





# **MIDNIGHT SHOWCASE**

## **Erotic-aah Digest Vol. 05-07**

**A Spellfire Christmas Digest**

**Spellfire Seasons**

**MIDNIGHT SHOWCASE**  
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**WELCOME TO  
SPELLFIRE, TEXAS**

*Where things aren't what they seem, no—  
they are so much hotter!*

*The Second of the Spellfire Collections*

**A Spellfire Christmas Digest**

**SPELLFIRE SEASONS**

In Spellfire, Texas, many seasons abound and are believed in at this very special time of the year. Some of them are specific, some are only once a year, and then some seasons can last for what seems like an eternity in Spellfire. Yet, paranormal beings and creatures with passionate natures will make every season in this remarkable town very unique and memorable. Enjoy the loving and sensual surprises within the mysterious realms of a unique place, written by these imaginative writers.



***Elves, Bells, & Mistletoe, by Jennifer Metz***

What if Santa was real and he had a very attractive, very single son named Nikolas? Seductive Secrets Boutique owner Mandy Stockholm is about to find out as Spellfire is overrun with disgruntled elves on strike. Now the two must work together to get the elves back to the North Pole and save Christmas.

***Mistletoe & Mayhem, by Emery LaRue***

Garland Mayhem is not quite sure what to expect returning home to Spellfire, Texas. Visions of a beautiful woman call to him, and he feels her inside his heart. Once he lays eyes on her, he sees the true meaning of love, and learns just what he truly is.

***Eid al-Fitr, by Ann Regentin***

A Muslim couple Feisal and Salwa started out in love but became dishonest in an effort to protect each other from their “baser” impulses. Now they are haunted during the festival nights of Ramadan by two djinn, who fulfill the couple’s every unspoken and forbidden fantasy.

***Spirit's Bells, by Tamara James***

Running from an unsavory pack leader, werewolf and artist Spirit Tredmane seeks sanctuary in her cousin Electra's hometown of Spellfire. Gavin thought his dreams of finding his true-mate would never happen, until he bumps into Spirit, and his mind begins to dream of a home and pups of his own.

***A Statue For All Seasons, by Mae Powers***

For over a hundred years Georgiano McMillan’s spirit was cursed into a statue that stood in the middle of Spellfire Park, season after season. He hated Christmas and never thought his curse would ever be lifted, until the town librarian shed her inhibitions late one wintry night.







# **Elves, Bells & Mistletoe**

**By  
Jennifer Metz**

Incredible. Insane. Surreal.

Mandy stared at the black budget book sitting in front of her, analyzing and reanalyzing her sales figures from the course of the last twenty four hours. If her mathematics proved correct, she'd nearly tripled her profits, making more money in two days than she typically did in two months.

In complete bafflement, she raked her shaking hands through her hair, pulling it back into a makeshift ponytail. Seductive Secrets Boutique began as a pipe dream, but the tiny lingerie shop in the heart of Spellfire, Texas, looked like it may make a full recovery if the business continued to boom during the holiday season. Once women opened up their Christmas packages and discovered the quality garments she carried within her store walls, they would surely flock back by the dozens. She could picture it now. Bras and panties, negligees and bustiers flying off the shelves faster than she could possibly restock.

Her prices rivaled the biggest department stores and she carried a far cry more in variety. Women of all shapes and sizes felt welcome in her shop, which catered to the true inner beauty, and enhanced what nature generously or not so generously endowed these women with. The boutique offered free fittings and expertise service on a one on one basis, whereas the larger stores struggled to keep up with the volume of customers filing through the doors every hour.

Yes, Mandy definitely offered the women of Spellfire something more, and the confidence she had lost throughout the previous months of poor business began to flood back. She would prove her parents wrong, as well as all of the others who doubted her choice in careers.



One look at this week's profit was enough to make even the biggest cynic swoon in disbelief.

A loud knock sounded at the front door of the boutique. She glanced down at her watch, noting the store didn't open for another hour. "Who in the world..." Mandy pushed away from her desk and walked toward the front of the store, quickly recognizing her best friend through the glass door. Immediately, she knew something was wrong as Katastrophe hopped from one foot to another, stopping every few seconds to peer in before continuing her ridiculous chicken dance.

Mandy turned to lock and pushed the door outward, motioning Kat to enter. "What's going on? You look like you've seen a ghost."

"Well, something like that. I don't have time to explain so come on." With a firm grasp, Kat wrapped her slender fingers around Mandy's wrist and dragged her out onto the sidewalk.

"Let go of me Kat! Have you completely lost your mind? I have to open up shop in an hour and with the way business is going, I don't want to be one second late." Mandy tried to pry her own fingers underneath Kat's but the girl's death grip proved too strong. She felt herself being dragged down the sidewalk and towards the center of town, to wherever or whatever Kat deemed so important. "At least tell me what in the world is going on."

"Elves...on...strike." The words came out in a labored huff as Kat continued to pummel forward.

"What!? Look Kat, I don't have time for this. I normally don't have a problem with your antics, but not when my business could be in jeopardy."

Her crazed friend stopped and spun around, letting go of Mandy's wrist and planting her hands firmly on her hips. Her left foot tapped with impatience while her glaring stare spoke in an increasingly angry volume. "Mandy, do you notice anything out of the ordinary today?"

"Spellfire is always out of the ordinary, and you are this town's biggest kook."

"I'm serious." Kat's nasal tone began to take on a most annoying whining affect. "The Christmas parade was scheduled for this morning, but do you see any floats? Any crowds of people?" Her arms gestured wildly about.

"The parade!" Mandy smacked the palm of her hand against her forehead and groaned. "I was supposed to go over to my parent's



house this morning and help them finish up their float for the grocery store.”

“Well sister, there isn't going to be a parade and there isn't going to be any Christmas either.” Tears formed in the corner of Kat's eyes.

“Don't cry Kat. I certainly don't believe in elves, but if it means that much to you sweetie, I guess I can open a few minutes later than need be.” Mandy wrapped the trembling girl in her arms and squeezed before backing away and taking hold of her hand. “Now show me whatever it is that is so important.”

Mandy tried to sort the multitude of thoughts rushing through her head as she led her friend toward Town Square. Kat may be a lot of things, but a cry baby was not amongst them. Something awfully serious had her shaken up, but elves? Spellfire overflowed with paranormal activity, including vampires, mummies and witches, all beings long deemed myths by the modern world. Elves pushed the envelope too far, however, suggesting that Santa Claus did exist, and that thought proved downright hysterical. She tried to picture a fat man in a red suit flying across the sky with his eight tiny reindeer leading the way, but laughter continued to bubble to the surface and she quickly pushed the mental slide show to the side.

Kat wiped a trembling hand across her face, smearing away the last of her tears. “I know I shouldn't cry over something so ridiculous, but with having the baby and all, Christmas means that much more to me.”

“Can you honestly say you still believe in Santa Claus?” Mandy tried to keep the sarcasm out of her voice. The poor girl had already been through enough, with her fiancée leaving as soon as he found out she was pregnant. He hadn't wanted kids, and consequently hadn't wanted Kat once she started carrying one.

“Well, I didn't, but then I saw the elves, and heard the nasty things spouting out of their wicked little mouths.” Kat lowered her head and studied the cement before looking back up at Mandy. “You do believe me, don't you?”

“I don't know...,” Mandy cut herself off as they rounded the corner. Town Square proved almost unrecognizable. Leagues of townspeople and tourists alike stood huddled in one solid mass, staring like statues at the small group of little men dressed in tacky green attire. “Well, I'll be damned.”



Her hand traveled on its own accord to cover her gaping mouth. Never in her twenty-four years of existence had she seen anything so unbelievable. Holding station in front of Bell Tower, five elves held up little picket signs, proclaiming their strike from the North Pole. Five tiny voices rose in unison as they chanted, "Saint Nick is a prick!" Parents gathered up their children and scurried away from the scene before too much damage could be inflicted. Others stayed motionless, as if in shock. The adorable little elves, long depicted as docile, loving creatures had turned into vulgar, angry monsters.

"What is the meaning of this?" Mandy watched a policeman push his way through the throng of people and approach one of the elves.

"We want more pay! We want better housing! We want cookies and milk!" The elves proceeded to march in a circle, their cries continuing to grow louder and louder. "And until Santa meets our demands, we refuse to make toys. There will be no Christmas!"

Outraged shouts began to rise from the crowd. Grown men shoved their way towards the protesting elves, fists raised and ready to strike, while women stayed back and hollered obscenities. A full blown riot loomed in the very near future. Careful not to bump in to anyone, Mandy grabbed Kat's hand and pulled her back into safety.

"Oh! Excuse me..." She turned to see who she had backed into, and her train of thought went right out the window. Her gaze rested on a chest, a very muscular chest, which led up to the most gorgeous face she had ever seen. Dark chocolate eyes stared back at her, framed by thick, almost feminine lashes. Black locks cascaded down the sides of his face, coming to rest on his broad shoulders. His skin was the color of snow, pale, yet glowing radiantly. His nose, while perfect, had a slight crook that only complimented his firm cheekbones and jaw. "My apologies sir," she fumbled for words. "I didn't see you."

"No apologies necessary, miss?" He raised an eyebrow and extended his hand.

Mandy wiped her palm on her dress slacks and took the offered hand. "Mandy Stockholm, owner of Seductive Secrets Boutique. And you are?"

"Nickolas Claus, Miss Stockholm. It is a pleasure to meet you." He raised her hand to his mouth and placed a delicate kiss on each of her knuckles.

To no avail, she tried to squelch the excitement tingling in her belly. The crazed elves forgotten for the moment, Mandy focused on



the delectable man standing before her. And then his name came screaming forward in her mind. "Did you say Nickolas Claus?"

"Yes, son of Saint Nick himself. My father sent me to form some sort of peace treaty with the elves, and I think I have my work cut out for me. Coincidentally, I was looking for you."

"For me? Why me?"

"You are the only one who can help me."

"I don't know where you deduced that idea Mr. Claus, but I can assure you, I have no experience dealing with disgruntled elves on strike."

"No, but you have something else I need." Nickolas wrapped an arm protectively around her waist and pulled her flush with his body. He leaned down and whispered into her ear, "Or better yet, something else I want."

Mandy felt her knees go slack and braced herself for a fall that never came. The day only continued to get weirder by the second, but in Nickolas' arms, she forgot all talk of elves and Christmas, of money and turning her business around. He turned her body into molten lava, igniting fires long burnt out and releasing pent up feelings better left buried. She didn't know much at that particular moment, but one thing she knew for sure - Nickolas Claus was nothing but trouble.

\* \* \* \*

Nickolas stared down into the shocked face of Mandy Stockholm, and grinned like a kid in a candy store. Never had he met a woman he wanted more than the one standing right here in front of him. Blue eyes stared up at him, glazed over with desire. Blond curls tumbled down her back, landing an inch from her full, rounded bottom. While he wouldn't classify her as thin, she had curves that would not quit, child-bearing hips, and breasts that would make any hot-blooded male foam at the mouth. His cock stood at full salute, a definite problem in his current predicament. With great reluctance, Nickolas released her and took a step back.

"I would like nothing more than to kiss you right now Miss Stockholm, but as you can see, I have a serious situation to diffuse."

Her face reddened in embarrassment, giving him a glimpse of what she would look like in the throes of passion. He looked away, trying to ignore the tightness of his jeans as his cock continued to swell.



"Please, call me Mandy." Keeping her eyes diverted, she waved a hand dissuasively, attempting to break the uncomfortable atmosphere. "I really must get back to the Boutique, although, I don't think I'll have much business if this charade continues."

"I am going to do everything in my power to get this nonsense cleared up as soon as possible. These elves aren't good for anyone's business. I'll be stopping by your shop this afternoon. We have much to discuss and little time in which to do so."

"I can't imagine what you need to discuss with me Nickolas, but I'll be looking forward to your visit."

"So we have a date, then?"

A warm smile softened her already delicate features. "It would seem that way, wouldn't it?"

"Until later." He leaned down and brushed a tender kiss across her forehead, weaving his hand into her hair and massaging. Her scent, a fresh blend of musk and rose, filled his nostrils. In a perfect world, free of commitments and annoying, protesting elves, he could stand here all day and delight in her warmth and beauty. In a perfect world, he would have her in his bed, snuggled safely in his embrace, relishing in the feel of her naked flesh against his own. If only such a world existed. The increasing violence surrounding them pulled him harshly from his fantasies and slammed him straight into the brick wall referred to as reality.

