



# FAE BY EMAIL

By

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## Chapter One

"Come on, Maiven," Jeb coaxed, his eyes clearly ripping her clothes off as he leaned his narrow hip against the edge of her desk, "you're a bitch in heat and you know it."

Maiven tossed the day-old contents of her favorite kitty mug into his face, "Get the hell out, Jeb. I'm not telling you again."

With a move faster than lightening, Jeb enclosed her wrist with talon-like fingers, gripping so tightly, Maiven cried out at the pain. She tugged to free herself, even scratching at his hand to no avail.

"Stop it, Jeb. Let me go."

Just inches from her face, his seedy eyes narrowed and his rancid breath cut off her oxygen supply. He spat his usual threat. At times like this, she knew she was trapped and had no way out.

"At the snap of my fingers, I can have your legs spread and take what I want, as often as I want." He shoved her away from him so that she caught a bare heel against the edge of the small file cabinet and fell heavily into her seat. The aged metal creaked in protest under her weight and she righted herself with trembling hands on the arms of the chair.

"You have no right--"

"I have every right!" He grabbed a hand full of her hair and bent forward again, inhaling its honey scent. "Mmm, that's nice. Just remember, Mai. I own you."

She sat silently enduring his treatment. She'd pushed him too far by tossing the coffee at him. If she could have called it back, she would have. It didn't pay to antagonize him. Not ever. She was lucky this time. He didn't hit her.

When he was quiet too long, she risked a look up at him. The tiny bloodshot eyes were full of lust and locked on her nipples, plainly outlined through her *Hello Kitty* nightie. She hated how often he managed to catch her before she was able to dress in the morning.

She despised his greasy black hair, too long as it hung in thick clumps past his hairy ears. The dull brown eyes, the elongated nose, the fishy lips along with a ridiculously thin body all culminated to make up the man she hated most in the world. He was her employer and the one who had held her prisoner from the day she turned eighteen, ten years ago. Was her crime, so long ago, worth this almost daily humiliation?

"No, don't hide those jugs from me, Mai. Let me get my eyes full." He yanked on the arm covering her breasts. She flinched at the vulgar term and Jeb laughed in her face. "Aww, the little princess doesn't like my fancy language?"

"Get out of here, Jeb. Let me get back to work. Gambling takes concentration." She attempted to swivel her chair to face her computer, but he stopped her.

"Concentration, huh? Not for you. Anyway, you'll get back to work when I say you do and not a minute sooner." A bony hand slid over the gunk in his hair, before he mashed it against the leg of his jeans.

He was right, but she wasn't going to admit it to him. Gambling, her glamorous profession, came somewhat easily--most of the time. And Jeb wasn't above cashing in on it with his constant threats of prison for her if she didn't do what he said. His 'no statute of limitations on murder, Maiven' had had her doing his bidding for years.

He must be down on his luck again. It was the only time he stayed around long enough to ride her back. When things were going well, Jeb was nowhere to be seen, which was how Mai liked it. She made him the money and he spent it on fast girls, trying to impress them with wealth he didn't have. Then he'd come back, putting pressure on Mai to produce.

And when he didn't have the money to buy his own girls, he sniffed around her. But she'd told him from day one, she'd rather rot in a hundred jails than jump into his bed for a second. It must be the only reason why he had never followed up on his threat to take her against her will. Well, that and Mrs. Kitt.

As if on cue, she had just caught the delicate tinkle of Mrs. Kitt's bell, when she hopped up to Mai's kitchen windowsill. With the welcome sound, it was only a matter of seconds before she would be free of Jeb for at least another two days.

The lustful expression on Jeb's face froze in place. The fingers of one hand worried a matted lock of hair and he began a careful inching toward the door. Mai suppressed a giggle. As if an animal wouldn't smell his funky breath long before it entered the room, she thought.

She eased back in her chair until the rusty gears allowed her to tilt enough to view the doorway. Mrs. Kitt paused on entrance with one front paw raised as if questioning whether her nose and her keen eyes were fooling her. She nodded at her kitty, knowing Mrs. Kitt would take care of Jeb.

Mai returned her amused gaze to her boss who was still slowly making his way to the door. When Mrs. Kitt let go of a growl fit to put the fear of feline in a bulldog, Jeb screeched like a girl and barrowed through Mai's office door, across the living room, and slammed into the closed front door. Before he could grasp the door knob and stifle the blood streaming from his nose, Mrs. Kitt swiped a claw across his bare ankle. A moment later, Jeb was gone. Mai tumbled over onto the carpet holding her stomach and laughing.

"Mrs. Kitt, you got him good," she shrieked between giggles. With a mewl and confident stroll, her pet returned. Mai could almost see the snap of furry fingers in the air. "I don't know why Jeb's so terrified of you, Mrs. Kitt, but good riddance. Now I have to take a shower and scrub down the place to get rid of his smell."

She lifted her pet onto her lap and stroked her lovingly. "He's so stupid, Mrs. Kitt, scared of an ordinary cat." She held the cat up, and stared into its face, eye to eye. "What, is he scared you'll tell his secrets or something? Well, just don't tell mine."

\* \* \* \*

Mai's back was pressed against the shower wall, allowing the jet of warm water to gently wash away the last of the suds from her damp, mocha skin. Her chest heaved with her ragged breaths as she eased two fingers from between her legs.

Jeb had been right on one head. She was in heat. Mai had been craving a man so badly for so long, at one point she'd even considered Jeb. Of course, after discussing it with Mrs. Kitt, the loyal pet had nipped *her* ankle and brought her to her senses. Jeb was no substitute for a real man--and apparently neither were her fingers.

Mai leaned a hand against the cool tile just under the shower head and used her

other hand to stroke her moist, swollen center. The steam, the steady ping of the water bouncing off of the shower floor and the near-chant of her 'I want a man' all worked to bring her to climax. Yet, even then she was dissatisfied. Only the stiff erection of a flesh-and-blood male could ease her ache.

Mai stepped from the shower, dried herself, and dragged a comb through her newly dyed honey brown hair before slipping into an over-sized tee and padding out to her office to power up her outdated computer. Working at home wasn't all it was hyped up to be. "If Jeb wasn't such a sleaze, Mrs. Kitt, I'd be allowed to get a new computer."

While the ancient contraption booted at the speed of a slug, she shuffled around the various cat paraphernalia on her overcrowded desk, searching for her mug. Fresh coffee should get the gambling juices flowing this morning.

On her return from the kitchen with a steaming Joe, Mai flopped down in her chair to find a screen popping and fizzing with blue and purple dots chasing each other around in the too small square of her monitor. Mai gave it a good whack on the side, which had always worked previously. The dots ran faster and Mai found herself almost imagining each had tiny little legs.

"Lord, I really am losing it."

A few more whacks and internet explorer popped up on the screen, the cursor blinking in the address bar. Mai stared a moment and then entered her first web address-- [www.truegamble.com](http://www.truegamble.com). The computer popped and fizzed, then switched to [www.fae-email.com](http://www.fae-email.com). Mai tried again.

"T-R-U-E gamble, stupid." Some autocorrect feature switched the name again. Mai screeched and pounded the monitor. The screen remained a white blank, yet the hour glass rotated repeatedly in the middle of the screen. After half a dozen times, Mai gave up and let it search for the fae-email site. Maybe it would be a temporary distraction from her problems. Finally, after an eternity, more blue and purple dots danced and then melted to form words.

"Welcome to Fae-Email.com, the number one site for accessing all of Faeland through the Internet." Colorful sparkles followed her pointer and she called over her shoulder, "Mrs. Kitt, you should see all these colors and dots. It's so cute." The sleepy cat joined her but gave no indication of caring or understanding one way or another.

Suddenly, a pop-up window came onto the screen while Mai continued to watch. A tiny fairie with green-spotted wings like a luna moth and a white glittering dress with matching shoes, flew happily within the new window.

Mai noticed her lips moving, but couldn't hear her words and she reached out to click on her sound. The tiny, sweet voice rang out immediately.

"Hello, there. Would you like to set up an email account today?"

Playing along, Mai muttered, "Sure why not?" Instantly, the original screen melted into a sign-up form. "Wow."

"Login Name?"

Still not believing what she was seeing, Mai tossed out a few silly choices, "HotMai2007? MaiNeedsAMan?"

"Both are available. Which one?"

Mai blinked at the screen, an unsettling growing within her. She glanced down at the floor where her microphone, broken beyond repair, lay in pieces. Something fishy was going on here.

“MaiNeedsAMan,” she whispered cautiously. The line for the login name filled in with the name at the pointing of the fairie’s glowing finger tip.

Mai shoved her chair away and stood. She pointed wildly toward the screen. “Mrs. Kitt, do you see that? Do you see?”

Mrs. Kitt yawned and went back to sleep after taking a quick peek. Mai was on her own. She didn’t dare go near the screen again, but the fairie was still speaking to her. Carefully, lest something explode, she reached to snap off the sound. The fairie’s voice continued without hindrance.

Mai bit her thumb nail, tugged at her wild hair and muttered to herself. This was a dream. She was in her bedroom asleep, because this was not real.

\* \* \* \*

“Ok, you’re all finished, Maiven. Will there be anything else?”

How did she know her full name? Mai was about to go into cardiac arrest. Surely she couldn’t take any more of this dream. It felt so real. She needed to wake up before her brain gave her a heart attack without meaning to.

“No,” she forced out. “There won’t be anything else.”

“Ok, you’re all set.” The fairie and her box popped and disappeared. The only thing left was the mailbox of MaiNeedsAMan and one new email sitting in her inbox already.

Slowly, Mai returned to her chair and sat down. With an unsteady hand, she clicked on the message. It was from TheManForYou. She nearly fainted at the message.

“Hi, Maiven. I would love to get to know you better. Attached, you’ll find my profile. If you like what you see, drop me an email, Fallon.”

## Chapter Two

“Oh my God. No way. This is not real, Mrs. Kitt.” Mai stood again and paced in a circle around her chair. At each turn, she glanced at the computer screen to see if anything had changed. No, the pulsating purple link to TheManForYou’s profile was still there.

Mai perched on the edge of her seat, snatched up her coffee and slurped loudly from the cup. When she burned her tongue, she slammed down the mug, sloshing drops onto the keyboard.

“Ok, here goes.” She punched the enter key to activate the link, and then nearly flipped over the back of her seat when, instead of a popup or a new page, a hologram projected from her screen and into the space of her tiny office.

It was the image of a man, no more than twelve inches high. He stood confidently with fists on either hip as if he were posing. His body rotated in a circle so that she saw all angles of his chiseled physique. The jet black hair hanging in a thick rope down his back, only added to his aura of unlimited masculinity. The bulging muscles of his chest and biceps would make Arnold Schwarz cry with envy.

Mai gawked, experiencing a piercing tingle in her southern regions when her eyes traveled down this mini god, to land on his better qualities. “Oh,” she squeaked, “he’s wearing leggings, Mrs., and there is absolutely nothing left to the imagination.”

Mai stuck a hand out to wiggle her fingers through the projected image. “Well? Don’t you talk or something?” She didn’t actually believe it would answer, but it did.

“Hello, I’m Fallon. I’m a six-foot, five-inch fae from Faeland, of course. I grew up in the Nether Region, but moved to the city when I was just one hundred, thirty-five. Um, let’s see. I work as a retriever. That’s going well. Uh, oh yes, what I’m looking for in a mate. She must be a fae. That’s a given, though I don’t care if she lives in Faeland or the human world. She must be sexy, smart, and strong. I can do without the emotional baggage from failed relationships, which is why I’m trying this form of dating in the first place. All the fae females in the area where I live and work are ... let’s just say they’re not what I’m looking for.”

Mai frowned. He sounded like a real jerk. She hated men like that. They weren’t really ready for a relationship. They just wanted sex. The fact that he was a bona fide nut was also obvious. The man couldn’t be more than thirty years old, and he certainly hadn’t been born in Faeland. That was a myth.

The woman he was looking for must be a fae? “Give me a break.”

The image continued, “So, listen if you’re interested, drop me a line. I know you won’t be disappointed.”

The hologram fell silent, though it continued to rotate, with the man changing positions periodically in order to better display his charms, she figured. At one point, he leaned an elbow against some invisible bar and thrust his hips forward. The movement drew Mai’s gaze to his blue leggings again. The bulge there was so pronounced, so long, Mai wondered if he was erect. She squirmed in her seat, squeezed her legs tightly

together and licked her lips.

“Well, how do you turn this thing off?” With her words, the program switched off and Mai had access to the inbox again.

Before she could change her mind, she began an email to Fallon. She chewed at her inner lip, trying to think up something clever. The obvious was too tempting to resist.

“Fallon, I liked what I saw, but then you knew I would didn’t you? I can’t imagine a man with your charms needing to use an online dating service, but with your attitude toward women, it’s no wonder. The decent women tell you to F-off? Hmm. Though I do like the pointed ears. Very sexy. Mai.”

The second her finger rose from clicking send, a ding informed her she had new mail, from Fallon. Mai blinked and opened it quickly.

“You’re so cruel, Maiven. I thought I was wooing you with my profile.”

She replied, “You can’t be serious. That’s your idea of wooing?”

“Yes, I’m serious. Won’t you teach me to do better?”

“I don’t think so.”

“Sweet Maiven?”

“I prefer Mai.”

“But Maiven suits you.”

“You don’t know me.”

“I want to.”

Mai sat back in her chair and stared at her screen. Each time before she could lean back from sending Fallon a message, his reply came right away. It was as if he knew what she would type before she did. How could he do that?

She turned to survey her office. Had Jeb installed a hidden camera while she was out? He’d tried that in her bedroom three years ago as he’d done in the past to her mother’s. The investigative Mrs. Kitt had cut that little scheme short by continually mewling beneath the spot where it was hidden in one of Mai’s stuffed kittens on a shelf in her room. Mai had been livid, but there was nothing she could do besides remove it. Jeb held all the cards.

