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Witch Lore

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WITCH LORE

Alison Paige

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Prologue

"I call the four watchtowers, north, south, east and west, to scan the globe for he who suits best."

Power pulsed through Isabell from the tips of her outstretched hands to the bottoms of her bare feet and tingled over every inch of her naked flesh in between.

She turned to her right.

"Tower of earth, this daughter of the Goddess commands thee. Summon he who treads surefooted upon the sacred mother. Clear the path between he and me, lure the one to his destiny."

A half turn and Isabell faced the east tower glimmering in the distance through the haze of her drawn magic. "Tower of air, this daughter of the Goddess commands thee. Whisper in the ear of he whose mind is logic and clear. Tell him of his waiting mate. Coax him to his destined fate."

She turned to the south, arms outstretched above her head. "Tower of fire, this daughter of the Goddess commands thee. Know he whose power burns bright in his soul. Call like to like, lure the power of old."

Isabell completed the circle facing west, her long black air whipping around her in a wind of pure magic. "Tower of water, this daughter of the Goddess commands thee. Be he handsome or homely, befriended or lonely. Call to he who conduces thee, whose magic, knowledge, logic and power reside harmonious within this hour."

She faced north a final time, threw back her head and raised her voice. "Watchtowers, north, south, east and west, the Goddess summons thee at my behest. Air, fire, water, earth, elements of the mother's girth. I call you now, unleash thy power, do my bidding in this hour. By wand, by blade, by chalice and bell, I call you now, attend thy spell. Within this circle, hearken to me. This is my will, so mote it be."

Isabell reached for the churning power spooling deep within her body, pressing at her skin like an overfilled balloon. With focused intent she cast it up through her arms and out to the heavens, feeling it sizzle through her, tingling fine hairs and prickling at the tips of her fingers. It was done.

A small voice to her right, outside the sacred circle, scoffed, "That ain't gonna make nobody fall in love."

Isabell looked to her little guardian, a fairy no bigger than a chipmunk, sitting Indian style atop the two-foot pillar of ancient rocks at the east corner. "It's not meant to make anyone fall in love, Elvia. It's a luring spell."

The tiny woman in her mid-twenties by appearances with long raven black hair and gossamer wings snorted again. Her whole body hiccupped with the sentiment. She clicked her pipe back between her teeth and puffed. "Can't say as I sees the point ta that neither."

"It'll leave him his free will. Just coax him a bit. Speed things along to improve my chances."

"Danna' matter," said another voice, still small but deeper, more masculine in tone.

She looked to Brokk, a male fairy four inches tall, standing atop the west pillar of stones. His feet planted wide, arms knotted tight across his little chest. "Love or lure, the spell cost ya what time ye had left."

Isabell looked away, gazed out over cool dark waters of the lake. She swallowed back the surge of fear clogging her throat and exhaled.

"I know," she said. Goddess help her, she knew.

Chapter One

The delicious tingle was unmistakable. Isabell knew he was near before she'd even seen him. The power coursing through his body called to her, tugged at the pool of energy, her akasha, in the pit of her belly. She recognized it, recognized him, as she would her own reflection. The object of her spell, her perfect mate, her last hope to save her humanity, had arrived in Seven Isles, New York. He'd come straight into Isles Market where she just happened to be shopping for a few last-minute dinner supplies.

Hot dang, she was good. Pride pulled her spine straighter and tugged a smile at the corners of her mouth. She stole a quick glance when she rounded aisle two before heading down the next. She couldn't resist, besides it wouldn't hurt anything. She knew the spell had to play out, like taking the last pill in a prescription. Leave even one behind and risk ruining the effect of the rest. It was the same with magic. There was a beginning and an end. He had to come to her. That's what she'd cast. But peeking ahead wouldn't hurt.

Handsome or homely? Isabell took a good look from head to toe and relief sighed out of her loud enough to nearly blow the whole thing anyway. Stacy, the kid at the register, Stan Logan's daughter, glanced her way. The teenager smiled and crinkled her fingers at her. Isabell smiled and mimicked her wave then shifted her gaze back to him.

He stood next to the old wall phone by the front door. His head bowed over the phonebook Stan Logan kept on the stack of milk crates underneath the phone for his customers' convenience. It was Stan's phonebook and Stan's phone. There wasn't a slot for change but rather a coffee can decorated in flowered wallpaper with a slit cut in the plastic lid. Seven Isles worked on the honor system. Easy for a town small enough the mailman could cover his entire route on foot.

Isabell pretended to study the chemical ingredients on the back of a Twinkies box, trying not to look as though she weren't staring at the studly newcomer and failing miserably. Hair the color of butterscotch hung thick and wavy to the top of his yellow shirt collar. He had a sharp Romanesque nose with a broad forehead, a clean-shaven square jaw and eyes...well, she didn't know the color of his eyes yet, but she'd bet a bucket of butterfly balls they were pretty. He was as tall as the store coolers, she could see that, six foot something and broad-shouldered enough his off-the-rack brown corduroy jacket fit snug along his back and hugged his thick arms.

There were no rings on his beefy fingers she noticed, yet his jeans hung loose over his butt and legs. He was single and he'd chosen his clothes for comfort rather than how they'd display his assets. The man wasn't advertising, then again, looking like that, he wouldn't have to.

Isabell closed her eyes and stretched out her senses. She found him like a pulsating light in the darkness of her mind. She felt his power, or rather her power, the power of her spell still charging through his veins, whispering to his mind, energizing his body. But there was something different, something unexpected. She recognized the feel of her magic, like one recognizes their own handwriting, but there was more to it. The signature had been enhanced in a way. It was her power yet he'd assimilated it into his own akasha, made it his, and the feel of it sent a warm rush through her body.

Her smile grew wider. Oh this was better than she'd even dared hope. Handsome and a natural magical conduit. If he was a dimwit, she could probably live with it in the face of such a rare find in a human male. And it'd been so easy—casting the spell, luring the perfect mate to appease the fairies. Why hadn't her mother or grandmother or her mother before her thought of it? A century-old pact satisfied in less than a week. Perhaps she was the evolutionary perfection of fairy and human blood.

Or maybe she was just lucky.

"Uh, this is gonna sound...strange."

Isabell startled at the rich sound of his voice. Like the long draw of a bow across the strings of a cello, the sound hummed through her body, vibrating over sensitive feminine nerves deep inside her. She glanced his way to see he was speaking to Stacy, allowed the feel of his voice to caress her like a secret pleasure.

"I was looking for... Ah, actually, I don't know what I was looking for. A psychic, a palm reader, some people call her a witch. I don't know, I checked the yellow pages but I don't suppose witches typically take out ads."

Stacy cracked her gum and rolled her shoulders. "Sure they do. Try lookin' under A for alchemy."

The man snorted, a half smile flickering across his lips. His eyes narrowed and his expression turned puzzled as though he weren't sure if she was joking. "Okay."

Sixth sense prickled and Isabell heeded its warning, shuffling out of sight farther down the aisle. She kept the Twinkies.

"If it's a witch you're lookin' for —"

"That's right," the man said. "The, ah, Witch of Seven Isles."

"Yeah," Stacy said. "Catchy, huh? She just went down aisle three."

A distinct pop snapped in Isabell's ears. The sound of a spell completed.

His footsteps padded along the linoleum floor behind her. His akasha, his personal power or aura, pressed ahead of him. Isabell felt it when he'd passed the Twinkies display. His akasha was big, very big, and solid as a brick wall. Isabell's chest tightened at the feel of it rubbing up the back of her thighs, over her bottom, pressing against her back. Her hands went moist and muscles low in her body responded as though stroked by a hot wind.

She dropped the Twinkies box into her basket and reached for the loaf of fresh Italian bread she'd come for. Isles Market had the best fresh-baked bread.

"Excuse me."

Her eyes closed, enjoying his voice one last time in private. She turned. "Yes?"

He flinched back at the sight of her, blinked, his modest manly lips parting, male appreciation glinting in his eyes. He collected himself quickly enough and smiled. "My name is David Pennyfield, I believe I was referred to you."

They were blue—his eyes—blue as bellflowers. She knew they'd be pretty. "To me? Whatever for?"

"Answers," he said. "Assistance. I have an...odd sort of problem. I was told you were uniquely skilled to help me."

Isabell raised a brow. "Really? What unique skill would that be exactly?"

"Magi—" Color washed through his cheeks, his breath held as though the words stuck in his throat. He exhaled and smiled. "I'm sorry. May I ask your name?"

Isabell raked her gaze over him, made a show of it, taking his measure. "You may. It's Isabell. Isabell Faylinn Dionysus. Now I'll ask you, if you don't know my name, how were you referred to me?"

"Isabell Faylinn Dionysus," he repeated, his smile growing. "Not often people offer their middle name when asked."

She shrugged, ignoring the way his pretty eyes crinkled at the corners when his smile brightened. He was handsome but the smile was positively devastating. Oh yes, she was a powerful and lucky witch. And so terribly pleased with herself she couldn't help making the poor dear work for what he wanted. After all, if he was going to marry a witch, and he was, whether he knew it yet or not, he'd have to come to terms with discussing magic out loud.

"Names are important and mine more so than most," she said.

He straightened, gave her a quick once-over while his smile faded, turned more serious. "No doubt."

David slipped his hands into his jeans' pockets to the knuckles and centered his weight. His tone came surer now, more resolute. "I need your help, Isabell, and I can tell by looking you have the ability I suspect is required."

She opened her mouth for a quick retort but then swallowed the words. "By looking? You see my akasha?"

"That sparkly nimbus of power around you? Yes. I see it." His browed furrowed, his lips flattening to a tight line. "And more."

She mumbled on a surprised exhalation, "Goddess alive, how powerful was that spell?"

Isabell expected remnants of her power used to fuel the spell would mingle with his natural human energy, enhancing the normal power any being is born with while the spell played out. But this? It should've faded. It should've returned to the ribbon of energy that flowed through all things in and of the Great Mother. The balance should've restored itself within and around him.

She'd given him magic sight. What more had her spell done for him? How long would it last? An excited twitter tingled down her spine and colored her voice. "What else? What else do you see?"

His eyes shifted beyond her to the base of the far wall lined with shelves. "Little people," he said. "I see little people gathering cereal pieces."

Isabell followed his gaze to the two brownies busily gathering a pile of eight or nine Cheerios that'd spilled to the floor. A nibbled hole in the lowest corner of the box told the story. Bothersome brownies.

The creatures were humanoid, squat, dressed in dirt brown burlap from their rumpled triangle hat to their curl-toed shoes. Matching vest and pants completed the look with a lighter shade of burlap for their shirts. It was difficult to tell male from female brownies at a glance, but Isabell had seen them enough to know this was a mated pair. Both looked like pudgy, withered old men, but to the untrained, non-magical eye they were mice. A negligible distinction.

She made a disgusted grunt and turned away. "Feral brownies. Pests."

A movement at the other end of the aisle drew Isabell's gaze. Betty Sondgrove, piano teacher and town gossip, was coming. If she found out one of Isabell's spells had

gone bonkers, she'd ruin business. People tended to want their bought magic to work. Let their car break down or their computer crash and they shrug it off as "shit happens". But one bad tarot reading or poorly aimed love spell and they'd come with torches blazing.

"So, do you think—" David's words halted when Isabell laced her arm through his then tugged him down the aisle in the opposite direction of Miss Snodgrove.

"Let's talk about this somewhere more private," she said, leading him around the bottom of aisle three and up aisle four, the last aisle, to the front door.

She stopped and dropped the plastic shopping basket onto the stack, grabbed the box of Twinkies and shoved it into David's arm then scooped up the bread.

"Box of Twinkies and a loaf of bread, Stacy. Put it on my tab," she said, waving the loaf over her head as she pulled David behind her through the automatic door.

His power sizzled over her, made it hard to breathe. The connection of their bodies seemed to intensify the sensation and made her sex slick her thighs so they slipped against each other under her sundress as she led him to his SUV. He'd parked in the second slanted spot along the street in front of the store, between a red VW bug and white pickup. David's vehicle was dark blue, mid-sized, powerful yet conservative, logical, no surprise—exactly what she'd asked for.

"How'd you know this was mine?" he said, opening the driver's side while she climbed in the passenger's seat.

"The energy behind the wheel matched your akasha," she said, buckling up. "Sit some place long enough, you leave a piece of yourself behind."

"Damn, you really are a witch," he said, cranking the key and throwing the gearshift into reverse.

"What'd you expect, striped socks and ruby slippers?" she said, and pointed him in the right direction.

David wasn't sure what he expected but Isabell Faylinn Dionysus was not it. The old witch lore his customer had told him mentioned nothing about the witch being young, smart, bossy...and hot.

"Turn here. Left. Park over there next to the dock," she said, gesturing with a pointed finger and stretched arm across his line of sight.

Thank god, the vision of her aura was finally fading. He would've been blinded with her arm swooping so close like that, though he should've been used to it by now. He could see everyone's aura lately, the sight of it normally faded after a few minutes. Most weren't so bad, a soft fuzzy yellow cloud hugging around them. But people with power, either in magic or talent or plain old confidence, could be damn distracting. Their auras were brighter, thicker, so he could hardly see their faces through the haze, and that haze could be any color of the rainbow.

Isabel's was the most dazzling he'd seen yet. Golden with streaks of brilliant white and specks of silver flashing in a swirling cloud around her. He'd never seen an aura move. At least it'd given him glimpses of her face. And, good god, what a face. Nearly left him speechless and brought a tightness to his jeans he was still trying not to think about.

"Don't forget your bag," she said when he jammed the gearshift into park. She grabbed her Twinkies, a personal weakness of his, and her loaf of bread before jerking open the door and hopping out.

David wondered wordlessly why he needed to bring his bag but reached in the backseat for it anyway and found himself following behind her down the wooden dock toward an old *Kirie Ange de Mer* motorboat. At least that's what it said on the side. It couldn't be more than a seven-footer with an enclosed cockpit and lower birth.

He stopped at the bow, watched her climb aboard. What was he doing? Why wasn't he asking any questions? He'd let this woman, an admitted witch, lead him away from public areas and now coaxed him aboard a boat to who knows where. There was

something about her, something weirdly familiar. But was that an explanation or an excuse?

She was pretty, stunning actually, in a way that had nothing to do with her long jet-black hair or the delicate lines of her face. Her eyes were a mix of color, honey brown and green with yellow and gold flecks at the center. She had lips that robbed him of the ability to think and a slender athletic body that he'd already imagined beneath him an alarming number of times considering the short time he'd known her. She was pretty, yes, but there was something else, something inside him that felt pulled to her, pulled by something deep inside her.

"Feed me. Feed me. Feed me."

David dropped his gaze, followed the sound of the tiny voices to the dark water lapping against the boat and under the dock. "Shit."

"What?" Isabell leaned over the bow of her boat, looking at the water.

"They look like..."

"Mermaids," Isabell said as she straightened. "Bottomless pits. Constantly clamoring around the docks gaping at the tourists for bread crumbs or chips."

Half woman, half fish, they each bobbed in the water, little arms stretched above their heads opening and closing them again and again as though waiting to catch whatever he'd throw to them. Their small breasts peeked in and out of the water, tight rosy nipples flashing then disappearing beneath the surface. Their hair was long iridescent white with streaks of brilliant red, some more red than others.

David's gut churned. "I've never seen anything like it."

"Ever see Koi fish?" she asked.

"Sure, but —"

"Then you've seen mermaids. Most people see what they want to see. What's normal," she said, making air quotes around the word "normal". "People with magical sight see what's real, normal or not. Come on, dinner will be cold."

He should've asked where they were going, how he'd get back, if he wanted to go in the first place. He should've asked but he didn't. This had to stop. Whatever was happening to him had to stop. He'd do anything.

* * * * *

David was happy to see that they were nearing the little island dock. The cockpit of the old fishing boat was too cramped, too full of her scent, her presence. Like the brush of warm silk against his skin, her aura caressed him, sank through him, tightening muscles, stirring his thoughts. Her perfume, if it was perfume, smelled of rich spices, a mix of rosemary, sandalwood and dragon's blood, maybe more. He knew those scents. They reminded him of home, calmed him for reasons he wasn't ready to admit and made him smile, made him want to breathe her in.

She's a witch, David reminded himself for the third time since he'd laid eyes on her. He stepped to the side and offered a hand, helping her out of the boat and onto the dock. She took it, her small warmth like fire in his palm and then it was gone. David flexed his fingers, following behind, her touch a lingering ghost on his flesh.

He looked ahead, his gaze tracing up the slope of the island to the very top where a majestic Victorian-style house stood sentry. Silent, stoic. Shadows edged around corners, high windows stared open and dark like pitiless eyes. Seconds later thick boxwoods swallowed the view as they traveled the winding cobblestone path lined with towering shrubbery on either side. The path was longer than he'd first thought, twisting back on itself with side trails branching off here and there.

Finally they emerged at the top of the island, like breaching the surface of a dank cave. The shoreline and dock were far below, beyond the maze of shrubbery, which looked far less dense and smothering from above. "You have the island to yourself?" David asked.

"In a manner of speaking. Mine is the only house. It's been in the family for generations. It's not really that big. About eight acres."

The house was old but clearly well kept. With its steeply pitched roofs and two pointed turrets, all the decorative tracery and the four oriel windows, it looked like something straight out of a fairy tale.