Begrudgingly, he pulled away and turned toward the elves, sparing one quick glance at Mandy's retreating figure. She walked at a relaxed pace, her arm hooked in that of her friend's, as they made their way back towards Spellfire's business district. As if they had a mind of their own, her hips moved seductively from side to side, beckoning him to throw responsibility to the wind and taste the temptations so decadently displayed. He ground his teeth and set his facial features in what he hoped was one hell of an intimidating scowl. These annoying little trolls would be lucky to escape with their lives.

Ignoring the swelling pain in his crotch, he started forward, fists bunched at his side. Miraculously, the crowd parted for him, falling deathly silent as he progressed forward. Whether it was the determined look on his face, or a magic trick played by his father, Nickolas remained thankful for small favors. Even the elves quit screaming and laid their picket signs down by their feet as they watched him approach.



“What is the meaning of this?” He bellowed.

“So the big man has sent his son to do his dirty work has he?”

Alabaster Snowball yelled in response. The Administrator of the Naughty & Nice list, and head of the Equal Opportunity for Fairy Folk Union, he was the most disagreeable being to ever grace the face of the earth. But at the same time, he was the most knowledgeable and productive elf on the team, and was consequently irreplaceable. Nickolas loathed the creature with every ounce of strength in his body, and then some.

“I would think you of all people would realize how important your role is in Christmas, Alabaster. Do you really want to be held accountable for disappointing millions of children around the globe?”

“Bah, hum-bug!” The vertically challenged man put his hands on his hips and tapped his foot impatiently.

“I refuse to negotiate anything with you in front of the good citizens of Spellfire. Your attitude and actions have only aided in negating feelings toward the North Pole, Santa Claus, and everything that Christmas stands for.”

“We aren't leaving, Nickolas Claus, until we get what we want. Elves, resume the strike!”

“That will be enough Alabaster. Remember the courtesy my father has shown your people. He has employed hundreds of elves otherwise left penniless. You will repay that courtesy by meeting with me in private to discuss the areas in which you feel the elves have been neglected, or you will never return to the North Pole again.” He paused, looking at each elf in turn. “Any of you.”

“You drive a hard bargain, like your father, and I respect that in a man. I agree, but you have until this evening at eleven. We will be waiting for you at the top of Bell Tower. Don't let me down, boy.” Alabaster pointed a wagging finger in his direction.

“You have my word. Now, please quit this madness and let these people get back to their work.”

Five of his father's top elves, four males and one female, picked up their various materials and formed a single file line, marching into the Bell Tower one by one. Following Alabaster, who happened to be in the lead, was Bushy Evergreen, who invented the magical toy-making machine allowing mass production. Next, Wunorse Openslae, creator of the world-renowned sleigh and Pepper Minstix, chief elf of security followed suit. Bringing up the rear, Sugarplum Mary skipped



inside as if she had not a care in the world. Since the elves left two days ago, Mrs. Claus had been in an inconsolable state without her assistant. She counted heavily on Mary to help with the baking of the assorted Christmas treats. The entire North Pole remained in shambles. These elves were vital, each playing a key role in the overall scheme of things.

At least he had made headway without a lot of expended energy. Nickolas had braced himself for the worst, and things had gone off much better than expected. He wouldn't count his chickens before they hatched, however. There was no doubt in his mind that these fairy tale creatures would put up one hell of a fight once the debate went underway.

With the back of his hand, he wiped away the sweat beading across his forehead. It may be the middle of December, but Texas remained hotter than hell's furnace. Although he welcomed the idea of a nice tan, his body protested full force as the sun's rays continued to penetrate his skin. Another half an hour, and he would be redder than Santa's suit.

He blended in with the slowly dispersing crowd and headed toward his hotel. A quick shower was in order, followed by breakfast and perhaps a short nap before he was scheduled to update his father on the negotiations. Then, after all matters of business were taken care of, he would pay a visit to Mandy, and indulge in a little pleasure. The wicked thoughts running through his head were enough to land any man on Santa's naughty list, and for the first time in his life, he wondered if that was truly a bad thing.

\* \* \* \*

"Bye bye business, hello unemployment line." Mandy slammed her head down onto the desk. Not one customer visited the Boutique from open to close, more than likely because of the happenings earlier in the day. She couldn't say she blamed them, with the future of Christmas hanging by a thread, but she still had bills to pay and a business to run. Her blood began to boil as she thought about the inconsiderate little shits responsible for this mess. Of all the places in the world to choose from, they decided to camp out in Spellfire and ruin any chance she may have had at turning a profit. Most places could make up for a day's loss in profits, but not when the company already teetered on the edge of bankruptcy. "Think, Mandy, think."



Asking her parents for a loan remained out of the question. Already the laughing stock of her family, she refused to subject herself to anymore ridicule. There were worse things in life than losing your business, and being the daughter of Richard and Vanessa Stockholm happened to be one of them. Changing her name and skipping the country sounded extremely appealing at the moment.

A hair-brained idea sprang to the forefront of her mind. Mandy chewed on her bottom lip in deep concentration, contemplating the pluses and negatives. What if she were to move to the North Pole? The elves didn't think twice about storming in and wrecking her livelihood, so why not repay the favor? Surely, there must be some sort of job for her to do, especially if the elves decided not to return.

But could she deal with sub-zero temperatures and separation from humanity? She didn't socialize very often, but she still enjoyed the company of close friends and the few family members who didn't snub her. Could she live around a group of people whose median height came in at a meter high?

Head pounding, Mandy dug furiously through her purse for a bottle of ibuprofen. She could easily classify this day as one of the most stressful days she ever endured. Disappointment filled her past, uncertainty her future, and the present simply looked dismal. All except for a very sexy man named Nickolas Claus, whom she hadn't been able to get out of her mind since their meeting this morning.

While pretty boy looks usually sent her screaming in the other direction, there was something about Nickolas Claus that she couldn't quite put her finger on, something almost magical. A crazy notion, considering she'd known the guy less than twenty minutes, but undeniable nonetheless. His presence stirred up indescribable feelings and sent electrifying currents coursing through every nerve ending in her body. His voice, smooth and husky, caressed and soothed, while his hungry gaze set her hormones ablaze. Never had she experienced such desire for another human being, or felt the raw need to claim a man for her own. Until now.

Mandy stood up and walked briskly to the front of the store. Waiting for a customer all day had been nothing compared to the anxiousness of awaiting Nickolas' visit. He told her he would stop by this afternoon, so where was he? Seductive Secrets closed over an hour ago, and still, no sign of him. Maybe she imagined the chemistry between them, imagined the way he looked at her as if she were the



only woman in the world who could satisfy his needs. Heaven knew she'd been without a man long enough, so maybe it had simply been wishful thinking on her part.

With a sigh, she returned to her office and grabbed her purse. She refused to wait here all evening on what could very well be a figment of her imagination. Digging for her keys, Mandy returned to the entrance, shutting off lights as she went and setting the security alarm for the night. Once outside, she took a deep breath, bowed her head, and hurried off toward her car. The evening air held a chill, a drastic change from the abnormal heat wave plaguing Texas in the middle of winter. Without a coat to ward off the cold, she nearly froze by the time she reached the parking lot. She wrapped her arms tightly around her waist and picked up her pace.

"Mandy, wait!"

Startled, Mandy jerked her head up at the sound of his voice. Dressed in khaki pants and a red button down shirt, Nickolas jogged across the empty parking lot, waving his arms high above his head. She stalled, torn between hauling ass to her car to avoid further embarrassment or staying put and hearing his explanation for being so late. Curiosity won out.

He reached her fairly quickly, bending over at the waist to try and catch his breath. The poor guy looked exhausted. He held up a finger as he continued to take labored breaths, signaling for her to wait a second. Finally, after what seemed like an eternity, he righted himself, and made eye contact.

"I'm sorry, Mandy. I got held up."

"You don't have to explain anything to me, I understand." Oh, she understood perfectly clear. How many times had she heard that excuse before? Glancing back at her car, she tried to devise a plan to alleviate the awkward situation. "I really should be getting home."

"Mandy, listen to me." He grabbed her shoulders firmly, forcing her to look at him. "The past couple of days have been hell for me. I went back to Spell House to shower and grab a bite to eat, and then I planned on taking a short nap. I guess I didn't realize how tired I really was. I only woke up an hour ago, and I had to have a phone conference with my father to let him know how things were progressing. I got here as soon as I possibly could."



"I've been waiting for hours. My shop closes at seven, and when you said this afternoon, I thought you would be here long before closing time."

"What time is it now?"

She glanced down at her watch. "A quarter til nine, why?"

He cursed, letting go of her and spinning around in the opposite direction. "I've got a meeting with the elves at eleven in Bell Tower."

Mandy stared at his back, a puzzled expression on her face. "I don't understand. You have plenty of time."

Nickolas turned around to face her, taking two long strides before he stood directly in front of her again. He cupped her chin gently, tilting her head upwards to meet his waiting mouth. Fireworks seemed to explode all around her as his lips caressed her own. The kiss started out soft, sensual almost, but soon turned into desperate want. His free hand found her side, slid down, and came to rest on her bottom.

He broke away long enough to mutter, "There is never enough time where you are concerned."

Relief flooded through her body at his words. Her gut instincts had been right about Nickolas Claus. Her mind didn't fabricate foolish girl-hood fantasies. Instead, her intuition had been right on the money. Nothing in the world seemed more important than this moment, this very second in his arms, tasting him, feeling his erection pressed against her belly. She lost all sense of time, of location. Everything in her world vanished except the man standing before her, making passionate love to her mouth with his.

She couldn't explain her feelings, nor did she want to. How can you justify loving a man without knowing him? She already felt dependant on him, needing his strength, his heart, and everything he could give her. She wanted to put her soul on a silver platter and hand it over to him, because somewhere deep down inside, she knew he would never betray her. At the same time, Mandy wondered how it was possible to feel this way, to know without a shadow of a doubt that he was the one she was meant to be with for all eternity.

"Get a room, you two!"

As if ice water had been dumped down her drawers, Mandy pushed hard against Nickolas' chest, propelling herself backward onto the hard cement. She tried, unsuccessfully, to stand with a little grace. "Horrible Henry, how could you?"



"I'm sorry toots." The opaque ghost glided through the air, hovering a few feet from her. "If the mayor catches you two out here like this, why, he would write you a ticket for indecent exposure. I just did you a favor."

"You would do me an even bigger favor if you found someone else to bug."

"Aw, now don't be that way, darlin'." He feigned a hurt expression. "You know you are my favorite lingerie shop owner."

Mandy rolled her gaze skyward. "I'm the only lingerie shop owner in town, Henry."

"Which reminds me, do you have anything new in my size?" Mimicking a bra, he cupped his hands and boosted up his pectorals.

"Get out of here." Nearly doubled over in laughter, Mandy tried to sound stern. Henry may be Spellfire's resident mischief maker, but he rarely caused any harm. More often than not, he had her in stitches within thirty seconds. "Henry, have you met Nickolas?" She stole a glance in Nickolas' direction, grimacing at the hard scowl etched on his face. He didn't appear too happy about the little interruption.

"I know who he is. Say boy, what are you going to do about those elves?"

"Whatever I possibly can, sir. Now if you'll excuse us..." Nickolas grabbed her hand and yanked, pulling her in the direction of Town Square. She trailed behind, pumping her legs furiously to try and keep up with his long strides.

"What do you think you are doing?" She planted her feet and centered her weight until he stopped. "That was extremely rude."

"What do you call what he did?" Crimson tinged his cheeks. "In case you haven't noticed, I have a hard on the size of Texas. Do you have any idea how bad I want you? How bad I've wanted you since the moment I laid eyes on you? Tell me, do you?"

Mandy suppressed a giggle. He reminded her of a teenage boy, fueled by hormones, and pouting over having his first chance at sex ruined. She freed her hand from his and reached for the zipper on his pants. A quick flick of the wrist allowed just enough room for her fingers to wiggle through the small opening. Hot, hard flesh greeted her on the other side.

Whatever she had been expecting, this exceeded it ten fold. She had been with a man once, in college, but nothing could have prepared her for the size of Nickolas' erection. Her fingers barely



touched when wrapped around the diameter, and his hardness could be compared to that of a steel pipe.