While she sat wondering what to make of this whole insane experience, a small rectangular box popped into view in the middle of her screen. The colorful border sparkled with the same pixie dust that followed her pointer. The message inside simply said, “From Fallon: Chat?”

Mai accepted and waited for the next surprise. She didn’t wait long. An animated hand appeared, snapped its fingers and a chat session opened with a line stating she was chatting with Fallon. He typed right away.

“Shall we use visual?”

“Sorry, I don’t have a camera.”

“Ha-ha, what are you a moonling?” A brilliant square of color shot out toward Mai, but she held up both hands to ward it off.

“No, stop!” The square froze in the air and Mai leaned around to one side to see if it really was extending from her screen. It was. “Um, I don’t want to do visual on my end,” she typed.

“Oh no,” Fallon responded, “an ugly fae female. Or are you a troll, pretending to be fae?”

Mai froze. If this man believed he was a fae, then he would not like it that she was



impersonating one. He'd know she was human, though he was one too. His befuddled brain just didn't know it, she thought.

"I'm trying to slow things down a bit." She wrote. "All the men I've met, have wanted to jump into bed with me right away."

"So what you're saying is I can't bring my hard-on over there and shove it up inside you yet?"

Mai caught on fire. His blunt speaking had her panting with desire. All other times men spoke to her that way, it disgusted her. Maybe it was the fact that Fallon had every other male beat in the looks department. Or maybe it was that she hadn't had sexual relations in too many months.

"Would you like to see me, Maiven?"

"Yes." She answered without thinking, but had to admit to herself it was true. Was he as hot as his hologram?

The screen changed and there he was, the same arrogantly handsome face, with mischievous green eyes, laughing out at her from where? A forest? Was it a live feed?

"Where are you?"

Trees passed as he seemed to be walking along. Every now and then, as he moved, she could see snatches of the sky, a pinkish, cottony-soft sky. Everything about the fae appeared to involve bright colors. It looked to be daylight. It must be some kind of trick.

"I'm in Nether Forest, working."

Mai frowned, "Wait, you're in a forest working *and* on the computer talking to me? How does that happen?"

His chuckle rumbled up from his throat in the most attractive way. "You *are* a moonling, Maiven. It's so refreshing. I think I will keep you."

Annoyed at being called a moonling and not knowing what it meant, Mai minimized the view of Fallon to access a search engine. Seconds later, her temperature rose.

"A moonling is a lunatic, an idiot," she accused.

"What?" Fallon's face registered genuine surprise. "How odd. The human world is backwards. A moonling in Faeland is an inexperienced fae, a babe, sometimes referring to a virgin. Are you a virgin, Maiven?"

Mai blushed, feeling the warmth spread to her ears, which tingled and itched when she was uncomfortable.

"I'll have you know, Fallon, I am not a virgin," she huffed. "I am not a moonling."

"Prove it."

She crossed her arms, angry with him. And then it occurred to her what he said. Fallon knew she was in the human world. Not that she believed in this faerie stuff.

"How do you know I'm in the human world?"

"I use my magic, of course. How do you think I'm contacting you from the field when my computer's at home?"

She wasn't about to say she didn't know, for fear he'd call her crazy again. "Well, what are you doing out there?"

Mai leaned over toward the screen to get a better look. The pink sky had begun to darken. It wasn't as easy to distinguish Fallon from the shadows of the woods.

“I’m retrieving.”

She risked it, “Retrieving what?”

Fallon shook his head, with a ‘didn’t I tell you’ look on his face. He explained briefly, “I retrieve rogue fae. The king declares the punishment for their crimes, and they take it into their minds to run from justice. The king employs me to go get them. At first they try hiding in the woods.” He indicated his background. “Then they try to escape into the human world.”

“What happens then?”

Fallon shrugged, “Then it gets trickier. The world you live in is much bigger than Faeland, and there are many more magical creatures to stir up the works. But it’s not impossible to find them. I just have to concentrate, lock on to their magic signature. Every time they use magic, I can track them better. The hard part is when they don’t use any magic. Then they may disappear forever.”

“Oh.” Mai wondered at this interesting tale. She wanted to believe in it just because Fallon did. There was something so appealing about him. He wasn’t quite the jerk she had thought at first. If he weren’t so crazy ... maybe she could play around with him a little, just until her horniness died down some.

“Maiven, are you there?” He stared into the screen. “I have to go for now. Will you let me call you later?”

Mai hesitated, “I can’t. My computer’s not working properly. I have to see if I can get it fixed.”

“If I fix it, will you let me talk to you again?”

Mai trembled with the anticipation of speaking with him again. If nothing else, at least Fallon distracted her from work. There were no other prospects. “Ok, yes, call me again, Fallon. I look forward to it.”

“As do I, fair Maiven. As do I.”

True to his word, though she couldn’t have explained how he did it, Fallon somehow zapped Mai’s computer until it successfully pulled up her gambling sites. At first she was fearful she wouldn’t find the fae site again, but a tiny icon appeared on her desktop. Fallon had pointed it out to her. Clicking on it opened her internet explorer and then brought up the fae e-mail site. Mai sighed with relief. She hadn’t lost him.

## Chapter Three

Two days later at four in the afternoon, as she figured he would, Jeb returned. This time, he brought a peace offering to Mrs. Kitt and tossed a large slab of fish outside the window to distract her cat.

Mai watched him warily. "What do you want, Jeb?"

Without warning, Jeb reared back his calloused hand and snapped it hard across her cheek. She squelched her cry of pain while gritting her teeth. She wouldn't give him the satisfaction of knowing how much he hurt her.

"Where the hell is my money, Mai?"

"I put money in the bank." Her response was forced, resentful. Supplying him didn't leave much left over for her own bills. If she couldn't win more, she'd have to survive on beans and rice this week. Lately, she was considering running again. But that would be harder. No access to the Internet to gamble and she'd be forced to open a new bank account if she did. That meant she'd be traceable. As shabby as Jeb appeared to be, he did have talented friends. Any number of them could find her in less than a day.

"It was less than a thousand, and that won't pay for anything," he grumbled. "I need more."

"Of course you do. Just one night with the prostitutes you buy would run that out." Mai had too much mouth. Her mother had always told her so. *And Mama had horrible taste in men*, she thought bitterly.

"Oh you just want to push my buttons today, don't you Mai?" Jeb rummaged around inside his checked blazer pockets. He thought the hideous thing made him more appealing to the ladies. "You forget who you're dealing with."

She stilled, the sassiness ebbing from her attitude. Pain and fear arrested her breathing. Jeb waved the digital video tape in the air and waited for her reaction.

"You carry it on you," she said simply.

"Where else? I'm smarter than you are, Mai. I've been around a lot longer." He laughed, "A *lot* longer. And I figured you'd try to steal the tape from me, so I keep it on my person."

Mai sank to her chair and gazed unseeingly around her office. She was in prison already. This little box of space was where she spent all of her time, never having a social life or friends or anything. As lucky as she was at gambling, she was not good enough to win the amount that would free her forever. She was not lucky enough to have never landed in this position in the first place.

"Are you going to hang the murder over my head the rest of my life, Jeb?"

With no forewarning, he yanked up her chin and planted his lips firmly on hers. Bile rose in her throat and she quickly kned him as hard as she could in the groin. His cry of pain was not nearly satisfaction enough.

When Jeb sank to his knees, releasing the tape, Mai scrambled for it and half crawled, half ran toward the living room. But even in pain, Jeb was too fast for her. He caught a hand full of her curls and dragged her back against him.

“Where do you think you’re going?” He slipped his tongue in her ear and Mai turned her head in disgust. “I’ll take that tape thank you. This is my ticket to getting laid.”

Mai jerked herself free from his hold. “You disgust me. I don’t want to hear about you getting laid.”

“Jealous?”

“Go to hell, Jeb!”

“You can pay my way there, princess.”

Mai returned to her office and slumped before her computer. She dropped her head in her hands, tugging lightly at her hair. Sometimes it seemed like she’d be stuck at this computer for the rest of her life, financing Jeb’s sex life and having none of her own. She felt the tears start, but ruthlessly swallowed them. Jeb wasn’t going to get that show today. She’d figure a way out. She had to.

“You were my mother’s boyfriend, practically raised me. How can you do this?” Mai knew reasoning with this selfish ass was pointless, yet she tried anyway. “You were the one who taught me how to play the game.”

Jeb’s laugh was mocking. “Yeah, I taught you to play the game. And you were good, too. When I think of all the dumb slobs we fleeced, I miss the old days.”

She sneered. “I don’t miss the old days. You and my mother spent your days gambling and cheating other people in every way you could conjure. And now I must spend my days following in your footsteps, gambling.”

He grinned. “Like father, like daughter.”

“You are not my father.”

His eyes narrowed in warning and he bent over her again, “Just remember, Mai, if you hadn’t killed that guy, we wouldn’t be in this situation now would we?”

She swiveled her chair away from facing him, feeling a renewed sense of guilt. He was right. If she hadn’t done it, she wouldn’t be in this mess. She would be free to live her life as she pleased, maybe even have a boyfriend and talk about marriage. Anything other than this.

\* \* \* \*

The alarm sounded, startling Mai awake in the most rude of ways. She fumbled for the snooze button to stop the insistent blare, but managed to knock everything else off the nightstand instead, including the lamp. Growling, she dragged herself from beneath her warm covers to trip along to the wall switch. The darkness was immediately dispelled and served to bring her thinking into focus. Today, she was going to try it again.

She yanked open the closet door and snatched her backpack from the hook on the back. Bending down to scoop up Mrs. Kitt, she tossed the cat onto the bed to keep her out from under her feet as she stuffed her bag with only the essentials. A couple changes of clothes and extra panties, toothbrush. Oh yeah, she needed that now.

In twenty minutes, she was ready to go. She slung the backpack on her back and gathered Mrs. Kitt, before clicking off all appliances and lights and heading out the door. It was still dark outside being only four-thirty in the morning. No one stirred about in the complex’s parking lot, just as she hoped. Mai hopped inside her ten-year-old Toyota and roared around the curve until she reached the main street. It had to work this time. It just had to or she ... no, she wouldn’t think negatively. It was going to work. She’d get away.

Four hours later, the highway was crowded with commuters headed to work, but Mai was miles from home. With each passing marker, her heart lifted. This time, she’d

run her life her way. She'd come and go as she pleased. When it was safe, she'd make contact with Fallon somehow. At least she hoped she still could. She was sure she could convince him to keep their relationship on a very casual basis, for sexual satisfaction only and no digging too deeply into each other's pasts. That way, she could be reasonably sure he would never find out about the murder.

Mrs. Kitt yowled at the same instant Mai's stomach rumbled. "You're right, Mrs. Kitt. It's time for breakfast. I'm starving."

She pulled off the highway onto a service road lined with restaurants. She chose one at random and slid into a parking spot before quickly feeding Mrs. Kitt and heading inside to satisfy her own hunger.

The first thing Mai noticed the moment she pushed open the door--right after her nostrils flared at the mouth-watering smell of fried potatoes--was the poker slot machine wedged in a corner. She grunted. It was small change and she had enough to sustain her, but she couldn't help noticing, after she'd gotten her burger and fries, that the man playing the game was lousy at it.

When she finished her meal, she joined him, "You're going about it all wrong."

He sneered. "Like you'd know better? I've been playing poker for twenty years and I say this machine's rigged to make a person lose. Nobody ever gets more than a few dollars from it."

Mai cast him a withering look, "Mind if I prove you wrong?"

He shrugged and she took his place as soon as he stepped aside. She cracked her knuckles and flexed her shoulder and neck muscles a few times for dramatic effect, then placed her hands on the buttons. Just as she knew it would happen, she won three out of every four hands she played. She quit when her fingers grew numb and she felt the familiar drain of her energy. Yet, her winnings had spilled over onto the floor and eventually into the man's cap.

"How did you do that? It was like you were magic."

His eyes grew round with awe, but Mai was no longer paying attention to what he said. Her eyes focused on the man just entering the restaurant. There was no doubt in her mind that he was there for her. Somehow, Jeb had plenty of friends to do his dirty work, like searching her out. She knew she was right when he began weaving through the tables toward her, his eyes boring into hers.

She spun on her heel and raced to the back of the restaurant toward the ladies restroom. She burst through and shoved a shoulder against the door to force it closed against the hydraulic control, and snapped the lock in place.

When she turned, another woman was frozen in place on her way to the sink, staring at Mai as if she thought she would attack. Her mumbled apology was lost somewhere beneath her own pounding heart and the hammering on the door.

She sprinted across the floor to the window and managed to wedge it open before wiggling out onto the street. By the time she made it back to her car and was peeling out of the drive, the man in black was running out of the front door of the restaurant.

Mai reached out to adjust her rearview mirror and pressed harder on the gas. Her car might be old, but it still had some get up and go in it. She'd put as many miles between her and the hunter as possible.

Mrs. Kitt's mewl caught her attention and Mai nodded absently. "Yes, Mrs. Kitt. They found me, just like usual. I just can't figure it out. I--"

She fell silent and cast a nervous glance in the rearview mirror again. She hadn't been mistaken. Flashing red-and-blue lights filled the reflection and she relented and pulled to the side of the highway.

She fumbled for her identification as the officer exited his vehicle and walked toward her at a leisurely pace. She rolled down her window just as he reached her, and held up the information.

He grinned, "Now, Mai. You've been a bad girl."

Spots danced before her eyes. The license and registration card, clutched in her shaking hand, slipped to the side of the door. "You know me."

He didn't answer her question. "Mai, Jeb isn't happy." *Damn!* Jeb had something over a policeman? He had too many connections for her to get away.

Her shoulders slumped. She placed both hands on the wheel before dropping her forehead against them. It was no use. He'd always find her.

