

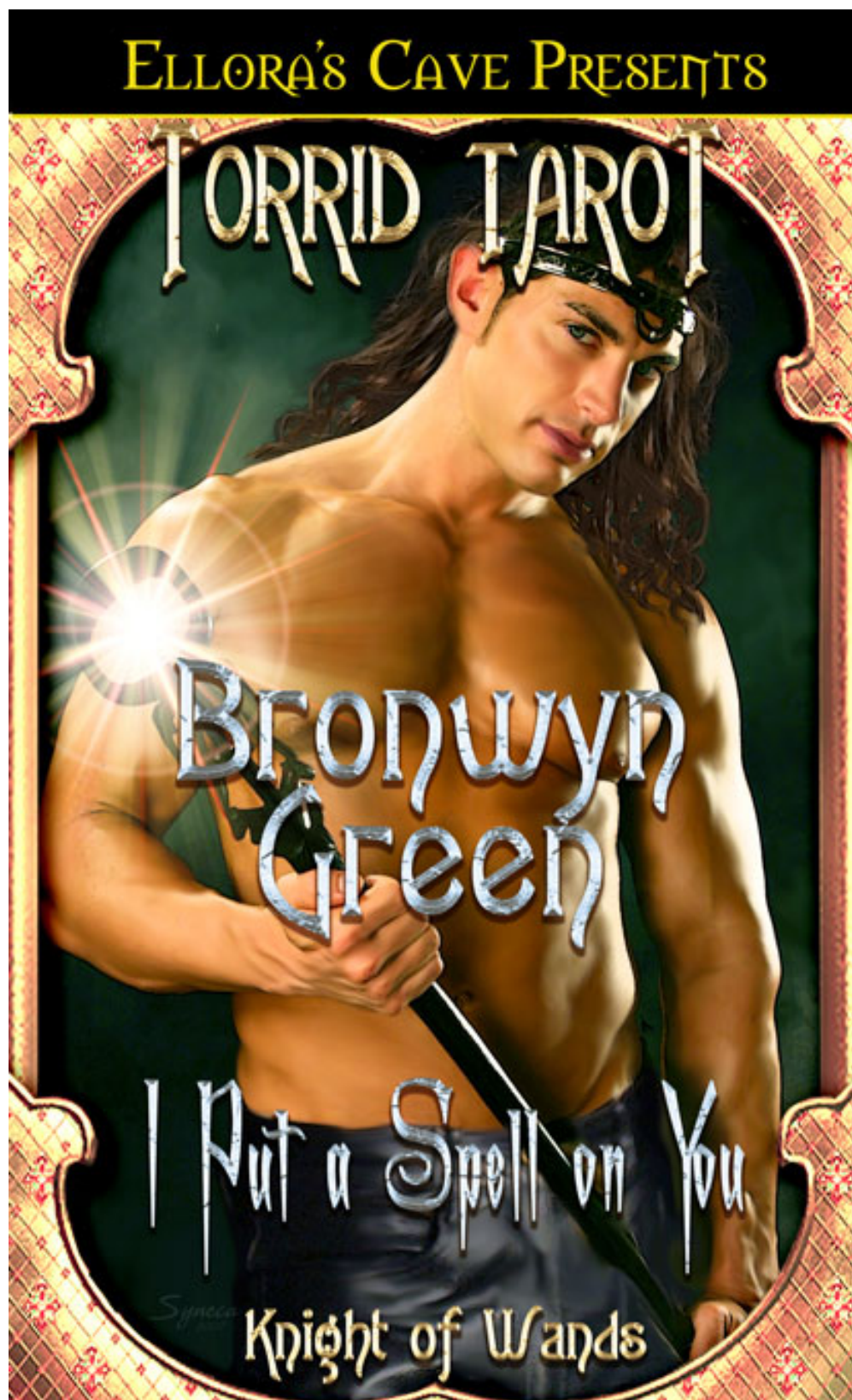
ELLORA'S CAVE PRESENTS

TORRID TAROT

Bronwyn
Green

I Put a Spell on You

Syneca
Knight of Wands



An Ellora's Cave Romantica Publication



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I Put a Spell on You

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I PUT A SPELL ON YOU

Bronwyn Green

Dedication/Acknowledgements

For Aunt Malita who taught me to read the tarot when I was still in high school. In retrospect, you might have warned me that the nuns would get a little cranky about that.

I'd also like to thank the Friday Night Mudslingers—Chel a.k.a. my very own Rumpelstiltskin, Jen, Cheryl, Marti and Mary. There's no one else I'd rather hang out with at stupid o'clock in the morning. Thank you also to my wonderful editor Helen, and to Matt, Mom, Cait, Manda, Margaret, Julie, Roxanne, Shannon and Kim for all of your love and support.

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The Knight of Wands

Every person has a complex combination of traits—both positive and negative. The Knight of Wands represents an individual who is full of life and energy. A person who has this card as a significator is courageous, passionate, sexy, charming and irresistible. He never sweats the small stuff, has no doubts about accomplishing anything he sets out to do and usually succeeds in achieving his goals. However, every card has shadow aspects as well. The Knight of Wands can also be brash and cocky about his abilities. He can be reckless and hot tempered and have a hard time admitting he's wrong.

Gray Foster is a contractor who personifies the Knight of Wands. He's gorgeous, confident, sexy and absolutely irresistible to childhood friend Temperance Callahan. Gray also has a tendency toward being a little wild and reckless. Temperance must discover which side of Gray is stronger. One could break her heart, but the other might just lead to happily ever after.

Chapter One

This wasn't happening. Temperance Callahan stared at the man who walked into her shop and almost dropped the sign she'd been painting. What the hell was Gray Foster doing here? A metaphysical shop wasn't exactly the kind of place where a non-believer like him hung out. Besides, her business, Mystic Circle, wasn't open yet and wouldn't be for two more weeks — *if* she could get her renovations done.

The latest turn of events wasn't the least bit auspicious, but things were bound to get better. They had to. This shop was her dream—a place to put down roots and call home—a place to finally belong. Mystic Circle would also afford her the opportunity to follow the path she was meant to follow. She wasn't about to let a few bumps in the road stop her.

She studied the man lingering in the doorway, sizing up the space—well, actually sizing up her—and shoved down the sharp kick of highly inappropriate lust that hit her whenever Gray, her best friend's brother, was in the vicinity. The last thing she needed was to be distracted by the embodiment of her every illicit fantasy. Tall, with longish, black hair, he moved with predatory grace. His gaze scrutinized the surroundings, before stopping to rest again on her.

A flutter of awareness trembled through her belly but she ignored it. She couldn't allow her hormones to rule her. She had things to do.

Tem glanced behind him. "Where's Morgan?"

She thought of the haphazardly stacked pile of wood and drywall her AWOL contractor had left behind. Morgan was supposed to be rounding up a replacement contractor to do the renovations. Tem had been so sure the original man had been the one for the job. So much for the reading she'd done. Granted, she'd never been especially skilled with tarot as a divination tool but she'd never interpreted a reading so

badly either.

When the Knight of Wands came up, she took it as a positive sign and hired the contractor. Of course, she'd checked his references as well as previous work sites. Everything had looked good including the reading. Unfortunately what she interpreted as charming, daring and self-confident was actually superficial, foolhardy and cocky. Frowning, she added dishonest and thieving to the list.

Morgan had gotten the same reading.

Stifling a smirk, Gray crossed his arms over his broad chest. "It's good to see you too, Temperance."

"Yeah, whatever, Gray. Where's your sister?"

"Don't know."

Morgan had been scheduled to arrive almost an hour ago, but she operated in her own particular time zone. Morgan Standard Time rarely corresponded with anyone else's. Tem frowned wondering about the identity of the promised builder. If anyone could get a professional carpenter to work for the pathetic amount she had to offer, it was Morgan. She'd probably talk her boyfriend *du jour* into doing the work. She went through men like Temperance went through chocolate. Neither habit a good one.

Noticing the measuring tape attached to Gray's belt, Tem's eyes narrowed. No. Morgan hadn't done this to her.

"Why don't you show me what you want done. Morgan wasn't very specific and I've got a meeting in about an hour."

She groaned inwardly. Apparently, she'd miscalculated the depth of her friend's sadistic nature. Of course, Tem had worked hard to convince her she was over her adolescent fascination with Gray. Maybe Morgan had actually believed her. Besides, his construction company *was* one of the most successful in the state. It made sense that she'd ask her brother. Still, Tem considered doing bodily harm to Morgan next time she saw her.

"Where is she?" Tem asked again.

"What's the matter, Temper?" He used the nickname he knew she hated and his sensuous lips curved as he stared into her eyes. "Afraid to be alone with me?"

"Clearly, that's the answer," she deadpanned. "I'm terrified that I won't be able to keep my hands off you." She hated to admit how close to the truth her taunt was.

His gaze sparkled with ill-concealed amusement, and he held his arms out. "Bring it on."

He studied her with the darkest blue eyes she'd ever seen. Midnight irises, framed by black lashes so long they could cast shadows, took in every detail and Tem resisted the urge to squirm under his perusal. Despite her practiced devil-may-care attitude regarding her appearance, she was suddenly self-conscious about her overly generous curves. Ignoring her discomfort, she met his gaze.

"The majority of the work needs to be done in the back room."

"So, you're going to let me help?" he asked.

This close to opening, what choice did she have? "I guess so."

He winked at her. "I'm good with my hands," he added.

Yeah, she'd just bet he was. Shaking her head, she watched him surreptitiously as he inspected the woodwork and the built-in bookshelves.

He dragged a hand through his hair, shoving an unruly lock from his eye. He appeared several weeks past his regular haircut, but she liked the look. It contrasted nicely with his white dress shirt, obligatory tie and khaki pants. The dark shadow of a beard covered his finely chiseled features, and her fingers itched to trace the high, compelling cheekbones. Oh who was she kidding? She wanted to do a hell of a lot more than that. And that was just plain wrong.

She knew better than to get involved with Gray. It wasn't that she didn't like him — he was a great guy. But he didn't do relationships. She suspected it had something to do with his parents' marriage.

Tem had met Gray and Morgan shortly after she and her Aunt Ruby had moved to Oakdale, Michigan, when Tem was nine. Morgan and Tem had become instant friends and Gray had become an instant annoyance. When they were teenagers, they'd discovered Gray and Morgan's father had been having an affair. Worse, he'd apparently had one affair after another and there were a whole slew half-siblings out there. As far as she knew, Gray had never spoken to his father again. Maybe that was the reason he didn't date seriously. Or maybe Tem had read too much into it. It was possible he simply hadn't found the woman he wanted to be with, or maybe he had a wandering eye like his father – either way, Gray was off limits.

Even if he weren't, she *so* wasn't his type. Men like him didn't bother with women like her. Morgan referred to his typical dating pool as the Wall Street Wonder Women. Fitted, yet alluring business suits, perfectly placed highlights in their hair and long, lean, gym-toned bodies. Tem knew the type and she had nothing in common with any of them.

She watched while Gray inspected the room, running his long fingers over the oak leaves carved in the woodwork. Warmth spread through her body as she imagined his hands stroking her with the same attention to detail.

"I've always loved this building," he murmured.

As kids, they'd come here all of the time with her aunt. Back then, the turn of the century building had been a bookstore, but it had been vacant for the last ten years. The ornate woodwork and leaded glass windows were as beautiful as she remembered albeit covered with layers of grime. At least she'd finished cleaning the high tin ceiling. Scrubbing the intricate raised patterns had been a pain but it had been worth the effort. It looked beautiful in the late afternoon sunlight. Gray looked freaking gorgeous in the afternoon sunlight, too. Who was she kidding? He'd look freaking gorgeous in the rain...the snow...the dark.

"Why don't you tell me what you want and I'll get started," he said bringing her back to the present.

Tell him what she wanted. Yeah, right. She wanted him hard and naked and throbbing inside her. She wanted him to fuck her until she forgot what it was like to be alone. What would he do if she stripped down and begged him to take her right now?

What was she thinking?

Shaking her head at her idiotic imaginings, Tem cleared her throat, forcing away the erotic images. She crossed her arms over her chest, ignoring the way Gray's gaze dropped to her abundant cleavage before taking an excruciatingly slow climb to her face. Dismissing his engrossed expression, she gestured at the bookcases behind him. "I'd like to keep all of the existing shelves in the main room."

She needed to keep him on track, but it was even more important to keep herself from wishing for things that would never be.

"What exactly are you doing with the space?" he asked his tone abruptly businesslike.

Absurd disappointment pricked at the easy dismissal of his interest in her. Needing to put some distance between them, she walked behind the antique display case. "Well, I'll have merchandise out here, so I'll need some display stands. And —"

"How big?" Gray flipped open his notebook and began scratching notes.

"What?"

"How big do you want the displays?"

"I'm not sure."

Crossing the room, he set his notebook on the counter. "Well, what kind of merchandise will you be carrying?"

She glanced at the page where he'd scrawled his notes, watching as he sketched several different types of structures. "Some pottery, jewelry, incense, stones, candles, tarot decks—stuff like that." She warmed to her topic. "We'll keep the books on the shelves and probably the essential oils, too and then offer classes in the back."

He stared at her, his expression incredulous. "You've *got* to be kidding me. You're

still into that mystical bullshit?"

"Excuse me?" Why was she surprised? She knew how he felt about this kind of thing. How he felt about her—how he felt about what she was.

"I would have thought you'd outgrown your delusions of magical powers."

Forcing her hands to unclench, she shook her head. "This is never going to work. I don't know what Morgan was thinking."

"I'm guessing she was thinking you were in a bind and I'd jump at the chance to be your knight in shining armor. His lips twitched as he held her gaze, reminding her more of the boy he'd once been. Just when she'd started to feel somewhat charitable toward him, he added, "Turn anyone into a toad lately?"

She forced a saccharine smile. "I'm seriously considering it at the moment."

He looked as though he was about to respond, but she cut him off. She wanted her inner peace back and she wasn't going to get it with him here.

"Look, we can relive our childhoods or we can both move on. I choose 'move on.' The best way to do that is for you to leave. I'll find someone else." She pushed her hair from her face wishing it was as easy to push away the sadness his rejection caused. More importantly, she wished she didn't care what he thought. She walked to the front door and held it open. "I'll see you around."

"Who are you going to get to do the work?"

"What do you care?" It was amazing. Supposedly, they were adults and here they were acting like the bickering adolescents they'd been years ago.

He leaned against the display case as if he had all day to wait.

Tem looked pointedly at her watch. "You should get moving—don't want to miss that meeting."

"What contractor are you going to hire?"

"I don't know, but I'll figure it out." She gestured toward the door. And she'd better figure it out quickly. Tomorrow, she'd be driving to Chicago for a merchandise show to

purchase the rest of her stock.

He didn't move. "When do you open?"

"Why does it matter?"

"When do you open?" he repeated, obviously not willing to let it go.

"Fine." Hands on her hips, she stood in front of him. "If that's what it takes to get you out of here. Two weeks. Buh-bye, now."

"Two weeks," he repeated, his voice flat. "Way to budget your time."

She crossed her arms over her chest and tried to rein in her anger. As far as Gray was concerned, this was just another case of her being flighty and irresponsible. "The contractor skipped town," she informed him.

Gray's eyes softened and she knew she'd been right about his opinion of her. "Why didn't you just call me in the first place?"

She held his gaze. "I thought about it."

"And?" he prodded when she didn't continue.

"And decided against it."

At his quizzical look, she continued. "Morgan told me how great your business was going and how busy you were." She shrugged. "I didn't want to be an imposition or an obligation."