Instantaneously, her pussy began to throb. She could feel herself becoming wet, while at the same time, her mouth went dry. Her eyelids drooped from the passion beginning to overwhelm her body. A hoarse moan escaped her throat as she slid her fingers up and down his cock, envisioning herself on all fours as he pounded her backside. He would reach around with one hand to cradle her breast, while the other hand held onto her hips for optimum penetration. She spared a glance up to see his eyes rolling backwards in their sockets. His mouth open slightly, he breathed deep and heavy while rocking in rhythm with her strokes.

"Mandy, we have to stop or I'm going to take you right here on the street."

"And what would be wrong with that?" She barely recognized the raspy voice emanating from her mouth.

"Nothing baby, but you have to live here and I have a reputation to protect. Could you imagine if the word got out about Santa's son making love to the lingerie shop owner in public view?"

"I guess your right." Her reply came out on a sigh. Disappointment registered, and she suddenly felt very aware of what she had been about to do. "God, I must seem like a wanton hussy."

"Never." He zipped up his pants and kissed her one last time on the lips. "How about we go get something to eat and then you can attend the meeting with me? I saw a nice little place by the hotel I'd like to try. Sinful Sundae's I think it was called?"

"Oh yes, Electra's shop. She has the best ice cream in Texas, and quite possibly the world."

"Well then, what are we waiting for? I think we could both use a little cooling off right now."

"I couldn't agree more."

\* \* \* \*

Nickolas sat on a little wooden stool facing five sober-faced elves. For half an hour, they had went around in circles, neither side happy with what the other proposed. The elves wanted their pay raised to a ridiculous amount, along with a half dozen other things that simply weren't feasible.

He would give anything to be sitting back in the ice cream parlor, having a comfortable dinner with Mandy. He experienced pure joy



when her face lit up from something he said. But he couldn't deny the joy he felt when he said something that made her blush either. Right now, she sat on his left side, her hand resting lightly on his knee. He fought the temptation to pick her up and carry her back to his hotel room and leave these miserable elves to fend for themselves.

"...we won't do it!" Alabaster finished with a near shriek.

Nickolas shook his head, trying to clear away the lingering thoughts. "I'm sorry, could you repeat that?"

The head elf threw his hands in the air in exasperation. "I give up."

"Look, do you have any idea who this is?" He nodded his head toward Mandy. "This is the future Mrs. Claus, and not only have I been sent here to negotiate with you, but also to bring her back to the North Pole with me so that my father can retire. I think you can understand why I've been a little distracted."

Total and complete silence filled the room at his revelation. Mandy stared in open-mouthed shock.

"Is that why...oh my goodness, it can't be..." She began rambling.

"Why you felt an instant connection to me? In one simple word, yes. You were predestined from the day you were born to be my bride." He watched her face closely for any signs of disgust or betrayal. Instead, her entire face brightened and she squealed in what he perceived to be delight.

"I knew there was something special about you." Her pointer finger nearly tapped him on the nose. "And to think I was debating whether or not to move to the North Pole today. It all makes sense now."

Alabaster interrupted. "Excuse me, but there won't be a North Pole if you don't give in to our demands. We won't make toys and children will stop believing. Santa and the North Pole will lose their magic."

"You will go back to work, and I'm here to make sure of that." Shinny Upatree walked through the door carrying a handful of paperwork. His father's oldest, most trusted friend, Shinny was the only one of the top six elves who seemed to have any loyalty. "I can assure you that not all the elves at the North Pole share your opinions, and are in fact, quite happy with their standards of living."

"Stuff it Shinny, you have no business here." Alabaster raised his middle finger in an obscene gesture.



“On the contrary.” The angry elf slammed the stack of papers down onto the small wooden table. “Do these contracts look familiar to any of you?”

Nickolas could have leapt up and kissed Shinny square on the lips. Why hadn't he thought of the contracts? Each elf, when hired on, was required to sign a contract agreeing to the terms of their employment. Any disputes were to be handled before the elf signed his name. Once the signature rested on the contract, all future disputes became null and void. Every five years, the elves got the opportunity to renegotiate pay and housing; however, these five elves agreed and renewed their contracts only last year.

“Point blank, all five of you are in violation of the signed agreement. Your employment at the North Pole could be terminated at any time. If it were up to me, you'd all be fired right now, but Santa has graciously agreed to not only let you keep your jobs, but to renegotiate your contracts four years early.” Shinny clasped his hands behind his back, rocking back on his heels and waiting for the retort.

All five of the protesting elves turned as white as the snow that fell so abundantly in their homeland. They were trapped, with only two decisions. Either take what was being offered to them, or pack their bags and find another job. To Nickolas, it was a no-brainer, but there was no telling what these lunatics would do.

“If you've got it from here Shinny, I'm going to take my soon-to-be-bride back to my hotel room. We've been interrupted one too many times tonight and I'd like to finish what I started.” He winked at Mandy before taking her hand and hoisting her to her feet.

“I've got things under control, boss.” The elf gave a military salute and turned back toward the others.

Nickolas highly doubted he would ever get used to being called boss by a man who had been like a second father to him, but he would take care of that situation later. Right now, he had another agenda to attend to. As Mandy walked down the flight of stairs in front of him, he took into careful consideration how her body would mold to his, and what positions would give them both the most pleasure. And as they stepped into the beautiful Texas night, under a sky blanketed with stars, his heart swelled. Tonight, he would make love to Mandy, his fiancée.

\* \* \* \*



If someone would have told Mandy a week ago that she would be engaged to the son of Santa Claus, she would have laughed them off the face of the planet. But in less than twenty-four hours, she'd learned about an entirely new world, and met the man she would share it with for the rest of her life.

Nickolas brought them back to his hotel room in Spell House only moments before and now she lay stretched out on the king-sized bed, stripped down to her sexy lingerie. One of her favorite sellers at the Boutique, Mandy secretly stashed one away for herself in the hopes that she would be able to wear it for that special someone someday. Someday had come.

He stood over the top over her, running his gaze down the length of her body and up again. The appreciative gleam in his eye warmed her to the core. He truly found her attractive, curves and all. His fingertips danced up her stomach and lingered on her breasts, before he took his palm and began massaging. She could feel her nipples harden, her bra tightening, and her panties becoming moist. No longer able to handle the clothing restraints against her skin, she sat up long enough to unclasp her bra. Then, wasting no time, shimmied out of her panties. Both were quickly discarded alongside the bed.

"God, you are gorgeous." Nickolas tackled her body full force, taking off his own clothes in the process. "I've never desired anyone as much as you Mandy." His voice came out muffled as he flowered kisses down her neck and onto her breasts, and yet further still.

She fisted her hands into the sheets when his mouth found her pussy wet and ready. His toyed with her clit, alternating between tongue and teeth, while a long, lean finger plunged into her depths. Mandy could already feel the beginnings of an orgasm and begged him to stop.

"Please Nickolas, I want to cum together."

He merely smiled up at her before returning to her pussy. When he inserted a second finger and made consistent thorough laps across her clit with his tongue, she could hold off no longer. Her body began to convulse and the rivulets of pleasure rained down upon her. Wave after wave of tremendous sensations rocked her to the core, leaving her breathless and exhausted. With one final shudder, her orgasm left almost as strongly as it had come on.

"Oh God, take me now." Mandy flipped her head from side to side, still experiencing the aftershocks of her passion.



Nickolas climbed on top of her, spreading her legs a little farther apart with his knee. His cock sat poised and ready at her entrance and with one fast thrust, he buried himself deep inside her womb. He remained still for a moment to give her pussy time to adjust to his thickness before slowly pumping in and out. She locked her legs around his back and lunged her pussy up to meet each and every thrust. His pace began to gather speed, and Mandy felt the beginnings of another orgasm brewing close to the surface.

“Faster, please, faster!” Desperate, she dug her fingernails into his skin, overwhelmed by all of the feelings. Her back arched underneath him, pressing her breasts up against his chest as he continued to slam his cock inside of her. When she felt him begin to swell, she knew he was close to the edge. She barely heard his cry of release, as her own took hold, sending her soaring up into heavens in a torrent of ecstasy.

He collapsed on top of her, his breath coming out in ragged gasps. Mandy weaved her fingers through his hair and pulled his head to rest over the top of her heart. If she could have one wish, it would be to stay like this forever, snuggled closely to the man of her dreams.

“Have I told you how much I love you Mandy Stockholm?”

“You just did, and I love you Nickolas Claus.” She planted a kiss on his forehead.

“So, you won't have any issues with moving to the North Pole then?”

“As long as I'm with you, I wouldn't have a problem moving to Mars.”

“What about Seductive Secrets?”

“I don't know. Do you think there is a need for elf lingerie at the North Pole?” Mandy giggled while trying to envision Sugarplum Mary dancing around in a little black teddy. “Nah, I think I'm going to give it to my friend, Kat. She has a knack for running businesses, although she hasn't had the money to open one up herself. And she is all alone.”

“I will take care of getting Seductive Secrets out of the hole financially, and you can come down and help her as often as you need to. I know how much she means to you.”

“Yes, she does mean the world to me, but you mean so much more.”



Nickolas rolled off the bed and struck a muscle-man pose. “So, future Mrs. Claus, do you think I’ll be on the naughty or nice list this year?”

Mandy laughed, a rich, hearty laugh straight from the soul. “You’ve definitely been a naughty boy, but in this case, that would land you on the nice list.”

From the middle of Town Square, they both listened as Bell Tower rang five times, a symbol that the elves would be returning to work. Christmas was saved.

At least for now.



**Emery La Rue**  
**Website:**



# **Mistletoe & Mayhem**

**by  
Emery LaRue**

Garland Mayhem closed his eyes and counted to ten. For the past three miles every car along the Texas highway located a water hole and doused him. Soaked to the bone, all he wanted to do was make it the next few miles still intact. Spellfire was just ahead. A few more miles and a few more water holes away.

Calm once again, Garland hitched his bag over his shoulder and started ahead. What ever convinced him he could drive all the way to the town of Spellfire, Texas from Montana, he would never know. It sounded like a good idea. See the country. Well, he was seeing it alright. His truck broke down 5 miles back, and walking seemed logical. Until the damn storm rolled in. His father told him it was not the best of his choices.

“What the hell would you go to that place for, boy? There’s nothing there for you.”

“Apparently there is, or have you forgotten my mother?”

Real pain registered in his fathers eyes. Not for the first time, Garland wondered if his father had regrets.

“I need to do this, Dad. I want to know more about her, about me and what I am.”

Though he wanted to, his father didn’t argue after that.

But his mother wasn’t his only reason. For the last few years, visions of a beautiful woman filled his dreams and thoughts. He could feel her loneliness and need. His heart began to beat faster at the thought of her. Something deep down told him where he would find her and he meant to find her.

Another car rounded the bend behind him, and Garland stepped away from the road. Not that it mattered, the rain was falling again. As the car moved passed, his eyes narrowed at the tail lights, alerting him the driver was slowing.



“Probably wants to take another go at me.” he muttered as he kept walking.

When the car backed toward him, he stopped. As the window came down, the breath left his body. It was her. The woman who haunted his dreams. The same long, silver gold hair. Violet eyes he could stare into, forever.

“Do you need a ride?” the woman asked and smiled.

He could hear her speaking, but his heart was pounding so loud he couldn’t think. Damn, but she was beautiful. Her eyes sparkled so bright, and her smile was kind.

“Sir?”

Shaking his head to clear it, he walked to the car. “I’m heading into Spellfire.”

“What a coincidence.” she smiled again. “So, am I. You look like you could use a ride. Hop in, I promise I’m safe.”

Hurrying around the car, Garland took deep breaths to control his emotions. He couldn’t believe his luck. He threw his bag in the back seat and climbed into the front. Sighing with appreciation at the dry warmth.

“Thanks for the ride.” he commented as he got comfortable. “You live in Spellfire?”

“All my life. I’m Mistletoe by the way.”

“Mistletoe?”

She rolled her eyes, as if she had heard that many times. “Yes, my name is Mistletoe. It’s a long story.”

“I’m Garland.” he smiled, liking her even more. “Garland Mayhem.”

She darted him a quick look, her eyes slightly narrowed. Her tongue licked her bottom lip and she gently nibbled it.

“You wouldn’t by any chance be Lorvena Mayhem’s son?”

“You know her?” he sat forward, anxious. “She’s my mother.”

“I know her quite well. I work for her.” her eyes turned hard as she glanced at him. “I hope you’re here for a good reason. It may be none of my business, but you have been gone awhile. Lorvena is very dear to me and I will not see her hurt.”

“But.”

“I mean it.” she stopped the car. “If your intention is to come back and hurt that woman any more, then get out now.”



Okay, the woman of his dreams also possessed a temper. But she had the wrong idea.