## Chapter Four

Ten years. It had been ten excruciating years since that day when Jeb forced Mai to view the scene of her attack on the man in her mother's bedroom. She'd tried to turn away and block out the sound of the bat connecting with the man's skull. Jeb had placed a hand at the nape of Mai's neck to ensure she took in every splash of the thick, sticky blood.

And afterward, when she hung over the toilet, casting up the last contents of her stomach, he'd stood over her explaining her new job of making him money. No one and nothing but Jeb would be allowed a permanent place in her life—no boyfriend, no girlfriends, no school. He was a selfish jackass, bent on controlling every aspect of her life, and she'd brought it all on herself, defending her mother. She tried to convince herself that it was the horrible lifestyle Jeb and her mother had lived which led to this kind of thing happening, but logic didn't wipe out the guilt. Jeb was blackmailing her, but that, mixed with her own need for penance, kept her in front of her old computer day after day. Only when she crawled out from beneath the weight of it all did she try to get away.

Mai clicked the power button on her computer, remembering that time in the beginning, before she'd learned about online gambling. Late nights in Vegas at the casinos was the norm. Mai didn't think she'd survive, and then Jeb burst into their room one night, demanding she get dressed. They were leaving Nevada for good.

The tiny faerie icon flashed once on her desktop, distracting Mai from her memories. Excitement bubbled inside her, knowing she had fae mail. She glanced back over her shoulder at Jeb, who was watching her moves like a hawk.

"You know I can't concentrate with you standing over me," she grunted. "I'll deposit the money like usual."

Jeb shoved at the back of her head, "You'd better, or else."

Mai frowned. She willed Mrs. Kitt to finish Jeb's latest bribe and to attack Jeb right now. A few scratches on his mug would be perfect. But the Mrs. was nowhere to be seen and Jeb winked before exiting her office and then a few seconds later, the apartment.

Mai hurried to lock the door behind him and fairly flew to get back to her email. Thoughts of seeing Fallon again clouded out any of making Jeb his whore money. That sexy imaginary fae was too hot to resist.

A double click on the icon and her email was open. Before she could click to see if new messages were available, the chat box appeared. "From Fallon: Chat?"

"Of course, sexy." She grinned into the monitor.

Fallon's deep voice filled the room, though the screen was dark. "Are you ready to let me see you, Maiven?"

She frowned. "Well I can't see you. What are you doing? It's dark. And how is it we can speak now without typing?" Her microphone had not been replaced. She leaned closer to the monitor as if that would dispel the blackness. No movement could be detected at all.

“Hold on a sec.”

Mai heard what sounded like boxes being shuffled around. She wished he'd hurry up. Suddenly, the screen lightened and Mai saw Fallon stepping out from what appeared to be a ceiling door leading to an attic.

“Where are you?” she demanded.

Her new beau grinned into the camera, causing Mai to catch her breath. He was shirtless and his massive chest made her want to jump through the screen and have a taste. When Fallon's eyes danced, she knew he could sense her thoughts.

“Someone's turned on today,” he grinned. “Would you like me to come over and play with you, Maiven?”

Would she ever! “I don't know you well enough to let you come over. Meeting guys on the Internet isn't always safe.”

Mai leaned an elbow on the edge of her desk and tucked her chin in the palm of her hand. Just watching Fallon move about the little wooden house, which was obviously his home, was giving her ideas of seeing him naked.

He strolled with a box, colorfully gift-wrapped with a large bow on top to his living room. She wondered how he could do all of that with a computer cam. She needed to get one like that.

He stopped and placed the box on a table and swiveled to face her, wearing only his blue tights and a smile. “Well, Maiven? What do you think of this?”

Did he mean the outline of his huge shaft that was making her mouth water, or the little box? As delightful as the wrapping paper was, it just couldn't compare.

“About what?”

Fallon's hand hovered above his groin a moment before moving on to the package. Mai tossed him a dirty look, though he couldn't see it. He knew he was turning her on and enjoyed doing it. It was too bad he couldn't see her. She'd give him a taste of his own medicine. Still she hesitated, not knowing his reaction to her. Mai knew she was very attractive, but what woman didn't doubt something, especially in view of Fallon?

As if he read her mind, he told her, “You know, whenever you're ready, I can make it so I can see you, as well. I mean when you're not so chicken.”

“I am not chicken.” She slapped at the screen, startled by the prickles of energy in her fingertips.

Fallon rubbed his jaw. “Remind me not to annoy you again. You pack a wallop.”

“What?” Her eyes widened. “How did you ...? Oh you probably heard the sound of me smacking the screen.”

“Little Mai, so doubtful of my abilities. Have you been sheltered all your life? Never enjoying the magic of faes? Or maybe your parents are fugitives on my list, suppressing their magic to stay hidden.” The speculative look in his eyes caused Mai to squirm.

“I have been sheltered,” she admitted. “My ... step-father home-schooled me.” If one could call constant lies about the way of the world and lessons in playing poker, school.

“That's great.”

She frowned.

“What I mean is, I get to teach you everything.” Fallon glanced at the gift and snapped his fingers. The box began to levitate. “Now for my gift to you, my dear.”



She gaped at the special effects. There were no visible strings. He was good. And then she nearly hyperventilated when the box moved toward her and disappeared with a puff of sparkles. A moment later, it reappeared on the carpet beside her chair. No magician could do that.

“How?” She slipped from her chair to the floor, poking cautiously at the box. It was real all right, but how did he do it? She glanced back over her shoulder to find his amused face filling her screen. Somehow she knew he could see her. “You can see me?”

“Sorry, honey. I couldn’t resist. But believe me when I say, I like what I see.” His eyes dropped to her rear with a look of hungry lust.

Mai yanked at her nightie to cover her red bikini panties. One day she’d stop being a slob and wear more clothes around the house.

“No, don’t cover it, Maiven. That rich mocha bottom of yours looks good enough to lick,” he teased.

She scratched at an ear. “Stop it, Fallon. Now what’s in this box?” She fiddled with the bow, loath to ruin the packaging.

“Try opening it.”

Mai stuck out her tongue at him and began unwrapping. Before she could pop open the sealed box beneath the paper, Mrs. Kitt strolled in to see what the ruckus was all about. She paused with one paw in the act of stepping as she always did to find a man in her domain, even if it was only the face of one on a screen.

Mai watched her kitty’s reaction to Fallon, hoping she’d like him. The pink nose sniffed the air and then she mewled loudly toward the computer.

“Mrs. Kitt, is it? Oh that’s funny. He’s afraid of you?” Incredibly, Fallon seemed to be carrying on a conversation with Mrs. Kitt.

Mai interrupted lest this Dr. Doolittle learn all her secrets. “Mrs. Kitt, you will not share my business with Fallon. I don’t know that I can trust him yet.”

The Mrs. tossed an offended head and glided from the room. Mai turned back to Fallon. “So you can talk to animals, too? How many more surprises do you have up your sleeve?”

“Well, Ling. I’ve decided your name should be Ling, short for moonling, you see.” He chuckled.

“You can kiss my ass, Fallon.” Mai didn’t appreciate his joke and was more annoyed at the confusion she felt with his obvious gifts. The man was more than just a nut who thought he was a fae. He couldn’t have guessed Mrs. Kitt’s name.

“Oh, may I?”

Fallon didn’t wait for her to agree, a rope of multi-colored flecks snaked out from the computer screen, headed toward her. Mai froze, staring. It glided sensuously through the air until it reached her bare thigh, and then the tip morphed into a finger.

Bolts of desire swept her body as the finger slid along her skin. Mai had turned to face Fallon, so that she now sat with her legs slightly parted and a hand at either side of her hips. The magic finger slid beneath her nightie and hooked in the edge of her panties.

“You shouldn’t do that, Fallon,” she whispered.

“You may ask me to stop at any time.”

But she couldn’t. The sensations that rippled over her skin had her breathing heavily and opening her legs a little wider. It felt so good, like he was actually touching her, fondling the intimate curls just out of view.

"I'm not what you think ..." Her words died on her lips when the finger slid lower.

"No? What I think you are, Maiven, is a woman on fire. You ache for your mate so badly you can barely concentrate on anything else."

She allowed her head to drop backward and closed her eyes. With only half her attention, she heard the squeak of her computer chair moving away, giving her more room to stretch flat on the floor. Slowly, her nightie slid higher.

"I'm just a woman," she breathed.

"You are fae, Maiven," Fallon assured her. "I see it very clearly. There's an aura of fire around you. It tells me not only that you are fae, but that you are in heat."

She sat up and brushed away the finger. It dissipated with her rejection. "You make me sound like a dog. Dogs get in heat. I'm a woman."

"I'm sorry. I don't interact much with the human world, except to retrieve. I don't mean to insult you, honey. You already know what I feel for you."

She did. Fae or no fae, a woman can tell when a man's seeing her naked. She shuddered. She'd seen it enough in Jeb. But in Fallon it set her on fire just as he said. She somehow knew, that just like she was, Fallon was aching for sex. And he wanted it with her.

She reached up to scratch at her ears again and heard him laugh. She avoided meeting his gaze while yanking her curls down over her ears.

"You can't hide it, Maiven," he teased.

"Hide what?"

"A female fae's ears give her serious trouble when she's denying her sexual needs."

"What?" Her eyes widened. She grasped at her chair to tug it in front of her, to hide from his view. "What do you mean? My ears only itch when I'm uncomfortable."

"Is that so? Well, I suggest you think back, honey. Every time your ears itch, the subject is bound to have been sex. Tell me I'm lying."

She whimpered and reached a hand again to the top of her ear. The birth defect she'd hidden all of her life, even from Jeb, were her misshapen ears--ears that perfectly matched the pointed ones of Fallon, the fae.

## Chapter Five

In heat. It was the same term Jeb had used about her a few days ago. That didn't prove anything. Jeb was no more fae than she was herself. Fallon, though convincing, had not made a believer out of Mai. Her mother, Jeb, and herself had lived for years just above the poverty level. If there had been any available magic, such as Fallon had displayed, surely one of them or herself would have used it to get them out of their many problems.

She rolled over to her side, squinting at the stream of sunlight peeping through the blinds of her bedroom window. It was time to rise, but she wanted to consider Fallon's words a little longer. And a mental replay of that magical finger stroking between her legs was cause to delay, as well. He was beyond any man she'd ever met. Was it magic that made him look so well-endowed or was it natural? She wanted to find out for herself by stripping the man naked. Something told her he wouldn't complain.

She rolled abruptly to her feet. How could she have forgotten the gift that he gave her? She stumbled toward her closet and yanked open the door. The little package was still sitting on the top shelf where she'd left it when she heard Jeb banging on the door again. He'd barely given her an hour to make money before he was back.

It hadn't been easy giving Fallon an excuse to cut the connection. "Fae are notoriously nosey," he grinned. "It's what makes me really good at my job."

"Whatever. My boss is here and if he catches me schmoozing instead of working, I'm sunk. Please, Fallon, go."

He sighed, "Ok, honey. I will if you promise to let me see what's under those panties and that nightie. I find I envy that kitten lying on your breasts."

"Do you ever stop thinking of sex?" She might have reprimanded him, but she wanted it just as much. She had to bite her lip to keep from demanding he show her what was under the leggings.

Regardless, he guessed her thoughts again. "I'll show you mine if you'll show me yours."

"Fallon! Go!"

With a shout of laughter, his image faded to be replaced by [www.pokerface.com](http://www.pokerface.com). She frowned. The man knew too much about her activities. Nosey was not a strong enough a word to describe him.

She had swiped up the gift and stuffed it on the shelf in her closet before working to get rid of Jeb and his impatient lust for Ebony, top porn queen down on the block. If she could only have spit in his face for working her so hard for his insatiable desires. He should be accused of being in heat. The loser.

She had finally gotten rid of him, but had to concentrate on making some money for the two of them. The gift had slipped her mind until now.

She eased it carefully from the shelf and sat it on her bed just as the Mrs. hopped up to join her. "Maybe you're a fae, too, Mrs. Kitt. You're just as nosey as we all are. Maybe the human world doesn't exist. It's just all fae." She laughed, not believing a word

of it.

When the cardboard box top popped open, a flash of color exploded as if someone had just taken a picture. Immediately, a beautiful melody began to play as she sifted through the tissue paper covering her present.

“Oh, Mrs. Look!” she exclaimed, when she uncovered an intricately designed music box with odd symbols carved into the sides of the small golden box. Inside was a cat, perfectly identical to Mrs. Kitt, including the paw mark on her shoulder.

Emotion clogged Mai’s throat and she cradled the gift to her chest. “No one can give such a thoughtful gift and be bad, Mrs. And how could he know about your birthmark? He’s amazing.”

Mrs. Kitt sniffed at her likeness and seemed to approve.

Mai wandered around her apartment, searching for the perfect home for her music box. Mrs. Kitt indicated the narrow shelf above the bed and Mai agreed. It was a good way to bring Fallon into her bed, without actually doing so. She grinned. Well, she was seriously considering bringing him in soon. After that performance yesterday, she needed a cold shower every time she thought of him.

\* \* \* \*

Mai tucked one foot beneath her and munched her buttered toast while fixated on Fallon’s incredible physique. He had stripped off his jacket and was wading into what looked like a marsh.

“Fallon, what are you doing?” She called out to him through the screen. This was like watching reality TV on the computer. She loved it. “Fallon?”

*Shh, hush honey. I need to concentrate.*

She choked on her bread and shoved back so hard from her desk that her chair tipped over backwards and she rolled over onto her side, skinning her cheek on the carpet. She coughed repeatedly to clear her throat with her eyes burning and tearing. Mrs. Kitt calmly wandered over and licked butter from the other, less painful cheek, before Mai pushed her away.

Had Fallon just spoken inside her mind? No, that’s impossible. He couldn’t have. She had just imagined she heard his deep voice echoing across her thoughts.

