie Award winner in horror, and with her husband, retired Navy Captain Leslie Roy Carter, she coauthored a fantasy novel, WILD SORCERESS.

Margaret welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her author bio page at www.ellorascave.com.

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