"I have been gone, yes. But sure as hell not by my choice. It wasn't my fault. I have come all this way to meet my mother and learn more about myself." his hand grabbed the handle. "I can walk from here. Thanks Missy."

"Wait." she grabbed his arm. "I'm sorry. It's just that she has been a mother to me. I shouldn't have jumped at you like that. Come on. I'll take you to her."

With a relieved sigh he shut the door. "She's a pretty special lady, isn't she?"

"Yes. Yes she is." pulling the car back onto the highway, she smiled again and his heart turned over. "She also calls me Missy. I guess you can too."

Mistletoe silently scolded herself. First of all, she never picked up strangers. What in the hell had she been thinking? Always the careful one, she took care to stay safe. But something she couldn't name made her pull over for him. It also didn't hurt that he was the son of the woman she most admired in the world.

But what shocked her the most was how attracted she felt towards him. The minute their eyes met, she felt this sensation of awareness. Like a part of her recognized the man. Lord knew her body did. But her other half was drawn to him. Damn, but the man had looks.

Garland Mayhem was tall. At least six-three. She liked that, being tall for a woman herself. His black hair, even wet, looked silky and rested just above his shoulders. But his eyes were his best feature. A crystal gray. Eyes not unlike his mothers. Eyes of a Selkie. Did he know what his mother was, what he was? Better yet, could he sense what she was as well? She was unmated and she knew her scent was unique.

Spellfire was still a busy community when they made it to the outskirts. Garland took second glances at almost everything. Being this close to Christmas, the town was lit up and colorful. His father told him what to expect, but he still could not hide the surprise on his face. Trolls in hard hats walked the streets, Fairies fluttered about looking busy or playful.

"Amazing.." he whispered to himself, but aloud.



“Spellfire is that. We can all live in peace here without worry of sideshow acts or fear.”

“It still just amazes me.”

“Did your father tell you anything of Spellfire?”

“Yes.” His look told her it was a touchy subject. “He had a lot to say. But it is still something to behold.”

Nodding her head in silent agreement, she continued on through town. Spirits was an establishment on the outer stretch of Spellfire. The pub could get rowdy at times, so the distance became a necessity. But directly behind Spirits was the Selkie Falls. A more beautiful river she had never known.

Pulling into the driveway, she killed the engine. “Well, here we are.”

Garland sat staring up at the building. It presented a look of something from the old west. Wooden decks, even double swinging doors, but best of all or at least he hoped, his mother was inside. His eyes widened when a petite woman stepped out, drying her hands on a bar towel.

“That’s her, isn’t it?” his voice was hushed.

“Yes.” Mistletoe stepped from the car and walked to the woman. After a shared embrace, the woman’s hand covered her mouth and she looked directly at Garland.

Slowly he stepped from the car. This was his mother, yet he was afraid. What if she rejected him? What if she expected something more? He held his breath as she walked slowly to him.

Lorvena touched his face with gentle fingers. She couldn’t believe it. Her son was here. After twenty something years, he finally stood before her. She didn’t know whether to laugh or cry. She settled for the laughter, and threw herself into his arms, then she started to cry.

“Garland Mayhem, have I ever missed you !”

Returning her embrace, he felt the tingle of familiarity and his heart swelled. When his mother pulled away, he smiled into her eyes. His face registered shock when she smacked him none to gently across his arm.

“Ouch!”

“Your lucky that’s all you get. What the hell took you so long?” Lorvena hugged him yet again.



"I know, I know." he said as he looked down at her. "We have a lot of making up to do, mother. Will it be safe to let you go?"

Wiping her eyes, she pulled him toward the front door of the building. "Come, you must be hungry."

Garland raised an eyebrow at Mistletoe as he walked by her. She was smiling, wiping her own eyes and shaking her head.

\* \* \* \*

Spirits was a fine establishment. The likeness to the old west was uncanny. The bar was wooden, a large mirror ran along the back wall. The tables and chairs were wooden as well. High vaulted ceilings showed a large stage with all the band equipment one would need. Beneath his feet, honest to god sawdust laid on the floor.

"Welcome to Spellfire, welcome to Spirits, and welcome home, Garland." his mother's smile was heart warming.

He sat at the bar while his mother disappeared through a door behind it. Mistletoe took the seat beside him.

"So, what do you think of our little town?"

"It's unique, that's for sure, but it seems friendly enough."

"I can guarantee you, Garland. You will never find another like it."

He couldn't argue that point. His father told him of the town, and given his father's own unique qualities he believed him. But the sight of a troll in a hard hat, or a witch actually flying around town on a broom as if it were a car, was enough to shock even the most open minded.

His mother returned with a large plate of meats and cheeses, as well as a tall glass of iced tea. Garland had no idea just how hungry he was until she sat it before him.

"Now, eat and tell me all about yourself." Lorvena said as she sat across the bar. "Missy, would you be a dear and flip the closed sign? We'll open later tonight."

He watched Mistletoe move to do his mothers bidding, admiring the sway of her hips. She was a beauty. Her trim waist complemented the swell of her hips. He knew without a doubt her breast would be full but firm. What would they feel like? Taste like? Pure desire settled below the belt. Garland swallowed hard to get the food down his throat before he choked.

"She's a pretty little thing, isn't she?"



His eyes snapped back to his mother, a blush rising to his cheeks. His first true meeting with her, and he gets caught ogling a woman. Good thing he was sitting. If his cock got any harder he would pop his zipper.

"She is that." he said and turned his attention back to his plate.

"Tell me, Garland. Tell me about your home in Montana."

"Well, it's a big ranch with horses and cattle. Miles of hills and valley's."

"Do you like it there? Happy? A lady friend?"

"Yes. Most of the time. And no." he smiled as he answered all her questions at once.

"How is Samuel?"

Garland looked into her eyes. The tone of her voice almost held a touch of longing. Did she miss his father?

"He's doing fine. Stay's pretty busy. I think he's lonely." he couldn't stop the question that formed. "Do you miss him?"

Lorvena looked out the side window, her eyes in another time and place. A smile, and also sadness crossed her beautiful features.

"I miss what could have been. I loved him dearly, still do, but when he took you from me, he opened a wound that would never heal." she looked back to him. "But he did call often over the years. Sent pictures though it wasn't the same."

"Why did you stay behind? Why didn't you follow him?" he knew his voice sounded hurt, but he wanted to understand.

"Garland, do you know what I am? What you are?"

"Not until high school."

Lorvena shook her head, her eyes sad. "He should never have waited so long. Had you been here, I could have helped you." she sighed. "What happened?"

The flush covered his cheeks again. For the first time he noticed Mistletoe beside him, and as if sensing his pain, her hand rested on his arm. Her beautiful violet eyes full of concern.

"Against dad's wishes, I tried out for the swim team." as he spoke he rolled up the sleeve on his right arm. "Apparently, me and chlorine are a bad combination. I got out of the water before any real damage was done. But my arm was burned."

His forearm was ruff and dry. Like a chemical burn that took the skin off and only new skin was starting to grow.

"Oh, Garland."



“The problem was, my arm literally started to smolder. The coach freaked and the other students were terrified. Dad took care of it with the excuse of a severe reaction.”

“And then?”

“Then he took me home, scolded me, and told me of my heritage. I thought he was crazy until my body senses began to heighten.”

His mother patted his arm. “Well, you’re here now, and Missy and I can help you to understand just what being a Selkie is.”

Garland’s eyes flew to Mistletoe. “You’re a Selkie?”

“Yes. I think that’s why I was so compelled to pull over today. I sensed the same in you as in myself.”

His face heated again, and her eyes widened. What the hell was wrong with him? It’s not like he had never been with or around a woman before. Fatigue? No, he was wide awake and wired. Nerves. That must be it.

“You are perfectly normal, son.” Lorvena said, sensing his discomfort. “Tell me, does Missy have a certain pleasing scent about her?”

If his face heated much more he would combust. “Well, yes. Her perfume is nice.”

“It’s not perfume, Garland. What is happening is, you are responding to a female of your kind. One who is not mated.” she smiled at her son. “I have no scent to you, other than that of a mother. There is nothing wrong.”

Mistletoe was doing some blushing herself. Her bodies reaction to Garland became explosive. Her breasts tingled and a sweet ache began to center between her thighs. She knew what was happening to her. Mistletoe wanted a mate. She knew too that her body would recognize her mate even if her eyes did not. Her eyes and body both responded to this man.

“Come with me, Garland. I want to show you something.” Lorvena took his hand and Missy followed out the back door.

It was there that Garland truly lost his breath. Not even the rivers in the mountains of Montana could compare to the beauty before him. A river so clean and clear, sparkled in the sunlight, seeming to wink and entice him to its edge. Though not too deep, the water was like crystal, and he could see the fish along the bottom. His skin started to tighten, and he had the sudden urge to undress and sink



into the cool water. Bending forward, he ran his hands through the water. It was as soft as a lover's caress.

"Magnificent, isn't it?" his mother whispered. "This is my reason, son. This is why I needed to remain here. This is Selkie Falls."

"Falls?"

"You can't see it from here, but the river bend runs through the forest," Mistletoe explained as she stood beside him. "The falls is deep within. It's a beautiful and magical place."

"I didn't notice this river on the map."

"You never will. Selkie Falls is the town's own. We enjoy our tourist friends. But the falls are our private haven."

"I would love to see it."

His mother turned to him. "Have you ever embraced your other skin?"

"Once, but it frightened me. I never tried again."

"You need to embrace it. Once you do, you will be able to control it," she smiled and looked back to the water. "Just because you are in the water, does not mean you must change your skin."

"What do I do?"

"Just walk into the river, and let your nature take control."

He started to step forward, but Lorvena grabbed his arm. "Garland, you must remove your clothes."

"What?" he looked to Mistletoe.

"Missy, would you mind going into the river with him?"

"Not at all, Lorvena."

To Garland's amazement, Mistletoe began to strip. His throat went dry and his body reacted. He couldn't possibly do this without humiliating himself. Her breasts sprang free from her dress and he clinched his fists. He wanted to drag her to the river bank and sink deep into her incredible body.

"I can't do this."

Mistletoe stood before him naked and carefree. "Am I making you uncomfortable?" she asked. He could see she was genuinely concerned.

"That's an understatement," his voice rasped.

"Garland, your body's reaction is natural, Missy will not think bad of you and neither will I," her hands on her hips, she faced him. "In fact, I think it's wonderful. If you are to be here son, you must embrace what you are. Your body wants her, and I could think of no



other better than Missy. But more then, you need guidance. I just got you back, I don't want you to drown yourself."

Bitting his lower lip, he stood, undecided. If his mother was not present, it would be different. But she was, and his bodies response to Missy was not something he cared to share.

"I'm going back to the bar to clean up for tonight." she said as she turned. "Embrace it Garland, you will be glad you did. There is nothing in the world like it. The sooner you embrace it, the better." With his mother gone, he could concentrate on the naked siren before him. Mistletoe approached him, reached out, and began to unbutton his shirt.

"Are you afraid?"

"A little."

"I will help you, Garland. Don't be afraid. It's a beautiful experience."

She helped him shuck his shirt, and bent to remove his shoes, then his socks. His body tightened as she grasped his jeans and popped the button fly open. He wore nothing beneath them and his cock sprang free.

Mistletoe gasped. He was the biggest male she had ever seen. Though she never new a mans touch, she did see others as they made love at the falls. She always thought all men were the same. Not so. Garland Mayhem looked to be enough man for two women.

Garland pushed his jeans from his body and stood before her. When her eyes met his, he saw desire and a little fear. He knew he was big, but her glance filled him with pride. The more to please her with. He only hoped he got the chance.

She took his hand and they stepped into the river. Once it reached his waist, the tingling started., Mistletoe began to cup water in her palm and rub it across his back.

"How do you feel?"

"Like one big ball of nerves." he gasped as the sensation settled in his groin. "Like my body is not my own."

"Let it happen. Once the change occurs, you can speak to me with your mind."

He looked to her and his eyes widened as her lower half began to change. The change slowly worked up her body until all that was before him was a magnificent creature of all white. He looked in awe at the beauty and grace she exhibited as she swam around him. She



resembled a seal. A very sexy and erotic seal, by the way she rubbed against him. He closed his eyes and welcomed his new skin.

Garland fought only when his head was beneath the water. The need to hold his breath was strong. Gradually, he relaxed and his lungs filled. He glanced at his hands, but they were not hands at all. Black paddle type flippers took their place.