She pushed herself up to a seated position and glanced toward the computer. The marsh was now a full-fledged swamp and he was nowhere in sight. She righted her chair and scooted to within inches of the screen.

“Fallon?”

He didn’t answer, yet he had to be there. She had a direct connection to his location. She still wasn’t clear on how he was projecting his surroundings without the proper equipment.

After a few more boring moments of watching the screen and then cleaning up the mess of her breakfast, she slouched on one elbow and imagined him in her bed doing that thing again with the magic finger. She grinned. Now that had been good, but she was too nervous to ask him to do it again. Especially since she wasn’t sure she hadn’t imagined that whole thing.

Soon she heard the unsettling of the water and returned her attention to the screen. Fallon was rising up from the depths like some aqua god. Beads of water glistened as they trailed down across his chest to tight abs. She was practically panting as she watched. Her fingertips ached to feel his warm wet skin as she followed his progress with

her hand.

It was some time before she realized that he had a small man clutched in one fist--an angry red man. She laughed out loud. The guy was in a fury, his arms crossed and legs clenched to make himself heavier. Yet Fallon had no trouble at all hoisting him ashore.

"Fallon, where did he come from?" she wondered aloud.

The man was tossed unceremoniously onto the ground while Fallon shook himself, his ponytail whipping to and fro across his back and chest. Again, she had trouble keeping her desires under control.

The amused green eyes focused on the screen. "Maiven, why do I have the feeling you have mentally stripped off the rest of my clothes?"

She squeaked and ducked her head. "Don't be ridiculous. I am just asking about the man you've captured."

"And thinking about me naked."

"Fallon."

He chuckled and turned to hoist the man by the back of his collar. "This, honey, is one of my retrievals. He's wanted in Faeland for assaulting several female fae and at least one male."

She gasped, "You mean he attacked them?"

He shook his head. "I mean. He grabbed their rears and other intimate places. His appetites are out of whack to where he doesn't just seek a mate. He takes and that must be stopped."

Mai wondered about fae punishment. Was it harsher than human law? "What's going to happen to him when you take him back?"

Fallon didn't answer right away. He produced lightening cords which wrapped themselves around the man, securing him so that he couldn't move his arms or legs. Another thinner one wrapped itself around the man's mouth. Mai was impressed when Fallon touched a finger to the cord and a symbol burned into it. The fae were a whole other breed.

When he'd shot another flash of magic from his powerful hands, the man disappeared from her view and Fallon returned his attention to her. "He will go into therapy."

Well that wasn't so bad, Mai thought. Maybe the fae were more lenient.

"The therapy will consist of wiping his mind clean and stripping him of his magic for a period of one hundred years."

"Oh."

Amusement still lit his eyes and he leaned into the screen until a hologram of his head projected into her room. Boldly, she kissed him and sparks of magic danced about her lips.

"I want much more than that, Maiven."

*So do I*, she thought.

"Unfortunately, I must return to give my report. I can contact you again tonight if you wish. Say around ten, your time?"

She nodded, "Definitely, I'll log on at ten. Have a good day, Fallon."

He winked. "We'll have a good night, Maiven."

\* \* \* \*

Mai reclined on her bed, swinging one bare leg back and forth in the air while

watching Fallon move about his bedroom. Beyond the two oak dressers and matching chair, her eyes were drawn to the king-sized bed with the rich burgundy comforter arranged on it.

Before she could look away, he turned to face her. "I see you like my bed. Would you like to come and join me in it tonight?" He wiggled his brows, winked, and threw kisses.

She laughed. "Stop it, Fallon. I told you. I'm not convinced you're real. I don't know if what you've done so far is an elaborate trick or if you've hypnotized me. And I thought you told me you lived in your own house. That room doesn't look like it belongs in that other wooden place you were in before."

He shrugged and sat down on the bed as he removed his boots. "Sometimes, the king requires me to stay at the castle for early or late meetings. I don't question him. I obey like the good soldier that I am."

"Is that right?" She flipped over onto her back and popped a grape in her mouth from the bowl beside the bed. She was very glad she'd listened when he suggested she move her computer to the bedroom for tonight.

"Yes, that's right." His magic fingers slipped through the screen and swiped the grape she had poised to eat. "Mmm, that's good."

"You thief." She giggled. "Behave, Fallon."

"Never. In fact ...." The fingers returned and trailed along her nightie.

"Fallon."

"Shh, just enjoy, Maiven."

She made an attempt at obeying when the glittering fingers brushed at her nipple, pinching gently and twisting the aching points. Her back rounded as she pressed into the touch, wanting so much more.

"Fallon," she gasped. "What do you feel when you do that to me?"

His answer was swift. "I feel like I want to smash through this computer and push myself between your legs."

She mewled, not unlike Mrs. Kitt, and he slid the finger lower along her belly to brush her lightly through her panties. She lifted her hips to receive the stroke, rocking against it.

"Can you ... can you ...?" She was too nervous to say it.

He must have anticipated her desire. He transformed the fingers into one solid piece, thick and long. Her eyes widened in shock and she covered her mouth.

"That is what you wanted, isn't it?"

She laughed. "Oh, you are certainly amazing. But I meant is it possible to feel the fingers inside me, not that."

"Couldn't it work as well?"

She closed her legs and swung around to a sitting position, for the first time realizing that he'd removed most of his clothes and was lying on his bed in boxers alone. "I think that when I decide to get in your bed--or mine--with you, it will involve the real thing only. Well, mostly. A little light show to add to the excitement wouldn't hurt."

He grinned. "That night could be tonight, Maiven. Just say the word and I'm over there. Damn. Yes, mother? Just a second."

She frowned. "Mother?"

He nodded. "Yes, my mother's calling."

She leaned forward to search his room again. She didn't see a phone. "I don't see a phone, and I didn't hear one ring."

"Poor Maiven, cooped up in the real world too long. My mother isn't here. She's calling mentally."

She blinked. "Wow. And I didn't know you had a mother."

"Of course. Doesn't everyone?"

She grew quiet and then spoke quickly so he wouldn't notice. "Yes, I just didn't think. Do you have a father too? Brothers, sisters?"

"A sister. She's off on her honeymoon in some other dimension somewhere." He waved a hand as if traipsing on different dimensions was a common occurrence. "Honey, I'll have to contact you later." He threw her a kiss and the screen went blank, leaving her sexually frustrated again.

\* \* \* \*

The farmer's market, set up every Saturday morning in the spring and early summer, was Mai's favorite place to shop for fruits and vegetables. The large ripe fruits drew crowds every week, and she found herself squeezing between customers and wooden stalls every two feet. If the product wasn't so tasty, she'd leave in disgust.

She lifted a melon to her nose and sniffed as she'd seen many women do. She wasn't sure what she was sniffing for, but she did it anyway to keep up the knowledgeable appearance. Feeling eyes on her, she peered up over the edge of the fruit to catch a man staring at her from several stalls away.

She winked. When it rains, it pours. She'd been wishing for a man in the shower, now she had Fallon and now this gorgeous hunk of masculinity was headed toward her. She watched with eager eyes, assessing his build as he came.

The obvious bulk beneath his t-shirt and jeans had her panting. She dropped the melon, deciding to meet him halfway. Before she could take a step, her new Adonis collided with what seemed to be an invisible force field. Colors rippled over its surface like something out of a science fiction movie. The stranger brushed a hand over the surface, testing its strength. Mai glanced around to see if anyone else present noticed this odd phenomenon. No one did. In fact, other shoppers were passing through the barrier as if it wasn't there. Only the man was prevented from coming forward.

A sudden flash of light momentarily blinded her and then Fallon was there, standing before the man. She could not mistake the long ponytail and the tight rear. She inched closer. He really was as tall as he had said. She began walking up at him from behind, willing herself to touch him before he was gone.

Still, no one else, other than the stranger and Mai, could see Fallon. He leaned confidently against the shield she assumed he'd made and hooked a thumb over his shoulder. "That fae female is already spoken for. Stay away from her."

She gasped and then grew angry at his possessiveness. They hadn't made a commitment to each other. How dare he interfere?

Right before her eyes, the handsome man disappeared. She searched the crowd but saw no sign of him. Had he been fae?

She turned back to Fallon who had snapped away the force field and was walking toward her in the beautifully raw flesh. Anger was the furthest from her mind when he wrapped her in his arms, latched on to her bottom and ground his thick erection between her legs. Mai gripped his shoulders, hating the material separating their bodies.

"Someone will see us," she gasped.

"No one will. Mmm, Maiven, let me taste your mouth." His words were a command that she had no will to deny. She parted her lips only a second before his tongue darted inside, taking what he'd claimed as his own.

She surrendered her herself to him, to his large hands as they ravaged her body, pinching roughly at her nipples beneath her blouse. She whimpered, wanting to be naked under his touch.

"Say the word, Maiven, and I'll have you in my bed or yours right now."

"I--"

"Retriever Fallon."

The commanding voice from somewhere above their heads drew them apart immediately. Before she could ask who it was or where it was coming from, the shield reappeared and encircled her in a cocoon against the outside world, apparently from view and sound.

She shoved against the wall and banged on it calling out to him. He either couldn't hear or was ignoring her with his back facing her. She glanced past him to another man now stepping into view from a doorway of light.

The ornate crown on his head, the pointed ears and reddened skin brought to mind the faerie king. But that was an insane thought, wasn't it? She vaguely remembered the stories her mother told her of the faerie king when she was a little girl when her mother still had some motherly love in her.

If she remembered correctly, the king was hard and demanded loyalty from his people. His magic knew no bounds. No enemy could stand against him. She could well believe it looking into the hard eyes of the fae with symbols burned into his right cheek--symbols, she was almost sure, that matched those on her new music box.

She watched the king's lips move, but couldn't hear what he was saying, nor Fallon's reply. She knew Fallon was blocking her from the people around them, but how could he keep the king from seeing her if he was so unlimited?

She laid her forehead against the shield, the micro sparks creating the colors tickling her skin. With one finger, she followed after a purple dot in a zigzag chase. *If I'm supposed to be a fae, why don't I have power?* She pouted as she waited.

And then she had an idea. She was standing directly behind Fallon. Perhaps if she concentrated really hard, she could get her hand to pass through the shield and touch him? After all, he had passed her gift through the computer screen, or beamed it out. His magic finger had come out. Why couldn't she do something similar?

She shook her hands and cracked her knuckles. She took a deep, calming breath and shut her eyes. With a single finger pressed against the shield, she visualized it passing through the shield and touching him. She pushed and concentrated as hard as she could. Suddenly, she could feel Fallon's warm skin beneath her hand. She'd done it!

She opened her eyes to find Fallon grinning at her, the shield gone and him facing forward. His jacket gaped open and her hand was pressed against the warm hardness of his abs. A tingle of delight raced along her arm at the contact.

"Just what are you doing, honey?" He pulled her into his arms again.

"Oh, nothing." She wrapped her arms around his neck while trying to keep her desires controlled for the time being. "Was that the faerie king, Fallon?"

He nodded. "It was." She didn't need faerie magic to see he had become reticent.



He was keeping something from her.

“What were you two talking about and why did you put me inside that shield so he wouldn’t know I was here? Are you not allowed to consort with human women?”

“Dating a human is frowned upon, and forbidden for an employee of the king. However, since you are not human, Maiven, you don’t have to worry about it.”

She tried again. “Well, my mother never told me who my father was and I’m pretty sure she wasn’t fae, so maybe I’m half human.”

His green eyes sparked brighter and she felt something like a warm liquid spilling down over her body from head to toe. She had the impression that he was doing a type of scan of her. His words confirmed it.

“From what I can see of your signature, honey, you’re pure. One hundred percent fae.”

She loved the magic she’d seen since meeting him. If this was a trick, it was so wonderful, she wanted desperately to believe in it forever. But to think her mother was fae and had never told her or never used any power was too much. Could it be that she was one of the people he hunted and retrieved for the king?

She wanted to believe, but believing meant she was a bad seed. He must never find out who her mother was or what she herself had done. If he did, she might find her first visit to Faeland was to go directly to jail. And she had no idea what the cruel king did to murdering faeries. The punishment in the human world was fearful enough.

\* \* \* \*

Fallon clasped Mai’s hand and tugged her forward, into a slow jog, along a path in the park. “Come on, Maiven. I want to show you something.”

“What?” she laughed, tripping along behind him with joy bubbling inside. She was glad she’d decided to meet him today. If possible, he was looking even more delicious than before. The bulge in his leggings made her mouth water and she had to make a conscious effort not to stare so hard she’d trip over her own feet.

Finally, they stopped in the gap of a group of trees. His look was triumphant as she took in the incredible scene. A quiet brook bubbled a few feet away from a grassy area where he’d set out a picnic lunch on a blanket. Plush bushes cocooned the area so that it was completely private from the path.

“I don’t remember this ever being here.”

He winked. “It wasn’t. I whipped a little something up for the occasion.”

Mai stared. “You whipped up a brook and trees?”

He laughed and tugged her toward the blanket before pushing her gently down beside the basket. “Can’t you enjoy, woman, without a bunch of questions? If you must know, it’s an illusion for our pleasure.”

An illusion. So he really was a magical fae. The knowledge sent shivers along her spine. She’d not only found a man she thought she could enjoy for quite some time, he was also unusual. Not many human women could say their man was a fae. She grinned across at him.

“I have a feeling you’re thinking naughty things about me,” he teased. “Come, show me what’s on your mind.”

She tilted her head, considering him and then crawled across the short distance to position herself on his lap. The hair peeking out from the opening in his jacket drew her attention first, so she stroked it a few moments and then tugged at the buttons until they

released so that she could explore further.

She teased his warm skin with feathered kisses along his torso, and then across his taut abs. He lay back on the blanket with a moan, and she followed him down, not allowing her lips to lose contact.