He snorted in disbelief. "You've been a lot of things in my life, Temper, but never that."

She bit her lip as she contemplated telling him the rest of the truth. "Also, I figured you'd act like a pompous asshat and I didn't want to deal with it."

"So you hired a shoddy contractor and he bailed on the job."

The implication was obvious. She should have gone with Gray.

"Lucky me. I got the loser who ditched me *and* the asshat."

His lips twitched as if he fought a smile. "I know who the asshat is, but who did you hire to do the work?"

She'd had enough of this conversation and him. Glaring, she pointed toward the door. "Bye. Have a good meeting."

Instead of moving away as she'd hoped, he waited, studying her.

Her arm dropped to her side and she sighed. "It doesn't matter. He's gone and I can't reach him."

"Let me guess, he took the money, too." The arrogance was curiously missing from his expression.

"Got it in one," she snapped. "Give the man a prize." The last thing she wanted from Gray was his sympathy.

He stepped closer and the warmth of his body enveloped her. She wanted to back away, but she couldn't seem to make her feet move. He traced the neckline of her blouse, holding her motionless with his deep blue gaze. "Do I get to pick?"

His touch heated her skin, making her ache for more. She pressed her lips together, remembering all too well the one disastrous kiss they'd shared. Recalling the addictive taste of his mouth, she couldn't remember what they'd been talking about. "Pick what?"

His eyes dropped to her breasts before slowly rising to hover at her lips. "My prize."

What was he trying to accomplish? She shook off the longing his nearness created. "You're not funny." Backing out of reach, she hoped he hadn't noticed the way her nipples had tightened in response to his visual caress. Her skin still tingled where he'd touched her.

He followed. "Good. I wasn't trying to be."

"Don't you ever get tired of this schoolyard behavior?"

He grinned, not looking the least bit contrite. "When it involves you—apparently not."

"I'm not a kid anymore."

He scanned her body with an appreciative gleam in his eyes that made her wish he meant it.

Forcing herself to breathe past the urgent throb of desire pulsing through her cunt, she frowned at him. "What I meant is that we can move past the teasing stage."

His lips twitched as if he fought a grin. "Who says I'm teasing?"

She snorted. "Yeah. Whatever, Gray."

He opened his mouth. Before he could speak, the shrill ring of his cell phone interrupted. Released from his gaze by the distraction, she darted around the display case and vigorously wiped at the wood. If she didn't busy her hands, she was liable to start tearing at his clothes.

Tem watched him from the corner of her eye as he talked and paced, her gaze drawn to his perfectly sculpted backside. How many times had she imagined digging her fingers into his ass as he pounded her into the mattress? Her body clenched with need, but she ruthlessly buried the feeling. She would not allow herself to lust over someone who basically despised her.

She sighed. She wasn't being fair. He didn't hate her. He thought she was a fruitcake. She was used to that response. Often, people thought she was either a flake or in league with the devil. In truth, she was neither. She was a witch.

"Yeah. I'll be right there." Gray's voice pulled her from her thoughts. He snapped his phone shut and pinned her with his gaze. "Are you staying at your aunt's?"

His low tone slid up her spine and she stopped her frenetic cleaning to glance at him. She shook her head. "There's an apartment upstairs."

"I'll be back after the meeting."

"That's not necessary. I—"

A slow, sexy grin spread across his face and he laid his finger across her lips. "We'll argue about it later."

The sensation of his work-calloused fingertip brushing her mouth sent a cascade of

want fluttering through her belly. Screw the Witches' Rede to harm none. Morgan was a dead woman.

* * * * *

It was three hours after Gray had left and she still couldn't believe what her so-called best friend had gotten her into.

Tem dropped her head into her hands and sighed. The whole situation was unacceptable, but it had become exponentially worse when Gray had shown up.

Every time he'd looked at her, a secretive smile played over his lips, like he knew things about her that he shouldn't. Worse, he watched her like he wanted her. No matter how much she might wish for that to be true, he was just toying with her like always.

Raising her head, she spied her aunt's dusty *grimoire*. Maybe Aunt Ruby had spell she could use. Of course, Ruby had always warned Tem that messing with the forces of nature was not to be taken lightly and always at her own peril. Besides, who knew if time alteration could even be accomplished.

Shoving her hair from her eyes, she lifted the ancient spell book from shelf and carefully opened the cracked leather cover. She smiled at the clumsy incantation written in pink crayon on the front page. Her aunt had been so angry when she'd discovered that Tem had written inside the generations-old *grimoire*.

She'd calmed somewhat when Tem had explained that it was a spell for finding lost kittens and puppies. She'd made it up when her kitten, Tinkerbelle, had gone missing—and it had worked, too. Ashley, the little brat next door, had sullenly brought the kitten home, shoving her at Tem. With the admonishment to always check before using the book, Ruby let the spell remain.

Gently turning the musty pages, Tem skimmed the spell listings until she found one that looked promising. Per the spell's instructions she made a list of things she would have done differently.

Hire a different contractor.

Go shopping with said contractor rather than sending him with her cash.

Convince Morgan not to call Gray for help under any circumstances.

Tem looked at the last item on her list. Did she really mean that? Remembering the hunger in his eyes as he looked at her, she wasn't sure. What she wouldn't give to have him for just a night. She pushed that thought aside quickly. Interfering with another person's freewill was at the very least unethical. At the most, it was forbidden, and karma had a way of bringing one's negativity straight back to the source—threefold.

She sighed. It wasn't like he really wanted her. Besides, if he saw her with her clothes off he'd probably run in horror. No, her life had become plenty complicated without trying to get her best friend's brother into bed.

Crumpling up the piece of paper, she tossed it in the recycling bin and replaced the book on the shelf. Being in an uncomfortable situation didn't make it acceptable to use magic to get out of it. She'd just deal with Gray and all of the unwelcome feelings he roused. Unfortunately, no matter how much he teased, she was never going to get what she really wanted from him.

Restless longing tormented her body. She briefly considered running upstairs to her apartment to find her vibrator, but it wouldn't give her the relief she needed. She needed Gray to scratch this particular itch—an itch she'd had since she'd hit puberty. Thirteen years later and it still popped up from time to time. This time was a doozy.

The bells at the front door chimed and her stomach tightened in anticipation of seeing him again. Leaving her office, she walked into the front room, and her friend Beth waved at her. Waving back, she glanced around. No Gray. Disappointment sank like a rock in her stomach. She was pathetic.

Smiling, she banished him from her thoughts and focused on Beth. "What's up?"

"I know you're busy getting this place ready, but...I really need a spell." She grinned sheepishly.

“What do—”

A long shadow fell across the floor as the door opened, and Tem swallowed hard as Gray stepped inside. Catching his eye, she gestured behind her. “Would you mind waiting in my office while I finish up with this consult?”

He nodded and flashed her a bone-melting smile as he passed. Taking a deep breath, she turned back to the other woman.

“Who is that gorgeous god of man?” Beth asked in a loud stage whisper.

“My best friend’s brother,” she answered tightly.

“I swear, he’s sex walking,” Beth gushed, eyeing Gray’s backside as he walked away.

Sex walking, sitting, talking, breathing...damn she wanted him. She had to stop thinking about him and she sure as hell didn’t want Beth thinking about him like that. “About the spell,” Tem reminded her. “What do you need?”

Beth peered around Tem to keep Gray in her line of vision. “A sex spell.”

Jealousy she had no right to feel slammed into Tem. Gripping the edge of the counter, she tried to keep her voice calm. “You know I can’t do anything that would interfere with the autonomy of another person.”

“I know.” Beth leaned forward. “What I have in mind is something that will draw the right person to me for the hottest sex I’ve ever had.”

She glanced around Tem as if looking for Gray again.

“You realize that even having a specific person in mind would be against the laws of magic.” She tried not to growl the words, but the idea of Gray giving Beth the best sex she’d ever had made Tem want to claw her eyes out.

Beth grinned and leaned forward on the counter. “Don’t worry, hon, I’m not trying to move in on your man. Promise. I’m just enjoying the spectacular view.”

Tem’s mouth dropped open in horror. “He’s not my man,” she whispered, her voice fierce.

Beth' eyebrows rose in disbelief. "Right. Anyway, I don't want a relationship right now. I just want a quick, hot, no-strings fling to get this restlessness out of my system before I start my new job. I can't afford to be distracted by my hormones."

"You know, there are alternate methods," Tem began.

"Yeah, but the vibrator isn't doing it."

Tem grinned. "I understand." She cleared her throat. "You realize that the person the spell picks might not necessarily be the person that you'd pick."

Beth nodded. "I know. I'm okay with that. How soon can you have it ready?"

Tem blew out a hard breath. "Tomorrow at the earliest."

"Perfect. I'll stop by in the morning."

With a wave, Beth left Tem imagining the hottest sex she'd ever had, with Gray. Glancing up, she saw the embodiment of her fantasy standing the doorway.

"So she actually thinks you're going to make a magic potion for her?"

He'd opened his mouth and the warm fuzzy feelings evaporated. "Yes. Because I am."

Skepticism was written all over his face. "And she's going to pay you."

"That's how it works." Frustration tightened her fists, but she tried to relax. Getting angry wasn't going to solve anything.

"So she really believes magic exists?"

"It does." She dropped her head back and stared at the ceiling while she counted. To fifty. "I realize you said we could argue later, but I thought you were speaking figuratively."

He shoved his hand through his hair. "I'm trying to understand, Temper. Show me. Do something magical. Prove it to me."

Stalking forward, she poked him in the chest. "Fuck you, Gray."

His eyes widened at her tone.

"I'm not Fifi-the-Wonder-Poodle, performing tricks at your command."

Turning on her heel, she stormed into her office, throwing a burst of energy from her hand as she passed the threshold. The door slammed shut in Gray's face, shuddering violently in the frame. Despite the release of power, it would look like nothing more than a tantrum to him.

This was high school all over again. She could hear the taunts as clearly as if they were happening now. Blinking back the tears that burned her eyes, she wished she could use her abilities to do the renovations. Unfortunately, magic didn't work that way.

Chapter Two

The doorknob rattled behind Tem and she felt Gray hovering in the doorway.

"I'm sorry, Temperance. I didn't mean to piss you off."

She pressed her lips together to keep her mouth from falling open. The last time he'd apologized to her had been after his high school graduation party when he'd given her the most amazing kiss she'd ever received. She'd never had another kiss that lived up to that one. The fact that he'd apologized for kissing her in the first place had nearly broken her heart. How repellent had she been that he'd felt the need to repeatedly express regret?

Clearing her throat, she pushed aside the memories. "I guess you're quite the overachiever then, aren't you?" She refused to look at him. "Just go. Please. This isn't going to work."

"It's just that I don't understand how people can believe in this stuff. Where's the proof?"

She pulled her hands into tight fists at her side and resisted the urge to show him proof in the form of an energy blast to the groin. "Not. Helping."

"I'm sorry." He sighed behind her and she felt the soft heat of his breath stir her hair. "I've never been very good at believing in things I couldn't see or touch."

His hands fell heavy on her shoulders. The contact felt so good. She just wanted to sink into him and forget about all of the angst between them.

"You're on an impossibly tight deadline. You're never going to find someone who can do it in time and work for what you can afford to pay."

She pulled away from him. "Thanks for the news flash."

Reluctantly Gray released the warmth of Temperance's body and circled around to face her. "Can we start over?"

She stared at him through narrowed green eyes, suspicion etched clearly on her face. He didn't blame her. Despite the fact, he wanted to expand his business to include building restoration, he could hardly believe he'd agreed to help renovate what would end up being a misguided hippie shop. He'd even pushed back the start date of his latest contract so he could help her. Normally, he only took on high-profile builds and now he'd agreed to work at Mystic Circle, for Christ's sake. What the hell had he been thinking?

He hadn't been thinking about much besides Temperance and the gentle sway her of her generous hips. The glorious curves he remembered were still there—if possible, her breasts were fuller, more luscious. She had the kind of body made to cradle a man while he fucked her and God, he wanted to be that man. He desperately wanted to be that man.

His teenage fantasies were back in full force. Right now, he imagined laying her across her desk and burying his face in her pussy until she came screaming his name, begging him to fuck her. Okay, so his fantasies had evolved a bit since high school. But damn, so had she.

"Why?"

Why what? What had they been talking about? The renovations, right.

"Believe it or not, I actually want to help you." As he said it, he realized it was true.

She stared at him tapping her foot. Her purple, gauzy skirt swished enticingly around her calves, practically begging him to drag the fabric up her legs and bare her. She jingled softly as her foot tapped, and he noticed a chain of small, silver bells circling her ankle. The sweetly spiced exotic scent she wore drifted to him as she moved. He shoved his hands in his pockets. If he didn't, keeping his hands off her might be impossible.

"Look, this is a win-win situation for both of us. I want to branch into restoration

and you need your property renovated.”

Putting her hands on her hips, she stared at him, clearly weighing his argument.

He cleared his throat. “I promise, I’ll try to pry my narrow mind open a little further.”

She stopped moving and stared at him as if she didn’t exactly trust him. He couldn’t really blame her. He’d been an asshole. He wouldn’t have treated any other client like he’d treated Temper.

She bit her full lower lip as she considered him. “I can’t believe I’m saying this, but okay.”

The knot in his chest loosened as an impish smile quirked her lips.

“Let’s make a deal,” she said. “I won’t tell you how to use your tools if you don’t tell me how to use mine.”

He was sure she hadn’t intended the word “tools” to sound erotic, but it did. It wasn’t a much of a jump to go from tools to the conversation he’d overheard a few minutes ago. Images of Temperance pleasuring herself with a vibrator filled his head. He could imagine her long red curly hair spread over his pillow and her creamy white legs spread open while a thick vibrator slid in and out of her writhing body. Damn he was glad his hands were still shoved in his pockets.

“Deal,” he choked out.

“Good.”

Her voice raked his nerve endings. He’d almost forgotten how the sound of her morning husky tone made his cock ache with need. What was his problem? She wasn’t even remotely his type. His type wore heels and hose, not sandals and bare feet. His type ran offices not crunchy granola hippie stores. His type certainly didn’t wear exotic-smelling oils that had him wanting to strip the clothing from their bodies and fuck them nine ways from Sunday. And yet, he had the sinking feeling his type was right here right now, staring at him with smoky green eyes and softly parted lips. How was this

even possible? Temperance didn't fit in his orderly world.

She darted around him suddenly. "I'll show you the supplies the contractor got before he took off."

He followed her out of the office. His gaze traced the narrowing of her waist up to her impressive rack only to realize she'd stopped and turned to face him. His eyes rose to hers, and he couldn't help but wonder if her nipples were the same raspberry-ripe color as her lips. She cleared her throat, and he realized his gaze had dropped to her cleavage again. God, what was his problem? He never had trouble remaining professional with women in the workplace, but with Temperance, he was a sexual harassment suit waiting to happen.

"What?" she asked, warily.

"Nothing. I just haven't seen you in a while. I just realized your hair's back to its original color," he finished lamely. And he much preferred its natural red color. When they'd been in high school, she'd adopted the Goth look, dyed her hair inky black and cut it so the short strands hung in her face. It hadn't stopped him from fantasizing about her, but the way the long silky waves now kissed the upper swell of her ass inspired a whole new set of daydreams.

"Uh-huh. It's been like this for years."

She wasn't buying his sorry-ass excuse—not that he could blame her. He didn't even sound convincing to himself. Of course, if he told her what he was really thinking, she'd kick him out on his ass faster than he could say magic didn't exist.