Mistletoe rubbed her body along his and swam up river. He followed, thrilled at the feel of the water caressing his body. It was like nothing he ever felt. Swimming along beside her, he rubbed her with his body every chance he could. Even in this form, the attraction stayed there and it was strong.

“How do you feel, Garland?” His soft voice touched his mind.

“Free. I feel unbelievably free. Like nothing ever before.”

Her laughter touched a place deep inside. This woman who invaded his dreams. But from the moment he looked into her eyes on that highway, he knew he finally found what he had been missing in his life. A piece of him lost but became replaced by the sweetness that was Mistletoe. It seemed they played for hours, but it could have been no more than minutes.

Soon she guided him to the top of the water, and he found himself in a pool. The waterfall was everything his mother and Missy said it would be. It was beautiful, as well as magical. This place was something very special.

Mistletoe began to take her human form, and if he thought her sexy earlier, it was doubly so now. Her nude body was a sight with pearly drops of the crystal water running down her length in rivulets. Her long, silver-gold hair was slicked back from her face, and her features were more pronounced.

She reached out and touched his black head. “Visualize yourself as the man you are, Garland. Let your mind control your change.”

He closed his eyes and pictured his human body. The tingle began and he allowed the change to take over. When he opened his eyes, her smiling face was all he could see. He reached out and touched her face.

“Your beautiful, Missy.”

She leaned into his touch. “You did well.”

This was the woman who haunted his thoughts and dreams. Maybe he should have told his mother. Maybe she would have known



the answers. But right now all he could think about was how beautiful she was, and how much he wanted her.

Garland pulled her body flush with his own. "This is crazy. You don't know me, I don't know you. But something inside me recognizes you."

She gazed into his eyes and saw the truth. Could he be the one? Her mate? Though she dated, and could have slept with many men, she hoped and waited. Her first time she always hoped would be with the man fate destined her for. Mate or no, her body wanted him. She was hopeless to resist him.

He lowered his head and gently covered her lips with his own. Slowly testing her willingness. Mistletoes body melted, and she leaned into him fully. At her surrender, he licked her lower lip, silently asking for entrance. She granted him his passage.

Garland kissed her deeply, groaning at her taste and feel. She felt like a drug and he fast became addicted. He felt as if he could kiss her forever and never grow tired. His breathing came harder, and his head was spinning. He had never known such desire.

Kissing his way across her cheek, he licked a path down her throat and laved at the water gathered there. She tasted better than a fine wine. At her gasp, his eyes meet hers.

"Do you want me to stop?" he hoped her answer was no, because he didn't think he could and survive.

"No."

"Are you okay?"

"This is new to me, Garland. My body wants yours. I have never felt these feelings."

He regarded her with passion hazed eyes. "Have you ever been with a man before?"

"No."

Elation shot through his body like lightening. She was a virgin, and she was his. After today, she would know no other man.

"I won't hurt you, Missy."

"I trust you. I don't know why, but I do." she leaned forward and kissed his chest.

He cupped her head and let her touch and kiss his body at her leisure. Garland wanted her comfortable and unafraid. Did his mother know this would happen? He glanced at the waterfall. The pounding water matched the beat of his heart. Slowly he pulled her with him



toward the falls. As he stepped under, he noticed a ledge that sat back into the formation. A small cave like alcove. Perfect.

Pulling her through the falls, he clasped her waist and set her on the ledge. It was the perfect height for what he wanted. Her legs dangled off the ledge and he stood between her knees. Their hips were perfectly in line, and her body so accessible. Garland leaned forward and licked a rosy nipple.

Mistletoe gasped and clutched his head in her hands. What an incredible sensation. His hot mouth closed over hers and he drew the sensitive flesh into his mouth, sucking gently. Her hips bucked against him, the feeling settled low in her abdomen.

“Like that, do you?” he asked as he trailed one hand down her body to settle between her thighs.

All she could do was nod her head and gasp when his rough but gentle fingers parted her folds. She pleased herself before, but it felt nothing like this. Her body was on fire for more of his touch. She cried out when he touched and rubbed her clitoris.

With gentle pressure he pushed her back until she rested on her elbows. Open and exposed to him, she could feel nothing but desire.

Garland licked a hot trail down her tummy, then gently blew warm air across her heated flesh. Her body trembled in expectation. When his tongue snaked out and tasted her with one long, deliciously slow lick, her moan echoed off the walls. But when he clamped down and sucked her clit into his mouth, she screamed and arched her body into his mouth.

Her taste intoxicated him like nothing before. She became so responsive to him, that he needed to keep reminding himself she was an innocent. Wanting her to feel nothing but pleasure, he increased the pressure of his mouth on her. Slowly, so as not to take away from her pleasure, he gently pushed one finger into her. Hot, wet, and so damn tight. Her muscles clamped down hard on his finger and he knew she was close to release. He increased the pressure of his mouth, and moved his finger just a little faster.

She felt as if her body would ignite, but suddenly she melted. Her muscles tight, her body arched off the ground, only to be caught and held by Garland. He didn't let up, just kept tasting her, until finally her climax peeked. She shouted his name as sensation after sensation flooded her body and mind.



Garland pulled her hips to his, and without hesitation, while in the throes of her climax, he entered her body in one hard thrust. Mistletoe flinched, and he gritted his teeth against the pleasure that her gripping sex brought to him. He held still while her body settled and allowed her time to adjust to his entry.

She felt full and stretched beyond belief. Her pleasure had been so great, her body beyond her control. But now, her passage burned and felt as if she would split in half. He was so large, she wondered that he fit at all. Her body flexed around his and his cock twitched inside her. The burning ache was slowly fading, replaced by something more. She flexed again, and he groaned. Looking into his eyes, she realized it brought him pleasure. She flexed again.

“Missy, I’m trying to be gentle baby. But if you keep that up, I won’t be able to.”

Her clit started to tingle again, and she rotated her hips, testing the fullness inside her. She gasped at the feeling. He was touching something deep inside, and it felt so good!. She flexed and moved again, his body jerked.

“Please Garland, do something.” her voice sounded husky.

Slowly, he pulled back, and her muscles clamped down to hold him to her. When he pushed forward again, her eyes widened. He continued to move slowly, not wanting to hurt her, but something inside guided her to what she really wanted. Mistletoe sat forward, clamped her mouth to his mouth, hard. She thrust her tongue inside his mouth. Her hands reached around his back and she pulled him into her. Silently asking for him to move inside her even faster.

Garland clasped her hips and drove into her with a pounding urgency. He was close to climax and wanted to take her with him. Her cries of pleasure drove him on and he released her mouth to pull her nipple into his mouth. The cool water caressed his heated body, like a million lovers fingers. He moved harder against her, his head thrown back, feeling like he had never felt in his life. But when her hot little mouth closed over his own nipple and gently nipped him, he went over the edge and tumbled headlong into a sea of pleasure.

“Missy....” he gasped as he felt her tighten on him.

The feel of his hot seed flooding her acted like a drug. Mistletoe crested with him, his name on her lips.

\* \* \* \*



Garland slowly opened his eyes. Cradled still against Mistletoe, he loathed to leave her. Taking a deep breath, he inhaled her special scent. Frowning he breathed deeply again. Her scent somehow changed. Was that good or bad? He raised his face to hers.

“What has happened, Missy?”

“What do you mean?”

He sat up and pulled himself onto the ledge beside her. “Your scent, it has changed.”

Mistletoe sat forward and tucked her legs beneath her. She had never been modest about her body. When the selkies gathered here every year, looking for their mates, they did so unadorned.

“Is it a pleasing scent or do you find it unattractive?” she knew what his answer would be. He may not understand, but they were mated. Even now the scent of belonging clung to him. Her scent. No other female would dare try to seduce Garland. Well, not a selkie female.

“Oh, it's pleasing alright.” he had a slight blush. “My body seems to respond to it on its own.”

Mistletoe smiled, and it traveled to her eyes. But then the light faded from those beautiful eyes and she hung her head.

“What? What is it?” he asked, stroking her hair.

Her smile now forced when she looked back into his face. He could tell she was troubled. Did she regret what they had shared? He didn't, and never would.

“Let's get back to Spirits. Your mother will be anxious to see you.”

Mistletoe slid off the ledge into the water, her second shin taking her over as she did. Garland was so confused, but decided not to push her. He followed her into the water, fought the change only a moment and swam beside her back into the river.

Though she loved the feel of him next to her, she was hesitant. He was her mate and she should be happy. But a part of her was frightened. His father claimed to love Lorvena unconditionally. But still he had taken Garland and fled. His father was a human. He had been raised a human. Would he be like his father, leave because he wanted to hide his heart and his child? She knew the odds of her not being pregnant was slim, she mated, with her mate. It was very rare that with the first mating, the female would not conceive. After the



first time it could take years to have another child. Mistletoe would go to Lorvena. She could explain it to her son.

Once they emerged from the river behind Spirits, she stood and waited as Garland took his human form. He was so stunningly attractive. If he rejected her, she would never have another mate. Selkies mated for life.

When he stood before her, he reached out and drew her against him. "What is it, Missy? Talk to me."

She returned his embrace. "Let's talk to your mother. Then we will talk."

Though he wanted nothing more than to hold her longer, he nodded and released her. They both dressed quickly and quietly. Garland took her hand and held it within his as they walked back to Spirits. Once they rounded the corner, Garland froze. A frown marred his brow.

"Are you Okay?" she asked. Looking in the direction of his gaze, there was a vehicle there she did not know. It was pulling a black pick-up. The truck pulling it was loaded and it looked like someone was moving in. "Is that yours?"

"Yes. And unless that's the local towing company, we have another visitor."

"That's not any truck I have ever seen. Who is it?"

Garland's hand tightened on hers and his mouth drew up tight. His body was tense, as if waiting for an attack.

"My father." he pulled her with him onto the front deck of the building. "Well, I guess there is no way to avoid this."

Walking behind him, Mistletoe chewed her lower lip. What was Samuel Mayhem like? Why was he here? It had been over twenty years. Then her heart picked up pace. Lorvena. Was she alright? She had been devastated when Samuel left. That's what the town folk said anyway. She never loved again, had filled her days with work and taking Mistletoe under her wing. A strong urge to protect slammed into her. Head held high she walked past Garland and stopped in her tracks. This was not what she had been expecting at all.

Samuel and Lorvena Mayhem sat at the bar, side by side. Both wore smiles and both seemed happy as clams. They turned to Garland and Mistletoe in unison.

"Garland! Your back." Lorvena smiled as she stepped from the seat at the bar and walked to her son. "Did you like the falls?"



Heat worked its way back into his face. "It was magical." Her smile told him she knew just what was magical. The heat in his cheeks grew warmer. Damn it! Why did he have to blush every time he got near his mother?

"We will discuss that adventure very soon." she looked to his father. "But for now, we have a guest."

"So I see."

Samuel walked to him and pulled him into his arms, hugging him close. Garland was taken back by this. This man had been livid to the point of yelling before Garland left. Why the sudden change? His father stepped back, his eyes going to Mistletoe.

"Who is this beautiful lady?"

"Forgive me, Samuel." his mother said. "This is Mistletoe. Or Missy if you prefer. She has been kind enough to show Garland around."

"Pleased to meet you, young lady."

"Likewise sir."

Before Samuel could say more, Garland took her hand and pulled her to his side. He tucked her close, as if protecting her. She had no idea why Garland would feel threatened. Samuel seemed safe enough.

"What are you doing here, Dad?"

The look in Samuel's eyes said he expected confrontation. "It's close to Christmas. This year I wanted to celebrate with my family." his eyes lingered to Lorvena. "My whole family."

"Just like that?" Garland couldn't believe this. "You didn't want me to come. You said it wasn't a good idea. Now you want to be here?"

Lorvena stepped forward. "Garland, your father and I have been talking." she stood beside Samuel. Her eyes bright. "We would like to spend this year together as a family. Maybe, just maybe, we can try to pick up the pieces and start again"

"Start again?" he looked at his parents and was shocked. He loved his father, worshiped the man who raised him with much love. But there was a hint of resentment. The man kept him from his own mother. Until he knew why, Garland didn't think he could handle this.

"I need to go for a walk." he turned to the door. When Mistletoe moved to follow, he stopped her. "I need to be alone for awhile, Missy. I'll see you a little later."



The confusion in her eyes almost changed his mind. But he needed this time to think. He stepped out the door and noticed it was nearly dark. Making sure he had his wallet, Garland set out walking toward town.