Finally, she sat up on him, immediately feeling his hard-on pressed between her thighs. She met his heated gaze and raised her eyebrows. He shrugged but said nothing as he tucked his hands behind his head.

“Why did you go into retrieving?” she wondered.

“I like thwarting bad guys.”

She laughed. “Seriously.”

He sat up, lifted her to the blanket and began setting out their lunch. “I told you I have one sister. That wasn’t entirely true. I also had a brother, an older brother. Another fae wanted the woman my brother was seeing. To get her, he set a trap for Dorian, killed him. When the king passed judgment, he ran and hasn’t been found yet. I first took the job to make it my mission to find him. Now, while I am still determined to track down that fae, I am also determined to bring every murdering fae to justice.”

She shivered, the warmth of her perfect day draining away. If Fallon knew what she’d done, he’d bring her in, too. And who knew what happened to a fae who had committed murder? She was too afraid to ask.

She was glad he was engrossed in setting out the food to notice her reaction to his words. Standing, she strolled to the brook and dipped her fingers in the cool water to fling drops against her overheated face. What was she going to do now?

## Chapter Six

“Two thousand, fifty-six dollars.” Mai leaned away from her keyboard and rested her hands on her lap. She could walk away. She could have that money put on her debit card immediately and then withdraw it from the bank right now. She’d take no clothes, no personals to weigh her down. She and Mrs. could disappear forever.

Mai tugged her hair and dragged a hand across her tired eyes. She stood and moved to the window overlooking the patch of weedy grass behind her apartment building. She’d never have to see the bald spots in the lawn again, never have to be distracted on a hot summer day by the kids playing in the playground because her air conditioning unit was on the fritz again. Best of all, she’d never have to hear Jeb threaten her or try to kiss her with his repulsive wet lips.

“But worst of all, Mrs. Kitt,” Mai turned back into the room to lift her kitty from the sticky pads, “I would not see Fallon again. And that is unacceptable.”

Work had called Fallon away from her again. And it was only later that Mai remembered that the stubborn man hadn’t told her why he had hid her from the faerie king if she was one hundred percent fae. If so, what did it matter? The more she learned of Fallon, the more she questioned. This all seemed like a dream, but her life had never been so exciting before. There had been days when she felt she couldn’t make it through another hour. Now Fallon made it livable. How could she give him up?

“Well, Mrs. Kitt,” Mai lifted her cat to face her, “we’ll just have to practice our own magic. And if it works, then Fallon is telling the truth. If it doesn’t, then I have no reason to stay with him.”

\* \* \* \*

Mai figured the best place to start learning about magic was from Grandpa’s Candle Shop down on Saratoga Street. If Grandpa didn’t have something to help her, then help didn’t exist.

Mai stepped inside the dark shop and waited for her eyes to adjust to the dim light. The pungent odor of various candles made her head swim and she hurried forward to find something of interest before she developed a headache.

Every available space of floor and wall was covered with magical paraphernalia, from books to charms to candles. There was even a wrack of clothes should she feel a need to dress the part.

Mai perused the bookshelves. “Demons, tarot cards, *All You Ever Wanted to Know About Fairies*.” Mai flipped open the last, but soon returned it to its place. The book was little more than a child’s fairie tale. It would not be of help.

When she’d been searching for nearly half an hour, she grew frustrated. It was foolish to think any human would have full knowledge of the fairie magic or that such a book would be needed by inhabitants of Faeland. Fae babies were probably raised learning about their magic just as they learned to walk and talk.

Just as she turned to leave, there was a flash of blue light just above her head. She glanced up to find a glowing book thumping back and forth against the books on either

side of it. Her heartbeat quickened immediately. She searched around her wondering if this was some kind of trick. There were no other customers nearby and the old man she figured must be Grandpa was bent over his counter, sorting through small stones.

She turned back to the book, which was fairly dancing with eagerness now. Saying a little prayer, she reached up to take it down. The same prickly energy tickled her fingers when they touched the binding. The book immediately stilled in her hand allowing her to read its title, *Seven Steps to Tapping Into Your Magic--For Moonlings*.

"By Fallon!" Mai whirled around. "Fallon, where are you? You show yourself right now."

She heard his amused laughter before he appeared, "What is it, my sweet?"

"Don't you, my sweet, me. Why are you trying to trick me?" Mai waved the book beneath his nose.

"But you did want to learn how to develop your power, did you not?" He struck an injured pose. She rolled her eyes at him.

"Get out of my business. I have to do this on my own."

"Why?"

"What?"

"Why do you have to do it alone?" He pulled her against his him. "I can teach you all you need to know. About magic and about other things ...."

She trembled. Why did the man have to be so irresistible? She tipped up her chin and he took it as an invitation to explore her mouth again. He nipped at her bottom lip while easing a hand beneath her blouse. The moment his fingers plucked at her swollen nipple through the thin material of her bra, she was ready to give in to him.

"Come to my place, honey," he muttered against her cheek. "Let me satisfy you right now."

She wanted to. Oh, how she wanted to. Consent quivered on her lips with each burning kiss he planted on her lips. But he knew things about her already that she didn't know. Like the fact that she was a fae. He could read her too easily. Possibly he could even read her mind. No, if she gave in to him fully, sexually, there was no telling how much further his delving into her mind could go. He might find out about her past. She couldn't bare to see that look of distaste that was bound to cross his face once he knew. It was better that they not take this too far. She was safer seeking out another lover.

She pulled out of his arms, not meeting his gaze. "I'm sorry, Fallon. I need to find out who I am. Making love with you right now will only complicate things."

She could sense his anger and frustration. The fact that he was as hard as a rock, extended inside his leggings made her turn away quickly before she gave in to him. She clutched his book to her chest and concentrated on calming her raging hormones.

After a while, he spoke. "I won't push you, Maiven. When you are ready, call me."

"How do I--?" But he was gone. She cleared her throat and headed to the counter to pay for the book. She didn't need to cry. He wasn't the only handsome man in the world. She blinked her burning eyes and forced her thoughts to make plans to run.

\* \* \* \*

Mai had been practicing most of the night, but she must be missing something important, because nothing was working. Once again, she reached out to examine Fallon's book.

“Step one: Close your eyes and clear your mind. Allow the magic energy that’s in every fae and all of nature to come to your aid and collect in the palm of your hand. Once you feel the energy dancing in your fingers, you will begin to see it in blues and purples, which are the easiest to master. These two work mostly for healing and protection.”

She hadn’t progressed past this first step. She’d glanced over the next few pages to note that there were levels of red, green and even black, which was apparently the result of evil. She shivered at that thought. From what she could grasp from the introduction of the book, faeries were mostly good. If they broke faerie laws, eventually the evil would turn their magic black.

So far, she hadn’t raised even a spark. She tried again and again, yet her mind wouldn’t clear. Desperate fear clouded her thoughts, keeping her from concentrating the magic available to all fae. She worried that her magic when it did appear would be black because of what she’d done.

“I don’t suppose it will work if I’m too afraid to find out,” she whispered to herself. “Come on Mai, you’re braver than this.”

She tried yet again. *Clear your mind. Now, feel it. That energy’s out there for you.* Subtly at first, and then growing, it started with the wisps of hair on the back of her neck standing on end. And then goose bumps formed on her arms.

She opened her eyes when she felt the prickles, almost like her hand was falling asleep. The familiar blue and purple dots danced in a perfect sphere the size of a plum in the middle of her palm.

Joy burst in her heart and she leapt to her feet. “I did it! I did it!” Less than careful, she threw her left hand up in the air and the sphere went flying about the room, bouncing from the ceiling to the dresser to knock over a glass there, then to the wall and dissipating on Mrs. Kitt’s back, sending the animal scurrying out of the room.

Mai doubled over laughing. “Sorry, Mrs. Kitt. But I did it!” She whooped about the room, dancing with joy and relief. The magic had been blue and purple. That must surely mean she wasn’t a bad fae.

She stopped dancing. “And it means Fallon was telling the truth. I *am* a fae.”

She shouted it over and over, whirling about the room. With her new found confidence, she produced sphere after sphere in first one palm and then the other. She had no idea what she should do with them, but the fact that she’d done it was reward enough for now.

\* \* \* \*

Mai watched her computer monitor blink off with a heavy heart. She’d just sent off an email to Fallon letting him know she might not be speaking with him for a long time. She imagined he must be working since he hadn’t responded immediately.

She unplugged the computer cords and turned off all other electrical appliances and lights. In the last two weeks, she’d barely given Jed any money at all. Her new found powers had been put to good use allowing her to fake the flu. Even in sadness, she had to smile. Jeb would never suspect her of being a fae, so he would not know she was faking. She had even produced a slight fever and a pale sheen to her skin.

All the time, she’d been making money for her move and studying the book Fallon made for her. She would master her abilities to hide from Jeb’s friends and ultimately destroy that tape if he didn’t let her go. If she could not have Fallon, at least she would have the memory of knowing it was because of him that she was free.

When she'd gathered a small bag for extra panties and Mrs. Kitt and her things, she let herself out of her apartment for the last time. It was four-thirty in the morning and in fifteen minutes, a taxi would pick her up to take her to a random address. Soon after that, another would pick her up to take her to the bus station. She knew it was excessive, but necessary. Jeb was tricky.

After several hours of her zigzagging back and forth across the country, she finally settled in a YWCA room, hoping for a night of rest. She grabbed a quick shower and fed Mrs. Kitt before settling down to study her magic book again. Thoughts of Fallon filled her mind. His sexy body, his hands exploring her body. She clicked off the lamp, let the book slide to the floor and lay on her back, imaging him there with her.

She groaned with desire as she remembered the way his fingers of magic stroked her. She'd go insane if she didn't get a man soon. She wanted Fallon, but she'd have to settle for someone else, anyone else. She'd leave Mrs. Kitt in the room and search for a place to get online and then, she'd find a man. Fallon's comments in the third chapter of his book had indicated an ability to influence humans. She wondered if it was bad if she plucked a man from the street and made him her sex slave. Her body said yes, but her conscience held sway for the time being.

Her thoughts drifted back to Fallon as she began to fall asleep. Her eyes were fluttering closed when she had the overwhelming feeling that someone was inside her room. The thought brought her fully awake. She didn't rise, or move on the bed. Though her eyes were adjusted to the darkness, nothing appeared out of place. Still the feeling that she wasn't alone persisted.

Suddenly, she heard Fallon's voice in her mind. *Concentrate, Maiven. Use your magic to see.* She breathed deeply, calming her mind. Slowly the energy seemed to gather from the air around her and flowed into her pupils. As if she'd put on night vision goggles, the room transformed. Suddenly, she saw in shades of heat. Everything--the dresser, the table and chair, even the bed--was muted in purple. At the foot of the bed, Mrs. Kitt was a red blob and in the corner, near the window, was a larger red shaped like a man.

## Chapter Seven

Panic tightened Mai's chest. She considered trying to make a break for the door, but figured she'd never get the locks opened before the person caught her. Who was he? How had he gotten inside her room?

Fallon's deep baritone sounded again in her mind. *Don't be afraid, Maiven. I'm not going to let him hurt you.*

*How can you be in my mind?* She must be imagining Fallon was there with her. She'd been fantasizing about him only moments ago. Maybe she was overtired from her long day?

But Fallon answered immediately. *I've been tracking you. Remember I do it for a living. You're easy to find when you use your magic.*

*Stupid. I should have known. Now what, Fallon? What does he want with me?*

*Shall we see? Wait for my signal.*

His signal, if it could be called that, was to rampage the entire room with energy that shook its very foundations. Lightning flashed, nearly blinding her, forcing her to tuck her head in her arm until it subsided. When it did, she glanced in the corner where the stranger had been hidden. Now he knelt on the floor shaking his head, apparently disoriented from Fallon's attack.

Her uninvited hero stood with legs apart and arms akimbo over the kneeling man. Fallon flicked a wrist and the man's body instantly flipped over. But he was not to be bullied by the likes of her rescuer. The man snapped a ball of light of his own and shot it out at Fallon, only to be blocked and countered.

Mai gaped at the light display, almost like a game of tennis, the ball being magic. She followed with her eyes back and forth until Fallon ended it.

"Enough!" The force of his power sent the man crashing hard against the wall, creating a large hole in the sheet rock. "Who are you and what do you want?"

The man took his time answering and Mai considered tossing her own magic at him just for practice, but Fallon seemed to sense her aim and gripped her hand before she could raise it. She grumped quietly, but waited.

"I'm Bale," came the reply finally. "I've been hired to find Mai."

She gasped. Of course. It was this way every time. She'd never been able to stay hidden for more than a day. But she wouldn't go back, no matter what she had to do. She'd use her new found power to attack Jeb and take the tape from him. Before she could voice her decision, Fallon squeezed her hand. Jolts of delight sped up her arm from the contact. The nosy man seemed to know what she would do at every turn.

Fallon interrupted her thoughts. "Who hired you?" He raised a hand which in turn raised Bale from his feet to levitate in the air. "And don't think of lying to me or I will crush you."

"Calls himself The Trickster," he muttered. "That's all I can say. The Trickster hired me."

Mai frowned. How lame was that? The Trickster? So it hadn't been Jeb? She

wondered who this guy was. Maybe Jeb had asked him to get someone to find her. Maybe he didn't even know the guy hired fae to do his dirty work. After all, private investigators were really good at locating missing persons. Of course, none of them were so good that the person was located in less than a day. The Trickster must get plenty of money.

Fallon disagreed with Bale, "No, that's not all you can say." He released Mai's hand and flattened his hand in the air toward Bale. The man's body moved backward as Fallon moved forward, until he was pressed into the hole in the wall. "Now, give me more information."

As Mai watched, she was relieved that she wasn't caught on Fallon's bad side. She considered the length of time it would take her to learn to do his cool tricks with magic. Being a fae was going to have plenty of rewards ... if she could free herself permanently from Jeb.