She watched him for a moment longer, her green-and-gold eyes narrowed as if she knew he was mentally stripping the clothes from her body. Not that it was too difficult to figure out.

"So, how about those supplies?" he asked needing to get his body under control.

She pointed at a small stack of substandard lumber and Sheetrock.

"I thought Morgan said something about partitioning this back section off for

classrooms.”

“That’s what this is for.”

Anger knotted his stomach. Not only had the stupid fuck of a contractor left Tem in the lurch, but he hadn’t purchased nearly enough materials.

Gray walked the perimeter of the room, pacing off the wall placement.

“Did he get enough?” she asked.

He shook his head as he made notes. “No, but I’ll cover it, so don’t worry about that.”

“What so you mean you’ll cover it?” Suddenly defensive, she drew herself up to her full five-foot-nothing height, arms crossed over her chest.

“I’ve got some stock in the warehouse and anything I don’t have, I can get. On the house.”

“Absolutely not. I’ll try to get another loan from the bank.”

From what Morgan had said, it hadn’t been easy for Temper to get the original loan. He doubted she’d be able to get a second one.

Uncertainty momentarily shadowed her eyes. “Or I’ll just make do with less.”

“Tem—”

“I’m not going to argue with you.”

Fine. He wouldn’t argue with her, he’d just do what he wanted. Of course, if he was really doing what he wanted, neither of them would be wearing clothes right now.

“I’ve got some work to do out front, are you okay back here?” she asked.

“I’ll finish up my measurements and then we’ll get some dinner. And before you open your mouth, you should know I’m not going to argue with you about that, either.”

He turned away dismissing anything else she might have said. He grinned listening to her grumble all the way back to her office.

Once she was out of earshot, he dialed his sister’s number. When Morgan answered, he didn’t bother with a greeting. “You know you’re sadistic, right?”

"Problem?" Amusement tinged her voice.

"Yeah. She's about five-foot-nothing, thinks she's a witch—"

"Because she *is*," Morgan interjected.

"And," he continued as if she hadn't interrupted, "she's so damn hot I can't think straight."

His sister laughed. "You were the one who said you wanted to branch out into restoration and she's got a building that needs restoring. Besides, if I remember correctly, you were also the one who said you couldn't remember the last time you'd met a woman who'd really interested you."

"Yeah," he grudgingly admitted. "I said that."

"So what's your problem?" his sister asked.

"I don't know," he sighed. Did he want to admit to Morgan that he might actually be falling for her best friend? He wasn't even sure that was what he was feeling but he had to admit, he did want her—in every carnal way possible.

He raked his hand through his hair and tried to think of how to phrase his question. "Is she married?" he finally blurted. No matter how much he wanted her, that was a line he wouldn't cross. He'd seen first-hand the destruction affairs had on a family. He wouldn't wish that on his worst enemy.

He'd noticed she wore several rings on both hands, all silver and set with various stones. None of them looked particularly wedding-like, but Temper had never been traditional.

"Took you long enough to ask."

He grimaced. He supposed he hadn't asked Morgan when she'd approached him about doing the job for Temperance because he hadn't wanted to admit to himself that he wanted to know. "Well?"

"Nope. No husband." Gray heard the smile in Morgan's voice. He scowled even though he knew she couldn't see it.

“Boyfriend?” He couldn’t bring himself to say the word “lover”.

“Nope.” He could tell her smile was growing by the second.

Another thought occurred to him and as much as he didn’t want it to be true, the idea turned him on nonetheless. “Girlfriend?”

“Not that I’m aware of.” He could tell Morgan choked back a giggle. “What’s with the random questions?”

Pacing, he stared out the window. “Just wondering what she’s been doing.”

“Just wondering who she’s doing sounds more like it,” she said on a laugh. “You know,” she said, suddenly more serious, “I did a reading for her a couple months ago and your card came up.”

He rolled his eyes—a tarot reading. “I don’t have a card.”

Morgan released the long suffering sigh of younger sisters everywhere. “Someday, you’ll realize I’m right. I just hope you’re not too bull-headed to admit it.”

He grinned. There was nothing Morgan liked better than saying ‘I told you so.’ “Talk to you later, sister-mine.”

“Bye jerk-face.”

After he’d disconnected from Morgan and assessed the space, he took the measurements and made a list of the materials he’d need to get from the warehouse. Following the primitive sound of tribal drumming, he went to find Temper.

His heart stumbled in his chest as he caught sight of her in the main room. She’d been shelving books—some of her merchandise, he supposed—but now she was swaying to the beat of the pounding drums. Swiveling her hips in some kind of belly dance move, she lined up titles on the shelves. Oblivious to his presence, she raised her arms above her head, exposing the smooth skin at the small her back as she undulated. The tiny bells at her ankle tinkled in time with her sinuous, sensuous motions. How would they sound when he fucked her?

His cock hardened instantly as he imagined her riding him, rolling her hips, taking

him as he plunged into her from beneath. He swallowed—at least, he tried. It was near impossible with his tongue feeling swollen and his mouth dry. He must have made a noise because she whirled to face him with a shriek—her eyes wide and her cheeks flushed with embarrassment.

“You’re done already?”

For several long moments he stared at her, not speaking. “That was the hottest fucking thing I’ve ever seen,” he finally managed to rasp.

With jerky movements, she punched the off button on the portable stereo. Silence fell like a wall between them.

Pulling the plug from the wall, she picked up the stereo and headed toward her office. “Did you get everything you need?” she asked over her shoulder.

The sight of Temperance’s rolling hips was burned into his brain for all eternity. He cleared his throat. “Not quite.”

“Oh. Okay, then. Sounds good.”

He grinned. She wasn’t even listening. Following the sound of thumping, he found her in a closet covered by a curtain of beads. Beads. Of course she had beads.

“I just remembered some stuff I’ve got to do,” she called. “Why don’t you go on to dinner without me?”

“I can wait.” Hearing her muffled groan, he smothered a laugh and looked around. Earlier, he hadn’t noticed much besides her. Now he saw a burgundy couch covered with richly colored pillows. Shelves of corked, brown bottles lined the upper half of one wall. The workspace below was covered with patterned scarves. On the tabletop lay several stones, a deck of brightly colored tarot cards—the Knight of Wands on top. He heard Morgan’s voice in his head and ignored it. He didn’t have a card, damn it, because magic didn’t exist. A mortar and pestle with crushed herbs in the bowl lay next to the cards.

He lifted up the green marble bowl and sniffed at the contents. “Is this stuff legal?”

he asked as she pushed aside the beads.

“Yes. Now put it down.” She’d schooled her expression to indifference, but the high color on her cheeks and the brightness of her eyes betrayed her.

Gray returned the container to the tabletop and lifted a bottle marked Clary Sage, and loosened the cork. Before he could smell it, she took it from his hands.

“You’re worse than a toddler.” Exasperation coated her words as she stood on her toes to replace the bottle.

“Sorry.” He grinned, not at all repentant. “It’s only way I can keep my hands off what I really want to touch.” He eyed the swell of her ass appreciatively.

The bottle clinked into place as she glanced over her shoulder at him in time to catch him ogling her and lost her balance.

He settled his hands over her hips, steadying her. “Careful,” he murmured, not missing the way her eyes widened at his touch. They were an even deeper shade than he remembered, a mossy green that darkened further as she stared at him.

Her lashes swept down, hiding her gaze from him. “Thanks.”

Without looking at him, she seated herself at her desk and busied herself sorting papers. She tucked a stray hank of hair behind her ear, baring the smooth column of her neck. He wanted to taste her there—her neck, her lips, her breasts... For a brief, crazy moment, he considered dropping to his knees and spinning her chair around. Closing his eyes, he imagined her gazing down at him as he lifted her skirt, nuzzling the sensitive skin of her thighs as he sought the sweet warmth of her pussy.

Would she cry out when he stroked her with his tongue? When he sucked on her clit? He remembered her soft whimpers as he’d caressed her breasts during that long ago kiss. Even now, her strangled cries were the sexiest sound he’d ever heard. Despite the guilt he’d felt at taking advantage of her teenage crush it was a sound he’d give almost anything to hear again.

“Temper—” he began. What was he going to say? *I’d like to fuck you until I can think*

straight again. Yeah, that was bound to go over well.

She looked at him expectantly.

“We need to talk about the classroom plans and I’m starving. Let’s go get dinner, witchy-poo.”

Tem tensed at the nickname. She knew he thought he was being funny, but it still hurt. Granted, he’d been long gone before the mockery had made her life a living hell, but that didn’t stop her reaction. She reminded herself to let the pain go since she wasn’t about to play true confessions with him and ask him stop teasing her.

The walk to the restaurant wasn’t as uncomfortable as she’d anticipated. Gray managed to behave himself while they discussed the building plans and ordered drinks. He’d loosened his tie and rolled up his sleeves, revealing beautifully sculpted forearms. Despite his business casual look, this was definitely a man who worked for a living.

As a kid, he’d built constantly—legos, scrap lumber, concrete blocks—now he’d moved on to buildings and houses. Her eyes traced the lean muscles and old scars and she wondered if the rest of his body was as perfectly chiseled. The last time she’d seen him without a shirt, he’d been maybe eighteen or nineteen with the body of a lanky kid. Even with all of his clothes on, she could tell that the man was a long way from the boy he’d been.

Meeting his eyes, she shifted in the booth across from him and questioned her sanity. This felt too much like a date for her comfort level. When his fingers brushed her hand as he passed her the menu, tingles danced over her skin—the aftereffect of his touch. For just a moment, she let herself imagine his touch on other more intimate areas of her body. She squirmed in her seat as a rush of moisture dampened her panties.

“You okay, Temper?” He stared at her, his expression intense as if he knew her thoughts.

Before she could answer, a shadow fell across the table, and she heard a voice she’d

hoped never to hear again. "Gray? Gray Foster! I can't believe it!"

Tem glanced at the statuesque blonde stroking Gray's arm and groaned inwardly. Ashley Freaking Davis. This was like some ghastly sort of spontaneous high school reunion. Would the hell never end?

"I haven't seen you in forever," Ashley purred like a cat in heat.

Tem rolled her eyes. Ashley missed it, but Gray didn't. Catching her gaze, he smirked. Ashley must have sensed his attention drifting because she glanced over at Tem.

"Temperance Callahan?" Ashley looked between Tem and Gray as if trying to figure out a complex mathematical equation. "You're together?" She said the last as if it were too incredible to be believed.

Tem blinked at the other woman and hoped her mouth wasn't hanging open in shock. It was as if Ashley had never made the emotional journey past the tenth grade.

Gray opened his mouth, but Tem beat him to it. "We're just friends. Having dinner together," she added when Ashley continued to look confused.

Gray pinned Tem with a heated gaze. "I still haven't been able to convince Temperance to date me."

Ashley's mouth opened and closed before she began giggling. "Like you'd actually date her. You're too funny."

His mouth thinned and anger brightened his eyes. This was not a scene Tem wanted to be a part of. She turned toward Ashley with the most plastic smile she could manage. "Isn't he just the silliest?"

He scowled at her before turning to glare at Ashley who was clearly oblivious.

"Well, it was good to see you, Gray." Ashley fished out a business card from her monogrammed carrying case and handed it to him before walking away. "Call me sometime, so we can catch up," she said over her shoulder.

"I can't believe her." Gray crumpled the card in his fist. "What a bitch."

Tem laughed.

“What’s so funny? Didn’t you notice the way she treated you?”

Was he joking? How was this any different from any other time she’d been forced to interact with Little Miss Perfect? “I’m used to it, Gray. In fact, this was pretty tame coming from Ashley.”

“What are you talking about?”

Sometimes Tem forgot he graduated two years ahead of her and had been off at college during the majority of her high school humiliation. “This was nothing.”

Until she’d reached high school, she’d hated the fact that she had abilities other girls didn’t. She’d hated being different. Hated the laughter and whispers. But as her abilities grew, so did her confidence—except where Ashley was concerned. She’d always managed to make Tem feel completely inadequate. It hadn’t helped that Gray had dated Ashley a few times when he was home from college.

“What did she do to you?” His voice resonated with controlled anger.

“It’s ancient history. Don’t worry about it.”

Temperance refused to meet his gaze, not wanting to see the sympathy that would probably be lurking there.

“Tell me,” he insisted.

Staring at her water glass, she traced figures in the condensation. She really didn’t want this to turn into the Temperance Callahan pity-party. “It’s in the past. I’m over it. No big deal.”

She felt his piercing gaze on her.

“It is to me.”

“It was just the typical rotten things teenage girls do to one another. You know, attacking the weakest one of the herd.”

She glanced at him and instantly regretted it. He stared at her, waiting.

She sighed. “During our senior year of high school Ashley found out I’m a witch.”

She'd had a field day with that bit of information. "She spent most of the year mocking me as often as possible, writing things on my locker and in the girls' bathrooms about me and spreading all kinds of nasty rumors. You know typical high school crap."

Tem remembered how gleeful Ashley had been in her maliciousness. She'd never seen another person who had enjoyed cruelty as much as that girl had. Of course, Tem hadn't been her only target. Just her favorite.

"I'm guessing there's more, or you wouldn't be squeezing your glass like you'd like to shatter it."

She hadn't realized she'd been doing that. Count on Gray to notice the little things. She released her death grip on her water and shifted in her seat, wiping her palms on her thighs. Fine. If he wanted to hear it all, she'd tell him.

"When I left for school on my seventeenth birthday, I discovered that someone had spray painted 'Die Witch' all over my car."

Tem's aunt had been so upset, she'd wanted Tem to stay home from school that day but like an idiot, she'd refused. Because they had to file a police report she'd arrived to school late—just in time for gym.

She glanced at Gray. Fists clenched, he leaned forward slightly waiting for her to speak.

"In the locker room, she dumped a bucket of dirty mop water over my head."

She refused to tell Gray how Ashley and her friends laughed, saying that she couldn't possibly be witch because the water hadn't caused her to melt. Morgan had tried to defend her, going as far as to throw the bucket at Ashley. Unfortunately, she missed and broke the mirror, earning herself two weeks of detention. Ashley, of course, received nothing.

"Later, in the lunch room, I stuck my hand in my purse to pull out some money for lunch. Instead of my wallet, I found a partially dissected frog." Considering she'd refused to dissect anything in biology class, finding the frog corpse had been especially traumatic. "Ashley got a lot of mileage out of the rumor that the frog was my ex-

boyfriend."

Tem shrugged and raised her gaze to Gray's. His jaw was clenched and his eyes bright with rage. Forcing a smile, she patted his hand. "It happened a long time ago. I'm over it."

"I'm not," he growled.

A knot loosened in Tem's chest. No one but Morgan and Aunt Ruby had ever gotten angry on her behalf. The fact that it was Gray only made the sensation even more acute. In the span of a few short hours, he'd gone from openly ridiculing her to wanting to defend her from the wounds of her past.

Gray's protective attitude made her feel safe in a way she'd never before experienced and his anger at Ashley was more of a turn-on than she wanted to admit. Still bright with simmering fury, his gaze bored into hers and she couldn't look away. She needed to get away from him before she begged him to take her in this restaurant full of people. Reaching across the table, he took her hand but she gently extricated it from his big warm grip. She needed the distance back in their relationship and she needed it now.

Tem grabbed her purse and fished out her key ring. Ignoring Gray's puzzled expression she slid a key off the ring and passed it across the table to him. "I just realized that there may be times you want to get in to work on the shop when I'm not there, so I thought I'd better give you the spare key. And also, I know we got off on the wrong foot, but I wanted to thank you. I really do appreciate your help and I'm not sure what I would have done —"

"Temper?"