Isabell's leather sandals slapped against the long stone steps of the porch, his sneakers silent behind her. She laughed and glanced over her shoulder, her eyes sparking in the fading sunlight so the green in them took on an unearthly smolder, like liquid jade.

"As you can see, I'm not alone here," she said, gesturing with a tip of her chin to the explosion of flowering plants running along in front of the house on either side of the steps.

David shifted his gaze and caught a flicker of movement. He'd thought they were birds at first and stepped to the thick wooden railing for a better look. Not birds. There among the stalks of six-foot sunflowers, wine-colored foxglove and twisting stems of New England aster were the flushed faces and frantic little bodies of a pair of impassioned fairies.

She, the female fairy, knelt before the male, her filmy white dress a rumpled twist around her waist, her small breasts pert and pale, nipples tight as pin heads and half as big. Her hair was long, blanketing over her bottom, pooling on the ground around her. It reminded him of spun sugar, pink as cotton candy. Her dragonfly wings kept a slow and steady beat on her back despite the quick, rhythmic thrusts of her head and body. She gripped her lover's hips with her tiny hands, her mouth latched tight around his fat little cock, sucking him off with nearly blurring speed.

The male fairy turned his strange luminous green eyes to David, his cheeks rosy with exertion, his hips pumping his ruddy cock in and out of his tiny lover's mouth. His little green shorts were shoved down around his ankles, the muscles of his buttocks flexing with each hard thrust. A smile curled the corner of his red, red lips and he winked, dropping his hands to her cotton-candy hair, fisting it. He drove himself harder, deeper, into her suckling mouth.

David could see the ropey veins trailing around his swollen sex as he thrust in and out through her sweetly shaped lips. Hard, eager suction shadowed and puffed her cheeks, her mouth so small David's pinky finger would be too big for her to take in.

Despite himself, David's cock hardened at the thought, the sight. His muscles tightened low in his body watching the little fairy's sly expression fade to mindless pleasure. The fairy's eyes closed, his head lolled back, his hips pumping faster and faster.

His small lips parted on a moan, a moan that sounded no different than a bird's call. David's hand tightened around the straps of his bag, his muscles coiled, blood churning, cock thickening against the confines of his jeans. He watched as the little man exploded his orgasm into his lover's mouth, watched her drink him in, drawing on him harder, deeper, devouring all she could take.

"Most people don't see or notice fairies so they have precious little modesty," Isabell said, strolling on into the house. "Still, that's no excuse to stare."

David tore his gaze from the exhausted couple as the female fondled the male's limp cock. David jogged up the remaining few steps and in through the door behind Isabell, his cheeks warm from all manner of embarrassment.

He threw a glance at the dark wood of the long curving staircase straight off the large foyer and noticed the parlor and living room on either side as he followed her toward the back of the house. She made a left into a large kitchen with a center island and walls lined with soft yellow wood cabinets and drawers. Isabell dropped the Twinkies on the counter then came back out before he could join her. She took a right and led him through curtained French doors, out onto a stone patio etched with moss and outlined in a low wall of river stone.

Dark green ivy crawled over the wall and the house, clinging to wrought iron lampposts and claiming the leg of an iron-lace chair.

"You can leave your bag there for now," she said with a nod to the chair.

David dropped his bag, too lost in the simple beauty of his surroundings to comment. Beyond the patio, the backyard stretched like a wide green blanket, dotted here and there with trees and closer to the shoreline weeping willows thrived.

It was nearly dark, the Ontario Lake water looked like black glass and the soft glow from the gas patio lamps offered a romantic warm honey light. Isabell set the bread on a serving cart next to a small round table and took up a knife.

Two tall tapered candles burned as centerpieces on the table, dancing shadows over the cream-colored tablecloth. The material was so long it pooled on the flagstones in soft wrinkles. The smell of spaghetti seasoned the air, made his stomach growl. A large bowl of it sat to one side on the table. Across from it were plates, settings for two. Two wineglasses, two salads, two cushioned wrought iron chairs.

"You expecting someone?" he asked.

Isbell finished cutting the bread and carefully placed the slices into the cloth-lined basket. She set the basket on the table, her eyes dark in the waning light flicked to his.

"I was expecting you." Her voice was like hot brandy, warming through his veins, tightening his muscles. But he shuddered at her words.

She's a witch. "You know why I came?"

"Do you?" Her lips, burgundy in the dusky light, plump, moist, curled in a half smile that was more sexy than coy.

"Something's happening to me." His voice rasped through his suddenly too dry throat, his chest tight. From lust or fear, he wasn't sure which. Didn't matter. "I want you to make it stop."

Some of the sultry gleam faded from her eyes. She straightened, her brows gathering to a wrinkled point. "What do you mean, make it stop?"

"This, this magic sight, you called it. I want it to stop. I don't want to see the things I'm seeing. I don't want any of it."

Her spine went stiff, dainty chin rising, straight inky hair curtaining down her back. She knotted her bare arms under her breasts, her pretty flowered sundress flattering the curving shape of her hips and thighs. "Don't want any of what exactly?"

"Magic," he said. "I don't want anything to do with magic. Ever."

Isabell stumbled backward into the cart as sure as if he'd pushed her.

Chapter Two

Dinner was...awkward. Goddess alive, she'd been such a fool, so arrogant about her powers, believing the spell had worked without a hitch. When did magic ever work exactly as she expected?

"Careful what ye ask for, love," Brokk said, leaning a shoulder against the black marble gargoyle, guarding at the end of the patio wall. The little fairy was taller, six inches rather than his normal four. He could grow to human height at will and any height in between but never did so without good reason. And there was really only one good reason to a fairy's mind.

Isabell's body warmed at the thought. She glanced toward the French doors, made sure David hadn't wandered down from his room. She wasn't surprised when he asked to be taken back to the mainland tonight. He'd retracted the request quick enough when she mentioned motoring through the waters in the dark. He thanked her for the room and escaped to it as fast as a freed rabbit from a trap.

She might've risked the waters had he insisted. She was that disgusted with the turn of events. "I was careful. Knowledge, logic and magic reside harmonious within him. That's what I said. That's what I asked for."

She gathered the half-eaten plates of pasta onto the cart and the empty wineglasses and bottle as well. "I asked for a man with the kind of mind that could come to terms with the reality of magic yet not be intimidated by it, by me. A man whom magic can touch, flow through but not change. A man whom the fairies would finally approve."

"Aye, 'tis all those things, save one. We canna approve a man who turns his back on the power whether the magic settles freely in him or nay." Brokk half flew, half hopped from the patio wall to the stone floor, his pale blond mop of hair flopping back to a sexy tussled muss as always. Though his body grew, his wings did not and at his height

even the two-inch difference made his wings too small to support his lean-muscled frame. Since he'd fashioned them with magic, his clothes grew with him, a grass-green loincloth and matching vest.

He strolled to her as she blew out the candles and set the breadbasket and silverware onto the cart. His little hand smoothed up her calf. The feel of his touch cooled over her skin, light as butterfly wings, and made her belly flutter, muscles tighten.

Brokk was as tall as her knee now and he pressed a kiss to the dimpled flesh behind it. "Knowing magic, understanding her, 'tis not the same as accepting. He does an injustice to the Goddess, to our kin and the gift we shared with ye and yours. 'Tis nothin' but flab and a sweat, after all. His cock's half the size it needs be for a beast as big as he. Did ya see it? His wee thing swellin' his pants, his big eyes gawkin' at Shea and me out front. 'Twas a pitiful sight to be sure."

She'd seen it. Pity was not the word that came to mind. True, he couldn't change shape and size like the fey could, but as mortal men went, he looked to be amply blessed by the Goddess. Isabell's hands went moist at the thought and she moved from Brokk who'd grown thigh high while her mind wandered. She leaned against the patio wall where it met the house, her head swimming either from the warm night or the warmer thoughts of David churning her brain.

His scent still lingered in the air, sandalwood and fresh cotton mixed with the musky pheromones of the man. He was perfect for her. The rich music of his voice, those large masculine hands, striking smile and quick human mind, everything about him seemed so precisely created to awaken her body and soul. Even his power, the power he'd asked her to banish, was an erotic caress like she'd never known. So overwhelming, so undeniable, she'd fought the urge to allow the press of it alone to bring her to climax. She regretted that battle now, her sex hot and wet with the memory.

He should've been perfect for her. So male, so human, she craved him as she craved food or water. It'd been a long time since she'd been touched by a human man, too long. There'd always been the risk the fairies would mistake her fondness for a man as a declaration of her chosen mate. And that risk had kept her dalliances to one. The fairies' rejection would bring a quick end to her life as she knew it. Safer not to indulge her longing again. But there was something instinctively satisfying, something primal, unique, to the species that she missed, ached for. And never more than she had since laying eyes on David. She could barely breathe for the need of it.

Brokk, sensing her desire or fulfilling his own, drew near to her again. His small hand stroked along her inner knee, raised the hem of her dress to her thigh then down again. His touch sent a wash of tingles over her skin, made her breath shallow and her heart race. Isabell closed her eyes. A small comfort but she'd take it.

"'Twas meant to be, love," Brokk said. "You're mine. You're one of us. Best to give in to it now, spare ye the heartache. He'll fail ya, sure as look at ya. They always do. Le' go of that pesky shred of humanity you've left. Come to the fey where ye belong."

He was using his voice, using his fairy magic on her, she knew, but she didn't care. The feel of it wound through her mind cool and clean like a springtime mist, pattering over her senses, stirring her lust with a million thrumming tingles just as surely as David's power stirred her with heat and pressure. Need hummed through her body, her sex hot and wet between her thighs. She dropped her hands to her sides, offering no consent but no resistance either.

She slanted her gaze down at him, saw the triumphant smile stretching his cherry-red lips. He was three feet tall now, his wings a tiny flutter on his back. His hair, the color of new spun silk, white blond and just as fine, lay in a mop of loose waves and curls. His face was much like hers—delicate bones, sharp lines, high cheeks, yet masculine in a way that was difficult to define. He looked like a miniature twenty-year-old, his body perfectly proportioned, all lean muscle and sinew like a wild animal. He was four hundred if he was a day.

Isabell looked away, gazed over the grounds to the black water of the lake. She paid no mind to the brush of her dress against her legs as Brokk worked the buttons that ran from hem to neckline. She exhaled, tried to ease the tensing swell of anticipation that tightened her chest, made her thigh muscles quiver.

He pressed his small lips to her leg, his breath warm against her flesh. She closed her eyes as he kissed again and again, higher, circling in. Brokk's little cock beneath his loincloth brushed her calf, hard as stone, sending a fresh wash of lust to flood her sex. His tiny penis could grow as big and thick as a tree if he wanted. He could fill her to bursting—and had. But tonight it grew in proportion to his height, a stiff little poke against her calf. The warm air cooled over her naked sex when he pushed the edges of her sundress to her sides. Buttons remained fastened from her navel to her breasts, but the dress swayed behind her hips from her belly down.

She peeked again, seeing the top of his blond head level with the black curly hairs of her bush. He reached out to her, his hand no bigger than the round of her groin, cupping against her then slipping between her wet lips to her clit.

A quick jolt of sensation raced through her body, she caught her breath, leaned her head back against the house, shifted her hips forward. He stroked the swollen nub, his small fingers caressing with a preciseness that made her rock to his rhythm.

“Ah, love, I canna resist ye scent. 'Tis a drug to me. A bloomin' addiction, I tell ya.” With that, he fell forward into her mons, burying his flawless handsome face into her damp black curls.

Isabell gasped as his tiny mouth opened on her, suckling her clit, drawing on the juice of her sex. His hand slid between her folds, found the opening to her body and thrust inside her. Her muscles latched around his fingers, her legs spreading wider on reflex. The fairy's frantic eagerness nearly ripped a scream from her core as he pumped her sex, driving a swirling flood of pleasure through every fiber of her body.

She was only half aware of the tiny wind at her breast and when she opened her eyes, she recognized the second fairy fiddling with the top few buttons at her neckline.

Genius, hair the color of ripened strawberries, tugged and pulled at the buttons, driven to a lustful frenzy as Brokk was by the scent of her arousal.

Isabell shooed Genius back enough to unfasten the remaining buttons, allowing the edges of her sundress to fall open at her sides. She was completely exposed to the fairies, one three feet at her pussy, one four inches at her breast, both maddened to touch her, taste her. Genius swooped in lightning quick, suckled her hardened nipple, greedily taking as much as his little mouth could hold. His arms, slender as toothpicks, deftly stroked the sides of her breast, his magical touch drawing sensation in a sizzling rush toward her nipple. After a breath-stealing moment, he flittered to her other breast, tending it as hungrily as he did the first.

Isabell leaned back, arching her body, muscles and flesh turning liquid under their needy caresses. Sensation churned, muscles flexing, tightening, hot blood swelling her clit, surging through her sex and tingling along the flesh of her breasts. Her chest tightened, pressure knotting deep in her belly, growing, pushing at her skin, squeezing through her brain until she couldn't deny it.

"Goddess, blessed be," she moaned, and with it, her body released in a wash of heat, rippling over her skin, surging through muscles and nerves to leave her panting and shaky.

Genius dropped to her sex, recognizing the signs or smell of her orgasm and fighting with Brokk for a taste. Brokk's bigger size let him shoulder Genius out of the way as he lapped at her pussy, suckling the last of her cum from her sex. Isabell's breath shuddered, his needy suction pulling tingles from the farthest parts of her body, rushing them toward her core even as her muscles pulsed from her first orgasm. Her hips thrust into his face, his hungry mouth working her into another shuddering release.

"Enough," Isabell said, still too short of breath to add much volume or strength behind it. The crazed fairies ignored her, squabbling and pushing. Good Goddess, this is why she hated fucking the fairies. They'd go at it for days if she didn't stop them,

coaxing her body to produce more and more cum. Physically satisfying and exhausting but utterly empty.

She straightened, drawing the edges of her dress together. The fairies followed her quim like bees to a flower. She turned, slipped her hand down to gather her dress at her groin, bar them access. "That's enough. Go away."

Genius gave a frustrated snort, hovered near her clutched hand for a moment then fluttered higher to glower at her face. With a huff he zipped away into the night. Brokk edged back, one tiny step and then another and another. His glowing green eyes stayed fixed on her hand, his white brows tightly knit. Isabell knew if she showed the slightest invitation, he'd shoot back to her, settling between her legs and burying his face for more.

Brokk licked the last of her cream from his lips, breathing loud through his nose. The sound rumbling through him was akin to a growl, a result of the great willpower it took to back away. When he was far enough and the drive to taste her seemed to have eased, he swung his small eyes toward the French doors to the house.

"A bit of a peeper, that one is." He tipped his chin and Isabell followed the gesture.

"So it would seem," she said, embarrassment warming her cheeks.

David stood at the open door, arms knotted over his chest, face blank except for his flower-blue eyes. There lust flamed—intense, hungry. His power flared out to her hot as fire. She sucked a breath at its touch, felt it sear through to her groin, stroking nerves already too sensitized, already too needy for what his male human body could offer and the fairies could not.

Fresh cream slicked the walls of her sex and Brokk turned to stare as if she'd rung a bell. Isabell hurried to button her dress while trying not to seem hurried.

"You're fucking fairies on your back patio with a guest in the house," David said. "Was it meant to be a secret?"

There was a touch of reproach in his tone, just enough to squelch her embarrassment and spark her anger. "I'll be taking a piss later with a guest in the house. Will you be watching that as well?"

"Leave the door open and I might."

Isabell huffed, pressing her lips to a tight line. She fastened the last button between her breasts, grabbed the cart with one hand and wheeled it past him as hotly as she could.

"This is a magical household," she said when she reached the kitchen, parking the serving cart next to the sink. "You're likely to see all manner of things here that might shock or offend your ordinary sensitivities. If you want my help, you'll deal with it and keep your opinions to yourself."

He settled onto a stool next to the wide center island. "I think we've established I'm not exactly ordinary. At least not lately. And magical or not, I've never been one to offend easily. Besides, dinner and a show, who's complaining?"

She glanced at him then back to the plate of pasta she held, emptying it into the garbage disposal. A whisper of a smile curled her lips. "Right."

"Was one hell of a show too," he said, soft enough she wasn't sure he meant her to hear.

She gasped when his power flared over her again, shooting up her back, washing hot as lava down her chest, over her breasts and sinking straight to her sex. She spared him a look over her shoulder, saw him rubbing his thumb in his palm, head down. Did he know he was doing it? Did he know how he touched her without raising a hand? Isabell thought not and decided it best to keep that tidbit to herself.

"You sure you want to be rid of your gift?"

David snapped from thoughts of Isabell's naked body lounging against the house, writhing in mindless abandon as two tiny men licked and sucked and fucked her into orgasm. They'd looked crazed by it and he'd felt just the same watching.

"Sorry?" he asked, shifting on his stool against the tight squeeze of his cock. Jeezus, he couldn't get the image out of his head. Her long black hair swinging like a cape down her back, pale skin sex-flushed and glowing, her dress open, loose at her sides, her breasts pert like two mounds of whipped cream with cherries topping each, hard as pits. If he'd moved a muscle, he'd have found himself on his knees fighting the little glutton at her pussy for a taste.

"It's a rare thing you've been given," she said. "There are those who'd do anything to be receptive to magic."