Back inside Spirits, Mistletoe twisted her hands together. What should she do? He was her mate and her body wanted her to follow, as well as her heart. But her mind warned her that he needed time.

"He will be alright, Missy." Samuel said as he stepped beside her, watching his son disappear down the road into town.

She watched a moment more, then turned to Lorvena. Tears were in the woman's eyes. Mistletoe walked to her and hugged her close.

"What is happening, Lorvena?"

"I want to give my marriage another chance." she said as she stepped from Mistletoe's embrace. "You know we mate for life, Missy. I still love Samuel. I will never fully understand his reasoning for leaving. But he is here now and I want to have my family back."

Stepping away, Lorvena walked into Samuel's arms and allowed him to hold her. Mistletoe was reluctant to trust the man.

"Why now?" she asked. Concern for Garland made her speak.

Samuel regarded her with a closed expression and Mistletoe wished that she kept her mouth shut. He was a handsome man. An older version of Garland. Tall, broad, a muscular build that spoke of hard work. But she had a feeling, if provoked, this man could do damage. But his closed expression opened and a small smile graced his face. His eyes held regret.

"For the last twenty years, I asked myself why? Why did I leave? Why didn't I come back?" he looked to his wife. "Not a day went by I didn't think of this woman. But I also felt I did the right thing for my son. He's not like others."

"You don't have to tell me that." Mistletoe was shocked at her own voice. She had never been snappy in her life. But she was ready to bite this man's head off. All because she wanted to protect her mate. "I know very well what he is, Mr. Mayhem."

"Just what is he, Missy?" Lorvena spoke through her tears. Her eyes alight with hope.

"He is my mate." her voice was low. "But I'm not so sure that's a good thing at the moment."



Lorvena walked to Missy and touched her arm. "Why would you say that?"

Mistletoe didn't know how to answer that. She couldn't very well say that she was afraid he would walk away. Like his father had done. But then again, he was her mate and she needed to voice her fears.

"What if he leaves?"

Lorvena smiled her understanding smile. "I know what you are saying, honey. I don't blame you. Like father like son?" she shot Samuel a look and he hung his head. "Go find him Missy. Talk to him and voice your fears. I have a feeling my son is not as bull headed as his father."

"I resent that, Lorvena." Samuel's voice was quiet. "I did what I felt was best for him."

She looked to her husband. "Samuel Mayhem, when will you ever learn? If you want this to work you had better change your way of thinking. You don't always know best."

Mistletoe smiled and was glad to see the fire back in her friend. But her smile faded as she had no idea where Garland would have gone.

"How do I find him?"

"Let your heart guide you. You will know."

With a hug and a kiss on the cheek, Missy walked to the door. She turned suddenly and looked directly to Samuel.

"Don't hurt her." was all she said, as she left.

"I think she means to do me harm."

"Oh, not Missy. A sweeter soul you will never find." she stood beside him. "She is his mate, Samuel. She will love him for life. I don't want her to go through what I have gone through."

Samuel moved behind his wife, wrapped her in his arms and pulled her close to his chest. He finally felt almost whole again.

"I wish I could rewind it all, Lorvena. I never would have put us through this." he brushed a soft kiss in her hair and her body tingled.

"Was there ever another, Samuel?"

"Never."

She turned in his arms and pulled him close. "I have missed you. But if you plan to leave again, please go now. I won't risk total devastation to my heart again."



He kissed her gently. "I'm here, Lorvena. I don't ever want to leave again."

"What about your ranch?"

"I sold it." at her shocked expression, he kissed her again. "All I have is what's in the back of that truck."

Lorvena turned away and walked to the door. When the lock clicked and she faced him, he knew he was just where he wanted to be. But when her hands clasped his, heat flared through out his body. He felt alive again.

"Come with me." she whispered and led him to a room in the back.

\* \* \* \*

Lorvena had been right. All Mistletoe needed to do was walk through town and the beat of her heart acted like a beacon. As she stood in front of the hotel, she knew he would be inside. Through the front and up the stairs, the beat guided her, until she stopped before one door. When the door opened before she even knocked, she was almost surprised.

"Garland, may I come inside?"

"Of course." he opened the door wide and she walked into the room.

She stood uncertain, but steady. Garland watched her, knowing he must be the cause of her distress. He made love to her and walked away. But he had no intention of walking away from her for life.

"We need to talk, Garland."

He nodded and walked to the bed, sitting against the headboard. He patted the spot beside him and she sat on the edge, facing him.

"I knew you were here. It was like I felt you on the other side of that door." he said, reaching for her hand. "How is that possible?"

"When we were together today, something happened that I am not sure you are ready for."

"What?"

She took a deep breath, exhaling slowly. "We are mated, Garland. You may leave tomorrow and think you can fall in love with any woman you meet. But the truth is, we are one another's other half."

"Leave tomorrow?" he looked at her as if she just lost her senses.

"Isn't that what you will do? Drive away, and move on?"



Garland sighed, pulling her to his chest. He knew he couldn't blame her for her thoughts. He didn't exactly handle things well. Not ten minutes ago, he felt drained, lost, confused and hurt. But the moment he sensed her presence, he felt all that lift. Even if his mind didn't recognize it, his heart certainly did. He may have come back to Spellfire for his mother as well as finding her, but Missy was his home. He could picture a life with her. Even little selkie babies.

"Im sorry, Missy." he stroked her back. "I walked away and that was unfair to you. But I have no intension of walking away from you. From us."

Mistletoe closed her eyes and just enjoyed the feel of his hands and the joy in her heart. But would he feel that way a year from now? Doubt once again clouded her mind.

"How strange this must be for you Garland." she lifted her head to look in his eyes. "You made it to town this morning, just met your mother again. Embraced your other self and now you have a nagging woman at your door. You must be exhausted."

He couldn't help but chuckle at her and her words. Nagging woman indeed. He rolled and pulled her with him, laying her on her back as he leaned over her.

"Missy, I handled things badly. I know I did." he kissed her eyes. "But coming here was the best thing I have ever done." he kissed her nose.

"It was?"

"Yes." he kissed her cheek. "I have a confession to make."

"What is it?"

"I dreamed of you."

Her eyes widened and she sat up. "You what?"

"I dreamed of you, for a long time now, I have met you in my dreams."

Mistletoe stood and paced. Many strange things have happened in this town, but to dream of ones mate? She never heard such a thing. But then, she had been so lonely. Lorvena said it was possible for one soul to call the other. If they were truly mated. That would mean that he was connected to her before he even made it here. That explained why she felt such a strong desire to pull over today and give a lift to a stranger.

"Missy?"



She turned to look at him, her heart in her eyes. He had come for her. She put on her most seductive smile and walked slowly toward him. The buttons on her shirt coming free as she tugged them, one by one.

“Yes, Garland?”

His eyes narrowed slightly, trying to figure her out. “Are you okay?”

“I’m perfect.”

His throat went dry when she pulled the shirt from her body. “Not that i’m complaining honey, but one minute you looked terrified and the next, well, like you want to eat me alive.”

“It was just a shock to me, that’s all.” she reached his side and pulled him to her. Wrapping her arms around him and holding him close. Her legs wanted to buckle from just his nearness, his scent. “But it also means, that your soul knew mine. It helped guide you here for us to find one another. We no longer need to be lonely.”

“Im sorry, Missy.”

“For what?”

“Walking away today. I just..” he stopped when her finger gently touched his lips.

She leaned forward and kissed him gently. “I understand.” again she held him close, and brushed his hair from his forehead. “Later, we will concentrate on your father and your mother. Right now, it’s you and me, Garland. Just you and me.”

Again he tumbled her to the bed, but this time, he kissed her deeply. She was here, in his arms and that was all that mattered now.

Garland took his time, undressing her completely. For tonight nothing mattered but the two of them. He smiled as he looked at her. He had a feeling he would be smiling for the rest of his life.

“What are you smiling at?”

“You.”

She quirked and eyebrow. “Do I have something on my face?”

Rolling his eyes, he stood and undressed. “Sweetheart, you say the most romantic things.”

She giggled as he joined her, nuzzling her tummy. But it soon turned into a moan of pure bliss. Garland Mayhem had a talent with his hands and mouth that she wished she could bottle up. He wasted no time in bringing her body to a fevered pitch.



He was amused when she pushed him over to his back. "Something on your mind, Missy?"

Leaning forward she kissed his chest. "It's my turn."

Garland had no other warning. Her hot mouth went to work across his chest and he was no longer amused. He was on fire. She nipped and licked her way across his chest, pausing to play with his nipples. He felt her smile when he groaned at her play.

Lower and lower she went, until his hands fisted in the coverlet. When she stopped, he glanced at her face.

"Don't stop now woman. You'll kill me."

Her smile was shy, but she looked determined. "I have never done this before."

Now he knew what that look was about. He sat forward, cupped her face in his hands and kissed her gently. He made love to her mouth with his own, stroking inside and licking her lips.

"Do you feel how my mouth plays with yours?"

"Yes."

"That's all you need to do."

Her hand gently pushed him back onto the bed. When her mouth closed over him, and her tongue began to play, he thought he would die. Damn she learned fast. Her mouth on his cock was about the next best thing to heaven. He held on for dear life.

But when her hands started to caress him, he knew he would be lost if he didn't stop her now. He gently pulled away, groaning as he did so.

"Was I not doing it right?"

Pulling her up his body, she straddled his hips. "You were more than wonderful. But I want you too much right now."

He lifted her hips and gently made his way inside her. As before, her heat was close to scorching. Her walls gripped him tightly and he grit his teeth to hold back. He never wanted this moment with her to end. But then again, he would have many more moments to come. Years worth.

Seated, Mistletoe slowly rocked her hips, testing just what she could do. When Garland grabbed her hips and arched into her, she let the passion flow through her and made love to him with her heart. It felt as if she were chasing something and it stayed just out of reach. At the waterfall earlier in the day, Garland drove her over an edge that



amazed her. But now, she felt she needed to chase it down or miss it. So she moved faster.

Feeling as if he would explode at any moment, Garland closed his eyes against the erotic picture she made. She was absolutely stunning. He was close and didn't want to go alone. He reached down and flicked her clit and her cry was music to his ears. Her pleasure a balm to his soul. He held her close and flew with her.

After what seemed like forever, their hearts slowed and their breathing calmed. Garland pulled her to his side and held her close to his body. Her deep sigh and even breathing said she was asleep. He smiled to himself. She was something, his Missy. Though the Christmas holiday was still a few days away, he had all he wanted in his arms. Closing his eyes, holding her even closer, Garland drifted off to sleep with dreams not of sugar plums, but of Mistletoe and the beautiful Mayhem children he hoped to have with her one day.

\* \* \* \*

Christmas Day  
Spirits Tavern

"Are you happy, Garland?" Samuel asked his Son as they stood at the window overlooking the Selkie River.

"More than I ever thought possible."

"That's all that matters."

"What about you?" he glanced to his father. "Will you be staying or leaving?"

Samuel looked to be in deep thought and Garland hoped that his Mothers heart would not be broken, once again.

"I made a mistake, over twenty years ago. I know now just how wrong I was and odds are I will never forgive myself." he turned and leaned against the window frame, watching Lorvena as she passed around the eggnog to the friends who had joined them for the holiday. "But for that woman and the love she has shown me, I will damn sure try. I'm here son, to stay."

Garland turned as well, and searched until he found Missy. She looked lovely today in her festive clothes. But then again, she always looked beautiful to him. His heart was in his eyes and seemed to want to reside there.

"It seems so strange. You never stopped loving my Mother. You never had another. But right now, at this moment, it's like we never left."



“You love her, don’t you?” Samuel asked.

“With every fiber of my being, I love her.”

Patting his son on the back, Samuel smiled. “Then don’t muck it up son. Trust me on this. She will never be away from you, no matter how far you go.”

“No worries Dad. I’m here to stay.” he said, repeating his fathers words.

Smiling, Samuel walked away to join Lorvena. It would take awhile to win the town over again. They all loved and respected the woman with a devotion that was unwavering. But he would take all the time needed to do just that.

Missy walked over to Garland, he draped his arm over her shoulder. He never could touch her enough. Kissing her forehead , he reached into his pocket and pulled out a beautifully wrapped package.

“Merry Christmas, Love.”

Her eyes showed surprise. “What is it?”

“Open it.”

Like the small package may shatter, she opened it gently. The velvet box caused her heart to accelerate. When the lid lifted, she gasped. Nestled inside was a silver ring, but the design was that of a seal. The eyes were bright turquoise. The most beautiful thing she ever laid her eyes on. Her own eyes began to fill.