She met his amused gaze. "Hmm?"

"You're babbling."

Heat suffused her cheeks and she looked up. His lips quirked before a full-fledged smile spread across his face taking Tem's breath away. It figured, the only man able to affect her with nothing more than a smile would have be Gray.

Gray watched the woman across from him. He liked that she drank beer from a bottle, he liked that she didn't seem to fear a basket of fries, and Holy God, he really, *really* liked the way she enjoyed her dessert. She lifted a spoonful of rich chocolate mousse to her lips and practically seduced it off the spoon. Eyes closed, she savored the flavor while he savored the sound of her slight groan as she tasted it.

Opening her eyes, she caught him staring at her and quickly scooped up another spoonful, shoving it at him. "Here, try it. It's delicious."

He grasped her wrist and guided the spoon to his mouth, caressing her soft skin at the same time. The taste exploded on his tongue, but he knew it would taste better directly from her lips...or better yet, her breasts. Did this place have to-go containers for mousse?

"You like?" she asked seemingly oblivious to his current state of needy arousal.

He nodded. "Very much."

She smiled and the dimples he knew she hated popped into view, but faded just as quickly when Ashley sauntered by their table and waved at him. Ignoring the bitch, he kept his gaze on Temperance. He couldn't believe the shit she'd been through. He was pissed – both that he'd had no idea and that he hadn't been around to protect her.

Worse, he'd dated the person responsible for most of it. Temper certainly seemed to have moved past it, but Ashley didn't seem any different from the vacant blonde he'd played tonsil hockey with all those years ago.

He stewed about it the whole time he and Temperance finished dinner. After they'd left the restaurant, they walked along the darkened streets back to the shop. A light breeze lifted Temperance's silky hair and Gray fought the urge to run his fingers through it. There was no way he was going to be able to finish this project without touching her. Of course, if he started touching her, he might not be able to finish the project.

As she stopped in front of the store, he glanced at her sweetly rounded ass as she

fitted the key in the lock. Remembering the seductive swing of her hips as she danced, he stepped behind her and settled his hands at her waist. Her soft warmth seeped into his palms and it took every bit of self restraint he could muster not to slide his hands upward to cup her breasts.

"What are you doing, Gray?" she asked, her voice strained.

"I've been dying to touch you all night."

She laughed abruptly, the sound surprising him. "Whatever."

Dismissing him, she turned the key and the lock tumbled over.

"Temperance."

She stiffened at the sound of his voice but didn't look at him. Taking her by the shoulders, he turned her around.

"It's late, and we've got a lot of work to do tomorrow, so I'll see you..." she drifted off as she finally met his gaze, her eyes wide.

He wondered if he looked as crazed and desperate as he felt. Slipping his hand beneath her hair, he cupped the back of her neck and urged her forward. The half-remembered recollection of her lips would never be enough. He had to taste her again.

"What are you doing?"

"Something I should have done a long time ago," he murmured against her mouth.

Lowering his head, he brushed his lips across hers, catching her startled gasp in his mouth. For a moment, she stood stiff in his embrace, but as he deepened the kiss, she softened. He slid his free hand around her waist and pulled her against him, reveling in the sensation of her full curves pressed to his body. She felt so much better than he remembered.

Her full lips parted beneath his and he groaned at her sweet taste. Part Temper and part chocolate mousse. It tasted so much better on her. Her few muffled groans of pleasure had affected him more than any woman in recent memory.

Sighing, she melted against him and his cock surged at the sensation. God he

wanted to be inside her. He backed her against the door and she drove her fingers into his hair, pulling him closer, kissing him as if she'd never get enough.

He stroked her body, tracing the lush swell of her hip, the curve of her waist. Her gauzy shirt rode up, baring a line of skin above her waistband and he brushed his thumb across her satiny stomach, feeling her muscles jump under his touch. She shuddered as he circled her navel with the pad of his thumb, a delicate whimper escaping her parted lips. Needing more, he cupped the curve of her ass and pulled her closer. Her sharp intake of breath told him she noticed his raging hard-on.

A car horn blared behind them and she startled in his arms, her sleepy eyes opening in surprise. He looked over his shoulder to find a carload of teenage boys yelling encouragement and practicing the adolescent boy version of sign language.

Temperance hastily disengaged herself from his embrace. "Okay...that's my cue to say goodnight." Fumbling behind her, she twisted the doorknob and stumbled backward out of his reach. A nervous smile curved her lips. "I should really get to work on Beth's spell. Thanks for dinner. I'll see you later."

"Temper, wait. We need to talk."

She shook her head. "No. No we don't. I'm fine with saying nothing. 'Night." Before he could protest, she'd shut and locked the door between them.

"Temper!"

He pounded on the wooden door frame, but she didn't stop. Through the darkened glass he watched her retreat to the back of the store. Jeez, he'd fucked that up—of course he'd had help. Frustration surged through him and he turned his glare at the kids in the car. Still laughing, they took off with a squeal of tires, leaving him alone on the darkened street.

He turned back to the door. This wasn't over. He needed to talk to Temperance. Of course, it might be better if he waited until morning. He dragged his hand through his hair. He might as well get to work on the sketches for her since he wouldn't be working on anything else tonight. Fishing his keys from his pocket, he unlocked his car door

only to realize he'd left his briefcase in the store.

He located the key she'd given him and tried to fit it in the lock. It wouldn't turn. Maybe it fit the back door he'd noticed while pacing off the storage room.

Stifling his frustration, he walked around the side of the brick building to the dimly lit parking lot in the rear where her beat-up VW bug was parked. Gray added new security lights to the mental list of improvements he'd be making tomorrow.

Descending the cracked cement steps into the covered doorway, he fitted the key in the lock. This time it turned smoothly, opening the door with a soft snick. He made his way through the dark building on silent feet. A flickering light glowed in Tem's office. Candles he guessed. Was she casting her spell already? Was he crazy? Spells didn't exist. Magic didn't exist. Either Temperance was delusional or she was a con artist. Neither option sat well with him.

Quietly, he made his way down the hallway, but as he drew even with her office, he stopped dead. Tem sat cross-legged in the middle of a glowing—glowing for fuck's sake—circle in the middle of the hardwood floor. There was no electricity running anywhere that he could see. How had she done it?

A pink light pulsed, rose from the circle and engulfed her. She held aloft a glass vial murmuring almost soundlessly. Gray's breath stalled in his chest. A darker light shimmered and seemed to radiate from her cupped hands infusing the liquid in the vial with swirling luminosity. How the hell was she doing this? He peered around the room. The only movement he saw was the flickering candle flames and the unearthly glow that swirled around Tem.

As her voice grew louder, the candle flames soared higher and there now seemed to be a starry glow surrounding her. She looked more goddess than woman—as if a part of her wasn't tethered to earth along with everyone else. Primal and beautiful, she made his entire body ache with longing. He needed to touch her. Unable to stop himself, he stepped closer. A board creaked under his foot, sounding unnaturally loud in the quiet of the night.

Temperance gasped as her eyes flew open and she nearly dropped the vial. The light around her faded suddenly like stars blinking out in the night sky and the candle flames settled to a normal glow. The remaining light in the room highlighted her damp skin as several drops from the vial slid down and disappeared into the valley of her breasts.

She rose to her feet and he noticed that the circle on the floor still shone faintly. With whispered words, she held her hand above the glimmering figure and turned slowly around. As she moved her hand, the faint line vanished as if it had never been there.

“Damn it, Gray. You ruined it.” Her eyes flashed as she stalked toward him. “Now I’ve got to start all over.” Clutching the vial in one hand, she crossed her arms over her chest. “Why are you here?” she demanded.

“I came back for my briefcase.” *And you.*

As she drew closer, he noticed her flushed skin and the exotic perfume drifting around her. It was similar to her usual scent but with a hint of something more provocative. His gaze traveled down her body, taking in her rapid breathing and pebbled nipples. In the glow of the candles her hair blazed like living flame and the light rendered her skirt nearly transparent.

He wanted to ask how she’d managed the optical illusions he’d seen but the need to touch her far outweighed his curiosity. Reaching out, he cupped her cheek and brushed his thumb across her mouth. She was so soft and warm and he wanted more—so much more.

Tem tried to convince herself to move away from Gray. She didn’t need psychic abilities to know continuing down this road was a bad idea. His midnight blue eyes pulled at her like overwhelming tide pools. Try as she might she couldn’t look away. He’d said magic didn’t exist. Sure, it didn’t. He wielded it over her right now with nothing more than the indecipherable emotion in his gaze.

Forcing herself to take several huge steps backward she corked the vial of ruined potion and set it on the counter. She'd have to try again tomorrow morning but first, she needed to ground herself and settle her nerves. That wasn't going to happen with Gray following her every move.

Sighing, she turned around. "Gray I really need you to leave. I've got a lot of work to do before tomorrow morning and I can't concentrate when you're hovering around and I really think it would be better if —"

"Temper?"

"Yes?"

"Shut up."

Chapter Three

Before Temperance could speak, Gray slipped his arm around her waist and tugged her against his chest. She took a deep breath only realizing her mistake when her sensitized breasts brushed across his shirt front. The candles around the room suddenly flared higher in tandem with her need.

Half-fearful of what she'd find, she raised her eyes to his and caught her breath. Searing intensity filled his expression as he stroked her neck with his work-calloused hand. Without warning, he lowered his head and claimed her mouth. This was no softly searching kiss, this was soul-claiming greed. His arms tightened as he pressed her to his body, deepening the kiss, sweeping inside her mouth, stroking every inch of her.

Wrapping her arms around his neck, she drew him closer, pushing against the hard planes of his glorious body. The moisture she'd successfully battled earlier, flooded back with a vengeance, readying her body for more. For him. He tunneled his fingers through her hair, tilting her head to give him better access. He dragged his lips from hers, along her jaw and over her neck leaving trails of desperate need in his wake. He inhaled deeply, as if he could pull her within him. "You smell so damn good."

His words prodded some semblance of sanity to surface within her. "Shit!" Pushing at his chest, she shoved until he lifted his head.

"Hmm..." he rumbled. "That's not the usual response to my kiss." He lowered his face and began nipping at her collarbone. "Apparently, I need to work on it."

"You don't need to work on anything." She shoved at his chest again. "It's the spell, you idiot! You'd never want me if you weren't under the influence of an enchantment."

That got his attention. "Have you forgotten what happened at the door a few minutes ago? He frowned. "Besides, there's no such thing as magic."

She hadn't forgotten—like she'd ever forget a kiss like that—but it had been a

momentary aberration. It could have even been a pity kiss to bolster her confidence after the things she revealed about Ashley. She wouldn't put it past him. He'd always been the caretaker type. She doubted that much had changed since the last time she'd seen him.

Undeterred, he resumed kissing her neck, sliding his hand from her waist up inside her loose top. His hands were so big and warm, stroking her back igniting a firestorm of want spiraling through her. He felt so good. She considered letting him continue, but the thought of the disappointment she'd see in his eyes when the spell wore off was the dose of reality she needed.

She tried to ignore the bliss of his mouth on her neck and his hard body pressing against her. "Gray—listen to me," she choked out. "You interrupted the culmination of the spell. Instead of acting on Beth, it acted on me when it spilled."

A slow, sexy smile curved his lips. "The only thing that was interrupted was us."

Her knees turned to Jell-O and her stomach fluttered wildly. She was in so much trouble. Shaking her head, she tried to pull away from him, but he held her fast, his erection making itself known. Her traitorous body responded. It wanted Gray. A fresh rush of moisture damped her core and she squirmed in his arms, every nerve ending on high alert.

Expertly, he turned so her back was flat against the wall next to the couch and he pressed against her length. His hand slid over her hip to her waist and up higher to skim the outer curve of her breast. She shivered in response to the subtle caress.

"Gray, please..."

"I plan to, Temper." He flashed a wicked grin. "I promise, you'll be very pleased."

She needed to ground herself, to release the energy that bounded through her body and find a counter spell before something more than a kiss happened. Maybe if she reasoned with Gray. "You don't want me."

His eyes narrowed in provocation and she swallowed thickly.

"The hell I don't," he snapped.

"It's just the effects of the spell. It should wear off soon."

He continued to scowl at her but didn't release her.

"Everything will be back to normal then," she insisted.

"No."

"Excuse me?"

"Fuck normal," he growled.

She caught her breath at the anger in his tone.

"I've had a constant hard-on for you since high school and never could do a damned thing about it. He laid his forehead against hers, holding her gaze steady. "I think it's about time to fix that." His hand moved constantly under the back of her shirt, caressing her skin as if he craved the feel of her.

"When I jacked off, you were the star of every fantasy." He punctuated his statement by thrusting his rock hard arousal against her mound. When she whimpered at the sensation, he did it again.

Closing her eyes, she imagined him wrapping his hand around his cock and stroking upward. *While he was thinking of her.* Although she highly doubted his daydreams included his sister's pudgy friend, it was nice to hear.

"Are you picturing it?" he murmured against her lips. "Are you imagining what it was like? Every time I got myself off thinking about you?"

A strangled cry clogged her throat.

"It got even worse after that night," he continued. "That night? When I finally kissed you? Felt your nipples hardening under my fingers? Do you remember that, Temper?"

She nodded, unable to look away from his hooded gaze. Oh yeah, she remembered all right. She'd never forgotten the feel of his hands on her body. More than anything, she wanted to feel them again.

"What were...what did you..." her cheeks burned as the half-formed questions tried to escape.

"What did I imagine?" His voice wove a silky web, winding around her. She nodded, sensing he was about to trap her in his words but she couldn't fight her way free of the seductive pull of his voice.

Instead of answering, he followed the line of her neck with his lips, before dipping to the base of her throat where he tasted her pulse with his tongue.

"I imagined you," he murmured against her throat, "down on your knees with your gorgeous lips stretched around my cock."

A barely audible "Oh," was the only response she could manage.

His hand slid from her back over the curve of her bottom, tracing the crease where it met her thigh, settling his lips at her ear. "Then," he breathed, "I pictured slamming my cock into your tight, wet pussy."

Arousal ripped through her, weakening her knees and she clutched at his shoulders. Much more of his verbal seduction and she'd come on the spot.

"Of course, now I imagine different things." He trailed his lips over her cheek to hover above her mouth.

"Like what?" She couldn't have stopped the question if she wanted to.

He lifted his head until he immobilized her with his gaze. "Like stripping that skirt off your body, laying you back against your desk and burying my face in your pussy until you come screaming my name."

If he didn't do more than talk, she would scream. It was clear that the spell had Gray firmly in its grasp and it wasn't letting go any time soon. Would it be such a bad thing if she gave into it? Well, Morgan always said never look a gift fuck in the mouth. Tem was pretty sure she wasn't talking about her brother, but oh well.

"Gray?"

He looked at her expectantly as she gripped his tie.

"Shut up," she growled and pulled his face to hers.

He covered her lips on a groan, sliding his fingers up her neck and tilted her face, coaxing her lips open. Molding her mouth, he kissed her with an overwhelming hunger. No one had ever kissed her like she was more important than breathing and she wanted more. Even if it wasn't real.

As soon as he realized his desire was nothing more than a magically enhanced response, she'd regret yielding to it. Until then she'd take what she'd always wanted. What he seemed more than willing to give.

A strangled moan vibrated in her throat as he cupped her aching breast. He tormented her engorged nipple, rolling it between his thumb and forefinger before pinching sharply. The momentary pain gave way to biting pleasure as he swallowed her surprised cry.