David shook his head, swallowed the knot of lust in his throat. "No. Not me. Don't want anything to do with the stuff. Can't. It's not a part of my world. Not much call for magic sight as a computer technician. In fact it's damn near debilitating."

He knew what magic could do. The good and the bad. He knew more than most and seeing house brownies and kitchen gnomes in customers' houses would drive him insane. He was sure of it. He'd nearly lost it two days ago when a customer turned out to be a werewolf. He would've never known if not for this "gift" letting him see the beast rolling underneath the guy's skin, pushing at his flesh, trying to get out. He'd almost puked on the guy's keyboard.

He looked to Isabell, more resolute than ever. Small lines creased along her brow, her frown weighing the corners of her lips, wrinkling her chin. Her disappointment pinched his chest. Why did she care? Why did he?

David gave himself a mental shake, cleared his thoughts, banishing the images. He took a deep breath but the air was filled with her scent and it seeped through his body like a drug. The tight muscles along his shoulders eased, the knot in his gut relaxed and the hard squeeze of his cock seemed less a nuisance and more a sweet possibility.

“Fine. Have it your way,” she said, placing the last of the dinner plates into the dishwasher and closing the door with a nudge of her toe. “I think I’ve got everything I need, but it’ll take an hour or so to collect and prepare it. We can do it tonight or—”

“Tonight,” David said, not needing to hear any other options.

She flicked those strange, hypnotic kaleidoscope eyes at him and for a moment he thought he saw a glimmer of tears. But then she blinked and a smile flashed across her deep red lips, though the sadness in her eyes wasn’t touched.

“Guess I should get busy,” she said. He nearly winced at the regret in her tone.

Once Isabell set to gathering items—ritual tools, herbs and spices throughout the kitchen—her spirits seemed to lighten. David leaned his forearms on the counter and watched, smiled when she began to hum, her natural enjoyment seeming to lighten the air in the room. He knew that kind of happiness, when a woman loses herself in something she loves. She can change the mood of all around her. She can change the tilt of the planet if she chooses. His mother was the same way...once.

He had loved watching his mother work just as Isabell did now. His boyhood home had been filled with the same scents and sounds that surrounded him here. So familiar, so comforting. David allowed the pleasant memories, the comfort of familiarity to lull him. He liked it here. He liked watching her move, like the dance of a dandelion seed caught in a gentle eddy. The sound of her smoky voice humming behind wine-red lips touched something inside him light, happy. He could lose himself forever in that luscious, spicy scent of hers, the simple presence of her.

Isabell filled a large copper pot from an old-fashioned pump at the far end of the counter and placed it on the gas stove. “There’s a spring that runs deep beneath the island. The water’s perfect for potions,” she said as though she’d sensed his curiosity.

She turned up the flame, adding herbs from dark dusty bottles. She crushed dried leaves from stashes hanging on the pot rack over the center island and shredded plant stocks and blossoms from the garden. She stirred the brew, mumbling enchantments to the rhythmical accompaniment of the liquid bubbling and popping. Each tiny explosion

released a puff of aroma into the air. By the time she was done, the room was thick with the smell of it.

He knew that smell. David stiffened, memories focusing in his brain. All the pleasantness of the hour melted away with a cold chill down his spine. "That smells like... A reverse cast. You cast a spell on me?" He sniffed. "A love spell?"

Isabell turned, ladle and mug in her hands. "Not love, *lure*. And it was an accident. It was meant for someone else. Someone who's open to magic. Someone who would've appreciated the little side effect of the spell."

"Little?" David fisted his hands on the counter, anger heating his skin so his back felt damp with it. "Lady, you damn near cost me my livelihood. Hell, you could've cost me my sanity. No wonder I've been feeling so..."

He let the sentence fade away. David was in no mood to admit her spell had turned his libido to overdrive where she was concerned. Certainly explained why he craved her. He ignored the tightness in his chest at the thought. It wasn't real. He couldn't trust what he was feeling for her. It wasn't real.

"Melodramatic much? Here. Drink this quick before it cools and it'll all be over," she said, shoving the steaming mug his way. "It shouldn't have affected you. It was meant to lure someone who was naturally magical, not make someone magical. Especially someone who doesn't want the gift. If it makes you feel better, it cost me too. And I'll be paying for it...forever."

David swallowed the brew as she'd ordered, winced as it burned down his throat. What did she mean she'd be "paying for it"? The question waited to be asked on the tip of his tongue while he recovered from the sting of the potion. But then everything went black. The question, the world, vanished.

Chapter Three

David awoke to a blinding wash of sunshine streaming across his upper body and an erection so stiff the brush of sheets was nearly painful. He squinted, pushing up to his elbows and blinked at his surroundings. How the hell had she gotten him up to his room – he lifted the edge of the sheets – and naked?

He fell back to his pillow, trying to piece together his Swiss cheese memory. After a moment he scrubbed his face with both hands, frustrated. It was useless. One minute he remembered fighting to keep down that putrid concoction she'd brewed and the next...here.

That wasn't entirely true. He remembered dreaming. He remembered dreaming of Isabell, touching her, kissing her...fucking her. Maybe he had and he just couldn't remember. Maybe that's why she'd undressed him. Whatever the reason, he hoped she'd gotten her fill. His chest tightened at the thought of her staring at him, touching him while he slept. Blood heated through his veins. His erection twitched.

David lay back, slipped his hand beneath the sheet, over his belly to his cock wagging up from his body. His fingers brushed the engorged flesh and he gasped at the quick rush of pleasure that ripped through his veins. He wrapped his fingers around the shaft, thoughts of Isabell naked, writhing in lust as she had with the fairies, flickered through his brain.

His hand stroked his cock, flicking over the more sensitive head, making his muscles snap tight each time. He held his breath, closed his eyes, slipped his other hand down to cup his balls. Pumping faster, gripping tighter, he concentrated, felt the distant build of pressure. The need for release was maddening, the sensation, the ripples of pleasure felt good but not good enough. He couldn't get there, not like this, not by his own hand, and the frustration of it growled out of him.

He needed Isabell. His body expected her, waited for her, like a Christmas morning that never comes. He knew now he'd arrived in Seven Isles expecting her, expecting to have her before they'd even met. The anticipation would have his balls blue as berries if it didn't ease soon. With focused intent he took his hands from his cock, willing himself to ignore the ache of it. Was this all because of that damn spell? Had the potion failed? Possibly, considering she'd brewed it under a false assumption.

She believed his "gift" was a side effect of her spell. It might be, but not in the way she thought. She didn't understand why it worked on him, but David did. He didn't tell her. She wouldn't understand. She saw magical ability as a blessing, for Christ's sake. Just like his mother. It wasn't.

He sat up, throwing the sheet from his legs and swinging his feet to the floor. He could feel the tingle of power rising inside him, recognized it for what it was. His.

David stomped around the bed to the chest at the end where he'd left his backpack, tamping down the swell of magic within him, burying it deep inside where he'd kept it nearly all his life—until Isabell's damn spell. He dug for clean briefs, clean socks and shirt, trying and failing to ignore his stiff cock jutting out, poking against everything, making him flinch. *Dammit.*

Isabell's spell may not have given him his abilities but it sure as hell made it hard to deny them. David didn't want the power, wouldn't risk becoming his mother. Not for anyone, not even Isabell. No matter what the mere thought of her did to his body.

He'd wanted to banish his power since he was eight, since they'd taken her away, and he had. He'd nearly forgotten what magic felt like, what strange things were out there, invisible to the non-magical eye. And he'd been glad of it. Now it was everywhere, distracting him, driving him crazy just as it did her. He wanted normalcy, sanity in his life...and in his women.

Fifteen minutes and a hot shower later, the strain of his mind and body had eased. David was more himself, even dared to hope the potion may have worked. He jogged downstairs, more comfortable today in his Rolling Stones T-shirt than the jacket and

dress shirt of yesterday. He'd wanted to look like a reasonable, mentally stable person when he met the Witch of Seven Isles. Isbell likely thought less of him because of it. Retrospect had him smiling at the irony.

He crossed through the foyer, back toward the kitchen, glancing into the living room and parlor as he passed. No sign of Isabell. He reached the kitchen, it was empty too, the only sign she'd been there a freshly brewed pot of coffee in the machine. She'd known what time he'd awaken. The witch was damn good at her craft, he'd give her that.

David left the temptation of liquid energy to check the back patio. It was later than he'd thought, midafternoon. Sun dappled through the trees over the long span of backyard to the shoreline. A flash of movement caught his eye to the left and he narrowed his vision. After a moment he let out a breath he hadn't realized he held.

"A rabbit." David laughed out loud. He couldn't help it. A plain ordinary, run-of-the-mill rabbit. He scanned the yard. No fairies, nothing magical anywhere. The potion must have worked. God, he wanted the potion to have worked.

A smile stretching his cheeks, the urge to share the success with Isabell rushed over him all at once. Where was she? He went back through the house and out the front door, his gut tightening. He stepped to the edge of the wide wraparound porch and craned his neck to see over the maze of boxwood bushes to the small island dock. The boat slip was empty.

Heaviness weighed in his belly. He stepped back from the edge. His mind raced. She was gone. He couldn't reach her, couldn't touch her, protect her. His hands went moist, his heart quickening. Then he shook his head, knocked the sense back into his brain.

What the hell was wrong with him? She'd be back. This was her home. But the simple logic didn't ease the want of her, the need of her. He felt ill with the absence, as if a part of him were missing, a part he hadn't known he'd possessed. He felt...unfinished. David leaned a hand on the railing, forced himself to calm, forced the

need storming through his body to ebb. If the potion worked, how could he explain this effect she had on him?

“You’d be lookin’ a bit shook there, lad. Can I help?”

David swung his gaze to the right. If he hadn’t known better, he’d believe she’d come out of the garden and over the railing, but logic insisted it was a trick of light and shadow. He simply hadn’t seen her sitting there. But who was she?

He forced a smile he didn’t feel. “No. No, I’m good.”

“Aye, good.” Her pale green eyes, nearly white, drank him in from head to foot and back again. “True enough, I’d say.”

David straightened, turning toward her, feeling her voice, her gaze, brush over his skin, over muscle and nerve like the stroke of fingers. She was enchanting, captivating. And her voice was like the sweet ring of bells, tightening his chest, making his fists clench. There was something about her, about the way she dressed, the way she moved, that sent warning flags fluttering through his brain, but his mind couldn’t seem to focus enough to puzzle it out.

She moved toward him, gliding with a graceful roll of muscle, feline and sexy. She was slender. Her hair, the color of autumn leaves, like dark fire, floated up from her back as she walked—light as feathers, light as gossamer. She wore a filmy dress that draped from one shoulder across her chest and under her arm, leaving the other shoulder bare. There was a golden rope cinched around her slender waist, gathering the delicate grass-green dress to her shape. The lower half hung in wispy spikes to the top of her thighs, all of it layers on layers for a teasing, translucent effect.

David swallowed hard, tightened his fists at his sides, fighting the quick arousal of his body. “I, ah, didn’t know anyone else was here.”

“Mm, ’tis me home,” she said, feathering a dainty hand up his chest, tracing the lines of his muscles as she circled around him. A hot shudder shook through him, his balls tightened, his cock a painful squeeze.

"Really?" Jeezus, his voice cracked like a nervous teenager. David cleared his throat. "You live here with Isabell?"

She pressed her body to his back, whispered over his shoulder, "Aye."

Her scent, wildflowers, earth and wood, swirled around him, into him. He closed his eyes as it seemed to tingle over his muscles, tighten and tease. He licked his lips and she smoothed around him, her breasts crushing against him, nipples hard points his mind tracked on reflex. He opened his eyes when she came in front of him, leaned her slight body against his, coaxing his hand around her waist.

He could see it now, the resemblance. The bone structure, the delicate lines of her face, her nose, the shape of her eyes, they were like Isabell's but different, enhanced. They had to be related somehow.

"Have you, uh, have you seen her?" he asked.

She flicked her pale eyes up to his, the green more a tint in a wash of white, edged by a thin black ring. "The witch? Aye, I've seen her. Nearly every day."

"No. I mean have you seen her today? Specifically."

"Indeed," she said, focusing those strange, compelling eyes on his mouth. She raised a finger, traced his lower lip.

His breath caught, his muscles jerked tight. He laughed at himself, nervous, aroused beyond coherent thought. "What's your... What's your name?"

She pressed up to her toes, leaned in and licked the corner of his mouth, a quick dart of her tongue. She tasted like clover. She tasted wild. "Laila. And what be yours?"

"David." He tightened his arm around her waist, helped press her body to his.

She shifted her thigh so it brushed against the hard ridge of his cock. David gathered her around in both his arms so the soft pillow of her belly nestled against his sex.

"David," she said, her laugh like the light tinkle of crystal against crystal. "Aye, I know ye. You be the lover of science, are ya not? Wantin' to banish magic from yer life."

"That's right." He meant to laugh but managed only a smile. He'd never wanted to fuck someone so badly in all his life. The thought of it, the need of it, throbbed through his brain, tunneled his vision, his muscles tense with the compulsion. He wanted to bury himself in her, pound his body into hers, ruthless, endless, with no thought to who she was, who he was. It was a sexual drive, raw, pure and primal.

She pressed up again, this time giving a quick nip on his lip where she'd licked. The slide of her body against his made him lightheaded, made his fingers clench at the back of her dress.

"Does it frighten ya?" she asked, her breath hot on his chin, her scent filling his lungs.

He swallowed, wetting his throat. "What, magic?"

"Aye. Magic," she said, whispering the last as though the word itself had power.

"No. I don't know." He swallowed again, lowering his chin, wanting to kiss her, taste her. "Sort of. It's complicated."

She held his cheek in her hand, met his gaze. "And what of me? Do I frighten ya, lad?"

"You?" He managed a smile, a soft chuckle. "No, Laila. You don't frighten me."

He kissed her without realizing he was going to, a quick press of lips and the sensation washed through him like a cool splash of water on a hot day. Tingles rippled over his lips, cascaded through every nerve ending, flooding straight down to his cock. She pulled away.

"I've need of ye, David. Would ya come with me? Would ya follow?"

He nearly said "yes" on reflex but then he blinked. His brain stuck on something. He wasn't sure what. "Come where? Why?"

She didn't answer, instead her smile turned to a sexy simmer, her lids going low on her eyes. She took his lips again, her hot tongue sweeping into his mouth, pulling back when he tried to capture it. She pressed her soft feminine curves against him, squirmed

so he knew every mound and valley of her body, so the feel of her imprinted on his brain.

Her hand smoothed down to his groin, her small fingers cupping around the stone line of his cock. David gasped at her touch, flinched, then found himself pressing into her grip, needing her to hold him, stroke him – harder.

“Not afraid of magic. Not afraid of me, to be sure. And what might ye be plannin’ on doin’ with this?” she asked, her hand tightening around him. “I’ve an idea or two, if ya like.”

“Yes. Fuck, yesss,” he said on a growled exhalation. He reached down and put his hand on hers, pressed her to him, squeezed his fingers around hers, around his cock and rocked his hips. Like an animal, a beast, the need for sex, the need to mount her, to dominate her, swelled unbidden within him.

“Goddess bless it, yer as hard as granite and thick as a five-year oak,” she said.

His heart pounded in his ears, his body so tight he ached for release. She was small, delicate, female, and he felt driven to take what was due him by nature. His hand moved to her shoulder, fingers wrapped around the tie of her sheer dress. He jerked it down, past her elbow, off her hand so her breasts were bare to him. Her flesh jiggled with the rough movement, pale, supple. Her rosy nipples wrinkled tight, hard as nuts. He wanted to feel them between his teeth, on his tongue.

A thought of restraint flickered through his brain. This wasn’t him, wasn’t how he treated women. David was never a rough or careless lover but, God help him, he couldn’t rein in the want of her. The need was bigger than him, surrounded him, swallowed him up. He couldn’t breathe for the ache of her. He had to have her. He had to bury his cock inside her. He had to.

David took one soft breast in his hand, felt the pebbled nipple in his palm. He squeezed, watched her eyes widen, her sweet bow lips part on a gasp. He bent his head to her free breast, took the flesh into his mouth. His teeth scraped the firm nub, his

tongue smoothing over the tight wrinkled flesh. He drew her in hard, bit down so his teeth pinched the sensitive skin.

Laila arched into him on a moan, taking whatever and however he'd give. Everything male inside him roared with the knowledge, the freedom to indulge every urge, every impulse, his blood seared through his veins, swelled his cock, pulsing harder, thicker with each ragged beat of his heart. His cock squeezed tight beneath his jeans, his breaths coming quicker, his sex so full every movement sent jolts of pain and pleasure sizzling through his body. He'd take her here—now. He couldn't wait, wouldn't wait another moment. He was male, bigger, stronger.

But then his hands were empty, his lips going cold. David blinked and focused on Laila through a heated fog. She'd slipped from his embrace. How?

Laila smiled, innocent, sexy, her hands working his belt then the fasteners of his jeans. He felt none of it, all sensation lost to his cock, to the tight pull of his balls.

And then it was his flesh shaking, his body jerking with her hard tugs. His jeans and underwear were rumpled down around his calves in seconds. Laila was on her knees in front of him and David could only blink, his brain too fogged, too primal, to think beyond his cock wagging stiff and thick near her soft lips. The flesh of his sex strained with the rush of blood, thickening his dark shaft.