“Oh, Garland..”

He tipped her chin so she looked into his eyes. “I know it’s sudden. But I know that I love you. Marry me, Missy. Be with me forever. Have my babies.”

Blinking away her tears of happiness, Missy reached to kiss him. He loved her. She had never had a more wonderful Christmas.

“Is that a yes?”

“Yes. Yes I will marry you.” he pulled the ring from its box, sliding it on to her ring finger. It winked as if it found it’s rightful place.

Together they laughed as he picked her up and twirled her around. She held him tightly, knowing that her life just became perfect. Pulling away, she started to speak, but was interrupted by his parents.

“What’s going on you two?” Lorvena asked as she stopped before the happy couple.

“Shall I tell them?” Garland asked.



“Yes.”

“Missy has agreed to marry me.”

Lorvena gasped and hugged them both in unison. Samuel stepped forward and took his turn. They looked like what they were, one big and happy family.

“Congratulations. You both are deserving of such happiness.”

“Thanks Dad.”

Grasping Missy’s hand, Lorvena looked at the ring, and gasped. “Oh my.” she had tears in her eyes. “I always hoped it would find its way to your brides finger.”

“What?” Missy asked, confused. “What is she talking about, Garland.”

Pulling her close, he told her. “That was my mother’s ring. The one thing that she made sure my Dad took with him.”

“Really?” her eyes filled all over again. “Lorvena, you must love this very much. Are you sure its alright?”

“Don’t be silly. The ring is where it wants to be. Where I want it to be.” her smile was radiant. “This is the best Christmas present I could have ever hoped for.”

Missy smiled. “I have a gift for you as well, Garland.”

“You do?”

“Actually, I think it’s a gift for us all.” she looked at their expectant faces. “Garland, how do you feel about being a father?”

“What?”

“I’m pregnant.”

Garland’s jaw dropped, his father lost his breath and his mother jumped in excitement.

“It’s so soon. How do you know?” he asked, still in shock but daring to believe. He could think of nothing better than Missy to have his baby.

“There is no mistaking the change. My whole system is reacting.”

Garland held his tears at bay and hugged his soon to be wife. “Mom was right. This Christmas is and will be the best ever.”

Lorvena turned to the group at the bar and shouted. “Drinks all around. I am to gain a Daughter and a Grandbaby to boot !”

The crowd cheered and Missy embraced her soon to be father-in-law. He wasn’t so bad after all.

“Thank you, Missy.” Samuel said as he hugged her.



“For what?”

“For putting the light back into my sons eyes.” he kissed her forehead and walked away to join his wife.

“A baby.” Garland’s voice was hushed and his hand trembled as he touched her flat tummy. His child was in there. “I love you, Missy.”

Though she knew he loved her, it was a jolt to hear him say it. “I love you back, Garland.”

They stood holding each other, both content just to be near the other. Missy smiled and pulled away.

“Shall we find some Mistletoe?” she asked.

“No need.” he said as he leaned forward and kissed her gently. “I have my very own Mistletoe, year round.”

With family and friends, they celebrated life, love and new beginnings. Garland finally understood what his mother had been saying since he arrived. Spellfire truly was a magical place. After all, he did find some magic of his very own.

The End



**Works**

**by**

**Ann Regentin**

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# **Eid al-F'tr**

**By**

**Ann Regentin**

The mosque in Spellfire was an unassuming building across the street from a deli, its dome painted a discreet mustard yellow. It housed a small, equally discreet congregation. Although the women wore headscarves, there were no veils or chadors, nothing that would make them stand out too much, and the men were quick to point out that lessons offered there in the Koran emphasized The Prophet as a man of peace. Because it was a small community, it was also a diverse one, with people from all places and all sects setting aside differences on the common ground of faith. They worshipped together, studied together, played together, and took care of each other, whether they were Suni, Shiit, Saudi Arabian, Bosnian, or African American, good friends to each other and good, quiet neighbors when at home.

Still, in Spellfire it was possible, no matter where one was, if one knew just how to listen, to hear the call to prayer.

\* \* \* \*

The early morning call was, to Salwa, an irritation, since it woke her at least an hour before she needed to be awake, and she often could not get back to sleep. It made her grumpy in the morning, and she was sure it made the kids grumpy, too, even though they hadn't quite learned to listen for it yet. Even worse, no matter how early she got up, the morning always ended up in a frantic headlong rush that was a ripe breeding ground for forgotten lunchboxes, homework and science projects, and the first morning of Ramadan was no exception "Get your backpack," she said to her oldest son. "It's time to go. Aida, finish your breakfast," she added, glancing back at the table.

"I don't like toast and Ensure," her daughter whined. "I want cereal."

"It's Ramadan," Salwa reminded her. "You don't get cereal until it's over."



“You’ve let her get too Westernized,” said Salwa’s oldest, twelve going on thirty, who had recently gone from the American “David” he’d insisted on in grade school to the “Daoud” he’d been named at birth. “You should make her fast properly.”

“You’re a terrorist,” Aida said, drinking the last of her Ensure and making a face, “and if you don’t stop being mean, I’ll report you.”

“Aida, that’s not even remotely funny!” Salwa snapped, then she turned to Daoud. “She’s too young to fast and you know it. Leave her alone and go get your backpack.” She shoved her grumbling daughter’s lunchbox into her hands. “You don’t have time to complain. Go to the bus stop. Now.”

“I hate Ramadan!” Aida announced as she slid off her chair.

“Mom should beat you for that,” Daoud said, shooting a resentful glare over his shoulder at his mother.

“See you later, Mom,” said Dean, Salwa’s middle child, who had eaten quickly and determinedly through his siblings’ banter and was now halfway out the door.

“Bye,” Salwa said to their backs, breathing a sigh of relief. Once again, her brood would make it to the bus in time. Salwa put the younger children’s breakfast dishes into the dishwasher, her own stomach already starting to grumble. She’d had a bite to eat at dawn; she’d get nothing else until sunset.

Thanks to the shorter months of the Islamic calendar, Ramadan was creeping gradually away from Christmas, but it was still too close to what Americans called the holiday season for Salwa’s comfort. Just as she was forced to starve herself for a month, visions of turkey dinners with all the trimmings were dancing across the television screen at every commercial break. There were plans for parties, gifts to buy for both Christian and secular friends, the inevitable questions about exactly what they celebrated, and over and over again the sense that this was a time to indulge. It was a harsh contrast to the austerity of Ramadan.

The only thing that came close to redeeming it was the fact that her husband Feisal was spending his days working around food.

Salwa wasn’t sure when her husband had begun to disappoint her. She traced the worst of her resentment to the opening of the restaurant about the time Aida was born, but she could not remember being all that blissfully happy when he was working as an engineer. In



both cases, it was a lot of long hours and now that he had the restaurant, they were weird hours and the end result was less money and more uncertainty. With three children to feed, clothe and educate, Salwa worried about security. Feisal, she thought, was gambling her children's future on a pipe dream. That wasn't what a responsible husband and father did.

Feisal, at that moment, was sleeping, and Salwa took a certain grim satisfaction in knowing that for the next month, she was free of the obligation to make breakfast for him. In fact, they would both probably be a lot happier if the house was empty when he woke, and it was easy to find an excuse to go. She went through the children's rooms in search of dirty laundry and loaded the washer, then grabbed her purse and left the house to see to an elderly neighbor. Well, not exactly a neighbor. It would be a nice, half-hour walk that guaranteed that Salwa would not be home when Feisal woke.

\* \* \* \*

When Feisal got down to the kitchen, he was furious to find it empty. Then he remembered that it was the first day of Ramadan, but it only mollified him slightly. It would have been nice to have been seen off to work by a loving wife, but his had apparently decided to abandon him. There was no note, so he had no idea where she might be. In Iran, this would have been unacceptable but in America, a woman could do as she saw fit and Salwa apparently saw fit to leave before he even got out of bed.

He would never understand her. He would never understand women. He could not fix himself breakfast so instead he just showered, dressed and left, slamming the door behind him even though there was no one there to appreciate the gesture.

Feisal had moved heaven and earth to get his wife and then-infant son to America, but he had done it because he heard that in America, a man had opportunities that those in other countries could only dream of. He started with a student visa, finished his Ph.D., then found a job that allowed him to extend his stay indefinitely. Their second son, Saladeen, was born an American citizen and by the time Aida was born, Feisal had his green card.

The restaurant was the result of two things. One was reading American financial magazines, which made it clear that the real road to wealth was owning one's own business. Yes, the early years would be lean, but a thriving business was an asset in itself as well as a



source of income, and the amount of the income was limited only by his own industry and ingenuity. Feisal liked to cook, people always needed to eat, and Americans liked variety. A clean place with good service and authentic cuisine should do just fine. Houston was a bit too large, but the population of nearby Spellfire was diverse and prosperous enough to provide a more than adequate clientele and in any case, he was fascinated by the town without really understanding why.

He had been right. The first two years, he lost money, but by the third, he was climbing steadily out of the red, and Spellfire was home to people from all over the world. Not all of them were, he found out, people in the strictest sense, but the supernatural and the undead paid and tipped just as well as the living, so once he got over the shock, Feisal saw no reason to complain. Even 9/11 hadn't dented his receipts much. By then, he was well-known and well-respected, and he'd hung an American flag over one of the windows, loudly and clearly proclaiming his allegiances. Yes, some left, but others made a point of stopping in more frequently. Then time eased people's fears and things started looking up again, at least where his work was concerned.

He didn't know when his family first started to fall apart. At some point, his older son started hanging out with bad company, a group of older Muslim boys whose attitudes stopped just short of dangerous. His daughter barely spoke Farsi, and what she said in English would have earned her a beating back home. His middle son ignored him and everyone else, preferring to spend all of his time on the computer. And then there was his wife.

Salwa's behavior was, by and large, above reproach, and Feisal had the feeling that she kept it that way to spite him. She did exactly what was required of her, no less but also no more. The house was kept clean, the children's grades were good, meals were cooked, clothing washed, ironed and put away, but there were no little touches, nothing in what she did that indicated that it was done with affection rather than a sense of duty. When he hinted that he would like to see more from her, she snapped at him, daring him to find fault with her behavior, giving him a litany of her days that made him feel petty for trying to add to them. He seemed to have no way of asking for what he wanted that she would understand and not resent. He



knew that it was beyond cure when he woke up one morning to the realization that they had not made love in over a month.

Luckily, the restaurant would take everything he gave it, and he poured himself into his work with a sense of something akin to relief. There were new busboys to hire, new recipes to try, new suppliers to check out, and always something to do. Owning his own business was more exhilarating and terrifying than he'd imagined, and adventure of a kind that few modern men would ever undertake and like a mistress, it soothed his aching heart until he could almost convince himself that he was happy.



## Chapter 2

“Mom, I don’t want bread and Ensure!”

The day had not moderated Aida’s attitude, and her lower lip protruded far more than was strictly decorous. “Why can’t we be Christians? Dana Sanderson says we’re all going to hell because we’re not Christians. I don’t want to go to hell.”

“We’re not going to hell,” Salwa reassured her daughter, “a good Muslim doesn’t go to hell, just like a good Christian doesn’t.”

“Dana Sanderson is the one going to hell,” Daoud said. “She’s an infidel.”

“Daoud!” Salwa warned.

“It says in the Koran--“

“Before you go to bed, I want you to copy as many verses from the Koran as you can find where The Prophet says to live in peace with your neighbors,” Salwa said as Dean put his plate quietly into the sink and tossed his Ensure can into the trash. “Dean, before you play anything tonight, I need to check over your homework.”

“Right, Mom.”

“Aida, do you have homework?”

“No, and I’m not eating this.”

“Then don’t. Put the rest of your can in the fridge in case you’re hungry later.”

“I won’t be.”

“That’s up to you. Just put it in the fridge. Daoud, why don’t you get started on your homework?”

“I think Dean should give up the computer,” Daoud said.

“This is Ramadan, not Lent,” Salwa said, exasperated. “Dean is fasting as a child fasts.”

“He’s old enough to fast like a man.”

“No, he’s not. This is your first year and Dean is three years younger than you are. Just go do your homework, and remember that I want to see those verses before you go to bed.”

Salwa sighed as the children cleared out the kitchen, so relieved to have some space that she didn’t bother to tell Aida to take care of her plate and can. She would rather do it herself if it bought her a few more minutes of peace. Naturally, Feisal wasn’t there to help her with the kids. He would come in long after they went to bed, just as he did



almost every night. Salwa felt like a single mother, and Ramadan was going to make it even worse.