Releasing her mouth, he tugged on her shirt. "I need to see you."

She shook her head, knowing she'd never compare with his past lovers. She wouldn't be able to bear his look of dissatisfaction when he saw her body.

He cupped her face with both hands and forced her to meet his gaze. "I won't let you hide from me, Temper. Not now."

She bit back a sigh. Would it really matter if she took that extra step and allowed him to see her? It would all be one giant regret soon enough. She had the feeling her heart was already a lost cause where Gray was concerned. What was a little more pain combined with the rest? She was screwed any way she looked at it—she might as well enjoy it.

Nervously, she raised the hem of her shirt and bared her midriff. Sucking her stomach in, she lifted the fabric a little higher. Gray splayed his big, warm hand over her belly and a shudder raced along her limbs at his touch. She needed more. As it was, her body wept for want of him. She allowed him to take the material from her nerveless fingers and he pulled the shirt off over her head and tossed it on the floor.

She glanced at her bra, grateful her nicest one had been clean this morning. Swollen

and needy, her nipples jutted forward, pushing at the cream-colored, silky fabric. With a practiced motion, he released the clasp at the back. Gray's heated expression was almost more than she could bear as he slid the straps off her shoulders to drape over her arms as he removed it completely.

Instinct and shame dragged her hands to her breasts but he caught them, refusing to let her cover herself. He gazed at her like a starving man and heat swept through her body at his expression.

"So fucking beautiful," he breathed as if he wasn't aware he spoke.

Snaking an arm around her waist, he dragged her against him as he lowered his head to draw her tightened nipple into the warm depths of his mouth. He suckled, pulling repeatedly on the sensitized flesh.

She hardened further under his tongue and a taut line of need contracted between her breasts and pussy, tightening with the damp heat of his mouth and the play of his hands on her skin. Grabbing handfuls of his hair to hold him in place, she arched her back and pushed against him, demanding more without words. He complied, sucking harder, his fingers finding the drawstring at her waist and tugging it.

Tie released, her skirt fluttered to the floor leaving her in nothing but her panties. Gray dropped to his knees and dragged an open-mouthed kiss over her belly. "Your skin is so damn soft."

His tongue darted into her belly button before his lips brushed across her silk-covered mound.

She shuddered at the contact, gripping his shoulders to keep her balance.

Repeating the motion, he groaned. "You smell even better than that perfume you're wearing." He nipped at her through the fabric, pressing his tongue into the crease of her cleft. His fingers curled into the waistband of her panties, brushing the upper curve of her ass. Frissons of need threaded through her, as her body begged for more. The muscles in her womb pulled tight, readying for the storm to come. The storm she needed more than her next breath.

He dragged the fabric down her legs, his blunt nails gently scraping the backs of her thighs and calves. Sitting back on his heels, he just stared at her, his eyes hooded, his expression unreadable.

Oh God. Panic flared to life. He regretted this already. He'd gotten an eyeful of her and wanted to bail. She needed to get out of here before embarrassment moved her to tears. She kicked off the panties but before she could step around him, he settled his hands on her hips. He lifted his eyes to hers and she saw the raw hunger there.

"I should have known my fantasies hadn't done you justice," he breathed as he skimmed her damp curls with his fingertips. Without warning, he wrapped his arms around her thighs and dumped her onto the couch.

She landed with a shriek, her legs draped open. She tried to scramble to an upright position, but he was already between her thighs, keeping her exposed to his predatory gaze. Holding her captive with his eyes, he slid his fingertip through her cream and parted her folds.

Never breaking eye contact, he lowered his head. "Do you have any idea how long I've waited for this?" he asked, his voice gravelly with need.

She shook her head unable to form words as he smoothed his hands over the insides of her thighs. Trembling under his palms, she stiffened as he spread her with his thumbs, sliding through her moisture.

"Too damn long," he said, finally answering his own question. He tasted her with a swipe of his tongue. Hot, wet and so good against her sensitive flesh. Squirming, she wished he'd do it again.

"More?" he asked, even though he damn well knew the answer.

She nodded.

"I want to hear you say it, Temper."

Gray needed to know she was as desperate for him as he was for her. Marveling at

this twist of fate, he drank in the sight of Temperance's gorgeous body spread out like an offering. While he waited for her response, he hovered above her pussy, dying to taste her again, but he'd wait. He'd wait until she told him what she wanted. Even if it killed him.

He gazed at the dark red curls framing her glistening folds, hardly daring to believe he finally had his little witch where he wanted her. He fought the urge to smile, unsure what surprised him more—the fact that he'd started thinking of her as a witch or that he'd started thinking of her as his.

He slid his hands over her amazing hips, up her torso to brush the curve at the undersides of her lush breasts. She shivered at his touch, her nipples tightening further. He'd been right. They were the same raspberry-ripe color as her full, luscious lips. He rolled the taut peaks between his fingers and thumbs, watching her eyes glaze with arousal, as he waited for her answer.

Her teeth sank into her lower lip as he held her gaze. She opened her mouth to speak, but swallowed as if she couldn't get the words out. Finally, she cleared her throat. "I need more." Her cheeks pinkened with embarrassment.

"What do you need, Temper?" Gray asked even though the wait was killing him.

She squeezed shut her eyes as if she couldn't bear the connection any longer. "I need your mouth on me," she choked out.

Goddamn good enough for him.

Inhaling her sweet scent, he circled her clit with the tip of his tongue. Her cries resonated within him and he wanted to hear more. He wouldn't stop until she came against his mouth.

Lapping at her sweet, fevered flesh, he slipped a finger inside her tight cunt. Her ass rose off the couch when he added a second and she shuddered, clamping down on him like a vise. God, he could only imagine how her body would feel around his cock.

As badly as he wanted to know, he wouldn't let himself find out until he'd wrung every bit of satisfaction from her beautiful body. And she was beautiful whether or not

she agreed with his assessment. Judging from the way she'd attempted to cover herself, she'd argue the point. Swirling his tongue around her clit, he vowed to spend as much time as necessary to convince her otherwise. As often as it took.

He swiped his tongue through her swollen, pouting flesh, groaning at the fresh rush of juices. "You taste like heaven."

A strangled moan sounded in her throat as he pumped his fingers deeper, reveling in the moisture that drenched his hand and his lips. "I could do this forever," he murmured against her skin.

Eyes closed, she tangled her hands in his hair, holding him where she wanted him. Her muscles quivered as he drove her need higher. She pulled his hair so fiercely it stung, but he wouldn't stop. He wanted her to fly apart, to come harder than she ever had before—to feel what it meant to be truly desired. He wanted to be the one to give her that.

Sucking her clit between his lips, he flicked his tongue across it, treasuring every breathless cry, every thrust of her hips.

"Please, Gray. *Please*, I need you to fuck me."

His balls pulled up tight at the desperation in her voice. Yeah, he needed it too. But he needed her release more.

"Not yet, sweetheart."

Her thighs tightened and she arched against him. Getting closer, she cried out in frustration, her body quivering with tension, with the need to climax. A current of energy seemed to shimmer along her skin seeping into him. He added a third finger to the ones plunging into her body and sucked harder on her clit. Temperance screamed his name and stiffened as her pussy contracted sharply around him, milking his fingers and still he continued. He lapped and suckled at her until the tremors that rocked her body diminished into shivers.

He raised his head and stared at her. Panting, she slowly opened her eyes and for a moment he lost himself in their green and gold depths. "Do you have any idea how

fucking beautiful you are?”

She shook her head as a short, harsh laugh escaped her lips.

“What?” he demanded as he brushed her clit with the pad of his thumb, enjoying the shudder that slithered over her.

She smiled, but it didn’t reach her eyes. “Nothing. I was just thinking that I make pretty good potions.”

“Are you implying that the only reason I’ve had my face buried in your sweet cunt is because of your damn spell?” Not giving her a chance to answer, Gray yanked his tie from his neck and began unbuttoning his shirt.

Temper shifted and made a grab for the loosely woven blanket on the back of the couch, but he tugged it from her hands and dropped it to the floor. “I don’t think so, sweetheart.”

Stripping off his shirt, he let it fall from his fingers. He watched her face as she stared at his chest, desire obvious in her expression. Rising to his feet, he opened his fly and freed his cock, her small pink tongue darted out to moisten her lips. He gripped his rock-hard shaft, sliding his fist up to the head listening as her breathing quickened.

“This is *not* the effect of a spell,” he enunciated. “This is me needing to be inside you.”

She watched mesmerized as he stroked himself.

“This has been going on a hell of a lot longer than tonight.” Soon enough she’d discover that none of this was temporary. Gray stood between her legs, stroking his cock watching Temperance’s eyes dilate as her gaze climbed upward to finally meet his. Scooting to the edge of the couch, she settled her hands on his hips and pulled him closer. Anticipation knotted his stomach as she dragged her fingertips toward his erection. A moment’s hesitation flashed through her eyes before her hands wrapped around his aching length.

Before he had a chance to question her uncertainty, she dropped soft kisses over his

stomach and hip and the need to have her mouth wrapped around his cock dulled every other thought. Her teeth sank into her lower lip as she explored his cock with her small pale fingers. She traced every vein, every ridge, reaching back to cup his balls, weighing them in her hands. She held his gaze as she knelt on the floor in front of him. Leaning forward, she swirled her tongue around the head, before engulfing him in the hot, wet recesses of her mouth.

She gripped the base of his cock and slid forward taking him as deeply as she could. As she moved up and down his length, sharp ribbons of pleasure streaked up his spine in time with her insistent tongue. Had it ever felt this good before? He'd had plenty of good head, but nothing compared to the feel of Temperance's soft mouth drawing on him like he was better than chocolate. Rhythmically squeezing him, she leaned back and looked up at him, her eyes dark with desire. "Is this living up to your imagination?"

"Almost," he choked. He slid his hands into her hair, revealing her face and guided her mouth back to his cock. Licking her lips, she opened for him, taking him even deeper.

"In my fantasies, I could always see your face as I fucked your mouth."

She whimpered and the vibration nearly made him come, but he managed to hold back. He loved the way her lips stretched to accommodate him.

He began to thrust faster, her eyes closed and she groaned around him. The sound shuddered its way along his cock and he gasped. As she sucked him deeper, her cheeks hollowed and she increased her rhythm. Digging her short nails into his ass, she urged him still deeper. God, the way she took him was almost more than he could stand.

"Temper," he gritted, tightening his hands in her hair. "Stop."

Tem's gaze rose to Gray's and she shook her head. She had the power now, she wasn't about to let it slip through her fingers—or through her lips as the case may be. Relaxing her throat, she took him deeper, her fingers trailing through the silky hair over

his stomach to his groin. His abdominal muscles flexed and trembled with every pull of her mouth. She wanted to push him over the edge like he'd done to her.

She watched him as she devoured his cock, loving the satiny slide of him over her tongue. His eyes closed in languorous bliss and his head dropped back. With satisfaction, she watched his Adam's apple bob as he swallowed thickly. He seemed unaware of the fact that his hands had fisted in her hair pulling painfully. The pain quickly morphed into pleasure at the realization she'd brought him to that level of need.

He groaned and tried to pull away from her. "Temper, stop!"

She dragged her lips from his erection. "No." Resuming her study of his body, she took as much of his huge cock into her mouth as she could.

"I'm serious," he grated, his voice bordering on pain. "I'm too close."

She drew hard, flicking her tongue over the hooded edge of the wide head and he shuddered, his breath hissing through his clenched teeth.

"Enough!" He yanked her to her feet, making her head spin with the sudden motion. He toed his shoes off, baring the rest of his mouth-watering body as the rest of his clothes followed. She wasn't done exploring him — not by a long shot.

Temperance opened her mouth to speak, but he covered her lips and stole every thought she'd ever had with his clever tongue. He pressed her to his body, his rock-hard erection throbbing between them and she whimpered, frantic to feel him inside her. For years she'd wished for at least one night with him, but she'd never imagined it would actually happen. Perhaps fate had intervened on her behalf, gifting her with a spilled spell and stolen time. She was finished fighting Gray. She'd have this one night with him and they'd both move on.

His hands roamed over her body, driving her desire for him higher. Everywhere he touched, eruptions of need flared and she trembled in his arms. If he affected her this strongly with a simple touch, what would it be like when he was buried inside her? Needing more, she dragged her fingers from his muscular thighs over his slim hips to

caress his tightly muscled abdomen. Leaning forward, she spread open-mouthed kisses over his chest, flicking her tongue over his nipple, hardly daring to believe that she had her hands on Gray's naked body.

Splaying his hands through her hair, he forced her head back and nipped at her exposed neck. Shivers coursed through her at the sensation of his teeth on her flesh. He nibbled his way up to her ear.

"I wanted to take my time with you—to fuck you long and slow like I've always wanted to, but I can't wait any longer. I need to be inside you. Now."

Gray slipped his hand under her ass and pulled her toward him lifting her off her feet. Clinging to his broad shoulders for balance, she let him lower her to the couch. Kneeling between her spread legs, he palmed her aching breasts. She arched into his touch wanting him inside her more than she'd ever wanted anything in her life.

Reaching behind himself, he grabbed his pants, fumbling for his wallet. *Condom.* She'd been so crazed with need, she wouldn't have remembered if it had been up to her. The entire time he stared into her eyes, never looking away even as he smoothed the necessary protection over his cock. His gaze caressed her body like a slow burn and she shivered under his scrutiny. For once in her life she felt truly beautiful. She knew it was nothing more than the effect of the spell but for these few moments, it didn't matter.

Her breath stalled in her chest as he covered her with his body, nudging her thighs apart. Nervous anticipation trembled through her belly as the wide head of his cock prodded her opening. How long had it been since she'd had sex with anything other than her vibrator? She knew Gray was far bigger than her toy, but she needed him now. Her body had never felt so empty before, and she knew he was the only one who could make the feeling go away.

"Don't go slowly," she gritted out. "Just fill me. Please."

Staring into her eyes, he did as she'd asked. With a single thrust he slammed himself home, rubbing his pubic bone against hers. She cried out as her body struggled

to adjust to the invasion. She shuddered, loving the way he filled her, stretched her, completed her.

He smoothed the hair from her face, his eyes bright with worry. "I'm so sorry, sweetheart."

She shifted against him, urging him to move within her. "For what?"

His stricken expression didn't abate. "For hurting you."

"You didn't." She laid her hand alongside his cheek, hoping he couldn't see her blush in the low light. "That was a satisfied noise."

Slowly, he pulled back, his smile wicked. "Let's see if we can make some more then."

Her body gripped him mercilessly as he began to thrust in and out. "Christ, Temper," he groaned. "You're so tight I can barely move." His jagged voice raked over her, winding her tighter.

The exquisite friction was almost unbearable as their pace increased.

"I'm not gonna last. You feel too damn good." Slipping his hand between their bodies he tapped sharply on her clit. "Come for me, sweetheart, and I promise the next time will be better."

Next time? The thought was impossible to hold. The sensation of his throbbing cock pounding into her mixed with the stimulation on her clit was almost more than she could bear. When he drew an aching nipple into his mouth, she was lost. Body shuddering, she bucked wildly against him, her pussy rippling, clutching, drawing on his cock. Her ankle bells jangled a frantic accompaniment to their joining. He groaned around her nipple, shafting her faster, fucking her so hard she couldn't remember what it was like *not* to have him inside her.

A second release washed over her as he stiffened, thrusting one last time. Eyes closed and breathing heavily, he laid his head on her chest and she stroked his hair, glad he hadn't pulled away, yet. Despite what he'd said about next time, the spell

would likely wear off any minute. She'd take whatever precious time together they had left before he realized his mistake and her heart broke into a million little pieces.