She wrapped her fingers around his root, squeezed and stroked up to the head, drawing fine ribbons of pleasure through his cock from every corner of his body. His chest squeezed, he couldn't breathe for the hot blast of pleasure. David's knees buckled. He caught himself, finding his balance an instant before her tongue lapped over the sensitive head.

A small spurt of cum dribbled from the tip. He couldn't help it. It was all he could do to hold back the rest pressing hard inside him. Laila's white green eyes sparked. She pulled him to her, lapping up his cum like honey. She hummed at the taste of it, opening her sweet mouth on him, greedily taking his cock, surrounding him in luscious

moist heat. She suckled, drawing on him as though she'd suck the cum through his cock like a straw.

Nearly frenzied, her suckling and stroking grew faster, harder, sending a storm of sensation raging through his veins, searing through his muscles. David clenched his teeth on a moan. Like nothing he'd ever felt, she drew on his body with an unearthly hunger, an unimaginable strength. Sanity slipped to the back recesses of his mind.

He took her head in his hands, held her, pumped his cock into her warm wet mouth, faster, faster, her tongue rasping along the sensitive flesh. Pressure swirled in his gut, twisted, pulling tighter up through his chest, pushing at his lungs, tugging through his balls, tensing through his thighs. He held his breath. Almost there. Release whispered at the edges of his mind. Almost there.

"She'll fuck you to death."

David wrenched his head over his shoulder at the sound of Isabell's voice. She stood on the steps of the porch, watching while he rammed his cock into Laila's hungry mouth again and again. He couldn't stop. He couldn't. Even as his eyes met Isabell's, he thrust his hips, shoved his cock deep.

Isabell's gaze dropped to his sex, her hazel eyes going smoky as they watched him fucking Laila's mouth. Something passed between them. He felt it like a fresh wash of heat to his cock. A quick thrill raced through his veins. She liked watching. But when their eyes met again, he could see she'd found some measure of distance.

"It's what they do," she said. "Fairies. They love the taste of human sexual fluids. She'll spell you to get you to follow her into their realm and then she'll screw you to death. She won't stop. Ever."

Fairy? David dropped his gaze to the captivating woman latched to his sex even as he thrust into her mouth again. Christ, he was fucking a fairy? She'd used her magic to keep him from realizing what she was.

He pulled his hands from her hair, forced his hips to stop, tried to pull back. But Laila rose up, latched her hands on his ass and sucked harder, faster, deeper, rocking

his body herself, ramming his cock into her mouth more ruthlessly than he'd even dared.

"Oh god." His breath hissed out of him. He wanted to give in to it, to pound into her again and again. It felt too good. He closed his eyes, clenched his jaw and with a will he scarcely possessed, shoved at her shoulders, knocking her backward to the porch floor.

David fell to his knees, exhausted, humiliated beyond comprehension. And wanting more.

It wasn't his fault. Isabell knew better than most fairies were hard to resist even when she knew what they were and what they could do. David probably knew next to nothing about fairies. Still...

Her heart pinched even as her sex warmed. Watching him pump in and out of Laila's greedy mouth, his fat cock dark with excitement, his face flushed with effort and passion made her pussy slick, her thighs wet. But she shouldn't be jealous. She wasn't jealous. No.

"You've got to refuse her. Verbally. In no uncertain terms or she'll just keep trying." Isabell shrugged, tried to sound indifferent. "Unless you want her to keep sucking you off right here on my front porch."

She regretted the snide remark the second it left her lips but already Laila was licking her pretty fairy lips, crawling catlike back toward David. He sat where he'd dropped to his knees, now leaning back on his legs, panting, bare ass on his heels, stiff cock wagging like a flagpole up from his lap. And quite the flagpole it was, thick as sugarcane and just as hard.

Isabell blew at a strand of wayward hair tickling over her eye and did her best not to think of running herself up and down that pole. It wasn't easy. Determined, she pressed her lips to a tight line and headed past him into the house. She'd warned him. David could fend off Laila or not for all she cared.

"No, Laila. I'm sorry. I...I can't," Isabell heard him say.

That won't do it, she thought as the screen door clapped and clattered closed behind her.

"Laila, no. No. That's enough. Leave me be, dammit." The sound of scuffling, sneakers on wood, made her glance over her shoulder.

David was on his feet, hiking his pants over his narrow hips, flinching at the tiny pop when Laila shrunk from human size to as small as a dragonfly in an instant. She buzzed so near his face his hair fluttered in the wind from her wings. He stumbled back a step but made it inside before she came around for another flyby.

Isabell shook her head. Pissed-off fairies can be nasty little shits. She started for the kitchen, heard David following behind. "How did you know?" she said.

"Come again?"

"Last night," she said, setting the shopping bag of beeswax, fresh wicks and benzoin incense on the center island. "How did you know I was reversing a spell?"

David settled on the island stool beside her, his belt and the top button of his jeans still undone beneath the rumpled hem of his T-shirt. He sighed. "You know, don't you? Should've told you from the get-go but —"

"Just answer the question." She looked askance at him, her hands resting on the counter, the bag between them. Goddess, she was such an idiot, first thinking her magic was so powerful, so infallible, that his abilities were a result of hers and now...

A lure spell was not the same as a love spell. She'd brought him here but clearly that didn't mean he'd fall in love with her. Isabell's chest squeezed. Why did that bother her so much? Like a physical ache, she mourned the loss of something she never had. Why?

David gave a nod of agreement. His shoulders slouched, resigned. "I recognized the smell. I grew up with this stuff. My mother, she had...abilities. I should've told you. I was worried you'd refuse to help if you knew I was born with it rather than cursed."

"Cursed?"

He cringed. "Bad choice of words. Sorry." His power flared out like a hot summer wind, sparked by genuine emotion.

Isabell's breath caught as it washed over her, through her, heating a path straight to her sex. His magic mixed with hers inside her, a perfect balance that charged her with energy, passion, made her more than what she was alone. She opened her eyes, saw him watching her, his bellflower-blue eyes narrow, questioning.

Her heart skipped even as her body relaxed, the feel of his power inside her seemed a natural thing. He was perfect for her and she knew it, felt it. Perfect for her in every way...but one.

"You still want to banish your magic?"

"After what just happened on the porch? Damn right I do."

"So mote it be," she said, knowing that one imperfection made all the rest void. She took a deep breath, exhaled and started unloading the supplies she'd bought, knowing she'd need them despite hoping she wouldn't.

"I thought my spell had given you magical abilities. Now that we know that's not true..." She shot a look at him, watched him shrug, a cute apologetic smile flashing across his lips. She refused to dwell on it. "I figure my spell just coaxed your natural abilities to the surface. Either way, we'll need something stronger than potions to banish born power."

"What's that?"

"Sex magic."

Chapter Four

"Sex magic?" David's entire body tightened with her words.

"Mmm-hmm," Isabell murmured casually, unloading her grocery bag as though she'd suggested a game of canasta rather than a pagan sex ritual.

"You've done that before?"

"Sure." Her cheeks flushed. She looked away for a second then back, tucking some of her long raven hair behind her ear. "Well, on my own at least."

That brought a nice image to his mind and a smile that probably said more than words what he was picturing. "Ever do it with someone?"

"Once. When I was in college. My boyfriend."

"Did it work?"

She shrugged, her smile doing strange things to his gut. "Depends on what you mean by 'work'. Did we draw power? Yeah. Did I know what the heck to do with it? No."

"Did you care?"

"Uh, not really." She laughed and the way it rippled over his skin, through his chest, made him laugh too.

"You ever try it?" she asked, a thin ink-black brow drifting toward her hairline, her smile still bright.

"No. Haven't had anything to do with magic since I was a kid."

She reached for a brass-bottom pot hanging from the rack over the island and took it to the sink. "How come?"

He rolled a shoulder. "Just haven't. It all went away one day and never came back...until last week."

Isabell glanced over her shoulder, flashing a bashful smile to go with the quick rise of color in her cheeks. She grabbed a smaller pot from under the sink, set it in the bigger one on the stove and dumped in the sheets of beeswax.

"What do you mean, it all went away?" she said, lighting the flame. "Magic doesn't just go away. The power runs through everything, everywhere, all the time."

"Did for me. Course, it probably helped that I didn't have much use or want for it," he said, watching her graceful steps and reaches as she collected the tools and herbs she needed from around the kitchen. It was like watching the wind rustle autumn leaves along a forest floor and David found himself lost in the ballet.

"What'd your mom think?" she asked, having finally gathered all she'd need. She came to the center island with her green marble mortar and pestle and began grinding the herbs.

The muscles along his shoulders stiffened. "Nothing. She, ah, she wasn't around."

It was enough. David didn't like thinking about those days, about that day, the day they took his mother away. He wasn't near ready to discuss it with someone else, even someone as easy to talk to as Isabell.

Isabell looked up. "Oh. I'm sorry. I had no idea."

He shook his head, dismissing her unease. "No one else in the family seems to have inherited the...abilities. So when she went, all things magic went with her. My life was perfectly normal after that. It's not like I missed the weirdness."

"Weirdness." She chuckled. "I don't get that. Really. I mean, I can't imagine a life without magic. It's such a huge part of who and what I am. I'd feel half alive, half myself without it. It's hard to explain."

"No. I actually understand what you're saying. I was eight when my mother...left. Until then our home was, well," he lifted his hands, gestured to the room, "like this. There was always some potion or other brewing on the stove and all kinds of herbs and flowers hanging to dry in the kitchen. We celebrated Samhain and Yule, even Beltane. You haven't lived until you've danced naked around a maypole."

She laughed and the sound made his heart race and his chest tight. "Right. Try doing it with a bunch of lecherous fairies watching."

"No thanks," David said. "At least I was spared seeing my parents dance naked in the celebration. My dad never embraced my mom's...ways. Didn't like me being dragged into it much either. But what could I do? She was my mom."

"Must've been hard. Splitting loyalties between two worlds like that." She looked at him and her eyes held a sympathy and understanding that seemed to lighten a load on his shoulders he hadn't realized he carried.

"Both your parents magical?" he asked.

Isabell's brows pinched, her gaze dropped to her mortar and pestle, grinding the contents to dust. "Umm, yeah. They were."

"Were?"

"Are. I guess. I, uh, haven't seen either for a long time. They took off together when I was three."

"Put you in foster homes?" He kept his voice even, emotionless. He didn't know why the thought of her in foster homes made his chest hurt. Picturing a toddling little Isabell crying for her parents surrounded by the kinds of people kids run into in foster homes made his gut twist. Jeezus, he wanted to protect her from her own past? What makes a guy feel like that? It had to be the spell.

Her hazel eyes flicked to his. She smiled as though she felt his concern. "Family. I was raised by people who loved me. I was well taken care of."

He wrinkled his chin, nodded and tried to relax the muscles across his chest. "Guess our childhoods weren't that different. Magic or not, family's family. I think I know what you mean about missing a part of yourself without magic. Maybe that's what I've been feeling."

She turned and dumped the ground herbs into the melted wax on the stove. "How so?"

He laughed at himself. "Well, before I came here, I'd never admit it, but now... I feel like something has been missing in my life— No. That's not right. Not just my life but in who I am." He shook his head, tried to knock the crazy from his brain. "I dunno, I've been seeing...things, magical things, for more than a week now. But I didn't notice this...this half-finished feeling until I came here, until I met you."

She brought the top half of the double boiler to the island, her smoky hazel eyes flicking up to meet his. She smiled, brows high. "Really? I mean, I know what you're talking about and it makes sense. Makes a lot of sense. The spell I cast was supposed to lure a man who's perfect for —"

"The spell. Right. That's what I figured." He laughed, trying to sound relieved but not really feeling it. He didn't like magic, didn't like the thought of it controlling him, but he couldn't help liking the way he felt with her. "Figured it wasn't real. Had to be the spell. Damn, this magic shit creeps me out. Can't wait to be rid of it."

"Right," she said, her voice soft. She dropped her attention to the candle molds on the countertop, carefully pouring the mix of beeswax and herbs into each one.

"It'll take awhile for these to cool and set," she said, putting the smaller pot back into the larger one on the stove. "When they're ready, we can perform the ritual and you'll be magic free and back to normal."

"Great. That's great." His chest hurt again. Why? He was going to be rid of this hocus-pocus garbage finally — once and for all. The worry over his sanity would be gone but so would his reason for being here, being with her.

His gut knotted. If these feelings, this connection with her, was because of the spell, it would be gone soon enough, but for now he couldn't fight it. Anticipation made his body tight. His mind drifted, images flashed, her slender body in his arms, his lips to hers, his hand squeezing the soft, supple mounds of her naked breasts.

David's balls pulled, his cock thickened. *Dammit*. He felt near obsessed with the idea of having sex with her. The ritual wasn't happening soon enough. He needed a distraction. He needed to think of something else, anything else.

“So...ever try to bribe the house brownies into cleaning your room when you were a kid?”

A reluctant smile flickered at the corner of her lips but she kept her gaze focused on the candle molds, fiddling with the wicks. “Yeah. Backfired. They trashed my room instead.”

David laughed. “Me too. Would’ve been nice if someone had told me brownies take offense at being bribed.”

Isabell rolled her eyes and laughed. “Tell me about it. I was totally set up.”

They both laughed now, light, easy, and David couldn’t deny the feeling between them was more like two friends catching up rather than a man and a woman getting to know each for the first time.

The day passed quickly with the two of them comparing childhood stories and adult philosophies. He learned more about her, felt he knew her better, but couldn’t escape his hunger for more—more time, more intimacy, more her. They shared a late lunch and then an even later dinner. Sometime long after the sun had set and the soft breeze rippling in off the water had turned cool, Isabell announced the hour had come to perform the ritual.

With a mix of anticipation and trepidation, David followed her through a trap door in the floor of the pantry off the kitchen. The walls along the narrow twisting stairwell were rock, misshapen and cold, mortared together long, long ago. The way was dark, black enough he couldn’t see Isabell in front of him but he knew she was there. He felt her, the warmth of her aura caressing over him. God, he liked that feeling. Would that vanish after the ritual too? He wouldn’t think about it.

“Tower of fire I command thee—illuminate. This is my will, so mote it be.” Small spurts of fire swelled on candles dotting all along the walls with Isabell’s words.

The stairwell opened onto a room half the size of the house above. There were old wooden shelves along one wall, dusty jars, ritual tools, candles, burners and myriad other magical paraphernalia cluttering every morsel of space. A thick wooden table,

nicked and stained and age-worn, took up the short wall with three battered wooden stools surrounding it. There was a huge black cast iron pot in the corner, suspended over a cold fire ring with a flue overhead for venting. Large wooden barrels flanked the wall of shelves, one covered, the other half full with some dark liquid.

But it was the enormous pentagram inside a ten-foot-round circle etched into the center of the floor that drew his focused attention. Lined with silver, the circle and five-point star sparked in places from the flicker of candlelight. There were magical sigils painted between the points and four short towers of rock piled at the directional corners. Isabell, arms full with four of her homemade candles, strode to each tower. One after the other she placed a candle at the center. The moment her hand left the wax, a flame flickered along the wick then she'd move to the next tower.

"You have a permanent protective circle?" he asked, stopping just outside the ring, unease crawling through the soft hairs on the back of his neck. He was stalling although he wasn't sure why. He couldn't say, wouldn't think on it. This had to be done. His sanity or the magic, the choice was easy — or should be.

Isabell moved to the center of the pentagram. "Two. This one, and the one outside in the island grove. I still have to call the power and seal the circle but this makes it easier and faster."

"Convenient."

"I've always thought so." She started unfastening the run of buttons down her sundress. "Care to join me? Can't close the circle until you're inside it."

He knew that. David stepped a foot over the edge of the sliver ring and then the other. The instant his heel cleared the edge a hot rush of tingles rushed over his skin. His ears popped. His breath caught at the sensation but he managed to keep the surprise to himself. He moved to the center of the star so they stood face-to-face.

"Okay, ground rules," she said, her hands stopped on the third button from the top between her breasts. It was all David could do not to stare slack-jawed at those hands. "This is not free sex. Got it?"

David nodded, tried his best to look bored by the suggestion despite the fast pound of his heart and the sudden tightness in his jeans.

"In fact, we don't really need to touch at all," Isabell said. "I normally do this alone, so I know the power sex generates can be produced through masturbation. But naturally there's more power with two and as you're the target of the spell, your power mixed with mine will help even more. Besides, I'm betting I'll need a boatload of power to banish what the Goddess gifted you."

"Sounds sacrilegious when you put it that way," he said, joking – mostly.

"It is. Or it should be." She sighed. "But your wish, your money..." She unbuttoned the next button then the next, her pink spaghetti-strap dress blooming open between her breasts as she went.

She stopped. Her gaze flicked to his. "Unless you can jack off through your jeans, you'll need to strip."

David blinked, his cheeks going hot. Christ, he was behaving like a damn virgin. He toed off his sneakers, felt a small jolt, like an electric shock when he kicked them through the circle barrier to the wall. The same sharp tingle sizzled over his skin when he tossed his T-shirt. His jeans, underwear and socks went together with Isabell's dress for one final jolt. Fast learner, he was.

His gaze drifted over her and his body tightened. The simple act of being naked with her set his pulse to a gallop, tingled his sex.

"Kneel down. You're in the way," she said then shrugged. "Well, not really, but it feels like it. You mind?"