She stepped up next to Fallon and pulled at his arm to get him to release Bale. When he did, she bent to help the poor man up from the floor. "Are you okay?"

"Maiven," Fallon frowned his disapproval but she ignored him.

She faced the battered fae. "Bale. Is that what you said your name is?" He nodded. "Listen, I can tell you're not bad. Your magic is just as purple and blue as Fallon's is. So why would you do this? Why are you chasing me?"

She waited with bated breath, hoping he would trust her enough to talk to her. Even without her powers, she could see this man meant no real harm to her. So why would he work for this Trickster guy? Why would anyone who wasn't evil themselves?

"I have no choice," he confessed. His gold-flecked eyes burned into hers. She suddenly saw the same trapped animal look she'd seen in her own appearance in the mirror for years. "He has something over me and to keep myself alive, I do jobs for him."

"What the hell is this?" Fallon seemed about to attack him again, but she held up a staying hand.

"I understand, Bale."

The man nodded. "Yes, I have the feeling you do. You know what it's like to be his prisoner."

She gasped and hoped Fallon hadn't caught that last part. So The Trickster was *Jeb*. It seemed impossible. He appeared to be nothing but a loser, interested only in buying prostitutes. Maybe that was his cover?

He apparently had no power of his own or he was wanted by the faerie king and was probably on Fallon's roundup list. To save her own neck, Mai wasn't about to give up Jeb. Bale had spoken the truth. He had no choice, just as she didn't.

This time, Fallon curved a hand around each side of her waist and lifted her out of his way. She watched annoyed as he slipped on as severe an expression as he could as he advanced on Bale again. Mai tried to interfere, but found she couldn't move from the spot he'd placed her. Her feet were sealed to the floor and she couldn't speak.

"Now, you will stay away from Maiven," he commanded. "Or you will deal with me. I will not hesitate to remove you from the human world permanently."

Bale nodded again and was gone in a flash.

Disgusted with Fallon's arrogant treatment of her, she concentrated her powers on his mind. If he could project his voice into her mind, she should be able to return the favor. Her vision tunneled and instantly she felt an enclosed space around her. *Narrow*



*mind!*

*Fallon, let me go right now.*

She heard his gentle laughter and he turned to face her, amusement lighting his eyes to a florescent green. A tremor rippled over her skin at that look. The man was too sexy for his own good.

*Now, why should I do that, Maiven. You look so delicious in that nightgown.*

She longed to cover herself, only now realizing that her nipples were clearly defined beneath the thin material. At his words, they bunched to stiff points awaiting his touch.

*Fallon ...*

*Yes.*

He strode forward as if she'd asked him to touch her. She braced herself for the pleasure she already knew his touch would send crashing throughout her body. He slid a hand along her thigh, raising her gown slowly until his fingers met with her panties. A thumb hooked inside the band and dragged them downward. Her eyes drifted closed as her tongue slid across her trembling lips.

*Do you want me to stop?*

*No, I mean ...*

She wanted it badly. Her body was on fire and at this point there was no way she could deny him or her own desires. Her gaze traveled over the length of his body. He was wearing his usual outfit of close-fitting dark blue leggings, a jacket of the same shade made of some natural material and black boots. His braid hung over one shoulder, making her want to unravel it and run her fingers through his hair while yanking his mouth down to her bare nipple.

*Naughty thoughts, Maiven.*

He was reading her mind. Mentally, she pushed away from him. He didn't budge.

*Stop it, Fallon. Get out of my head and let me go.*

Instantly, she was free. She worked her mouth and took a step to be sure he had released his hold. She called him a big jerk in her mind to see if there was a reaction, but there was none. He simply stood before her with his arms folded and a patient smile curving his lips.

"Pay back," she muttered.

She had never been shy in her lovemaking, even when she was still a virgin. Fallon was huge and she had every intention of getting herself a piece of him before she had to move on. To maintain her freedom, it was necessary. Still, she wondered at the pang in her heart at the thought of leaving him again.

She winked at him and his jacket fell open. She nearly laughed out loud at the surprise spreading across his face. "I'm a fast learner."

He was clearly turned on. "What else can you do?"

"Oh ... this." She circled his erection through his leggings with one hand. She followed the thick hard curve from top to bottom before brushing her body against him. The sharp intake of his breath let her know she was having an unsettling affect on him.

She licked her way down from his collarbone to first one nipple and then the other. Her wet trail continued to dip into his navel and then she grazed the band of his leggings with her teeth. A glance up at him found Fallon's head was thrown back in ecstasy. She took it as an invitation to continue.

In seconds, she had his leggings around his ankles and his huge erection stuffed into her mouth. She was nearly bursting at the sounds of sucking her mouth made as she licked and tugged at his head. She slid her hands up over his taut thighs before gripping his buttocks and shoving him deeper into her mouth. She hungered for the entire length but took all that she could.

When she thrust her head up and down his tight erection, she knew he was ready to come. The tension in his thighs increased and he entangled both fists in her hair. She glowed with triumph as a cry was torn from his lips a second before he pumped his warm seed into her mouth.

Suddenly, she felt herself being lifted in the air. Fallon wasn't snapping his fingers or waving his hand. His burning gaze pinned her in the air and guided her, without a touch, to the bed. She gasped when he glided after her, his feet not touching the floor. Her eyes widened at the gossamer wings fluttering gently on his back.

"Fallon--"

He touched a finger to her lips. "Hush, Maiven. Let me pleasure you."

## Chapter Eight

Maiven eased as carefully as possible from the bed, praying she wouldn't wake Fallon. She slipped her slacks up over her hips while slipping her feet into her shoes. If she moved quickly, she could just make the six o'clock bus to Chicago, the station manager had informed her left every weekday morning.

A night of passionate lovemaking with Fallon had left her heart raw. There was no doubt now that she loved him. She glanced back at him sprawled across the bed, one arm slung over his chest. Her eyes roved his naked form. He was so perfectly built. Was it a fae thing?

Just watching him made her tighten between her legs, missing the force of his erection as he drove it into her repeatedly. Fallon had been an excellent lover, just as she knew he would be.

"Don't be afraid, Maiven," he'd whispered.

She grinned. "I'm not afraid."

"I'm very big. Most fae men are compared to human males." As he spoke, he curved a hand beneath her thigh and spread her legs.

She licked her lips in anticipation. She didn't care how big he was--and he really was, having grown out again since she'd sucked him dry--she wanted him buried as deep and hard inside her as he could get it. She'd spent the last few months on fire constantly, her sexual cravings threatening to consume her. Always before, there had been interruptions or reasons she hadn't been able to find a man to mate with. Now she knew why. Her body had been holding out for perfection.

Seconds later, Mai's screams of ecstasy must be heard down every hall in the building, when he drove his shaft deep and hard inside her. The scent of sex permeated the air and the sound of flesh grinding against flesh heightened her pleasure to the point that she felt her sticky wetness oozing down her buttocks and wetting the bed.

She caught her lip between her teeth and bucked like a bronco beneath him. Wave after glorious wave washed over her when she finally climaxed. He continued to grip her ankles high above her head, not allowing the pleasure to end. He was still stiff and ready for her when she began the climb again, and then again.

Now, as she sat aching from head to toe at six-fifteen in the morning, on a deserted bus stop, she wondered how many times Fallon had taken her on that passionate ride before he allowed her to rest in his arms. It had been too many times to count.

"Oh, yes. He is a good lover," she whined discontentedly.

\* \* \* \*

Mai took a seat on the bus near the middle. After a glance around to be sure no one was watching, she lifted the squirming Mrs. Kitt from her case and buried her face in the animal's fur.

"Mrs. Kitt," she whispered, "I don't know what we'll do. I can't use magic anymore or I'll be found."

Fallon had told her while they cuddled before he slept, that she had been

unconsciously using her powers to win at poker. Because it was undeveloped and she was not concentrating it properly, she hadn't been able to win as big as she would've liked to.

She sighed. Now that she knew the truth, she supposed she could take a small detour to the Grand Victoria Casino in Elgin, according to the flyer she'd seen in the bus station. One or two games ought to set her up for a long while. No, it was too risky. As fast as Bale had popped out of her room was as fast as another tracker could be where she was. She'd already seen that fae magic went far beyond what she could imagine. Fallon was bound to find her and already having experienced his gift for getting inside her head, she couldn't risk remembering the murder at the wrong time. No, she'd have to make her living honestly from now on.

"Even if it means I do it with a broken heart, Mrs. Kitt."

\* \* \* \*

Mai turned the corner onto Harrison Street. She'd been able to secure a job cleaning rooms at the Holiday Inn and had rented a room within walking distance. The continual scrubbing and bending was wreaking havoc on her hands and knees, but at least she could expect her first paycheck in another two days. She wasn't cheating anyone and she could come and go as she pleased. That beat her former prison any day of the week.

She tugged open the side door, off a short hall from the main lobby and headed for the stairs leading down to the basement. Her heart sank as she descended the stairs. Not even gratitude could lessen the impact of living this lonely life without Fallon.

She often wondered about his wings, revealed the night they had made love. The fae, then, could hide or reveal their wings at will. Fallon's had been so delicate looking, so transparent. It must be the use of magic just to lift his solidly muscled body an inch off the ground, let alone fly. Yet, he'd hovered above her easily before positioning himself between her legs.

She paused on the stairs, closing her eyes to savor the memory. It was all she had and she'd relive it as often as she liked for the next few hundred years. The fact that she'd lain with him one night would have to carry her through.

"Mai, are you ok?"

The high nasally voice grated immediately. She forced herself not to break into a run down the stairs to avoid Marvin. It wasn't that the man wasn't appealing. Her libido beat as strongly as it always did. And knowing she would never have a relationship with the man she loved meant she was free to choose whoever she wanted. Marvin just wasn't her type.

She turned to face him as he stepped down beside her. "Hello, Marvin. No, I'm fine. I was just thinking about something."

He chuckled, the boyish brown eyes twinkling. "Looked like something good. You had an expression almost like ecstasy."

"Then why would you interrupt?" she snapped and continued down the stairs. He was nice, but really how brain dead did one have to be to stop a woman's fantasies?

Marvin was undaunted. He followed close behind her and she didn't need to look back to know he was shoving his glasses higher on his nose with one finger. She found the habit aggravating.

"Well, Mai, I was thinking."

*No!* God, if she could use her magic to stop him from asking her out again. She increased her pace down the long hall leading to the laundry. She could already hear the

whirr of the dryers toward the end. Today was her day to suffer in that sauna. All of the maids took turns on this unwanted duty. But right now she welcomed it to avoid being paired with Marvin in one of the rooms.

“Look, Marvin. I’m a little late. I don’t have time to talk right now. Please excuse me.”

She put out a hand to shove open the laundry door, but Marvin stopped her. “Come on, Mai. You can’t put me off forever.” He wore his most charming smile. “Listen, I got this great recipe for Peking Duck off the net yesterday. Let me cook it for you tonight.”

Her interest perked up. “You have a computer?” She hadn’t been online in seemingly forever. After having spent years sitting in front of one on a daily basis, she felt a sort of painful withdrawal.

Her nerdy, would-be suitor nodded happily. “Yes, and you can see it if you come to dinner at my place.”

She considered it. She’d made a few cyber buddies in the world of gambling over the years and...who was she kidding? She wanted to see if she could access fae-mail to see if Fallon had written anything to her. It was probably too much to hope that he’d written of his undying love and begged her to return to him.

“Ok, Marvin. I will have dinner with you tonight.” Somehow she had to gain access to his computer and keep him from seeing what she was up to.

Marvin whooped. “Great! I will pick you up at--”

“No.” She didn’t want him knowing where she lived. “Give me your address and I will come on my own.”

She’d deflated his bubble a little, but he agreed. Soon she would be a little closer to Fallon, even if it was only for a moment.

\* \* \* \*

Mai stepped across the threshold into Marvin’s apartment. She smiled. It was exactly as she would have pictured Marvin’s home to be decorated. The uncomplicated couch and loveseat was straight from the catalogs of Ikea. The pastel-colored walls, the accent pieces on the side tables and the Computers Unlimited magazines neatly arranged at arm reach, confirmed what she already knew. Marvin was not the rough-and-tumble type of man. He could never compare to Fallon.

She blinked back the tears, knowing she was just tormenting herself. She’d chosen her freedom over an affair with Fallon that was destined to be short-lived. She might as well get used to it and move on, even though it would not be with Marvin. Now, she needed to figure out a way to get on his computer without him becoming suspicious.

“You have a nice place, Marvin.” She wandered toward the hall leading to the back. “Two bedrooms?”

He grinned excitedly. “Wow, you’re fast, Mai.”

“Down boy.” She frowned. “I was just making polite conversation.”

He looked crestfallen and she stifled a giggle. She should be nicer to him. But he wasn’t the type to stay down long. “Shall I show you around, Mai? You remember I told you I have a computer right?”

How could she forget?

“Well, I’ve got these killer speakers hooked to it that make my MP3s blow you away. And I have a webcam.”

Fallon didn't need a webcam. *Stop it, Mai.*

Marvin led her down the narrow hall into his bedroom. She paused in the doorway, not wanting to get any closer to his king-sized bed. The mere thought of the word bed, sent her pent up sexual hunger into overdrive. Even her co-worker was looking much more desirable in this heady environment.

She took the plunge, spotting the sleek flat screen atop his black desk. "Um, Marv, I wonder if I can check my email really quick while you're finishing up with dinner?" She bit her lip, hoping the hint for him to leave the room had sunk in. He got it and she sighed with relief, as he patted her shoulder and strode from the room.

Tension returned with a vengeance to knot her stomach as she dropped into the seat before the keyboard. She could only imagine how many emails filled her mailbox after being offline for the last three weeks. If she allowed her mind to move past that to the possibility of connecting with fae-mail, she might explode all over Marvin's tidy home office. It was better to take one step at a time.