Gray lifted his head and stared down into her eyes, a soft smile playing over his lips. "That was amazing." He stroked her cheek and dropped a gentle kiss on her mouth. "No. *You're* amazing."

Tem's heart squeezed in her chest. He didn't mean it. Not really. It was just the spell-laden sandalwood talking. She forced a smile. "You're pretty fantastic yourself."

He slowly withdrew, leaving Tem's body aching empty.

"How about if we bring our mutual admiration club upstairs to your apartment?" He nuzzled the valley between her breasts, nipping at her tender skin. "I have plenty more fantasies, I'd like to explore—including a brand new one," he added with a wink.

Her breath hitched. He still wanted her. She stared into his eyes weighing her options. What would be stupider? Risking the pain of his realization or missing out on the best sex of her life. No matter what, he'd realize his feelings weren't real. That wouldn't change anything.

Would it be so awful to take a chance? It would last as long as it lasted and she'd have to be satisfied with that. Yes, her heart would probably end up broken, but better broken than empty.

* * * * *

Apparently lacking the most basic of motor skills, Tem fumbled with her keys, trying to unlock her apartment door while Gray stood so closely behind her, his body heat seeped into her skin.

What was she doing?

The reality of what was about to occur sank in on her. Letting Gray inside would only end badly. She'd already let him inside her body and she feared her heart would soon be breached if she didn't end this now. Leaning her forehead against the door, she tried to form the words she needed to say to convince him to leave.

He swept her hair off her back, sending a shiver of anticipation down her spine. Lowering his face, he dropped kisses over the curve of her bare shoulder up her neck to the sensitive skin behind her ear. As she lost herself to the tremors he started, he plucked the key ring from her hand and unlocked the door.

“Gray, I—”

He turned her to face him and cupped the back of her head. Slowly he lowered his face until his lips hovered above hers. “I want to make love to you in a bed. I’d like to take you home with me, but...” A wry tone colored his voice. “I think we both know I’d never last that long.”

More importantly the spell might not last that long. She took a shuddering breath. She could push him away if she really wanted to—tell him to leave—but damn it, she didn’t want to.

“I need you, Temper,” he whispered brokenly as he crushed her to him.

What had she done? He didn’t need her. Not really. This was what came from meddling with another person’s free will. It had been an accident, but that didn’t change the fact that he was under the influence of an enchantment. A little voice in the back of her mind reminded her that it didn’t have to end. She could always reapply the potion and reactivate the spell.

No. She wouldn’t do that to him. When it ended—and it would—she’d let him go and deal with the consequences. But for now, she sank into his embrace and let him walk her through the open door and into her darkened apartment.

Chapter Four

Gray dropped their clothes and kicked the door shut as he pressed Temperance's lush body to him, his cock already responding to her tempting heat. He stroked her full curves, loving the way her softness cushioned him. He was so tired of dating women who were afraid to eat a cheeseburger. Being able to count a lover's ribs wasn't a big turn-on in the sack. Delving into the hot sweetness of her mouth, he realized there wasn't anything about Temperance that didn't excite him.

Sliding his hand up her body, he cupped her breast, thumbing her nipple as she arched into him. Molding her flesh in his hand, he bent his head and drew the pebbled nub into his mouth feeling the flesh crinkle against his tongue. Her needy cry tightened the knot of desire coiling in his groin.

He couldn't wait to make her come again. The sound of her husky voice crying out his name had been the most arousing thing he'd ever heard—except when she'd begged him to fuck her. That had been even hotter—and damn him if he didn't want to hear her beg again.

She drove her fingers through his hair, her nails abrading his scalp, and pulled his head tight to her breast. "More," she demanded. "Please, Gray."

Was she always this responsive or was it just with him? A stab of possessive lust surged through him at the thought of Temperance pressing herself against another man. Since when did he care about a woman's past lovers? Since he started thinking about hers.

Determined to be the only man she thought about, he drew hard on her nipple and trailed his fingers over her stomach to skim over her tight, damp curls. He slipped his finger through her slick cleft, playing over her weeping pussy. God, he needed to be inside her again. Her tight, grasping cunt was the best place he'd ever been. Hell, it was

the only place wanted to be. Possibly for the rest of his life.

A panicked thought occurred to him. Releasing her nipple, he dragged his gaze to her eyes. "Christ, Temper, please tell me you've got condoms."

He wasn't sure which answer he dreaded more. If she didn't have them, he'd have to wait that much longer to bury himself inside her. And the longer it took, the more he worried she'd change her mind. Damned if he'd give her that chance.

She worried her lower lip with her teeth and he fought the urge to soothe it with his tongue. She took a deep breath and pulled from his arms. "I really hope so."

He followed her through the maze of boxes as she made her way to the bathroom. Light from the streetlamp shone through the windows, highlighting her creamy skin. Snapping on the light, she squinted as she searched the medicine cabinet. Gray peered over her head, suppressing a grin at the plethora of cruelty-free, environmentally friendly lotions, shampoos and God knew what else.

Temperance muttered curses as she rummaged through every cupboard and shelf. He could tell the moment inspiration hit. She darted around him into her bedroom, her ankle bells jingling. The soft tinkling reminded him of how violently they'd rung as he'd pounded into her earlier.

She pulled a large cardboard box from a closet shelf and set it on the floor, pawing through it. Unable to bear their separation even a moment longer, he knelt on the rug behind her and ran his hands over the bare skin of her back before moving to cup her breasts. Tugging and plumping her nipples, he dragged open-mouthed kisses down her spine before swirling his tongue over the sexy little indentations above her shapely ass.

"Gray!"

"I'm right here, sweetheart."

"I know," she groaned. "You're making it impossible to focus."

Ignoring her squirming, he touched her, whispered in her ear, told her every fantasy he'd ever had about her, all the while thrusting his cock against the crease

between the rounded globes of her ass. She shuddered and he wondered if she'd ever taken a man there. If she'd take him there.

"Ah-ha!" She brandished a box of condoms at him. An *unopened* box of condoms. "I hope these aren't past their expiration date."

He almost hoped they were. *Almost*. He took the box from her hand and tore it open. "What? No environmentally friendly protection? I'm surprised."

"Bite me."

Placing his hand in the center of her back, he shoved her to her elbows. "Gladly." He sank his teeth into the upper swell of her hip, loving the fresh rush of cream that drenched his fingers as he stroked and teased her folds.

"I love seeing you like this," he breathed. "On your knees, your ass up in the air, waiting for me to plunge my cock in your tight little cunt."

Her sharp intake of breath punched him in the gut. Holding her steady with his hands, he thrust his tongue into her damp, heated passage, groaning when she drew on him with her internal muscles. Bowing her head to the floor, she swayed against him, canting her hips toward his face. As she rocked back and forth, he pushed a finger inside her moist channel, adding a second when she started to tremble.

The rug twisted as she clawed at it, her pace increasing. Slicking his thumb with her juices, he spread it over her anus, pushing ever so slightly at the puckered area. A low keening cry tore from her as he circled the opening with the pad of his thumb and added a third finger to the digits plowing in and out of her rippling cunt.

"Gray!" Her hips never stopped pumping as her keening cry rose above the sounds of her wet, needy flesh. Her scorching pussy gripped him as the tremors finally slowed then stopped.

Disappointment was a low growl in her throat as he withdrew his hand from her body. Ass still high in the air, she looked back over her shoulder at him at the sound of the tearing foil. He'd never seen anything more provocative than the expression on her face.

"I know I promised you a bed, sweetheart, but I have to be inside you now. Watching your gorgeous ass bob in the air was almost too much. You have no idea how close I am to exploding all over you."

"Hurry," she whispered. "I need you."

Holding her hips he knelt behind her, prodding her entrance, desperate to enter her. With no warnings and no preliminaries, she slammed herself backward, engulfing his cock in her taut passage. Heaven—he was in heaven. "God, Temper," he groaned, unable to keep from speaking.

Long past the point of any sort of finesse, he shafted her mercilessly, pounding into her body. The rhythmic, wet slap of his balls against her pussy meshed with the tinkling bells around her ankle as he fucked her.

"Harder," she cried. "Harder, Gray, please."

Complying, he placed his hand in the center of her back, holding her to the floor as he drove into her. Sensation pooled in the base of his spine, tingling and spreading outward as her climax bore down on him. Her cunt milked him, fisted around him and she cried out her release. Pleasure streaked upward to explode at the base of his skull as he emptied himself into her body.

Slumping forward, he covered her, his chest to her back, feeling her frantic heartbeat and erratic breathing. Kissing the ridge of her spine, he tasted the damp sheen of perspiration that clung to her skin. Slowly, he withdrew and disposed of their protection. Lifting her in his arms, he rose to his feet.

"Put me down," she demanded as she struggled. "I'm too heavy. Are you trying to get a hernia?"

He smiled down at her. "Shut up, Temper."

She stilled as their gazes met and he laid her on the unmade bed, her pretty green eyes widening as he lay down beside her. She stared at him as if searching for answers to questions she refused to ask.

Tossing the box of condoms on the bedside table, he pulled her into the shelter of his arms and dragged a patchwork quilt over their bodies. He wanted—no needed to hold her. He needed this connection with her. She turned toward him, tracing his face with her fingertip as if she wanted to memorize his features. Why did that thought twist his gut? If she thought this was the end of this thing between them, she was sadly mistaken.

He trailed his finger through the valley of her breasts. “I can’t seem to keep my hands off you.” He grinned. “I have no idea how I’m going to get any work done tomorrow.”

Temperance glanced away from him. “I won’t be here.”

“What? Where are you going?” he demanded. What the hell was his problem? Before today, he hadn’t seen her in years and now he couldn’t stand the thought of being away from her.

“There’s a merchandise show in Chicago. I’ve got to drive down and pick out the rest of the stock I need to order so it will be here for the opening. I’ll be back on Monday afternoon.”

Two days. Two days without Temper. Without warning, he quickly straddled her body and pinned her arms above her head. “You should know I’m seriously considering tying you to this bed to keep you from leaving.”

He didn’t miss the flash of excitement that flared in her eyes. Glancing around, he spotted a scarf draped over a lampshade. He snatched it and quickly wrapped it around her wrists securing them to the headboard’s spindles.

Tem tugged experimentally at the bindings, unable to contain the moan that welled up within her. She’d imagined being tied up, but she’d never trusted a man enough to allow it. Biting her lip, she suspected she’d let Gray do anything he wanted to her. Judging from the self-satisfied smile on his face, he knew it, too.

Sitting back on his heels, he surveyed her. She glanced down her body, noticing the

way her breasts were pushed together by this bound position. Raising her eyes, she met Gray's, stunned by the urgent need she saw there. His heated gaze traveled over her body like a slow burn and she arched under his perusal.

He leaned forward and shoved her breasts together, sucking and scraping at each nipple until she cried out. Drawing his hands down her body, he spanned her waist before smoothing over her hips. "If you're going away, you need something to think about while you're gone."

Sliding his finger through her sensitized folds, he pinned her with his gaze. "You need something to look forward to when you get back."

She swallowed thickly. There would be nothing between them when she got back.

Gray dragged open-mouthed kisses over her body until she writhed beneath him. This was so much better than anything she'd ever imagined. Prowling up the length of her body, he stared down at her as he reached over to turn on the bedside lamp.

"No!"

Too late. She closed her eyes against the brightness. The last thing she needed was for Gray to see her in the light. Every lump and flaw would be visible. Every extra pound would be highlighted. Granted, she'd been naked when they'd made love in her office, but there had been nothing more than flickering candlelight. Now she was bound and could do nothing to hide herself. She grimaced. The sight of her would probably dissipate the spell quicker than anything else.

He settled between her spread legs. "What's wrong?"

"I don't like the light on," she admitted, eyes still closed.

He tenderly stroked her cheek. "Why?"

She sighed and turned her face away. "I don't want to see your disappointment when you see...me."

"What? Why would you think I'd be disappointed?"

Exasperated, she opened her eyes. "I'm fat, Gray."

"No, you're not," he growled, "but you *are* an idiot."

Her gaze flew to his face and she noticed his hardened jaw. He looked as if he had clenched his teeth. "I happen to love your curves. I love burying my face in your full breasts. I love the way your body cradles me when I fuck you."

"I'm already naked and willing Gray," she said, trying to redirect him. "You don't have to try and sweet talk me into anything."

He scowled at her. "You're beautiful, Temperance."

"It's just the —"

"Don't you dare say spell," he interrupted. "It's not the goddamn spell. It's me wanting you — just like I always have."

Her heart clogged her throat at the tenderness she saw in his eyes and she wished she could trust that he truly meant it.

His face softened as he gazed at her. "I'll turn off the light if you really want me to but I'd prefer to leave it on. I've been waiting a long, long time to see you like this."

"Naked or tied up?"

A wicked grin spread across his face. "Both." He trailed his fingers along the underside of her arm, sending shivers through her.

She felt him harden against her thigh and need fluttered through her belly. How could he want her again?

He reached for the condoms. The box fell to the floor along with something else that clattered on the hardwood planking. Leaning over the side of the bed, he retrieved the fallen items.

"What's this?" he asked as he dangled an object above her head.

"A pendulum." She watched as the inverted moonstone teardrop spun lazily on its chain above her head.

"What's it for?"

She sighed, expecting yet another argument about metaphysics. "Divination."

He held the small moonstone sphere at the top of the chain between his thumb and forefinger. "How does it work?"

"You ask questions – it answers."

He stared at her, clearly waiting for more of an explanation.

"It swings one direction for yes and another for no. You can also use it to find people or things."

He trailed the cold stone across her lips and down her neck. "I can think of another use for it."

"Oh?" She caught her breath as he moved the pendulum to dangle above her breast. The point began spiraling wildly around her rapidly hardening nipple. He licked at her flesh and then blew as the chilly gem tormented her.

"It definitely looks like it's working, don't you think?"

"I guess that depends on what you wanted to know," she choked out.

A predatory glint brightened his eyes. "I asked it if you want me as much as I want you."

Holding the sphere in one hand and the teardrop in the other, he dragged the fine silver chain back and forth over her pebbled nipple. She shuddered under the cold friction of metal on flesh. Her eyes closed as she arched into his ministrations. It was a good thing she was lying down. The things he did to her made her weak.

Her eyes flew open as she felt him coil the chain around her nipple. Holding her gaze with his scalding stare, he tugged at both ends of the chain, cinching it around the sensitive nub.

"Gray!" she groaned, struggling against her bonds. She wanted to touch him – needed to touch him.

He pulled the chain harder before sucking her nipple into his mouth. He drew on it with firm suction, tugging the metal restraint in rhythmic accompaniment. Sensation rioted through her body and her cunt clenched desperately wishing he was buried

inside her already.

She rocked against him, thrusting her hips, begging him wordlessly to fill her. The wide, thick head of his cock brushed her slick, swollen flesh, taunting her. He continued tormenting her with the pendulum, nuzzling her breast with his stubble-roughened face, drawing even harder on her nipple. She'd have whisker burn, but at the moment, she didn't particularly care. She doubted she'd care come morning either.

"Gray, please...I need you."

"You've got me, sweetheart," he mumbled against her skin.

Yeah, she had him. At least for the time being.

Uncoiling the chain, he slid down her body to lie between her spread legs and dangled the pendulum above her aching pussy. The moonstone arced wildly, hitting her clit, sending currents of energy tingling through her with each strike. She'd never felt anything like it.