"No. No. Course not. Whatever." He knelt. Did she really think he'd object to anything at this point? Lord, she was breathtaking.

She stood before him, smooth naked flesh warmed by the honey glow of candlelight. He was close enough to reach out and stroke the soft curve of her hip, could see the tiny glistening of moisture in the dark curls at her sex. His muscles pulled, anticipation thrumming in a steady rhythm through his veins, hot and tingling.

Isabell raised her arms at her sides, closed her eyes and lifted her chin toward the dark, cobwebbed rafters above. He noticed the birthmark on her inner wrist, faint reddish brown like a scar, a pentagram. The mark of magic. It was more pronounced than his, which was little more than five peculiarly placed moles on his right pectoral muscle. She was powerful. This could work. He blinked to stop his stare and shifted his gaze to her face as she began to cast.

"I call the four watchtowers, north, south, east and west, awaken now at my behest. Protect me here within this ring, stand witness to the magic I bring. May the power I draw through earthly lust, banish the gift, which the Goddess entrusts. Magic sight and magic power, leave your son within this hour. Air, fire, water, earth, elements of the mother's girth. Within this circle, hearken to me. This is my will, so mote it be."

A breath of heat washed over him, through him, stroked muscle and nerve so his body responded as though caressed. David swallowed a moan, fought not to sway with the sensation. Isabell lowered her arms, the magic pulsing off her in waves. She knelt before him. Their eyes met and the feel of her, of her magic, her power engulfed him like water, as if sinking beneath the surface of a warm spring.

His heart raced, tiny beads of sweat iced down his spine and at the small of his back. Isabell reached out and traced a finger on his chest, connecting the moles, charging the invisible pentagram on his flesh with the sizzling wake of her touch.

"Wonder if your mark of magic will vanish when we're done," she said.

He took her forearm, pulled it back because her touch made him tremble and rolled it so her palm was up. "Yours is darker." He kissed her pentagram birthmark, felt the tingle of power on his lips. "Was it always like this?"

Her breath shuddered as she shook her head. "Was barely noticeable when I was a kid. It's gotten darker as I've grown stronger. Bet yours would too, if you practiced. If you accepted your gift."

David's gaze dropped to her breasts, to the pale teardrop shape and the dark rose tip. He reached for her, running his fingertips over the impossibly soft skin, the

textured wrinkles of her nipple. Goose bumps followed his touch then washed down her arms and over the gentle curves of her belly. Her body's response to him pulled the muscles in his gut, across his chest and low in his groin. His cock thickened.

"Guess we'll never know," he said. He leaned closer, his gaze on her lips, wine-red, plump, moist. He nearly took them with his but stopped a hairsbreadth away, flicked his gaze to hers. "Can I kiss you, Isabell?"

Her lids were heavy, her eyes dark, glassy. She licked her lips, her chin already raised to him and whispered her answer. "No."

The word took a moment to register. He leaned back, puzzled, but she offered no explanation. When he opened his mouth to ask, she leaned down to his chest, licked his mark and sent a sharp jolt sizzling through his body. She moved lower still to his nipple, licked and nipped as a tingling sensation shot rapid fire straight to his cock. His lungs squeezed, his breath came in a shaky rush.

David closed his hands on her breast, the hard pebble of her nipple centering in his palm. He squeezed and satisfaction mixed with want, made his hand flex and squeeze again. Jeezus, nothing else on earth compared to the feel of a woman's breast.

Isabell arched into his touch. Her hand, featherlight and small, smoothed down his chest, warmed over his stomach and down to his cock. She caressed his flesh at the root of his shaft, through his tight curls, over his balls. She cupped them and the feel of it sent a flood of heat rushing through his body, searing his chest, flushing his cheeks and making his brain dizzy. She toyed with his sac, rolling the heavy testicles through her fingers as she kissed his chest, licked and nibbled along his neck, over the round of his shoulders.

Their bodies pressed together, chest to chest, hers soft and giving against his hard muscle. He slid his arm around her back, held her firm, tasting her neck, her ear—sweet, salty, like clover and sea air. Isabell wrapped her fingers around his shaft, slid the length and back again, drawing pleasure from every nerve in his body like a glittering cord of sensation rippling straight through to his cock.

David rocked his hips with the motion. He couldn't help it. He slipped his free hand between them, found her moist curls on instinct and slid a finger between the slick lips of her sex.

Isabell moaned, her knees sliding wider, opening to him, so he found the sultry entrance to her body. He filled her, felt her muscled walls hug around him, milk him, coax him for more. He pumped her sex even as she stroked his cock, their rhythms falling in sync, their bodies building toward climax together.

"Let me kiss you," he said, his face buried in the sweet silky strands of her hair. She smelled of rosewood and jasmine, of comfort and sex. He breathed her in, kissed the hidden flesh behind her ear.

She pulled away. "It's not about that. This is sex and power. Kissing changes it, kissing makes it something else."

Isabell opened her hand, left his cock stiff and needy to cover the hand he had at her sex. "Focus your energy on your orgasm. Bring yourself over and send the force of it to me."

"How?"

She pulled his fingers out of her as her own slipped in to take its place. "Think of me. When you come, think of me, think of coming in me, of me feeling the power of it burst out of you into me."

Her voice was breathy, almost panting as she rocked her fingers in and out of her sex. His hand shifted to his cock, pumping on reflex, her words dizzying, the erotic fantasy filled his hazy thoughts. He watched her, her cheeks flushed with effort, with pleasure, her eyes closing, her breasts jiggling, her body rocking to match the faster and faster pace of her hand.

She leaned back, sat on her heels, spreading her knees, moving her free hand to her sex. One hand on top of the other, arms tight, muscles tensing, her head lolled back as she brought her body closer and closer to release.

David stroked his cock, his palm warm from the tight grip as thoughts of her sweet, wet sex squeezing around him transformed the sensation. Her cream coated his fingers and now his cock, made his grip slick, made the friction electric. His hand slid like greased lightning up and down his shaft, churning the fast swirl of pressure tingling in his balls, tightening his stomach, pulling in his chest, humming over his skin from the top of his head to the soles of his feet.

He fought the tempting release, the promise of ecstasy. He held on, drew out the sensation as he watched Isabell fingering her pussy, saw the wet cream glistening on her pale thighs, over the backs of her fingers, edging her knuckles. He stroked himself, his cock thickening in his hand, darkening, need swelling within him as he watched the soft undulating flesh of her breasts, nipples hard as diamonds.

“Oh dear Goddess...blessed...be...yesssss.” Isabell’s lids fluttered closed, her hands frantically rocking her pussy. Her cheeks flushed, color washing down her neck, over her breasts and belly. The pale rose hue of her orgasm consumed her, burst off her in a sudden wave of heat that swamped over David, severing his ragged hold on restraint.

His breath caught as the power tugged back through him like the ocean’s tide, rippling over muscle, tingling nerves, tugging sensation through his cock back to her. He couldn’t resist, couldn’t hold back and didn’t want to. He thought of her, thought of his creamy white cum shooting into her, thought of his body, his strength, filling her. Thought of his energy, the power of his release merging with hers, becoming one thunderous force.

Warm cum plopped on his thigh, more spurt in an arc to the far side of the circle. It splattered over the cement floor then evaporated in a small swirl of steam as though every ounce of their effort went toward fueling the magic. He was utterly spent.

“I could feel it,” he said, trying to catch his breath. “Jeezus, it was like an electric current crackling just above my skin. I could feel you pulling it, drawing it into you.”

She smiled, licked her lips as her little hands slipped from her pussy to her thighs. “Yeah. That was...intense.”

David laughed, the magic still tingling through his body. "Intense? That was fucking amazing."

She flicked her smoky hazel eyes to his, her face radiant in the afterglow of her orgasm. "You weren't too bad yourself."

His gut tightened at the sultry tone in her voice, the dark heat behind her eyes. He took her hands, edging closer, nudging his knee between hers. The heat from her sex warmed his thigh, his pulse surged, his cock stirred. "I've never tried anything like that before. Watching you touch yourself, get yourself off like that... I'll never forget this, never forget you. God, you're incredible."

He brought a hand to her face, slipped his fingers back through her hair to cup her head, pull her toward him. Her gaze dropped to his mouth, her lips parted. David's chest tightened as her breath washed over him, their lips only a sigh apart.

"No." She pulled back. "I can't. That's not what this was. It's business."

"Business?" He watched her stand, felt the pop when she broke the circle.

"Yes. It has to be with what you asked me to do." Isabell strode over to the wall where their clothes lay in a crumpled pile and grabbed her dress. "I banished magic for you. It can't ever be anything more than business between us."

She left him there, kneeling naked in her basement at the center of a giant pentagram, and he knew. Love, sex and magic, nothing would ever feel the same again.

Chapter Five

David opened his eyes in time to see the two brown mice making off with his comb. He lifted his head from the pillow, just enough to look with both eyes. Not mice. Brownies. "It didn't work."

The squat little people froze at the sound of his voice. Only their eyes moved, darting back and forth in their big sockets, scanning for danger, their round bulbous noses scenting the air. David didn't say another word but there was nothing he could do about the wide grin blooming across his lips.

After a moment the brownies scurried behind the chest of drawers, comb in tow, and David threw off his covers. He was showered, dressed and lumbering down the stairs within a half hour, weirdly happy with the failure of last night's ritual. They'd have to try again. His departure from her world, from her, was commuted for another day. He found Isabell in the kitchen, her back to him at the sink.

"Friend of yours?" he said, gesturing to the tiny fairy sitting crosslegged on the windowsill in front of Isabell as she washed her coffee cup. David leaned a hip against the center island, crossed his arms under his chest and waited for understanding to sink into Isabell's thoughts.

"Yeah. This is... Wait. You see her?" She looked crestfallen.

David shrugged. "Guess we needed more power."

He shifted his gaze back to the fairy as Isabell finished rinsing her cup. The little woman was no taller than a pencil and only three times as thick. She had hair so black it shined blue in the sunlight filtering through the leafy potted plants hanging above her and long enough it piled around her like a cape. Her wings were iridescent, filmy and translucent. They were enormous compared to her body but tucked around her like a bird's wings when she relaxed.

The tiny fairy puffed on a long curving pipe, eyeing him with one green eye squinted tight. "Don't look worth the trouble, you ask me. Kinda wishy-washy. Don't know who he be nor what he wants. Bah, thows him back. 'Taint worth the trouble."

"Elvia, hush," Isabell said. She set the mug in the strainer on the counter and looked to David. "This is Elvia, my... She raised me after my parents left."

"She raised you?" David couldn't help the shock in his voice. The fairy was barely big enough to wrestle a newborn kitten.

"Sure 'nough did. And her mammy too," Elvia said, hopping to her feet in one quick motion. "You Darwins ain't so hard. Ya smells a lot. That be true. But Elvia knows what's what. Raised 'em goods, I did."

"But how?"

Elvia snorted. "Throws him back, girly. Too stupid. Makes stupid wee ones. Don't wants no stupid Darwin piglets runnin' round heres. Throws him back."

"That's enough. Shoo." Isabell fanned her hand at the little woman, stumbled her back a step. Elvia huffed, hands fisted on her hips Peter Pan style then zipped out through a tiny hole in the bottom of the window screen.

"She means well," Isabell said, brushing past him in a hot gust of wind to the big wooden hutch next to the archway to the kitchen. She grabbed her purse and keys setting on top. "She loves me. They all do. They don't like being human size or dealing with non-magical humans. Darwins they call them. But she did it. For nearly eighteen years she did what she had to, to take care of me. Satisfied?"

David stared for a moment. "I wasn't judging you, Isabell. Just surprised. That's all. Believe me, I'm the last person to pass judgment on someone based on family ties."

Isabell shook her head, looked away for a moment. "Sorry. Childhood hang-ups and knee-jerk responses. It's not easy growing up different in a small town."

"I know."

Her hazel eyes snapped to his and something passed between them, some unspoken understanding, a connection of shared heartaches and worries neither seemed ready to explore. His body tightened, his palms itched to reach for her but the moment passed and Isabell looked away.

"You're probably right about needing more power. We'll have to try again. Go a little further this time." Color rushed to her cheeks, her gaze moving over his face as though she didn't want to meet his eyes. "It's a full moon tonight. We can perform the ritual out in the grove circle. I'll need to get some supplies first."

His brain flashed on images and sensations of last night's ritual. The promise of being with her again, being closer, going further made his knees weak. A warm shiver charged over his skin, anticipation a growing tingle at the base of his spine. The day would be slow torture waiting for the rising moon. He had to do something.

"I'll go with you."

She looked at him then, smiled and nodded as though she understood perfectly. And that possibility only made the anticipation worse.

When they arrived at the mainland dock, Isabell pointed to the old station wagon parked next to his SUV as hers. David volunteered his vehicle rather than risking the rust bucket she drove falling apart around them. Though as it turned out, the risk was minimal, the trip from the dock to the downtown street where they parked for the day lasted all of five minutes.

Didn't matter. He liked having her in his SUV, her scent filling the cabin, seeping into the leather of the seats, the cloth lining the ceiling. God, he hoped it sunk in deep, hoped it never faded. He breathed her in, a natural sweetness mixed with the spicy scents she used in her magic. He'd never forget her strange, intoxicating aroma.

They traveled the town on foot, stopping in stores, popping in at the post office, spending time at the local B&B. People they passed smiled, called her by name and Isabell nodded graciously, making small talk with ease. She asked about family and friends, a sick uncle, a troubled marriage, a lost pet, though the thoughtfulness was

never given in kind. There were those who passed with a wide berth, a few whispers behind cupped hands and some tentative stares. But most treated Isabell the same way people treated those in David's profession—asking for help and advice as though they'd found an ATM giving out free money. Although David was fairly sure no one he knew worried he'd hex their computer or curdle their milk if they pissed him off.

Surrounded by people she'd known all her life yet Isabell was utterly alone. Had there ever been anyone who understood her, who knew what it was like to be both feared and used at the same time? David's heart pinched, his jaw tightening as empathy and anger churned through his veins. These people offered pleasantries, a smile, a handshake, meaningless conversation, but there was no one to give her what she needed most, what anyone needed most—connection, a sense of acceptance for who and what she truly was.

David knew that feeling. His mother suffered just as Isabell did now. It's why he'd come to her. He wanted desperately to be normal, to be rid of the one thing that kept others from accepting him. Magic, as long as it was a part of him, meant he was different, he was the freak kid who could do and see strange things just like his crazy mother. He was the boy destined to relive his mother's fate, to let the magic and the visions and the loneliness consume him until they locked him in a padded room right next to his mother. He wouldn't risk that. Couldn't.

By the time Isabell's small French-made boat motored back across Lake Ontario to her little family-owned island, David felt he understood her in ways she likely didn't understand herself. She needed him and for the same reasons he needed her. They were the same, both searching for a way to feel normal.

The sky was a soft mix of gradient color. From the black of night to dark blues and purples melting to red and orange at the horizon where the barest slice of yellow sun still hugged along the curve of the earth. Gas lampposts glowed along the maze of boxwoods from the dock, moths, June bugs and fireflies risking life and limb to dance near their flames.

David followed behind Isabell, their arms full of grocery bags that held not just food but spices and incenses and exotic oils. Tonight's ritual would be more powerful than last night's, more intense, more intimate. He hadn't thought about it all day but now, back in Isabell's house where every sight, every sound, every scent filled him with thoughts of her, he couldn't think of anything else. He wanted to feel her in his arms again, to touch her, to kiss her.

His body tightened, his gut knotting, pulling the muscles low in his groin. He set the bags next to hers on the counter and tried to keep the eagerness from his voice. "There anything I can do to help get things ready?"

She'd already begun emptying bags and didn't stop to look at him when she answered. "You know how to cleanse your body for ritual? To wash the negative energy from your aura?"

David shrugged. "It's mostly visualization. Sure."

"Do that," she said, turning her back to him as she rose on tiptoe to put away the new box of sea salt on the top shelf of the corner cabinet. Her white cherry-spotted sundress floated up to a half inch below the curve of her ass, teasing his libido as much with what it revealed of her legs as what it hid. He stared at the dark shadow beneath her hem along the soft round of her upper thighs. His mouth watered as his gaze traveled where his hands itched to go. The dress lay flush along her lower back, shaping over the perfect round of her bottom and sinking ever so slightly in the cleavage of her cheeks.

Jeezus, he wanted to trace his tongue along that cleavage, to taste her, to feel the soft flesh and firm muscle. He clenched his fists and snapped his gaze to hers a half second after she turned around. She knew he'd been staring and he didn't care.

Color rose in her face, an answering heat filling her hazel eyes. "There should be a robe on your bed to put on when you're done. We'll meet in the grove behind the house. I'll have the corner towers lit. You won't have trouble finding it."

"Right. I'll see you out there in about a half hour?"

"Yeah. I mean, if you're sure this is what you want." She crossed her arms over her belly, dropping her gaze, all the easy smiles and practiced pleasantries she'd displayed during the day gone.

"I'm sure," he said.

Isabell shrugged and David turned to leave. He stopped after a few steps, feeling her unhappiness like a lead weight in his gut. He looked back at her. "I had a great time with you today, Isabell. Can't remember when I've felt more...myself."

Her gaze flicked to his and she smiled, though the sadness clouding over her remained. "Me too."