A few clicks and her mailbox popped up. She scanned the thirty-two new emails in her mailbox, ignoring most of them. They were from gambling buddies, but she couldn't risk that one could be working for Jeb. There was no way she was getting caught again.

When she was sure there was nothing more to see there, Mai clicked inside the address bar while expelling a heavy breath. She typed slowly. Her heart ached so much that she wondered why it didn't quit beating altogether.

The symbol in the corner of the screen rippled to show the browser was searching. She willed it to find fae-mail and then suppressed it, less she use magic inadvertently. Finally a new page popped up.

"We can't find 'fae-mail.com.' "

Tears flooded her eyes and Mai buried her face in her hands. If she couldn't use her magic, she was cut off forever from Fallon, from her heritage, her people. She could learn nothing more about where she came from and who she was. There was no hope at all.

She moaned quietly, waiting for the ache to subside enough for her to go back out to Marvin. Her head bowed, she heard a soft bleep from the computer and glanced up to see a pop-up screen. She sniffed. Silly Marvin was so proud of his equipment, he didn't think to get virus protection, she thought. And then her eyes focused on the words.

"Attention: Seeking Maiven. Fallon in trouble. Contact Bale at Eddy's, Boston."

"Oh God!"

## Chapter Nine

Mai stretched her cramped legs and arms, yawning and glancing around the near empty bus. One hundred eighty-six dollars and almost two days of travel and she was nearly at her destination.

This could be another of Jeb's tricks to get her back, but she had left everything--her job, Marvin, and his Peking Duck--to come to Boston. If there were even a chance she could see Fallon again, she was taking it. It had been a mistake to walk away from him without a fight. Just maybe he loved her in return and would be willing to overlook an accidental death in her past.

Of course, if someone had hurt him, nothing would keep her from crushing the unlucky person with every ounce of magic in her being. She'd do it with no regrets to save Fallon and that she promised him silently as she moved to exit the bus.

\* \* \* \*

Mai skulked in a doorway across from the bar. She kept herself hidden, while keeping its front door in view. If this was a trick, she'd know it before anyone had a chance to grab her.

The dilapidated gray door swung open and she tensed, but no one emerged. A hand reached around her from behind and covered her mouth. She struggled against the arm dragging her back against a hard body.

Without a thought, Mai flexed her fingers and a ball of energy leapt to life in her palm. She angled her hand in the air, poised to slam on her attacker's head, but he smothered the energy with his own.

"No, don't, Mai!" It was Bale. "Don't use your magic."

He released her mouth and clasped her hand. Seconds later, the busy street, the bar and the people strolling along, melted away. The next instant, she and Bale were in the middle of a park.

"What the hell?" She swung around, confused and afraid. "How did you do that?"

"I don't have time to explain it to you, Mai." Sweat beaded across Bale's forehead. A five o'clock shadow on his jaw had turned wild and his hair stuck up in clumps. "Listen to me. Fallon is in trouble. The only one that can save him is you."

She stared. How clichéd was this? Only his lady love could save him? What kind of game was Bale playing? "Look, Bale, I don't know what you're trying to pull, but I'm not buying. I rode almost a thousand miles to get here and I'm tired beyond belief."

"This is not a trick, Mai. If I don't turn you over to certain fae in forty-eight hours, Fallon will be killed."

She gasped and backed away. "I thought you were good. Why would you do this? Please don't hurt him. You can have me instead," she sobbed. The thought of Fallon being hurt, someone killing him, was unthinkable.

Bale grasped her shoulders and shook her. "Stop it. Listen to me. I'm not going to turn you over to them. If I did, you'd both be dead. The Trickster no longer wants to own you. He wants to kill you, and he's contracted your death out to fae who've already been

looking for an opportunity like this to rid themselves of Fallon. If they can get his girl in the process, so much the better.”

“What?” That couldn’t be true. Jeb was a jerk and a cheat, but he wasn’t a murderer. “I’m not Fallon’s girl.” *Good Mai, that was important to establish in a time like this.*

He ignored her comment about Fallon. “You don’t know half of what The Trickster’s done. Not even close.”

She rubbed her moist palms on the front of her thighs and then shoved a thumb nail between her teeth. Her eyes shifted to a point over Bale’s shoulder. What could she do? She was little more than an apprentice at magic.

Bale seemed to read her mind. “You can’t handle the fae on your own. You need the king’s guards to take care of it.”

Her eyes widened. “The king’s guards?”

He nodded. “The faerie king has an army of fae, all powerful enough to oust these rogue fae and get Fallon back from them.”

“Then why haven’t they already done it?”

Bale hesitated, his gaze dropping to the ground.

“Bale?”

“Fallon is now rogue.”

“What? What are you saying?” Fallon worked directly for the king. He was a retriever. He’d said so, discussed his work during their online chats. Bale was wrong.

“Fallon was forbidden to have anything at all to do with you. He disobeyed that order and was put on warning only because he is ... was ... one of the king’s favorites. Otherwise, he would have been judged immediately and found guilty.

“Instead of obeying, he had an affair with you. That put him in direct defiance of the king. When the guards came to bring him to the king for questioning, Fallon fought them off long enough to disappear into the human world. He sent them with a message for the king saying he would never come back to Faeland if you weren’t welcome.”

Mai gaped. That sounded unmistakably like love. Hope rose in her heart. If Fallon was willing to defy his king, to whom he’d been faithful for centuries, then maybe he could forgive what she did. Maybe they could have a life together, if he could be rescued.

“What happened to him after that?” *And how the hell did the fae know she’d had an affair with Fallon, or rather a one night stand?*

“After that, the rogues picked him up and The Trickster got the word to me that I had thirty days to pick you up or I’d be killed along with him. I guess you know I couldn’t track you because you weren’t using your magic.”

She nodded. “But you found me across from the bar easily enough, though I was hiding.” She frowned, annoyed that her hiding place hadn’t been a good one. She had strolled up the back alley and bribed her way inside the back door of the store across from the bar. It had seemed like a clever plan at the time.

Bale smiled with a pat to her shoulder. “Fae can sense other fae who are in the immediate vicinity. If we know the magic signature, we can pick them out even if they aren’t using their magic.”

“In other words you caught my scent like a blood hound,” she muttered.

“Exactly.” He searched the area. “We need to move. I don’t know if anyone caught your signature back at the store.”



Mai agreed. "Where are we going? To find Fallon?"

"No. To see the king." He clasped her by the hand before she could protest and jerked her inside a door of light.

\* \* \* \*

"This is ridiculous, Bale. He won't see me. You could be arrested bringing me here."

Mai tried again to pull her hand from Bale's death grip. He'd been dragging her along a street that fairly danced beneath her feet with sparkles shimmering in the cobblestone. Tall fruit trees lined the road on either side and looked so tempting she longed to whiz over and pluck a couple. She hadn't eaten since the night before. Yet, even as she stared at the yellow globes hanging ripe from the branches, she wondered how she could possibly reach them. The trees were several stories high and the lowest branches at least fifteen feet above the ground.

As she speculated, a faerie flew out from a covering of leaves with a large basket in hand. Mai murmured in wonder at the shimmering wings on the woman's back that were a match to Fallon's. Her skin was a smooth shade of olive and her hair was fluffed about her sweet face like a silver cloud.

"We're all different colors, just like humans," she whispered.

Bale agreed. "Yes, we have different races, just like anyone else."

"Anyone else? You mean humans."

He shook his head. "You have so much to learn, but no time to learn it. I have to get you in to see the king somehow. And I don't know how I'm going to do that given that I haven't been home in two hundred years."

"What? Why?" Mai couldn't imagine ever leaving this wondrous place for the human world if she had the choice. The air was sweeter and the pink sky she'd seen through Fallon's magic was real. It looked like cotton candy in person, too. Nothing in the human world could compare.

Bale didn't answer her question, as the road came to an end at a wide chasm. There would be no going across without flying and there would be no flying without the permission of the guard blocking the way.

"Wait here."

She stood a few feet away, watching the proceeding argument between Bale and the guard. She wondered what they were saying, but was too afraid to inch closer. The seven foot fae was imposing in his head to toe armor. She'd always thought fae were tiny creatures. What a great misconception that was.

"Ok, Mai. You have to go alone to the castle and convince the king to help Fallon. Over there through Nether Forest is my home. My wife and daughter live there." He winced, making Mai wonder if they were shrews. "If you need me, you can come there after you speak with the king. Good luck."

"Wait. Bale, why should the king listen to me? He doesn't even know me. Why aren't you going?" She trembled, digging her nails into his arm unintentionally. She remembered that austere king and wanted no part of him. Fallon had protected her from him for a reason. "Come with me."

He shook his head. "I can't, Mai. The king has commanded that you come alone."

"What do you mean? He doesn't know we're here."

"He knows everything."

“What is he God?” She knew she was being irreverent of his majesty but fear was knotting her stomach and she couldn’t help herself.

“He’s our leader and very powerful. Not much goes on here in Faeland that he doesn’t know about. He contacted the guard the minute you stepped into this realm and told him to let you pass.”

She sighed. “But not you.”

“No, not me.”

“Why am I so special?” She struggled not to whine.

“That you’ll have to ask his majesty, King Atmel.”

## Chapter Ten

A young fairy with large brown eyes and an impish smile gestured for Mai to follow her down the one wide corridor after another after she'd gained access to the palace. When Mai could drag her own wide-eyed gaze from the opulent surroundings, she surmised the girl to be eight or nine years old. She wondered what it would be like to have been born and grown up here. It must be wonderful.

"He's expecting you," the girl whispered.

Mai turned from the intricate tapestry of a half naked elfin woman which had caught her attention, to find the girl holding a door open for her. There was no sense delaying the inevitable. The austere man she'd caught site of in the marketplace didn't look like the type to be kept waiting.

She darted forward and slipped through the open door, only to find the girl did not follow, but closed it behind her. Cautiously, Mai turned to examine the room she'd been brought to. Instead of some type of kingly hearing room, which she'd expected, the room looked more like the elaborate room for a woman. The walls were painted in a gentle shade of lilac. The couches and loveseats, arranged around the parameter, were upholstered in purple with various colorful pillows thrown artfully about them.

It was a full minute, while she took in the luxury, before she realized a woman sat at the head of the room in a high backed chair, behind gauzy white curtains. Two other women stood next to her, one at each side.

"Come here, Maiven." Her voice was like music. It drew Mai forward as if she was carried on the waves of sound.

"The king is waiting for me," she protested. Surely, he'd be angry if she put him off longer? That would not bode well for her purposes. Remembering Fallon gave Mai new confidence. "I can't waste time here. I'm sorry. I need to speak to the king about Fallon."

The women at the sides of the great lady gasped. With the twitch of a finger, she silenced them. "Leave us." They obeyed without question and Mai wondered if she shouldn't just run behind them.

"No, don't run away, Maiven." The curtain lifted to reveal her flawless features, long black hair. She was brown like Mai.

"How did you know I wanted to run out? I'm usually braver than this, I assure you." She tried to display it by standing taller. She had the feeling the woman wasn't fooled.

The woman indicated a chair. "Sit down, my dear. I need to talk to you before you speak with the king. And of course you have to be readied. You don't go before King Atmel like that." Her almond brown eyes flicked over Mai's jeans and t-shirt.

"Well, I wasn't given much time to pretty myself up," she snapped. She could do without the insults and the haughty attitude.

"You will watch your tongue and your thoughts." The brown eyes blazed. "You will show his majesty the respect the king of the faeries deserves. Is that clear?"

Mai was through being intimidated by this woman, whoever she was. She was tired and scared for Fallon, and she didn't have time for some self-important woman telling her what she could and couldn't say to the king. She'd give him a piece of her mind was what she'd do. His abandonment of Fallon to the rogue fae was an act of evil and she'd tell him so.

"That's better." The woman smiled.

"What?" Ok, Mai was officially confused. "You said ... you're reading my mind! And now you're happy about making me angry? Who are you?" Mai took a seat before she fell down.

"I am Queen Moira, the king's wife."

The blood rushed from Mai's head, leaving her queasy. She'd just mentally insulted the queen. Now the king would never listen to her. "I'm sorry."

"No worries." The queen looked embarrassed. "Oh dear, I've been listening to young Piee too much. My language is deplorable."

Mai nearly laughed out loud. "Pee?"

"Yes, the young fae who led you here. She's only ninety-five, but she's already managed to pick up the language of humans and I'm afraid it's rubbed off on me."

Mai blinked. That little girl was ninety-five? She was older than Mai. "But she's so little. She looks like a child."

The queen nodded. "Fae age more slowly in body here in Faeland. Had she lived outside the protected realm, she would be as tall as you are."

"When ... but ..." Mai's mind was too befuddled to continue her questioning. She struggled to get back on course. "Queen Moira, when will I see the king?"

"Oh not today, child. You're not ready."

"But he sent for me. And Fallon. It's urgent. He can't die." Tears filled her eyes and she turned away to hide them. It was probably pointless since the woman must sense her grief if she could so easily read her mind.

"Don't worry, Maiven. Time in Faeland does not move as it does in the human world. You have more time than you think. The king understands that you are not ready to be presented to him. When he sent for you, he knew you'd come to me first to prepare you."

Mai didn't care how slow or fast Faeland time moved. One more second that Fallon spent as the captive of the rogue fae was a second too long. There was no telling what they were doing to him, if they were hurting him.

Again, the queen anticipated her thoughts. What was the point of her opening her mouth?

"I sense that Fallon is alive."

Mai stood and knelt at the woman's feet. "Please if you can sense it, then you can just bring him here."

She shook her head. "No, I cannot. I must obey the king in all things. We are not to discuss him or even mention his name again. But I believe you will convince him to send a regiment to free Fallon."

"Why me? And aren't you breaking the rules by discussing him now?" Bitterness crept into her voice unbidden.