He watched her through heavy-lidded eyes, his hunger apparent as he traced the line where her legs and body met. Shivers shot through her as he repeated the caress. He slid the pulsing gem through her folds to gently circle her clit. Could he feel the energy, too? Did she care?

Spreading her with his thumb and forefinger, he traced intricate figures over her aching flesh with the stone. The chain rasped across her clit and her wordless cry filled the room. Her hips canted toward the ceiling as he did it again and again. Need coiled her womb as she begged him to fill her, to fuck her, but he refused.

"You're almost there, sweetheart. Come for me."

Lowering his head, he sucked her clit between his lips—chain and all. The suction combined with the gentle scrape of the links on her sensitive flesh threw her headlong into savage, pulsing bliss. He held her hips as she thrust against him crying out her release. As the tremors slowly dissipated, he lifted his head and stared at her. Lips shiny with her juices, he nuzzled his way up her belly, until his cock was nearly where she wanted it.

Still holding the pendulum, he traced her lips with it, then moved downward to spiral the stone around her nipples. Back and forth, he moved from one swollen nub to the other while she urged him forward. While she watched, he lifted the translucent white stone to his lips and licked her essence from it. "You taste so good, Temperance."

Desire sang through her veins at the expression of pleasure on his face. "I can't wait any longer," she gasped. "Please don't make me wait."

He rose to his knees and she thanked the universe that the light was on. Tight and engorged, his thick cock had risen to his muscled abdomen and she wanted nothing more than to take him into her mouth. He wrapped his hand around the hard base and stroked upward.

"See what you do to me?" he breathed. Bright heat reflected in the dark midnight of his eyes as he stared at her. All the while, Gray's gaze bored into hers and she found she couldn't look away.

What *she* did to *him*. She would have laughed if her body weren't crying out for him. His muscles rippled and tightened as he continued to stroke himself. Need coiled in her womb as she watched a silky drop of fluid leak from the head. She licked her lips as she stared at him, gratified when she heard the breath catch in his chest.

"Fuck me already," she demanded.

Finally, he let the pendulum fall from his fingers. Holding her gaze, he grabbed a condom from the box and sheathed himself, dark purpose shadowing his face. Hands on either side of her, he covered her with his long, hard body. She spread her legs wider, welcoming him into her, groaning as he finally pushed into her with an urgent growl.

He stayed still and stared at her as if she was all he could see. The expression on his face was so fervent, so intense she could almost believe this thing between them was real. Knowing this would be the last time, the beginnings of tears burned her eyes but she blinked them away.

"I need to touch, you," she whispered.

Tenderly, he loosened the knot that bound her wrists to the bed. The muscles in her arms burned slightly as she lowered them, but the discomfort vanished as soon as she touched him. She ran her hands down his sides, determined to memorize the weight of him against her, the sensation of him inside of her, the sinuous movement of the muscles under his skin.

She rocked against him, needing him to move. Slowly, he withdrew. Her body clutched at him and she bit her lip to keep from whimpering. With a purposeful lunge, he propelled himself forward coming to rest deeper inside her than she'd thought possible. Digging her fingers into his backside, she urged him to thrust faster.

He shook his head. "Not this time, sweetheart. I'm going to take you long and slowly just like I've always imagined."

His voice, dark and sensual, wove a hypnotic spell of carnal longing—a spell from which she might never recover. She strained toward him, kissing the firm column of his throat, tasting his skin, wanting more than he was giving her. Wanting far more than it was possible for him to give.

"You feel so good," he groaned as he slid forward, filling her with his wide, thick heat. "So tight around me."

She arched against him driving his cock deeper still, loving the sensation of being utterly filled by him. Her nipples tightened into aching peaks as his chest hair abraded them and still she couldn't get enough. She wrapped her legs around his waist, changing the angle of contact, bringing him closer still, but no matter how close he got it would never be close enough. None of this was real.

Staring down at her, he glided through her rapidly gathering cream, picking up speed. Tightening his fingers in her hair, he claimed her mouth in a desperate kiss. He kissed her like he'd never stop, filling her mouth, mimicking their straining bodies.

"Don't hold back," she breathed, closing her eyes. "I need all of you."

On a groan, he thrust harder. Over and over he drove himself into her, his muscles quivering with the force of his momentum. "Look at me, Temper. I need to see your

face when you come,” he gritted out.

She opened her eyes only to be pinned by his feral gaze. His jawed clenched as if that was the only thing keeping his passion in check. There was nothing more arousing than the way he looked at her like she was all he’d ever wanted. The beginnings of release tremored through her womb.

“So fucking beautiful.”

Shudders racked her body at the sound of his tight, rough voice. All the while, he whispered her name like a mantra. Her body contracted, convulsing around his cock and she cried out. Inflamed by her reaction, he thrust harder still. When he threw back his head on a groan, another mind-numbing orgasm washed over her in dizzying waves that swelled and pitched around her.

Chapter Five

Still breathing heavily, Gray stared down at the woman in his arms. When he'd woken this morning, he never would have imagined he'd actually end up in Temperance's bed. Okay, so he'd imagined it plenty of times over the years, but he never actually thought it would happen. Unable to keep the smile from his face, he gently brushed her deep red curls from her eyes.

Closing his eyes, he remembered the way her hair flowed down her back to swish over the top of her ass as she'd danced earlier.

"I can't get that image of you dancing out of my head."

She blushed profusely and looked away. He turned her head back to face him.

"I want you to dance for me sometime." He swallowed thickly remembering the seductive sway of her hips and flexed inside her. "I want you to ride me. I want to see your body while you slide up and down the length of my cock, swiveling your hips and coming all over me."

Her breath caught and her small pink tongue darted out to dampen her lips. "I don't do that."

"Don't do what? Dance in front of people or ride your lover?"

She looked away. "Both. I'm too self-conscious to do those things."

"Why?"

She raised her eyes to his, emotion softening her gaze. "I think we covered this before, Gray. I'm fat."

His heart turned over at the vulnerability he saw in her. "I love your body." He'd almost slipped and said something else, but the panic he saw in her face as he'd said the word "love" had him changing his approach. There would be time enough to convince

her of that later. "I can't get enough of you," he added.

She pressed her lips together and he knew she was thinking about that damn spell again. She might be content blaming this explosion of need on the spell, but he knew better. If it was a spell, he'd been under it for years – not minutes.

Unease prodded him as he remembered the weird pink glow he'd seen around her earlier. Hell, maybe he'd imagined it. "Was I hallucinating earlier?" he asked, tracing the lines in her palm with his fingertip.

"Nope. We definitely had sex."

He rocked against her, shoving his still hard length farther inside her. Satisfied with her full-body shiver, he grinned. "Yeah, I was pretty clear on that." He dropped a soft kiss on her lips. "I was talking about the weird pink glow in your office."

Her brow furrowed and she cocked her head to the side. "You could see that?"

"Bright pink and floaty – it was kinda hard to miss."

Absently, she trailed her fingers over his shoulders and back. "Very few people actually have the ability to see the release and direction of magical energy. *I can't.*"

He frowned at her and she smoothed her fingers over his forehead.

"I can feel it," she clarified, "but I can't see it. You must have abilities similar to Morgan's."

"Are you saying my sister is a witch?" He hadn't meant to sound so dismissive, but she'd surprised him.

Instead of shoving him away as he'd expected, she smiled but her eyes were sad. "No, she's not. But she has plenty of psychic abilities."

He opened his mouth, but she laid her hand over it. "Watch and tell me what you see." She closed her eyes and turned her hand with a twisting motion, at the same time the air around her shimmered and the lamp by the bed turned off with an audible click. That was definitely not his imagination. No other part of her body had moved and it wasn't like she'd used that clapper thing.

Temperance closed her eyes and placed her hand, palm-side up on the pillow next to her head. She murmured quietly with words he couldn't quite make out and honey-colored light coalesced into a shimmering orb that hovered above her cupped hand.

Shock momentarily stole his ability to speak. "I see a ball of golden light."

He didn't bother trying to disguise the awe in his voice. Powerless to stop himself, he reached out and touched it. It dissolved like a soap bubble, but instead of dissipating into the air, it penetrated his skin. Tingling currents flowed up his arm to spread through the rest of his body, permeating him, imbuing him with a sense of well-being he'd never before felt.

"What the hell was that?" he breathed, even though he already knew the answer. Magic—plain and simple. There was no other explanation. Guilt twisted his gut. He'd mocked Temper. Dismissed her abilities. Dismissed her. He was a—what had she called him? An asshat. That was it.

He looked into her sleepy eyes. "I'm so sorry," he murmured.

She smiled and laid a hand on his face. "I know."

Slowly withdrawing, he disposed of his condom and pulled her sleeping form snug into the curve of his body. There were so many things he wanted to ask her—so many more things he wanted to apologize for. For now, he let her sleep. There would be plenty of time—they had the rest of their lives.

* * * * *

The shrill ring of his phone startled Gray from sleep. In Temperance's bed. She'd dragged the pillow over her head to drown out the ear-piercing noise. Fumbling for his pants, he pulled his cell phone from the belt. "Foster."

Listening, he dragged his hand through his hair. "All right. I'll be there as soon as I can."

Damn it. He'd overslept and now one of his biggest clients waited at his office for their scheduled meeting. He tugged the pillow from his little witch's head and kissed

the nape of her neck. "Temper, I have to go."

She rolled over clutching the sheet to her breasts and stared at him warily—regarding him as one might an injured pit bull.

"I'd really like to see you, tonight," he began, unsure of how to erase the mistrust from her eyes, but desperately wanting to.

She looked away briefly before meeting his gaze again. "I'll be in Chicago."

He hadn't remembered that she had to go pick out her stock. Damn it. He didn't want to be away from her for that long—but they both had businesses to run. And it was only two days.

She pressed her lips together, watching him. Where was the woman who'd screamed out her releases? Who'd gouged his back with her nails while her cunt milked him mercilessly?

"What's wrong?" he asked.

"Nothing," she answered too quickly. "I'm just tired."

"Do you regret last night?" He was almost afraid to hear the answer, but he had to ask.

She shook her head rapidly as if she didn't trust herself to speak.

"Good." He lifted her chin and kissed her until she clung to him, breathless. When he finally lifted his head, the guarded expression was gone from her eyes. "I want to see you when you get back," he said.

Pulling from his embrace, she scooted out the other side of the bed and pulled on her clothes as quickly as possible. "Well, of course I'll see you. It's not like you're going to be finished with the renovations before I get back."

God, he hated her emotional withdrawal.

As she smoothed her skirt into place, she bumped into her bedside table and the pendulum fell to the floor. He snatched it before she could reach it. Holding it in the air he watched it spin. He could still hear her cries of passion as he'd tormented her with it.

Temperance's gaze darted between the stone and his face. If her pink cheeks were anything to judge by, she was thinking about the same thing. Winking at her, he slipped it in his pocket.

"Hey!"

He grinned. "I think I'd better hang on to this for a while. You never know when something like this will come in handy."

Rolling her eyes, she left her apartment. He followed her down the stairs to the store, buttoning his shirt as he went. He was already late—what were a few wrinkles on top of that? He considered the possibility that he may lose this client, but that paled in comparison with what was developing between him and Tem.

He made a detour to her office to look for his tie and briefcase. Neither had made it upstairs with the rest of his clothes. Knotting his tie, he headed for the front room where he heard Tem talking to someone.

"What do you mean you gave the potion to Beth?" she demanded, her voice suddenly shrill.

"Well, you weren't exactly available, now were you?"

Temperance let loose with a string of curses.

"Sheesh...for someone whose name means restraint, you're doing a pretty piss-poor job of it."

Gray bit back a groan. He'd recognize his sister's voice anywhere. He moved to stand in the doorway in time to see Temper flipping off Morgan while his sister pointedly examined Temperance's appearance.

"So...who were you unavailable with?" Without waiting for her to answer, his sister added, "And might I add, it's about damn time you got laid."

Temper sighed and Gray wondered if she'd own up to sleeping with her best friend's brother.

"Don't you have a job?" Temperance evaded.

Disappointment crawled through him. Ridiculous though it was, he wanted to hear her admit it. As he walked toward the women, his phone began ringing again. Tem and Morgan both whirled to face him – Temper’s face filled with horror and Morgan’s with glee.

“Foster,” he answered. “Yeah. I’m on my way. I don’t know – stall him.”

Disconnecting, he pocketed his phone and dropped his briefcase at Temper’s feet. He slipped his arm around her and pulled her into his embrace. She stiffened, but he ignored it, lowering his head to claim her lips. Her mouth opened, whether to return his kiss or yell at him, he didn’t know. Or care. He took advantage of her parted lips, savoring her taste as he explored her mouth. She softened against him twining her fingers through his hair and pulling him closer as the kiss deepened.

His cock surged to life at the sensation of her lush body pressed to him. He wanted nothing more than to drag her back upstairs and bury himself inside her again and again. He wanted to hear her scream his name as she came. He wanted to throw her skirt up and take her on the floor right there, right now.

“Look, it’s not that I don’t appreciate the show you’re putting on, but this is so much more than I ever wanted to know about either one of you.” Morgan had always been a pain in the ass but never more so than today.

He lifted his head and stared into Temperance’s eyes, relieved that she didn’t immediately pull away. “Call me when you get to Chicago so I know you got there safely.”

Her teeth sank into her lower lip. He couldn’t help himself, he had to nibble at it himself, laving his tongue across the sweet flesh.

“Oh geez, you two! Get a room.”

Temperance smoothed her hand over his shoulder. “You should get going. You’re already late.”

“You’ll remember to call me?” he asked.

She nodded. It wasn't a profession of undying love—but it was a step in the right direction.

Tem watched as Gray pulled away from the curb before turning to face Morgan who stood with her hands on her hips and black hair loose around her shoulders.

"Well...it's about time you two got it together. Mom is going to be thrilled! And so will your Aunt Ruby and—"

Tem swallowed past the sudden lump that clogged her throat. "It's not what it looks like."

Morgan's dark eyebrows rose in obvious disbelief. "Deny it all you want, but your pink and red aura says different."

Great. Pink was the color of love while red was sexuality and passion. Just what she freaking needed.

"It's not real." *The spell!* "Where's Beth? Do you have her number?"

Morgan's brow furrowed in confusion. Tem didn't blame her. The conversational leaps were likely impossible to follow.

Morgan began digging through her purse. "Probably... somewhere...what's the big deal? What does this have to do with you and Gray?"

Tem sank to the hardwood floor and leaned her head against the display case behind her and closed her eyes. "Beth wanted a sex spell."

"Okay."

"Last night while I was casting it, Gray startled me and I spilled a little on myself." She looked pointedly at her friend. "We ended up on the couch in my office and then upstairs—"

Morgan put her fingers in her ears. "Whoa there, girlfriend. Back up the T.M.I. train."

Too much information. That was hilarious coming from Morgan. The same Morgan

who'd told her in excruciating detail about nearly every encounter. *Whatever.*

"Besides the fact that I don't want to think about my brother in that context, what's the problem?"

Tem sighed. "It's not real—at least not for him. When it wears off, he'll realize what a mistake it was and everything will get awkward and..." She couldn't complete the thought. It was getting too hard to breathe.

"And you'll end up miserable with a broken heart," Morgan finished.

Tem nodded and tried to blink away the sudden tears that filled her eyes.

The other woman sat next to her and put her arms around her. "You don't know that's how it's going to turn out. Don't you remember that reading I gave you? The Knight of Wands—don't you see? That's Gray!"

"No, it's not. That was the other contractor." The jerk who'd gotten her in this mess in the first place.