She didn't know how much it meant to him to feel at ease with someone, to feel as if he fit. He'd fix that tonight. He'd make sure she understood exactly how special she was, how special she was to him.

* * * * *

"Make sure he finds the grove and that's it," Isabell said. "No toying with him. Understood?"

Elvia snorted, slouching back against the sugar bowl. "Dat nincompoop can'ts find the grove, he oughtin' be there. Just wants to be puttin' his wick in ya anyhow. Who cares if we's tease 'im for da price of it?"

"I care," Isabell said, her belly doing somersaults even as she tightened the drawstring of her cape at her neck and slipped her hands through the armholes. It wasn't David's fault he'd been chosen by her spell. Maybe if she hadn't cast it, he would've come to her in his own time, when he'd found a way to live with his gifts, to live with magic. Her cast lured him here, gave him choices he wouldn't have had otherwise. That she'd lose him, lose everything, because of eagerness seemed harsh but she'd known the risks. She'd face the consequences. What she hadn't been prepared for was how much more she regretted the loss of him than the loss of her humanity.

"Oh fudge nugget, have it your way. Turnin' him full Darwin be punishment enough, I's reckon," Elvia said, hopping to the rim of the porcelain bowl and nudging the lid to the side with her toe. She slid it enough to reach in and snag a cube through the spoon notch and then plopped down on the edge to enjoy it.

"Good. And tell everyone to steer clear of the circle tonight. I don't want any interference."

"Bah, don't be worrin' 'bout that, girly. No fairy in their rights mind wants to be screwin' things up. The pact's nearly done. It be a cold ever after for the nit dat ruins three generations of waitin'." She took a big toothy bite off the corner of the cube and mumbled around the mouthful. "Be nice finally havin' ya in the fairy realm where's ya belong, girly."

Isabell ignored Elvia's parting words and the cold shiver that iced down her spine as she headed through the back doors and over the patio. She'd worry about her responsibilities in the pact her great-grandmother made with the fairies later. The debt would come due whether she worried over it or not.

It was full night but the moon was bright and Isabell knew the little island blindfolded. She called fire to the candles on the four stone towers before she could even see the circle through the trees.

The sacred circle had been there as long as she could remember, a soft mossy patch etched into the ground like a birthmark on the earth, the grass never grew over, the short stone towers brought from Ireland never fell, never eroded. A ring of thick cypress trees protected the circle from the elements as well as from any prying eyes floating by on the lake. Isabell wasn't the shy type but the privacy of the circle would comfort even the most introverted soul.

She sprinkled the candle flames with her mix of ajenjible herb, chopped bay laurel leaves, powdered hydrangea blossoms and a crushed wasp's nest. Each time the flame hissed and sparked like powered flint. The snap and crunch of footfalls through

undergrowth caught her ear as the last of her banishing mixture fizzled through the west flame. Her pulse quickened.

“Am I late?”

His voice was the same rich tone, the same dulcet cadence as it had been from the start and still Isabell couldn't help sparing a secret moment to close her eyes and let the sound wash through her like the stroke of fingers on bare flesh. She turned to see he wore the silky dark blue robe the fairies left for him. The color gave his eyes an unearthly luster she hadn't been near ready for. Her breath caught at the sight but she cleared her throat, glanced away, hiding the reflexive reaction.

Tied at the waist, the robe showed a triangle of bare chest in a V down to his flat stomach while his shoulders filled every inch of available fabric. The bottom hem fell at mid thigh, lower with his hands weighting down in the pockets. He was barefoot, his muscled legs brushed with dark hairs, his toes wiggling as he found a comfortable footing at the edge of the circle.

“Right on time,” she said, swallowing the flutter rising up her throat from her belly. Her sex warmed, turning naked thighs slick beneath her cape. Keeping this clinical would be an exhausting effort of will. So why the hell was she putting herself through it without a fight?

“But before we begin I have to tell you,” she said, catching her bottom lip between her teeth, measuring her words. “I think you're making a mistake.”

“That right?”

“Yes. Your abilities are a gift. They make you unique. Some might say they make you...perfect.”

He laughed. “Perfect? For what, the loony bin?”

“No. Perfect for me.” Her heart lurched. “The spell I cast, the reason you found your way to me, it was supposed to lure my perfect mate.”

His brows drew tight, his eyes narrowing. "Thought you said it wasn't a love spell."

"It wasn't. It was just supposed to lure you here. Falling in love," she shrugged, "it would happen naturally if we were meant for each other."

He stared at her for what seemed an eternity then slowly, painfully slow, his brow smoothed and the corners of his mouth quirked in a smile. He closed the distance between them and gathered her into his arms before she could think to protest.

"Well, I'd say it worked like a charm. Literally. You're a hell of a witch, Isabell." He bent to kiss her and everything inside her screamed with the want of it but she pushed from his arms.

"No. It was a mistake, a horrible messy mistake. You want to banish your gift. How can you be perfect for me if you want to banish magic from your life?"

"It's okay, honey." He tried to reach for her, his smile faltering. "I know I said I didn't want anything to do with magic but I can't deny how I feel about you. I can't be a part of all this hocus-pocus stuff but I want you in my life. I need you in my life. If that means accepting you dabbling in magic every once in a while, then I can do that. Hell, my parents did it."

"And how'd that work out? Everyone happy with your mother living in a magical world and your father living outside of it?"

David's whole body flinched as though she'd slapped him. "I told you already."

"Did you?" Isabell folded her arms over her stomach, more to stop her belly from rioting than anything else.

He raked a hand through his hair, frustrated, turning from her as tension stiffened across his shoulders. "Fine. You want the whole story?" He spun around to face her. "My dad didn't believe in magic, in any of it. Thought my mom was losing her mind any time she mentioned the things she saw or the spells she'd cast. He loved her. I know he did, but even I could see there was something wrong. My dad was right. The magic was making her crazy. The deeper into that world she got, the more it seemed to

consume her sanity. After a while there was nothing left of the woman he married. She's been hospitalized most of my life."

"You believe the magic made her crazy?"

"It broke my dad's heart. I swore I wouldn't let that happen to me. Swore I'd never allow myself to fall for a woman with powers." He laughed, short, bitter. "Guess you really can't choose who you fall in love with."

She felt her blush warm her face and her heart break. "No, but we can choose not to give in to it."

"Meaning what?"

"Magic didn't make your mother crazy. Trying to live in two diametrically different worlds did. You're right," she said, tugging at the gold drawstring around her neck. "We can't make the same mistake they did."

David caught the edges of her cape at her neck, fisted it, capturing her. He tugged her close. "You don't know that for sure. Whatever's between us is special. It's worth a shot."

She put her hands on his. "Do you still want me to perform the banishing?"

He exhaled, hesitating for a minute, glancing away then meeting her eyes again. "Yes. But that doesn't mean I can't accept you doing magic. I'm not my father."

"That's exactly what it means." She opened his hands on her cape, stepped back and let it fall from her shoulders. "Magic isn't something I do, it's what I am. It's a part of me. It's a part of my world."

David yanked at the dark sash of his robe, jerking the silky material from his shoulders. He tossed it to the side, standing naked, his gaze fixed on hers. "I'm not giving up, Isabell."

Isabell closed the circle with a quick shift of will, the magic sizzling the air within the barrier like ripples in water. She began the incantation, repeating the words of the night before, connecting herself to every molecule within her circle. When David

moved, she felt it, not just the hot push of his akasha but the disturbance of air. He reached for her, his big hands gripping around her arms at the shoulders, pulling her to him.

He wanted to kiss her, she could see it in his flower-blue eyes fixed on her mouth as he drew her to him. Isabell braced her hands on his chest, turned her face even as anticipation tingled over her lips. She couldn't kiss him. Lovers kissed. They weren't lovers, never would be.

David laughed softly, irritated. "Have it your way."

His lips pressed hot against her cheek, his fingers giving a hard squeeze to her arms. He edged back, one hand sliding down her arm to her hand. He brought her wrist to his lips, his eyes holding hers. His breath was hot against her pulse, the sensation of his kiss thrumming over her skin, tightening muscles low in her body.

David's tongue brushed the spot, soft and dry, before he pulled, bringing the bend of her elbow to his mouth. He kissed again, sending a riot of breath-quaking shivers through her body. He pulled her closer, chest to chest, their bodies flush, her breasts, her belly, her sex, formed against the hard line of him. She felt the twitch of his cock, the stiff shaft nestled against her, the fat head nudging at the lips of her pussy. He leaned to take her mouth. Isabell turned her face. When she looked back, he tried again and she turned once more.

"You won't let me kiss you?" he said.

"I agreed to make magic with you, not love."

"You think you can choose?"

"I have." She stepped back, freeing herself from his embrace. He'd seduce her heart if she let him. She wouldn't.

Isabell lowered to her knees then shifted back, unfurling her legs so she lay flat on the soft mossy center of the circle. David's eyes tracked her every movement, growing darker as his body went tighter. She could see his muscles bunch and roll beneath his

skin as he shifted down to his knees, saw the sharp lines of restraint in his face, the ropey veins straining along his arms as he covered her.

"You want me to fuck you. Is that it?" he said, his jaw tense, deep creases pulling across his brow.

She wiggled beneath him, spreading her legs. The fat head of his cock nudged and teased against the wet, wanting entrance of her body. Her breath caught and it took every ounce of control to keep the sharp spike of lust from showing on her face. "It's sex magic, David. The emotions don't matter. I want you to use my body to pleasure your own and I'll do the same with yours. When we come, I'll use the power of it to fuel the magic. Can you handle that?"

"Yeah. I can handle it." He thrust his hips, shoving his cock deep and Isabell gasped at the pain and pleasure of it. "Doesn't have to be like this," he said through gritted teeth, rocking back, nearly leaving her body.

"It does," she said then cried out when he drove into her again. "Ah!"

It's what she wanted. Isabell couldn't bear his tenderness, his sexy seduction. Her heart ached for what she'd lost, for what she never had, and his attempts only cut the wound deeper, fresher. Better this way, better passion and lust, frustration and defiance, better anything than letting him slip into that empty place in her soul, allow him to fill the spot left waiting for him only to shred her to pieces when he turned his back on all that she was.

She wrapped her legs around him, twined her ankles over his thick muscled thighs. He pounded into her again, his hard cock ripping sensation along the tight walls of her pussy, shooting a fast jolt of pleasure up through her body, humming through her chest. His pace quickened, her hands hooked under his arms and back up over the big muscled rounds of his shoulders. Her nails dug in, giving her leverage to counter his thrusts. He hissed at the biting sting of it, even as arousal doubled his rhythm, his strength.

His hips bucked, pounding into her, churning a glittering swirl of sensation through her sex, driving it up into her body so she felt her muscles tingle and flex, skin vibrating with the constant rhythmical thrum of it. She held her breath, rode his cock, rocking beneath him, opening wider, pushing him deeper, harder, faster.

David dropped to her, tucking his head to catch her breast in his mouth. Isabell arched her back on reflex, offered more, wanting him to take it all into the delicious tight heat of his mouth, to suckle her flesh long and hard, to nip and pull and tease the hard, sensitive nub. She squeezed her eyes, took a quick breath and held it as the build of sensation rose within her.

Sweet friction rippled in and out of her sex. Her thighs trembled, pressure building, muscles coiling, sensation winding in a growing ball in her belly, bigger, higher, pushing at her skin, tightening in her chest, her throat, her head, until she couldn't hold back any longer. Like a rush of water overflowing a cup, tingling pleasure poured through her, swamped her, rocked along every muscle, every nerve, until her whole body felt consumed by it.

"Oh god..." David's arms gripped in a sudden vise around her, his hips ramming his steel-hard cock at a frantic pace, deeper, deeper. A final hard thrust, deeper, harder than any before, buried him balls deep inside her, stretching her muscles so the fit was exquisitely tight, mind-numbingly exact. Isabell gulped for air, her pussy pulsing around him. David shuddered against her, the last spurts of his cum shooting into her. And then his body went boneless.

Isabell cast the spell.

Chapter Six

"You'll not have her with child if that's what yer thinkin'."

David blinked against the band of sunlight boring through a small break between the treetops. He knew that voice but could only make out the silhouette of a man standing at the north tower. He had one foot on top of the tower as though he'd step up but instead leaned forward, resting on his forearms crossed over his knee.

"She's herbs and roots to stir. Make her body a poison to yer seed," the man said.

David struggled up to his elbows, blinking against sleep and the bright morning sun. His mind shifted information, what he saw around him and what he remembered last. He was still in the grove circle, naked, his blue silk robe half under him, half not. And Isabell was gone.

"Me girl's not meant for ye, Darwin. She's not meant for this world at 'tal."

David cupped a hand above his eyes against the sun, squinting. "Who the hell are you?"

"Who be I?" The man hopped forward, closing the eight or so feet between in a flash, landing inches from David's shoulder. He dropped to a squat and leaned in so fast his breath washed over David's face. "I be her rightful mate, ya git."

"You're, you're that fairy," David said, leaning back, trying for a better view and comfortable distance. "The one I saw —"

"Feastin' on her quim while ye watched? Aye, that be me. And a right tasty flange it 'twas. Name's Brokk. You'll do right to remember it."

David pushed away, snagging the robe as he went. He threw it over his shoulders, shoving his hands through the armholes. "Goddamn fairies," he said, getting to his feet. "Jeezus, what's it gonna take to be rid of this shit?"

"Right? Goddamn fairies, is it? Like some curse." Brokk stood while David knotted his sash. "What is it ya think ye focked last night then?"

"What?" David blinked at him, only half hearing what he'd said. He moved to the edge of the circle, trying to peer through the thick ring of trees. Where had he come through last night? Which direction was the house? "Where's Isabell?"

"Me bride? I told ya. She's gone to wash the filth of ya from her body. She'll not be wantin' any of yer dirty piglets growin' and squirmin' in her belly."

Dammit, he hadn't even thought about protection last night. What was wrong with him? He didn't want Isabell pregnant any more than she probably did, but the way Brokk made it sound, as though she were destroying his child not just his sperm, it raised the hairs at the back of his neck.

He spared Brokk a glance over his shoulder, still searching for the right direction to break through the trees. "Humans don't marry fairies."

Brokk leaned back on his heels, one hand on his hip, the other smoothing over his lean muscled chest under his open vest. "Aye. True enough. Closer ta hand-fastin' it be. So long as a child begot, makes no matter what ye calls it."

David stopped, turned to face him, his gut twisting. "Humans don't mate with fairies either."

"Naw? Yer a right eejit, aren't ya, lad?"

"You got something to say to me, say it." David shoved his hands into the pockets of his robe, his fists clenching. He knew fairies lied for the sake of it but something about the conversation crawled over his skin like a million ants, a flesh-tingling omen.

Brokk smiled, pleased with himself. His strange luminous green eyes sparked in the sunlight, his pale blond hair like spun silk. He wore no more than he had the first time David had seen him, a grass-green loincloth and matching vest. He reminded him of Peter Pan minus the quiver and bow. More than anything though, it was Brokk's height, as tall as David so they looked eye to eye, that made his nerves jitter and his gut knot with a truth he didn't want to know.

"She belongs to the fey, boy," Brokk said. "She's kin and we'll be wantin' her home right shortly."

"She can't be. Isabell's human."

"Only by half and not so much as that even. She be witch, fathered by fey thrice over. 'Tis more fey in her than human now."

David studied Brokk's features more pointedly, the fine bone structure, the shape of the eyes, the curve of his nose, his lips, his chin, and then another face flashed through his thoughts. The fairy he'd let suck his cock on the front porch. She'd looked familiar, was this why? Isabell and the fairies on the island, they were the same breed.

"Not possible. How?"

Brokk laughed. "How? How do ya think, ya gom? Her ma and hers and hers before her spread 'dare legs is how. Me fellow fey stuck their cocks in them three, begot the next and the next, 'til me sweet Isabell was born."

David's head was spinning, his chest tight. Isabell didn't just have magical abilities, she was magic. This woman, who possessed him body and soul like none before, was the one thing he'd sworn against. "Why?"

The tall sinew fairy shrugged. "Same reasons as always. Power."

"I don't understand."

"Sure 'nough, you'd be speakin' da truth 'dare." Brokk huffed and settled down on the ground, sitting cross-legged Indian style. "She made a pact, she did, Isabell's great-gran'ma. All the powers of the fey mixed with her and her blood after her, on one condition. She find a mate worthy of such power before she's thrice times ten. A mate the fey approved."

"If she didn't?"

"She'd beget a child with the fey and that child would inherit the power and the pact. And she did. On it passed, from one girl child to da next, 'til a girl 'twas born more fey than human."

"Isabell," he said, his blood chilling through his veins.

"Aye. She be the last. Her charge to find a mate 'tis the same. And her time's nearly up. She'll be me bride soon enough and at me side in the fairy realm for da rest of her days."

That's why she cast the luring spell. That's why she'd said he was perfect for her. She thought she'd lured her perfect mate—him. And in that moment, David knew she had. Never mind his feelings about magic, something inside him, inside both of them, belonged to each other, belonged together. There was no point in fighting it for any reason.

"Best to be goin' on yer way now, boy," Brokk said, catching a passing bee in his hand. He unfurled his fingers and let it crawl along his palm, turning his hand as it made its way to the other side. "She be a right smart bird, she is. She cast the spell, made her choice. Knew from the start it wouldn't work. Just be wantin' to come home sooner is all. You be her only chore left to this world."