The queen patted her hand without addressing her question. "You will be taken to a room where my ladies will bathe you and ready you for bed. Tomorrow, you will go

before the king properly dressed, and I hope with the right attitude.” She tapped Mai’s nose. “I expect you have a fire in you to match the king’s and will soon convince him.”

So that’s what she meant by ‘that’s better’. The queen had deliberately goaded her, hoping to make her angry. Did no one stand up to the man? Was he a tyrant? Then why was he king and how could he not have evil magic?

“Stop questioning and go now.”

Mai turned to find the ladies waiting. The queen must have used the same mental contact that the king had used to contact the guard at the chasm. She wondered if it was in her ability to develop such a trick. She hoped so. That is if she lived long enough after her audience with the king.

\* \* \* \*

“Young lady, what you ask is impossible,” the faerie king bellowed.

“It’s not impossible. You have guards who are as strong and maybe more than these rogues. Why can’t you just send them to help Fallon?”

The royal fist slammed down on his high backed chair, maybe a shade more fancy than the queen’s had been. Did they never share the same room, she wondered.

Hazel eyes, not unlike her own, blazed in anger. “I have already commanded that his name is not to be spoken again. You are in danger of the dungeon, Miss.”

She couldn’t afford to back down. Not when Fallon’s life was a stake. She’d risk her precious freedom if that’s what it took. Meeting first thing in the morning with the king, when she and he were fresh meant nothing. His ire was quickly raised anyway.

“My name, your majesty, is Maiven. Or you can call me Mai. I will speak of Fallon if I choose and no overbearing evil king is going to stop me, now or ever.” She clenched her fists at her sides and her breasts rose and fell heavily in her fit of anger. The intimidation she’d felt at entering his chamber was gone. Somehow this man was giving her what she wanted.

“Silence!”

The king stood and the servants around him scattered. A ball of sparkling fire leapt to his palm and he hurled it neatly at Mai. An instant before it would have touched her, the king changed his mind and called it back. But Mai had crossed her arms and a head to foot shield had formed before her.

No one could be more astounded than she. When she moved to return her hands to her sides, the shield evaporated as fast as it had materialized.

The king nodded approval. “You learn quickly. Just as your mother did.”

Mai gasped. The king had known her mother?

“I did,” he said as if he’d heard her thoughts. He returned to his seat and settled while watching her. His features softened. “You look just like her. I knew that you would.”

She struggled to follow. “Then you knew me before? Was I here in Faeland when I was little?”

“You were born here.”

She sank to her knees. All her life had been a lie. For some reason her mother had taken her away from this beautiful protective land. She’d stolen away her heritage and never gave her the chance to know it, to embrace who she was.

Unshed tears burned her eyes. She fought to control her emotions, lest they have her bawling like a baby before this austere man. What could she possibly say to make

him understand?

“Your majesty, Fallon is my heart. I cannot bear it without him. Please, if you can do anything at all, save him.”

“You left him once. You will do it again. He’s better off dead.”

She gaped. How did he know so much and how could he have such a dark view of love? And then suddenly she knew.

“You loved my mother and she left you.” The arrested look on his hardened features told her she was right. “Now you’re bitter and mean. You won’t be happy until your magic is black.”

The king looked ready to attack her again, but Mai stood her ground. She was on the right track, without reading him with magic.

“That’s called human perception,” she told him proudly. “I may not have learned much out there, but I did pick up a few useful human traits.”

He sneered. “That’s no compliment.”

“Whatever.” Mai took a wild guess. “So, father, when are you going to go get my husband?”

## Chapter Eleven

Mai trembled with anticipation. Tonight she would see Fallon. Her mind, her body felt starved for sight of him and to hear his rumbling, deep voice. She'd been right in her guess that the king was her father. He'd been reticent about telling her about his relationship with her mother, but she'd learned already from Moira that she'd been his first wife.

"Miss, please hold still." The servant helping her to dress tugged a large pink bow around her waist and tied it in the back.

She frowned at her mirrored reflection at the pink lace and ruffled dress. The excitement of finally meeting her father after dreaming of him for a lifetime, had made her agree to his command that she wear this silly thing. As soon as his little announcement dinner was over and she was before her love alone, she intended to strip naked and have her way with Fallon. Tomorrow was soon enough to put her father in his place about choosing her clothes.

Fallon. She shut her eyes to see his face again in her mind. Her father had moved quickly once he'd given in to her demands. The battle to free Fallon was little more than a skirmish and he was back in the castle resting.

She would have stormed his room the moment she learned of his return, but her father's powerful magic had kept her from even venturing down that hallway. His command that she allow Fallon to recover could not be ignored.

Now that he was rumored to be back to health, the king was throwing an announcement celebration that he'd not only recovered his right hand retriever, but he'd recovered his long lost daughter. She could not be happier, unless she was skipping the party and heading straight to Fallon's bedroom. Her sexual cravings were in an uproar.

\* \* \* \*

Mai bowed her head slightly, while keeping her eyes fixed on Fallon. God, he looked beautiful. As usual, his thick braid hung over one shoulder, sharply contrasting with the blue of his new uniform. He wiggled his brows suggestively at her and she swayed toward him.

*I know what's on your mind, Maiven, he chanted inside her head.*

*No, you don't.*

She was having trouble not giggling like a school girl. All around her faeries congratulated the king on his recovery of Fallon and Mai. There were those who'd noticed the attention Fallon gave her, and they were not pleased. She hardly acknowledged their catty quips when introduced, because she was busy glancing over their shoulders at her love. This evening's entertainment could not end soon enough.

*Maybe we should slip out. They don't notice us, just the king.*

*They notice you.*

*Maiven, you know I have eyes only for you. Come, I need you in my bed right now.*

She reached out to clasp his hand and barely blinked before she was in his

bedroom, with the lights turned so low, she could only make out a few odd shapes of furniture and Fallon's tall figure in front of her.

She reached a hand out to stroke his chest and gasped to find it bare. "How did you ...?"

"Shh. A kiss."

His mouth closed over hers, silencing all words and sending her mind into a tailspin. She stood on tiptoe to push herself closer and parted her lips to suck his tongue into her mouth. She ran her hands down over his back, down to his bare buttocks and around to his long thick shaft.

She convulsed and arched herself closer still. She longed for her frilly dress to be gone and it was, in a blink. She had no idea if he had done it or somehow she'd learned the skill. It didn't matter. She needed him inside her right now.

"Fallon, put it in me now." She tugged him by his erection toward his bed and lay flat, guiding him to her hungry mound.

He hesitated. "Wait, honey. Let me check to see if you're wet enough."

She squirmed and pushed his fingers away as he tried slipping them inside her. She had no patience for that. It had been too long since their last coupling. She couldn't wait a second longer. "Fallon, now. I'm wet. Please."

*You asked for it.*

His voice was echoed in her feverish mind in the same instant he parted her folds and plunged deep inside her. She screamed and bucked against him, demanding more.

"I've never seen you so excited, Maiven." His green eyes flashed in the darkness. "You're so hot, you make me want to come too soon."

She reached down to claw at his taut thighs. She wanted it harder and faster. She couldn't seem to get enough. "Harder, Fallon."

He raised one of her legs above his head and spanked her gently before grinding deeper and faster. She screamed again and continued to whine as she flipped over to her side, so that he was pounding against her bottom.

"Oh, oh. Fallon, I'm ready." She gasped and then in a shower of lightening and brilliant colors, her climax was wild and intense.

With a few more violent grinds into her from behind, he released his warm seed inside her, making her tremble as a delicious aftermath of her own climax washed over her again.

He didn't pull out of her, but wrapped an arm about her and pulled her up with him to the top of the bed, so that they spooned.

"It seems like it's been so long," she whispered.

"It didn't have to be."

She heard the anger in his voice and was sorry she'd brought it up. Their lovemaking had been wonderful. She didn't want it ruined with him remembering that she'd left him.

He sighed behind her. "Remind me to teach you what it means to keep your thoughts to yourself."

She gasped, her feelings hurt. "It was good between us, Fallon. Don't ruin it. I left. I had good reason, but it doesn't have to affect us now."

He pulled out and sat up. She could have wept at the loss. Would he hold it against her forever? Of course, he would. She was the cause of him being captured in the



first place. If she'd stayed with Jeb, none of this would have happened.

She rolled to the edge of the bed and searched for her dress, "I better get back to my room. Father won't like that I spent time in your room. He remembers me as the three year old I was when my mother took me away." Her voice caught in her throat.

Many times over the last week she'd visited him to demand he let her in to see Fallon. Her father had confessed her history.

Fallon relented, "No, don't leave. He knows we're meant for each other. Even if he didn't, I'm not like him."

"What does that mean?"

He sighed and stretched, before pulling her onto his lap. "It means, I won't sit on my throne driving all those around me nuts if you leave me. I will hunt you to the ends of the earth until I find you. And I will enslave you to me, so that you'll never get away from me again."

Her eyes widened and she trembled. She'd lived ten years looking for ways to escape. That way hadn't presented itself until she met Fallon, who opened up her own world of magic. It had allowed her to escape slavery for almost a month. And yet, as she felt him hardening again beneath her, she would welcome being this fae's slave. She had the feeling Fallon's enslavement involved bending her over the nearest piece of furniture and giving it to her as hard as she could stand it.

"Exactly," he whispered softly in her ear.

He'd read her mind again.

She needed to tell him the truth, let him make the decision to stay with her based on what she'd done. Yet, the thought that Fallon would be driven away made her throat go dry. "I need to tell you about my past."

He waited quietly.

"I killed someone." Tears clumped in her lashes. "A man. He was attacking my mother. They were always cheating someone in some way--my mother and Jeb, her boyfriend. My mother liked to do things for men. Jeb supported her in it. God, I'm so ashamed."

Fallon cuddled her to his chest, still quiet and stroking her back while she cried it out for a few minutes. Finally, she spoke again.

"I was planning to run away the moment I turned eighteen. But one day I came in the house to find a guy in my mother's bedroom attacking her. I didn't think about anything except that I didn't want him to hurt her. Even as bad as she was, going out all the time, drinking, gambling. It doesn't seem possible that she was a fae. It's not possible. Why wouldn't she just use magic to get along?"

Fallon didn't answer.

"Jeb kept a bat for protection from those guys who got it into their heads to get back the money he fleeced them for. I saw it and grabbed it. You can imagine the rest. Jeb said I killed him and he had the tape to prove it. He and my mother liked to videotape their ... sessions. So, now you know my bad history."

She struggled to slip from his arms in anticipation of his rejection, but he held her tight. "Now, you listen."

## Chapter Twelve

Fallon turned her to face him, putting one leg on either side of him. His erection pressed lightly against her opening, but he didn't allow it to go in. Mai struggled to pay attention to his words.

"I had a little talk with the king and asked for permission to share with you all that he gained from reading you and from reading Jeb."

She leaned back from him. "What? Jeb? What do you mean from reading Jeb? Is he in Faeland?"

"Are you going to shut up and listen or will I have to get rough?" he demanded.

She shivered. "Can you get rough anyway?"

He laughed. "If you'll behave yourself, we will see."

She nodded and settled against him.

"Unfortunately, your mother was one of those fae who desperately wants to experience the human world. They get a little taste and they're hooked as if to a drug. She got her taste by traveling with the king through the human world before going on to the Dragon realm. The king went, but your mother stayed in the human world with you. She wrote him a letter saying she didn't want anything else but to stay where she was and that she was never returning.

Your father, as you've seen, is very proud. He would not bend to go and look for her, though he loved her and you very much. His grief over your loss turned to bitter anger and he ruled very harshly. I was hired to be a retriever as well as several others. We were assigned to go into the human world and take back rogue fae who'd skipped on their punishments."

"What's that have to do with Jeb?" she interrupted and then slapped a hand over her mouth.

He continued, "Jeb met your mother when she was cheating some guy out of his money in a game of cards. As soon as she tired of him, she moved on to the next guy." Fallon tipped up her chin. "There will be no leaving me once we are married. You must be sure it is what you want beforehand."

Mai stared up at him. "Married?"

Fallon continued as if she hadn't spoken. "Jeb is a fae. He's on my list. Since you'd never mentioned his name and he never uses magic, I couldn't find him. His time in Faeland had been before my job so I didn't even have a signature to sniff him out at your apartment.

"Mai, he killed that guy, not you. The man was merely knocked unconscious when you hit him. Jeb finished him and dumped his body, then blamed you to keep you under his control."

She squirmed in his arms. "How can you know that? You don't know what I saw on that tape."

"Think about it. You saw yourself hit him, and you saw the blood afterward. Nothing in between. Besides, your father read Jeb. I read him. He was captured in the

fight to free me. He's The Trickster and he's been holding trumped up evidence against many people. That's how he made a living and got away with so much. He lived as the worst kind of fae."

She cried again, burrowing her head beneath his chin. So many years wasted for a big lie. She could have had a better life, gone to college instead of being tied to that computer day in and day out. She could be married with kids by now.

"That can be remedied soon enough." He chuckled above her.

"Get out of my head, Fallon." She slapped at his chest. "Hey, you called me Mai not Maiven."

"Did I? Hmm, must have been an accident."

"Fallon."

"Yes, honey?"

"Can you ever overlook my awful past and all the things I've done? I gambled using my magic, though I didn't know it. Jeb did--"

"Exactly, Jeb did it. Not you, Mai. Honey, you are as sweet and honest as any woman I've met who's never been outside of Faeland. Even more so. I am marrying you, woman. I love you."

She threw her arms around his neck and fired tiny kisses all over his face. "I love you too, Fallon. And you're never getting rid of me."

She arched her hips toward him, feeling him glide inside her. "Now no more talk. You promised me something rough."

Fallon's response was a low growl and two hands squeezed her buttocks to drag her forward for her sexual enslavement.

The End