"Okay, so he may have had some of the same characteristics—but I think he represented more of the shadow aspects. Think about it," Morgan pressed. "That guy was cocky."

Despite the ache in her chest, Tem laughed. "And Gray's not?"

A wry smile curved Morgan's lips. "Point taken, but remember, each characteristic has both positive and negative characteristics. Yeah, Gray's cocky sometimes, but he's also extremely self-confident."

Tem had to concede that her friend was right. Closing her eyes, she tried to remember the other aspects of the Knight of Wands archetype. Charming, adventurous, passionate. Those traits certainly described Gray. Especially passionate. God, the way that man touched her. Even now, her body responded to the thought of him—ached for him. No matter how long she lived, she'd never find another lover like him.

"And where that guy was irresponsible and reckless Gray is super conscientious," Morgan continued. She frowned. "Well, I guess he can be reckless sometimes, but he's

got way more positive aspects than that loser did."

Tem dropped her head in her hands. "Even if the card referred to Gray, the reading was about hiring a contractor not about my love life."

When Morgan didn't respond, Tem raised her head. The sadness in her friend's eyes said everything that needed saying.

* * * * *

Tem sighed as she parked in the lot behind Mystic Circle. Her cell phone was ringing. Again. It was probably Gray. She lifted it from the passenger seat of the car and read the display. *Beth?*

Even though she hadn't answered a single one of his calls over the last two days, she was perversely disappointed that it wasn't him. She was insane. That was the only explanation. No, it wasn't insanity – it was self preservation. If she hadn't safeguarded her heart by distancing him, she'd fall head over heels in love and when he lost interest like he had with every other relationship he'd ever had, she'd be devastated. Pushing her foolishness aside, she answered the phone.

"Hey, Beth."

"Ohmygod, Tem! I'm so glad you answered. I've been dying to talk to you."

Tem sighed. She needed to own up to the mistake she'd made with the spell. "I'll make you a new potion as soon as I'm able. I can't tell you how sorry I am about this whole thing."

Beth laughed. "Why? Why are you sorry? I've just had the most amazing experience of my life."

Shock punched Tem in the stomach. "What?"

"Seriously, girl – that stuff worked like a charm." She laughed again. "Which makes sense, you know, 'cause it was."

It worked? If it worked then maybe Gray had been right after all. Or, maybe it just happened to work on both of them. She'd never had that happen before. Usually her

spells were person specific.

“In fact, it worked so well that I, ah...I, um...” Beth laughed nervously. “It attracted two guys.”

“Really?”

“Yeah, so I, ah...ended up with both of them.”

“At the same time?” Tem tried to keep her voice neutral, but it was near impossible.

“It was amazing. Absolutely amazing.”

Tem’s breath caught as she thought of Gray and their amazing sex for the zillionth time that day. Shaking off the errant thoughts, she focused on Beth. “I’m glad it worked so well for you. So will you be seeing them again?”

The other woman paused for a moment and Tem wondered if she’d overstepped her bounds.

“Nope. I got that particular itch out of my system. I think it was just a one-time aberration.”

A knowing sensation tickled across the back of Tem’s neck. She had a feeling that Beth wasn’t rid of those two—not a by a long shot, but she kept her premonition to herself. After all, Beth had her own path to follow.

After disconnecting the call from Beth, Tem hauled her suitcase out of the car and unlocked the store. As she walked into the back room, she nearly tripped over a huge pile of lumber. Looking around, she noticed several stacks of drywall—stacks that hadn’t been here when she’d left. With a sense of impending dread, she dropped her suitcase and walked toward the front room.

Seven antique tables and a roll-top desk she’d never seen before were lined up in front of the bookcases. Some tables had marble tops, others had intricately carved clawfoot bases—they were all gorgeous. Something peeked from the one of the desk drawers. Crossing the room she removed several pieces of paper from the drawer.

Her jaw tightened as she read and her head began to pound. Shipping invoices—all

marked "Paid in Full" by Foster Construction.

It had been bad enough that she'd had to ask for help with the construction. She wasn't about to compound it by having him bail her out financially. It didn't matter that the funds wouldn't be a hardship for Gray. His company was well-respected, not to mention prosperous, but she couldn't stand the idea of taking his money. Taking his charity. Especially after what had transpired between them. It was unacceptable.

* * * * *

Tem sat in her car in front of Gray's office and weighed her options. She could barge into his office in full-on bitch mode or she could try to act like a rational adult and have a civil discussion. The truth was, she didn't like either choice. She'd rather go home, crawl into bed and forget about everything.

As much as she'd missed Gray, she didn't want to see him. The pain of knowing that the man she loved had only wanted her because of some misdirected magic was too much. He'd probably still been under the influence when he'd paid for everything – and now she was going to have to figure out a way out of this mess without getting her heart shredded any further in the process. Standing in front of the door, she gathered her anger in front of her like a shield and entered the lobby.

A cute, petite blonde sat at the receptionist desk, further confirming Tem's suspicions about Gray's preferred type of woman. She'd been nothing more than an anomaly in his life.

"Hi. Can I help you?" the receptionist asked.

Clutching the invoices in her hand, Tem forced a smile she was nowhere near feeling. "I need to speak with Mr. Foster, please."

"He's in with someone now. Would you like to wait?"

"It's urgent," Tem added.

The woman frowned and tapped her hot pink nails on the desktop. "What's your name? I can let him know you're here."

“Temperance Callahan.”

Tem studied the photographs of completed buildings as well as the awards Foster Construction had received while she waited. No sooner had the woman hung up the phone, than a door flew open.

She turned to see Gray, followed by Ashley Davis. Ashley Freaking Davis. Her heart sank to the floor and stayed there. Fire in his eyes, he crossed the room to her and grabbed her by the shoulders.

“Where in the hell have you been?” He’d barely finished speaking when he crushed her to him. “You didn’t answer your phone.”

Was it possible the spell never affected him at all? She wanted so much to believe it, but she didn’t dare. “I—”

Covering her lips with his, he cut off her response. He swept past her defenses, delving into her mouth kissing her as if he was laying claim to her—body and soul. Unable to stop herself, she kissed him back, losing herself in the taste of his mouth and in the warmth of his arms.

Slowly, he raised his head and stared into her eyes. “Don’t *ever* do that to me, again.”

For a moment, she couldn’t quite remember why she’d been so angry with him, but then the invoices crinkled in her hand. “We need to talk.”

“So, Gray...about that offer,” Ashley interrupted. “I’d really like to have you come out and take a look at my property.”

Yeah, I just bet you would.

“Sorry, Ashley,” he said, not looking away from Tem. “I’m not accepting any new clients.” He nodded toward the receptionist, “Michele can get you a referral if you’d like.”

“That won’t be necessary.” Ashley left in a huffy cloud of designer perfume and Tem fought the urge to laugh. The urge vanished when she remembered why she was

here.

Gray took her hand and pulled her toward his office. "Michele, please hold all my calls." He glanced at Tem with a wicked grin. "And ignore any noises you might hear."

"Nice," Tem muttered under her breath.

As soon as the door shut behind them, he pinned her between the door and his body. "God," he groaned as he trailed kisses down the side of her neck. "It feels like years since I've seen you."

She shoved at his chest. "Stop it, Gray."

He cocked an eyebrow at her. "Temper...temper," he scolded with a smile. Pulling back, he bracketed her between his arms, his hands on either side of her head. "What's wrong?"

"What's wrong?" she echoed, shaking the invoices at him. "What's wrong is that I got back to find you'd ordered a ton of stuff I have no way to pay for. And don't even say it."

His brow furrowed. "Say what?"

"That you've covered it. You promised me you wouldn't get extra stuff."

A mischievous grin quirked his lips. "No. I promised not to argue about it. There's a difference."

She crossed her arms over her chest. "You'll have to take everything back—the building supplies and the tables." Unable to quell her curiosity, she asked, "What were those for, anyway?"

He kissed each corner of her mouth, teasing her with barely there touches. "I know you love antiques as much as I do, so I thought you might like to exhibit the merchandise on them. I can still build display shelves, if you'd rather have those, though."

Tem swallowed past the giant lump that tried to clog her throat. That was quite possibly the most thoughtful thing anyone had ever done for her. "I'll find a way to pay

you back.”

His expression softened as he gazed at her. “Shut up, Temper,” he murmured, his tone gentle.

Letting the invoices flutter to the floor, she wrapped her arms around his neck and pulled him to her. He kissed her hard and deep, letting his hands roam under her shirt, caressing her bare skin. Nothing had ever felt as right as being in his arms did. She’d been miserable without him for the last two days. Reaching behind her, she fumbled for the lock on the door and secured it.

“I never realized how sexy that sound is,” he murmured as he bent to nip at her breast through her lightweight top.

“We’re not done discussing the store,” she warned.

“Fuck now. Talk later,” he groaned as she cupped the hard ridge of his cock through his pants.

Hastily, she loosened his belt and opened the fly, pushing his pants down his thighs. Yanking down his boxers, she dropped to her knees and took his cock into her mouth. He drove his fingers through her hair and guided her up and down his shaft. “God, Temper, I need you.”

She froze momentarily at his words. Before she could continue, he toed off his shoes, shucked his pants and yanked her to her feet. He began bunching the fabric of her skirt, baring her legs.

“Please don’t tell me you *still* think this heat between us is the result of that spell,” he practically growled as he dragged her toward his desk.

“I think what you feel for me *is* the spell.”

He stroked the flesh of her thighs, trailing his fingertip along the edge of her panties. “And what about what you feel for me?”

She swallowed hard. “What I feel for you?” she parroted.

He bit the space where her neck met her shoulder and then laved his tongue over

the spot. "I'm not saying that magic doesn't exist," he murmured against her skin. "But this is something different. This is about you and me—not some smelly oil and pretty lights."

"I wish that was true." Unbidden, her conversation with Beth came back to her. Was it truly possible that the spell worked on Beth as intended and this thing with Gray was real? As much as she might want to believe it, she couldn't let herself trust.

He managed to release the closure of her skirt and it fluttered to the floor at her feet. Sitting in the chair, he pulled her to stand between his legs and released the tiny buttons on her shirt and slid it off her body. He trailed open-mouthed kisses over her stomach as he reached behind her to unhook her bra. Baring her breasts, he pulled a pebbled nipple into the heated torture of his mouth while palming the other breast with his hand.

Tem arched into his touch, letting his desire wash over her, glide through her body like the sharp rush of moisture that dampened her panties. He stared up at her with a look of absolute adoration in his eyes and she nearly cried.

"Aren't there ways to tell if someone is under a spell like this?" he asked as he continued to torment her body."

She tried to focus on his words, but it was next to impossible when he trailed his fingers over her rapidly dampening mound. "Yes," she finally managed.

"What are they?"

What are what? Right...the signs. She took a deep breath. "The obvious one would be the sudden unexplained attraction."

Laughing, he pulled her closer. "This attraction is neither unexplained nor sudden. Like I said the other night, I've wanted you for as long as I've known you. Even when you wore raccoon eye makeup and dyed your hair that nasty shade of black, I wanted you." He rolled her nipples between his thumb and forefinger, watching her face. "And, I bet if you're honest with yourself, you'll admit that you've wanted me for longer than the last couple of days."

Scowling at him, she ignored his last point. "Then there's the energy flow when the spell was released."

"You mean like that weird tingly feeling I felt when I touched that glowing ball you held?"

"That's the one."

He shook his head. "Didn't happen."

"What?"

"Well it happened the other night in your bed," he conceded, "but not when you were in your office."

"You didn't feel any physical sensation then?"

"Other than my desperately throbbing cock? No."

"Nothing?"

"Well, there was the intense urge to bury my cock inside you and fuck you endlessly, but that's just a side effect of being anywhere near you."

Her body clenched, damp with want. If it wasn't the spell—*especially* if it wasn't the spell—she had to end this now before her love for him grew any stronger. He'd leave her just like he'd left every other lover he'd ever had. "Even if this," she gestured loosely between them. "Even if it isn't because of the spell, I can't let it go any further than this."

She made a grab for her skirt but he tugged the fabric from her hands. "Why the hell not?" he demanded.

She smoothed her hand over his cheek. "You don't do relationships, Gray. You never have. I need more than that." She swallowed past the lump that had lodged in her throat. "I might survive having my heart broken now." *Yeah, right.* "But I'm not sure I would later."

His face hardened. "Did it ever occur to you that maybe the reason I haven't had a long-term relationship is because none of those women were you?"

She looked into his eyes and her heart leapt into her throat. She wanted so badly to believe him – to trust this feeling that bloomed in spite of her fear.

He gripped her shoulders. “I am *nothing* like my father,” he added, knowing her fears. “I only want one woman, Temperance.” Tenderly, he pulled her into his arms and held her as if she was the most precious thing in the world. “I only want you.”

She might not be able to see auras like Morgan could, but she could read him. He meant what he said. She pushed him against the back of the chair and unbuttoned his shirt, tugging it from his body. His underwear followed.

He’d bared his soul to her and she wanted to do the same for him but the words wouldn’t come. Instead, she’d use her body to show him how she felt – to show him her trust and love. She’d give him something she knew he wanted from her, something she’d told him she wouldn’t do. Standing in front of him, she closed her eyes and began dancing to the beat she heard in her head. Slowly, she rotated her hips, imagining Gray touching her while she moved. Satisfied, she heard his breath catch in his throat as she swiveled. Her eyes flew open as his hands settled at her waist.

For a moment, she panicked as the old insecurities surged forward, but when she saw the heat in his eyes the anxieties melted like old snow in the spring rain. She slid off her panties and let them fall to the floor. Bracing her hands on his shoulders, she straddled him, grinding her wet cleft against his rock-hard cock.

“I thought you didn’t dance in front of people,” he whispered, his voice strained as he searched her face.

“Things change,” she gasped as he thrust through her folds.

He circled her clit with the pad of his thumb. “And some things don’t.”

When she peered questioningly at him, he lifted her, sliding into her pussy on a determined thrust. “Let me tell you what’s not going to change.”

It was almost impossible to focus with the sensation of his thick cock filling her.

“I’m always going to think you’re the sexiest, most beautiful, most exasperating

woman I've ever met."

He flexed inside her and she braced herself on his shoulders, staring into the midnight blue of his eyes. She couldn't look away even if she wanted to.

"I'm always going to want you. Not just today or tomorrow, but always. We belong together." He drew sharply on her nipple before continuing. "I love you."

Words filled her head, but she couldn't make sense of any of them.

He smiled wryly. "I think I've always loved you and that's not going to change. Ever."

Joy more intense than anything she'd ever felt spread through her and tears burned her eyes. "I love you so much," she whispered.

"That's not going to change, either," he rasped as he pushed deeper, staring into her eyes.

She shook her head. "No, it's not."

Banishing her feelings of inadequacy, she rose up the length of his cock before taking the long, tight slide downward. His midnight blue eyes glowed with hunger as she rolled her hips, undulating around him.

Before today, she never would have believed that love was stronger than magic. Leaning forward, she took his mouth, pouring everything she couldn't say into her kiss and surrendered to the spell they'd both been under since the day they'd met.

About the Author

Bronwyn lives in Michigan with her wonderful husband, two amazing sons and seven somewhat-psychotic cats. When not tormenting her characters, she can usually be found helping with reading and writing projects in her sons' classrooms as well as providing child care and tutoring for several daycare children. Besides writing, she also enjoys reading, knitting, sewing, cross stitching, pottery, drawing—basically anything that helps her avoid cleaning and cooking.

Bronwyn 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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