"Because she hasn't managed to banish the magic for me yet."

"Aye. She's a lady of her word. Leave and ya free her."

"Right. And give up any chance either of us have at a normal life," David said, turning toward the thick ring of trees. "Not bloody likely, ya git." He picked a direction and went.

* * * * *

"How did they do it, Elvia? How did my mother and grandmothers live with this stupid pact hanging over their heads?" Isabell stretched a toe to drag through the water as the tire swing sailed out over the lake and back.

"Happy as kittens 'n' cream, ifen my thinkers right," she said from the branch above, rocking with the fat knotted rope she sat on. She gave a hard draw on her pipe and puffed her exhale through puckered lips to send rings of smoke wafting up through the leaves.

"That can't be true." Isabell leaned her head against the rope. "She made sure she had an out, that we'd each have an out, a way to free ourselves from the agreement. Why bother if you don't mind losing your humanity and living the rest of your life in the fairy realm?"

"Right. Dumb that."

"No, Elvia," Isabell said, tilting her head back to see the little fairy. "Tell me. What happened with my great-grandmother and grandmother, what happened to Mom? Why couldn't three generations of my family find a human man to love them? Is it the pact? Is it a trap? Did the fairies trick my family?"

Elvia's pretty little face wrinkled. "Bah. No trick, 'sept greed and foolhardiness." She sighed, resigned, and moved to lie on her belly along the branch. She could see Isabell without leaning over too far now.

"Balinda Dionysus," she said. "Yer great-mammy. Wicked smart child, she was. Always mixin' potions and stirrin' charms, tryin' ta boost her power. Aelfdane's offer ta give her fey magic purt near sent her over the moon. Didn't care one lick of cost. Spent her time wallowin' in the powers of the fey. No surprise time came fer her ta choose a mate, she hid herself away in dat house castin' her spells and callin' power. Aelfdane loved her, he did. They both got what they wanted most."

"She shed her humanity and went into the fairy realm willingly?"

"Near 'nough." Elvia took another drag on her pipe. "She spent so much time toyin' wit the fairy magic, was half fairy by then anyhow."

"What about Maurelle Dionysus, Balinda and Aelfdane's daughter?"

"Ah, birthed a bit more fey and a tad less human she was. Purther than a starry night. Smart as Isis and half near as powerful. Couldna' finds a man who 'twernt jealous of all that beauty, smarts 'n' strength. She tried though. Looked and looked fer true love. Fer a man the fairies called worthy. Nothin'. Gave ups, she did. Finally had's her a baby with the fairy Kheelan then disappeared into the fairy realm. Sad one, she was."

"And...my mother?" Isabell knew what Elvia would tell her. It wasn't the first time she'd asked about her.

Elvia scratched her chin, her bright green eyes going skyward as though remembering. "Rozalia Dionysus. Ah, yer ma was like Balinda, 'cept wit more power than Maurelle and more fey blood runnin' through her than both. Loved the power, that one did. Still does, I reckon'. Spent all her time castin' spells, chargin' the Darwins for her help. Makes her a barrel full a money. But never once tooks a human man to her bed. Hads her a babe with fairy Hefeydd when time came. Tells me ta brings it up. Then off she goes into the realm of fey wit her lover, happy as a kitten 'n' cream, likes I said."

"So that's it then," Isabell said, planting her feet on the shoreline. "Either they couldn't find a man they loved who could satisfy the pact or they had no interest in trying. I'm more fey than human, more powerful than all three of my ancestors combined. And I still can't stop the pact from taking me. Even finding a man I love who can satisfy the pact, fate twists so I'm doomed just the same."

"Bah, too much of yer Grandma Maurelle in ya. Gives up too easy."

"There's nothing to give up," she said, glancing up at the little fairy. "I chose David and he's banished magic—me—from his life. Or he wants to, if I can muster enough power to work the spell for him. Even if I could force him to change his mind, the fey wouldn't accept him because it wasn't his true will."

"What knows ya of true will?" Elvia sprang to her feet then dropped like a stone to Isabell's hands on the rope, her wings only opening for balance. "Ya can't takes a person's heart lessin' they gives ya permission. Same as same with magic. If ya can't banish his magic, then he ain't gave his permission."

"He asked me to do it," Isabell said.

"Aw, snail snot. He asks ya to help him not be scared a what he is no more. Hows ya do it is ups to you."

"OhmyGoddess, you're right. He's afraid he'll go crazy because of what he is. It's not magic he wants banished. It's fear. But what if it's already too late?"

Chapter Seven

"There you are," David said, running a hand through his damp hair. "Woke up and you were gone. Grabbed a quick shower. I was just about to come find you."

Isabell's smile made his chest tight, her raven hair shining in the wash of afternoon sun as she strolled across the back lawn toward him on the patio. "You needed the sleep," she said. "Sex magic can really wipe a person out."

There was a fairy fluttering behind her. He'd thought it was a butterfly at first glance but when it shot past Isabell and buzzed up to his face, there was no mistaking the miniature female body or the look of disapproval wrinkling her face.

"Elvia?" he asked the small winged woman hovering inches from his nose.

The fairy huffed, hands on her hips. "I's through raisin' babes. And 'specially no Darwin piglets neither." She zipped away, vanishing in the brilliant rays of sunlight streaking through the backyard trees.

"Yes," Isabell said. "That was Elvia. And since you saw her to ask, obviously last night's ritual didn't work."

David hoped she wouldn't be too disappointed with yet another failure, but he hadn't expected the sly smile flickering across her lips and pinching the corners of her hazel eyes. "Right. You okay?"

She shrugged, strolling past him to the wrought iron table and chairs. "Weird that it's not working. We generated enough power last night to light up Pittsburgh. Maybe there's some sort of, I dunno, conflict." Her gaze flicked to his. "Anything you can think of that might be...conflicted?"

David shook his head. "Conflicted how? You know more about this stuff than me?" His gaze dropped to the table when Isabell gestured to the chair next to the one she stood behind.

There was a silver coffee service in the center of the table, complete with an elegantly adorned serving tray, a coffee pot with hinged lid and a matching sugar bowl and creamer beside it. A plate of Danishes edged close to the service and next to it were two white porcelain coffee cups with matching saucers, napkins and two silver spoons. He hadn't even thought of food until that moment but the sight made his stomach growl.

David pulled out the chair and turned it so he sat facing Isabell with the table at his side. He watched her right the coffee cups and fill each to an inch below the rim. "You shouldn't go to so much trouble just for me."

Isabell glanced at him, placing his cup and saucer next the flat of his arm on the table. "Not me. House brownies. They don't like to be bribed but given with a little respect, they appreciate proper payment."

"Ah. So there's a trick to it."

Her eyes crinkled with a brightening smile as she spooned three sugar cubes into her coffee. Her smile softened a moment later, a visible cue her mood had shifted. "David, I think I know why the banishing rituals haven't worked."

"Really? Great. But there's something else we need to discuss first. I know about the pact."

Isabell's gaze flicked to his. "What do you know?"

"Well...I know that your magic is partly, if not mostly, fey magic. I know that your great-grandmother bargained for the magic with her life and the lives of your grandmother, mother and you. I know that you have to find your perfect mate, a man the fairies approve, or you'll live the rest of your life in the fairy realm as Brokk's prized wife." He reached out and took her hand, pulled her a step closer. "And I know you think luring me here was a mistake."

Her thin arched brow rose, her smile flickering across wine-red lips. "You're saying it wasn't?"

"I'm saying it couldn't have been. Maybe you're right and magic isn't what drove my mother insane, but I know it didn't help. I know magic had a part in her instability and that's enough to know I can't trust it. But the way I feel about you, the way I feel when I'm with you, it's like nothing I've ever felt before."

"Some people would say you've just described true love."

"Yeah, people who've never been controlled by a spell before." He dropped his gaze, regretting his quick tone. A moment later he started again, holding her hands in his, caressing her soft skin with his thumbs. "I don't know if what I feel is real, but I know I can't let it go. I can't just walk away. Maybe after you get the ritual to work, I'll know for sure, but it doesn't matter. We're meant for each other. That's why your spell worked on me. Whether I'm head over heels for you now because of magic or a year from now naturally, it doesn't matter."

He noticed her shoulders stiffen, her hands tensed in his. Her brow furrowed as her smoky hazel eyes took on an icy luster. "You think I spelled you into falling in love with me?"

"Of course not. Well, not intentionally. But, sweetheart, you have to admit, magic isn't an exact science," he said. "If you knew all the hows and whys, the ritual would've worked the first time. How do I know what I'm feeling isn't some magical side effect? How do I know it's real?"

"I'll show you how."

She kissed him. Before she even knew herself she'd do it, she was kissing him. Goddess knows, she shouldn't. It was her longest held rule. Kissing changed everything, made it intimate, undeniable. Kissing sealed her choice.

But his lips were warm and soft against hers, firming as the shock wore off and desire took its place. Her mouth opened at the slightest brush of his tongue. Blessed Goddess, she wanted this too much. Isabell pulled away, her hands releasing his face. She hadn't even realized she held him.

"Did that feel real?" Her voice sounded solid, confident, nothing like the way she felt. Her palms tingled, remembering the bristle of his beard stubble against them. He'd showered fast. Didn't bother to shave. He really had been in a hurry to find her.

David blinked, his brow ruttled with confusion. "No. Not at all. Try again."

He stood and scooped her into his arms in one quick movement. Their lips met, David taking a mile from the inch she'd offered. Isabell knew she'd opened a door she hadn't the willpower to close. She stopped trying. She wanted this. She needed it. Risks be damned.

Like the hot flow of candle wax, heat oozed through her—down her neck, her chest, her arms and legs—pooling low in her belly, melting the last fragments of her resolve. Her arms heavy, languid, she looped them around his neck, snuggled her body flush with his so every muscle, every deliciously hard ridge pressed against her. She opened to him, took the sultry sweep of his tongue deeper, suckled, made him moan and his body grow harder.

His palm opened on her back, the heat of it, the strength seeping through the thin fabric of her dress straight through to her bones. He traced the curve of her waist, over the round of her bottom, pausing long enough to squeeze. She gasped when he tugged her closer, pressing the solid line of his cock against her belly. David smoothed his hand lower, the tips of his fingers tracing the crease between her cheeks, finding the round of her thigh and the hem of her dress. His fingers gathered the edge.

Isabell pulled from his arms, dizzy, breathless. "And...and that? Feel real enough now?"

David looked as though he'd been startled from a wet dream. His lips mouthed words he couldn't seem to find. "Wha—I, but, yeah. No. Wait. Jeezus, Isabell."

A smile tickled across her lips, her skin tingling with the quick rush of his reaction to her. David reached for her. Isabell hopped back, shoving at his shoulders to avoid capture. His blood-deficient brain kept his balance off and he stumbled back into his

chair, landing lopsided so he struggled to keep from falling the rest of the way to the ground.

“No. Stay there,” she said when he shifted to bounce back up to her. He plopped down again, a little-boy pout tugging at the corners of his mouth.

Goddess, he made her heart race. Her chest ached when she thought of him leaving, when she thought of being forced to leave him. So she wouldn’t think about it. David was right. They were meant to be together, made for each other. Whether she’d brought him to her too soon or not, she wouldn’t let the moment pass without knowing what it felt like. She deserved to know what it was to give herself totally, utterly, to her perfect mate—if only just this once.

Isabell swallowed the melancholy that shadowed at the back of her mind and brought a smile to her lips. She leaned forward, her hands going to the snap and zipper of his khaki Bermuda shorts. He leaned back, arms out to give her free access.

“Whoa, need any help?”

She wrinkled her brow in mock worry. “You still don’t sound convinced this connection between us is real. It’s a question of honor. I’ll have to prove I don’t need to spell my lovers.” Never mind that including Brokk and her college fling, David was only her third sex partner and her only lover.

“Hey.” He grabbed her hands when she tugged his shorts to his butt catching at the bend of his lap. “I never thought for a second you’d do anything like that on purpose. You know that, right?”

Isabell met his eyes, bluer than ever in the late morning sun, his broad handsome face tight in earnest. Her belly fluttered with the way he looked at her, so sincere, so adoring. How could she live a lifetime and never see that look in another’s eyes for her again, never again feel how it touched something deep inside her? Tears stung at the edges of her eyes. She blinked them away and with them the last indulgence of self-pity. She could make this work. She could help him overcome his mistrust of magic by showing him she and magic were one and the same.

"I know." She kissed him quick, forced a playful smile. "Now lift up so I can show you the real magic of a woman."

His sharp burst of laughter halted when she yanked his shorts to his knees and shoved them down to his ankles. Isabell straightened, hand on her hips, eyeing him. No underwear, the man really had been in a hurry. His fat cock stood straight and stiff from his lap, his hair trimmed, his balls nearly bald. She licked her lips, her mouth going hot and moist. Goddess, she couldn't help thinking of suckling that clean, thick shaft, filling her mouth with the firm width of him, tasting the salty beads of pre-cum she'd coax from the tip.

The dark swollen penis twitched under her gaze.

"You trying to make me come with your mind or something?" David said. "Keep staring at me like that and it just might work."

Isabell flicked her gaze to his, anticipation zinging through her veins. "A clean cock's a kind of magic all its own to a woman. Makes me feel compelled to suck you off."

His chest shook beneath the tight hug of his T-shirt. His cock jerked and he shifted his ass against the hard wrought iron seat. "Magic, huh? Exactly how irresistible is this power my cock has over you?"

She looked at him beneath the shadow of her lashes, knowing her expression was sexy. His cheeks flushed with color, his eyes tracking her as she knelt between his legs, ran her hands up his thighs, squeezing, massaging his tight muscles.

Fingers splayed, she pressed her hands over the hard ripples of his stomach, sliding lower to tunnel through the short coarse hairs at the base of his shaft. His cock twitched, the tender flesh beneath tugging his balls. She caught the root of him between her thumbs and forefingers, wrapping hand over hand around him.

Isabell hovered close, letting her breath warm over his sex, building anticipation, feeling it sizzle through her body, wet her sex, make her muscles pulse. She squeezed her hands then relaxed, caressing him with the featherlight touch of her fingers.

David exhaled loudly, pushing his hips toward her, the smooth round head nudging against her lips. "Take it," he whispered. "Open your lips. I want my cock in your mouth, Isabell."

She tasted him, a slow lick, exploring the tiny hole at the tip. Clean, soap and water and the faint saltiness of his excitement, her chest tightened, her sex so wet her thighs trembled. She opened her mouth on him, took him in. His girth stretched her lips, his length pressing at the very back of her throat and still there was more of him left wanting.

Pulling back, Isabell kept her tongue to his flesh, loving the texture, the velvet softness, the ripple of veins, the mushroom shape of the head. She swirled her tongue around his rim, dipped into the tiny hole then went down on him again and again. Liquid heat cooled down her thighs, her breasts squeezed between his legs, nipples hard, pressed tight against him. She used his legs to stroke herself, squirming closer. Her knees spread on reflex, her bare pussy beneath her dress, open to the warm morning air.

His hips moved with her, following her draws and thrusts. She made her mouth snug on him, sucking as she drew back, stroking his root with her hands. The taste of him, the feel of him in her mouth, in her hands, filled her mind. The fast beat of her heart thundered in her ears. The sensation of his hand on her head was a distant recognition. At first he guided her, encouraging her bobbing motions up and down his cock.

But slowly she realized he was stopping her and then she heard him speak. "Stop. I...fuck. Stop. I'm gonna come. I'm gonna come. Stop."

She blinked up at him. "Isn't that kind of the goal?"

He laughed and laced his hands around her arms. "For both of us, not just me. Besides, as great as that sweet little mouth of yours feels and looks wrapped around my cock, I need to be inside you more."

Isbell let him tug her up to her feet and stood watching as he unfastened the buttons running down her favorite buttercup yellow sundress. She flicked her hair over her shoulder when he reached the bottom three, tucked the strands behind her ears to make sure it'd stay. The dress hung undone but closed and David leaned back in his chair, eyes wide as he unveiled her body, drawing the center edges to her sides.

His gaze fell to her breasts, braless beneath the spaghetti-strap dress, then lower to the dark bush at her sex. His expression seemed a mix of expectation and relief. He must have remembered and hoped she rarely wore underwear. He smiled, a lecherous, lustful grin that brought a fresh gush of heat to her pussy. He wanted her and it showed in the heat of his expression, the subtle thickening of his cock. The recognition made her body respond in kind, pulling her nipples tight, thrumming hot blood through her sex.

David shifted to stand again but Isabell pushed him back. He laughed, though his brows wrinkled with confusion. "What? You want to do it right here? Thought we'd go upstairs."

She shrugged, stepping closer, straddling his lap. "What's wrong with here?"

David's hands went to her hips instantly, his palms big and warm against her flesh. He stared at her belly then lower at the glistening hairs covering her sex as she centered herself above him. Finally he dragged his gaze from her pussy up to her eyes and gestured with a sideways tip of his head toward the patio wall. "You don't mind the audience?"

Isabell looked. At least fifty fairies lined the thick stone wall, their hair a rainbow of colors, their attention riveted. Most sat dangling their little legs over the edge, their wings folded neatly around them. Enough had gathered though, that a second line was forming behind the first. The latecomers were forced to stand in order to see clearly. Though standing seemed to lead to touching, which in at least three couples had led to sex.

She glanced back at David and saw him staring at the little couple nearest the house. The female fairy was on all fours, her royal purple hair brushing the ground as

her body shook from the thrust of her lover behind her. He knelt between her legs, holding her tiny skirt up over her ass at her hips, his miniature loincloth down at his ankles. He pumped his long ruddy cock into her, the flushed thickness of his sex showing each time he pulled back to ram it in again. Their faces were flush with the effort, the muscles on the little man's arms bulged as he moved her body back and forth on his cock. The pace quickened as they watched, both fairies throwing their heads back as they climaxed, mouths open, tiny voices crying out.

Isabell looked back to David, caught his hard swallow, the quick dart of his tongue wetting his lips. She shrugged and the motion drew his attention. "They'll follow us to the bedroom anyway. But if you want to take the time to go all the way upstairs..."

She lowered herself over him until she felt the soft, stiff head of his cock against her pussy. Her thigh muscles trembled, holding the position, but the look on his face, the quick flush, the darkening of his eyes, the instant flash of lust behind them, was worth the pain.

"Fuck it. Let 'em watch," he said, fingers denting into her flesh as he pulled her down. His cock parted her, slipped through the slick folds of her sex and wedged between the tight, needy muscles inside her.

Isabell moaned settling lower and lower on him, his long fat cock pressing through her walls, stretching her. The fit was exquisite, exact. The slightest movement, a breath, a sigh, sent jolts of pleasure rocketing through her body, stealing her breath.

They sat motionless, her body hugging around his, moistening, adjusting. Their quick, halted breaths heated between them and Isabell opened her eyes to see David still held his closed, still fought for control. She leaned forward, her bare breasts pressing against his chest, nipples hard and tight. She kissed him and his mouth opened on hers instantly.

The small shift of her body ignited a flash of sensation sizzling through her sex, tugging muscles low in her belly. She rocked again, the pleasure too delicious to resist.

David's kiss grew fierce, his mouth devouring hers, his hands latching around her thighs beneath her ass, rocking her body to satisfy his.

Sensation swirled inside her, squeezing the muscles low in her body, pressing against her lungs, tingling over her flesh. His tongue plunged deep into her mouth even as his cock buried to the root inside her. He filled her, penetrated her, impaled her, and Isabell writhed for more.

She pulled from his kiss, dropping her hands behind her to his knees, and cried out when his cock went deeper. Her breath caught. The feel of him so far inside her body sent a sharp blast of pain and pleasure ripping through her veins. Her muscles adjusted quickly and David's big hands gripped around her hips, steadied her even as he guided her body up his cock and down again.

Isabell's pussy flooded with cream, stretched to take him in. She rode his steel-hard shaft like a carousel horse, bucking up and down, her flood of juices slicking the way. The air around them grew thick, sultry. It rippled over her skin, like the warm gusts from a fire. The heat of it sank into her, churned and swirled inside her, mixing with the hot press of David's akasha, becoming one with her, with her power.

Her sex muscles fluttered, breath-stealing shudders quaking up through her groin, her belly, her chest. Every nerve ending in her body tingled, even the follicles of her hair hummed with the feel of it. Her mind spun, frantic for more. She rode him harder, faster, pounding her body down onto his, driving him deeper, deeper.

"Jeezus, Isabell..." David's low voice graveled out of him, his words choppy on panting breaths. "Yeah... Come for me. I can't, I can't hold back much long...er."

She held her breath, the push of sensations mounting, building inside her like water behind a dam. Just a little longer, a little more. Isabell gave herself over to David, let him use her body to pleasure himself, to pleasure her and the feel of it squeezed through her chest, crushed the last fragments of her control.

Like the cresting of a flooded river, release spilled over the edges of her mind, gushed from the top of her head, tingling down through her neck and chest, pulsing

through her groin, humming down her legs and out her toes. She moaned as it swamped over her, as it rippled her muscles around his cock, pulled him with her into the exquisite abyss.

“Yesss... My God, I love you, Isabell.” David’s cry echoed his release. His words an audible thrust of his power, his soul into hers.

Their akashas combined with a burst of brilliant light behind her eyes, made her gasp at the beauty and heat of it. The power melded with her orgasm, pushed a fresh spasm of pleasure through her muscles. David gulped a breath then wrapped his arms tight around her. He crushed her to him as the swirl of power whipped around them in a hot wind that tangled through her hair and heated along her back and arms.

The warmth of their melding powers tingled up from her toes, along her thighs, through her groin, her chest, her neck, until finally it rushed from the top of her head, flooding into the air, escaping into the ether. It was gone.

A cold shiver traced down her spine in its absence, refreshing after the long press of heat. David’s body relaxed beneath her, his breathing slowed in rhythm with hers. Isabell turned her face into his neck, pressed a kiss, and David’s arms snuggled her tighter. They were so good together, meant to be. She’d made her choice clear in every possible way. It was him, David, he was the one her spell had lured, he was the one she couldn’t help loving. He was the one who would rescue her humanity.

“That was a hell of a ride.” His breath ruffled through her hair as he spoke, tickled the nape of her neck. “Even scared away the fairies.”

Isabell closed her eyes, cold dread filling her belly. Slowly she turned her head over his shoulder toward the patio wall. Please, dear Goddess... She opened her eyes.

Her gaze met Brokk’s among the sea of little faces. He winked, his smile as sexy as it was arrogant.

“Aye, love,” he said. “Time to come home now.”

Chapter Eight

"Because. You have to leave." Isabell stirred the thickening broth of a stew she'd never eat. She'd be gone before it was done.

"Damn it, Isabell, will ya just tell me what I did?"

She glanced over her shoulder at him, standing by the center island behind her, arms a tight knot across his stomach. She looked back to her stew. It made her chest ache to look at him. "I don't have time to explain, David. It's done. You got what you came for. There's no reason for you to stay."

He snorted. "No reason? Granted my head's a little fuzzy and not everything's making much sense right now, but I know we just had sex out on the patio. Fuckin' amazing sex. What's changed in the last twenty minutes?"

"Everything." His memory was already altered. How much worse would it get? Goddess, it hurt to think about.

"Can you be more precise? What do you mean 'I got what I came for'?"

She looked over her shoulder at him again. "Do you remember why you came here, why you came to me?"

"Course I do. A client of mine recommended you. Said you could help me..." His brow furrowed, he dropped his gaze. "I mean, I...I came here because... I came here to..."

Isabell turned back to her stew, tears burning her eyes. She fought hard to keep them from falling. She wouldn't cry. Not yet. Not until she was alone.

"Aw, hell with it. I don't remember. Okay? But I know I don't want to leave."

She put the wooden spoon on the dish beside the stove and turned to face him. This wasn't fair. He was here. He was meant for her. Losing him, losing her humanity, was

torturous enough. Having to push him away was going to kill her. "Why don't you want to leave, David? Do you know? What's keeping you here?"

"You. That's what. I love you."

"How? Why?" Anger, frustration and heartache sickened her belly. She knew it wasn't his fault she hadn't changed his mind about magic before they drew power together again. The spell was out there, waiting for the right amount of fuel. She should've realized it. She knew better than him when two people give themselves totally, utterly, to each other the power they generate is unfathomable. She could've fueled the spell three times over with the power they'd drawn.

It wasn't his fault, she knew, but she couldn't help thinking the spell wouldn't have worked if David didn't still want to banish magic from his life. It wouldn't have worked if he wasn't more afraid of magic than he was of losing her.

"What do you mean why? I...just do." He looked out through the French doors to the patio. "My brain's mush. I don't know what the hell's wrong with me but I know what I feel."

"It's the banishing spell."

David laughed. His gaze swung back to her. "What?"

Blood seeped from Isabell's face, leaving her skin cold and a heavy weight in her stomach. "Never mind. You'll feel better in a day or two."

"No, wait. Did you say 'spell'?" He fought against another chuckle. "What, like magic? Seriously? You don't really believe in that sort of nonsense, do you?"

Goddess, he didn't even remember magic was real. "Leave, David. Go upstairs and get your things. I'll have one of the fairies take you to the mainland."

"Fairies?" He practically barked the word. "You want to get rid of me that badly? You know about my mother, right? You know she used to spout crazy shit like that all the time too. You trying to hurt me or just piss me off so much I'll leave on my own?"

"Neither." She sighed and stepped to the center island, leaned her hip against it so the corner was between them. "Yes, I believe in magic and up until about twenty minutes ago so did you. That's why you came here. You didn't want it to be real to you anymore. There's nothing I can do now to prove it to you. The spell keeps you from seeing anything magical. Your brain rationalizes everything and ignores what it can't. But trust me, David, magic is real. As real as me."

"Trust you? Sweetheart, I love you but..."

Trust me, trust magic. He couldn't do either. Goddess, she wanted to cry. "You have to go, David. Now. Please."

He must've heard the tears in her voice or saw the earnest in her eyes. He stiffened, his flower-blue eyes sad, confused. She couldn't help him. Brokk fluttered in through the hole in the window screen over the sink. He landed between them on the center island. David didn't even flinch. He was blind to him, to all things magical, to her.

"You really want me to leave?"

A tear burned down her cheek. Her voice trembled. "Please."

David turned and headed for the stairs.

* * * * *

What the hell was wrong with him? He couldn't think straight, couldn't remember shit. He knew he loved Isabell but for the life of him, David couldn't remember how or why he'd fallen for her.

"Trust her," he scoffed to himself, shoving his extra shirts into his bag. She wanted him to believe magic was real just because she said it was?

Of course he trusted her, but he wasn't an idiot. If anyone knew the dangers of believing in nonsense like that, it was him. He'd seen what it did to his mother. He wasn't crazy. He couldn't even bring himself to pretend. How could she ask him to?

David pulled the zipper closed on his backpack and slung it over his shoulder. One last check under the bed for forgotten items then he turned for the door. A movement

outside the window caught his eye. He stopped, stooped a little to see beneath the ruffled valance.

“Isabell.” His chest tightened. God, how could he leave her? It’d be easier to walk away from a glass of water in a desert than to walk away from her. But he’d seen that look in her eyes, as if she were dying inside, and he knew. He knew somehow it was because of him.

She leaned against a tree down by the shoreline, her arms loose at her sides. There was a tire swing hanging from a thick branch on the tree but Isabell obviously wasn’t in the mood to swing. She leaned her head to the side, her long ink black hair spilling over her shoulder, the tips brushing her wrist.

God she was beautiful, the warm sunlight of an early afternoon cast a nimbus of golden light around her. She was angelic standing there, her soft yellow sundress rippling around her shapely legs, hugging to the curves of her hips and breasts.

David narrowed his eyes. Were her lips moving? She was talking but there was no one around her. He scanned the lawn behind her, on both sides. He looked out over the water as best he could through the trees. No one.

Trust her? How could he? She was showing the same signs of insanity his mother had. He couldn’t go through that again. Magic wasn’t real. He couldn’t indulge her sickness. For her sake, he had to be the sane one. He straightened, almost turned but then hesitated. A strange tug in the pit of his stomach made him feel as if leaving now would mean he’d never see her again.

Bullshit. Of course he’d be back, with help, a therapist, a doctor. She’d hate him for it, just as his mother hated his dad for not believing her. It was for her own good. His dad had never relented, never once let her convince him to believe. But what if he had? What’s the worst that could’ve happened? What’s the worst that could happen with Isabell? If just for one minute he trusted...

His gaze shifted back to her dress. There was something strange about it. The hem rippled as though caught in a wind but nothing else moved—not her hair, not the

leaves above her in the trees, nothing. The bottom of her dress edged up one thigh as he watched. She bent her leg, let her knees part. Isabell looked drunk or half asleep, yet the movement of her clothing didn't wake her.

David squeezed his eyes shut then looked again. The hem of Isabell's dress was crumpled at the top of her leg as if it were caught on something or held there. Just when he was sure of what he saw, the dress dropped, falling back to her knee.

"Jeezus, I'm fuckin' losin' it." But he couldn't turn away. He watched. Her dress fluttered again in that strange wind and then it started to open. One button at a time, from the bottom up, the edges parted until the last at her neckline unfastened and the butter yellow material slipped to her sides.

Isabell arched her back, her shoulders barely touching the tree. She opened her mouth as though moaning, her eyes closed, head lolling to the side. She thrust her breasts forward, opened her legs wide, exposing the dark hairs at her sex. How could she stand in that position without someone holding her?

She couldn't and David knew it.

"Brokk." The instant the fairy's name popped into his mind, the lean-muscled creature appeared. As tall as Isabell, Brokk's face was suckling at Isabell's breast, one hand wrapped around her waist, the other at her pussy, pumping his fingers in and out of her. He bent over her, rubbing his body on hers, thrusting his hips, stroking his hard fairy cock against her side.

The oversized fairy shifted between her legs, nestling his hips against hers. His hand worked at his crotch and David knew he was pulling his cock out, preparing to fuck her right then and there.

"Like hell." He dropped his bag and raced down the steps, struggled to get the French doors open then tore across the backyard to where he'd seen Isabell and Brokk.

"Hey!" David said, panting, trying to catch his breath and sound menacing at the same time.

Isabell's head snapped around, her eyes wide. Brokk only lifted his head, his hand holding his stiff cock, ready to plunge into her. David came to a stop three feet away, struggling to believe what he was seeing.

"Too late, lad, she be mine now," Brokk said, stroking his cock as he spoke. "Her body, her soul, her quim. Mine. As it 'twere meant to be."

"No. I have my magic back. I see you. I see everything. It's real, I trust that now. I trust her. That means she's fulfilled the pact. She's free." David saw something pass in Brokk's magical green eyes as his smile broadened. "But you knew that, didn't you? You knew I was the one."

"Bugger it. Doesn't matter." Brokk shuffled, held the head of his cock at her pussy. "She gave herself to me. She'll be me bride. Now be gone with ya before I spell ya so yer insides are on the out."

David swallowed hard, his thoughts flashing on the instant of excruciating pain he'd endure before he died from being turned inside out. The threat was real. He looked to Isabell, her eyes glassy beneath the deep creases of her brow. She was watching him but the look in her eyes was distant, as though a great chasm separated them rather than a few feet.

"She couldn't have," David said, pushing Brokk's threat from his mind.

Brokk froze, his lean chiseled face slowly turning to David. "Leave it be, ye git. 'Tis generations of waiting ya piss with here."

David ignored him. "Doesn't matter what she said. She couldn't have given herself to you because she'd already given herself to me."

Brokk's jaw tensed, his smile turning to a snarl. "Ya speak of her heart, boy. I've got no want of it. Her word's all the fey needed to call the pact complete. Ya see for yourself she let me spell her. I'll fock her under me magic and there'll be no going back."

The fairy dropped his gaze to his cock and David closed the distance between them before the head parted her sex. He snagged the collar of Brokk's vest and spun him around. "Get yer fockin' hands off me, mate, ya git."

David balled his fist, cocked his arm and swung. He nearly toppled to the ground from the momentum when the fairy popped to his normal size an instant before David's fist would've landed. He quickly caught his balance and spun back to track the little bastard. If he was going to die, he'd do it head-on.

But nothing happened. Brokk hovered just out of reach, his arms folded over his chest, his feet wide and flat as though standing on thin air while his gossamer wings beat a steady rhythm behind him.

"David?"

David knelt to help Isabell sit, gathered her dress closed. Her eyes fluttered, her face wrinkled in confusion as though she'd just woken from a dream. "What're you doing?"

"Turns out the spell didn't stick," he said, cradling her in his arms. "It can't."

"Why not?"

"Because I don't want to lose my magical abilities. I want to learn how to trust them. The way I trust you."

"You trust me?" Her smile made his chest pinch.

"You were right," he said. "The luring spell worked on me because it was supposed to. I was meant to save you from the fairy pact and you were meant to save me from the same fate as my mother...or worse. No one else could've helped me come to terms with my abilities except you and without you I'd go crazy, magic sight or not."

She pressed into his arms, squeezed hers around him. He hugged her back, his happiness making him lightheaded.

"But wait." Isabell pulled away, her gaze shooting up to where Brokk still hovered. "Is it true? Do the fairies approve of my choice?"

Brokk rubbed his chin, rolled his jaw as though David had actually landed the punch. "The gom faced death for ye. Fought for ye. Faced his greatest fears for ye. And he'll not be turnin' Darwin anytime soon. Aye. I'd say he's a right fine choice."

The fairy went stiff in the air, snapping to attention. His voice came in a somber, stilted tone. "Isabell Faylinn Dionysus, I relinquish my claim on ye. Yer pact and the pact of yer kin before ye be settled now and forever more. So say the fey, so say the Goddess, so we all. So mote it be."

"So mote it be," David and Isabell said together then sealed it with the magic of a kiss.

About the Author

Alison Paige is the pen name of multi-published author Paige Cuccaro. She writes as Alison Paige when her stories run spicy. Burning up the sheets, blow the bedroom door off the hinges hot; and as Paige Cuccaro when the fun in the bedroom is subtler. The romance is always key, whether it's between beings of this world or out of this world.

Alison (Paige) lives in Ohio, with her husband, three daughters, three dogs, two cats and two parakeets, in an ever-shrinking house. When she's not writing she can be found doing the mom thing with a book in one hand and a notepad in the other. Ideas come without warning and the best way to stimulate your imagination is to enjoy the imagination of someone else.

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

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