She understood and even embraced the spiritual side of the fast, but she hated the physiological side-effects. By the end of the day, she became a short-tempered shrew, willing to find fault for every little thing the children did. She also felt tired, even though she knew she wasn't, and dizzy. Thankfully, Ramadan all but eliminated the task of preparing and cleaning up after meals, making her workload that much lighter, but still. She was dying for water, just water, never mind food.

Still, it was a reminder that part of life, part of a religious life, was sacrifice. There were things that faith demanded giving up and Salwa knew this, but she never knew it as acutely as she did during Ramadan, nor had she felt it as acutely as she did then. Without warning, she saw her marriage as a long, unrelenting fast, and she doubled over the kitchen sink, her hand clapped hard over her mouth so that the children wouldn't hear her sob. She hated Feisal then, for condemning her to this and hated herself for choosing him. She hadn't been forced to marry him, although it might have been easier if she had. No, she had gone into this of her own free will and she would never, ever get out.

After a minute, she splashed her face with cold water and started preparing a light meal, only the second that day, even though it was still a few hours before sundown. Still, it kept her hands busy, grounded her in a familiar ritual. When she was done, she'd check the children's homework, make sure their rooms were clean and they had school clothes ready for the morning. The boys would need showers, Aida a bath and with luck, Aida and Daoud wouldn't try to kill each other over supper. And if she was really, truly lucky, she'd be asleep before Feisal came home.

Whether it was luck or just a full stomach, she wasn't sure, but when she curled up under the sheets, she felt tired and strangely good. For the first day of Ramadan, it hadn't really been that bad. Aida would whine, but she'd get through it. Daoud wasn't really such a bad boy, just a young, uncertain one. Dean actually told her over supper that he was doing a solo presentation on Ramadan for his school's holiday show. Normally she got this kind of information only when she saw it on the program. Yes, it had been a good day after all, and she smiled to herself as she drifted off to sleep.



She thought she woke only a few minutes later, but when she opened her eyes, she knew she wasn't really awake. She was in a palace, the kind an ancient Persian prince might have built, and she was lying on silken cushions in a room with vaulted ceilings and gilded pillars. There were murals on the walls, and once Salwa got a good look at them, she blushed. They were beyond sensual, only just shy of pornographic, and she could neither look at them nor look away.

"Do you like them?"

It was a woman's voice, thankfully, and Salwa turned to find that the speaker could have walked out of one of the murals. She was young and slender but far from thin, the soft curves of her body spilling out of a traditional costume of voluminous emerald silks that didn't so much conceal as they did enhance. Her skin was the deep, even almond of someone who seldom saw the desert sun, someone whose life was limited to the harem, not necessarily as a sexual slave but as one who was kept, like a precious jewel, out of sight of others. She looked like something straight out of a legend.

"I...", Salwa began, at a lost for words.

"I know," the young woman said with a smile as she sat down on the cushions beside Salwa. "They're a bit much, but they're not bad."

"Whose room is this?" Salwa asked.

"Mine. And my husband's." She gestured toward the walls.

"The paintings inspire him. My name is Habibeh, by the way."

"I'm Salwa."

"I know."

They said nothing for a while, and Salwa looked at the walls. The paintings were amazingly real, with just enough brushstrokes to distinguish them from photographs. The positions of the bodies were such that she could see everything, but the faces were sublime, nothing mean or exploitative about them, just pure joy. "You don't sleep here," Salwa said.

Habibeh laughed. "Only afterward! And the mornings bear a remarkable resemblance to the nights before."

Salwa sighed.

"It's been a while," Habibeh said gently, "hasn't it."

"What's funny," Salwa said, "is that I don't miss it." And it was true, even though her eyes were lingering on a spot on the wall



opposite her where a man entered a woman as she was on all fours, her back arched to take him in.

“Why not?”

Salwa thought for a while about what sex with Feisal was like. At first, it had been pleasant, if not ecstatic. Then it had become a warm routine. Then an irritation. “What’s it like for you?”

Habibeh’s eyes closed and her smile became sweetly wicked. “Exactly as it’s supposed to be.”

It made Salwa want to cry again, and before she realized it, Habibeh had pulled her close. “It need not be so bad,” she whispered in Salwa’s ear.

“It’s not bad,” Salwa began.

“But it’s not as good as it could be,” Habibeh finished. “Why not?”

“It’s not that he never tries,” Salwa said, “but it never really works.”

“Have you ever told him what you like?”

Salwa blushed furiously. “I can’t. My husband is a proud man. He would be so angry.”

“Does he not want to please you?”

“It’s not that, it’s just.....” But she could not continue because Habibeh’s hand was stroking her neck, brushing her hair aside before drifting over her shoulder and down her arm.

“He’s a man,” Habibeh said, her breath warm in Salwa’s ear. “His own body is completely different. How can he know what you like unless you tell him?”

Habibeh’s hand drifted to Salwa’s breast, and although the hand was expert, the sensations it inspired disturbed as much as they aroused. “Wait,” Salwa said.

“You’re dreaming,” Habibeh said as her fingers rolled Salwa’s nipple to a disturbingly alert firmness through her nightgown. “Nothing that happens here counts.”

That was true. It was a dream, which meant that not only did it not count, but there was nothing Salwa could do about it.

Another truth was that there was nothing she wanted to do about it. Salwa had never had any great desire for women, but she didn’t find them repulsive, either, and it had been ages since she’d been touched at all, not lovingly and not by an adult. It was too good to object to, and Salwa lay still, her eyes closed, as Habibeh slipped the



straps of Salwa's nightgown over her shoulders, pinning her arms and exposing her breasts. A hand cupped one breast, the thumb rolling her nipple back and forth before a warm, soft mouth closed over it.

Salwa cried out in both surprise and delight. This mouth was the mouth she'd always dreamed of, one that knew exactly what to do. It licked, sucked, even bit, but not quite hard enough to hurt, just hard enough to make Salwa cry out. Then her other breast fell victim that tormenting mouth while a hand crept slowly but firmly down over her belly before it cupped her sex.

Salwa's eyes flew open in panic, but the first thing she saw was the walls, those explicit paintings of men fucking women in every imaginable variation. She was surrounded by spread legs and rampant cocks, and the walls themselves were almost writhing in the heat. She did not object as her panties were pulled aside and a finger slid through the swollen, slippery lips of her cunt. She did not object as that finger began to circle her clit, a slow, steady rhythm that matched the sucking and licking of the tongue on her nipple. Instead, she focused on one of the paintings, that of a man kneeling as he held a woman's legs apart, his cock vanishing into her belly, the look of concentration on his face apparent even in profile.

Salwa felt her panties being pulled down over her hips and she lifted them to aid the process, the protest burned out of her. She wanted to be the object of that kind of desire, wanted to be someone a man would put some effort into fucking, not a familiar, comfortable screw, but an adventure, and on the wall were adventures of all kinds. A tongue took the place of the finger on her clit and the finger and its nearest twin thrust into her cunt, and the painting seemed to move, the man's ass flex, as Salwa spread her legs so far apart that the tendons ached. In all the years of her marriage, she had never come at her husband's hand, never come at the hand of another at all, and she was going to now if that tongue and those fingers could go on just a little longer. Salwa was beginning to panic, afraid that they would stop, but they never did, and the man on the wall never stopped either, and Salwa at last began to come, harder than she ever had in her life as her vision narrowed to the man on the wall and the woman who lay before him, her eyes closed in bliss.

When Salwa caught her breath, Habibeh was sitting beside her, watching her and stroking her hair. "Thank you," Salwa said.



“You’re welcome,” Habibeh said. “You’re still sad,” she added, an observation rather than a criticism.

“It will never happen again,” Salwa sighed.

“Don’t be so sure,” Habibeh smiled.

“I will not leave my husband,” Salwa said, her eyes filling with tears.

“Your sacrifice will be rewarded,” Habibeh said in her ear, “when you figure out what the proper sacrifice is.” And the dream faded, leaving Salwa wondering even in her sleep what the other woman meant.



### Chapter 3

Ramadan was murder on a restaurateur. His late bedtime meant that he missed the dawn meal, so by about five in the evening, Feisal was surrounded by food and going mad with hunger. After that point, the minutes felt like hours and the hours felt like days. As dusk approached, Feisal found himself wondering at exactly which stage he could call it sunset, trying to calculate the precise moment at which he could eat again instead of timing it to the evening call to prayer. Because all of his kitchen staff and most of the waitstaff were also Muslim, he had plenty of company in his misery, but also felt obliged to set a good example, so in spite of his convoluted calculations, he always timed it anyway. He didn't set out the plates of food for his employees until the call was over.

From that point on, unable to sit down and eat properly, he snacked straight through until he went home, and when he got there, he went through the refrigerator, trying to fortify himself against the next day. Ramadan was an exquisite torture and a bitter reminder that he wasn't entirely in control of his fate. No matter what kinds of plans he made, there was always something that forced him to see them through by sheer will-power, perhaps not an obstacle exactly but something more like quicksand. Where the restaurant was concerned, it was Ramadan. Luckily, Feisal had been through it often enough to know that the first day was the worst. He would, over time, get used to it.

Feisal showered the day's work away and crept silently to bed so as not to wake his wife. Salwa would need to be up early with the children and, as she had made very clear numerous times, she needed her sleep. Still, he hadn't entirely wound down yet and he lay gazing at her in the moonlight.

Salwa was still beautiful. Her hair, which she wore under a scarf during the day, was braided for sleep and it lay in a thick, black rope on the pillow. The lines around her eyes were smile lines, not frown lines, and her lips were still soft and full. Her body, after three children, was softer than it had been when they married, but that was to be expected and anyway, Feisal had not grown up as inundated with images of stick-thin models, as had most American men. He preferred women who had a bit of meat on their bones.



He wanted to touch her, but he didn't dare, so instead he traced the lines of the braid. Salwa's hair, not visible to the general public, was undamaged by chemical treatments or styling lotions and soft as satin. Feisal bit back tears of longing. His marriage was like Ramadan; he was surrounded by what he wanted most, but unable to partake. He had wanted her from the start and never stopped wanting her, but at some point, she had stopped wanting him and he was not a man who took what others weren't willing to give. He had considered an affair, but his honor mattered more to him than gratifying his libido, so he was left with a mix of memory and daydream that only left him melancholy when it was over. It seemed that there could be no end. He rolled over and closed his eyes, thinking of the long day ahead and willing himself to sleep.

Feisal rarely remembered his dreams, so he was surprised to find himself in the beginning of what looked to be a truly memorable one. He was in a room of what looked like an ancient, expensive brothel. It was furnished like a palace, but the walls were covered with explicit paintings. They were too well-done to be obscene, but too sexual to be considered art, and he found himself looking at them in terms of what he had and had not done, and what he might like to try.

"What do you think?" a voice behind him asked.

Feisal spun around, startled. "What?"

A young man stood behind him, muscular arms crossed over a broad, brown chest. He wore only pants, and pants of a kind that hadn't been worn in a few centuries. His feet were bare, as was his head, and his hair was tousled as if he had just been out somewhere windy. He grinned broadly at Feisal. "What do you think?"

"They're unbelievable," Feisal said. "This room is yours?"

"Mine," the man said, "and my wife's. My name is Asad."

"Feisal," said Feisal. "Your wife comes here?" He simply couldn't believe it.

"Of course she does. I have only one wife and no mistress. Who else would I share it with?"

That startled Feisal as much as the idea of a wife in that room. This man looked like the kind of prince who could have all the wives and mistresses he wanted. "She can't approve."

"She posed for a few of these paintings." Asad walked over to the wall and pointed to a picture of a nude woman on her knees, legs



spread, one hand between her legs and another on her breast, her eyes closed in both concentration and ecstasy.

“That’s your wife?” Feisal asked, stunned by both the woman’s beauty and the intimacy of the pose itself.

“Yes. Habibeh. That’s one of my particular favorites.”

Gears ground in Feisal’s brain as he tried to reconcile the painting with his notion of what a wife should be. He had never seen Salwa in such a position, nor had he even imagined it.

“You’ve never walked in on your wife?” Asad asked, the grin now accompanied by a raised eyebrow.

“No,” said Feisal, who was only now seriously considering the idea of Salwa masturbating. He knew, in theory, that she must, but he’d never thought about what it might look like. The idea was at once disturbing and arousing.

“I was astonished,” Asad said, “and she nearly died of embarrassment. I had to reassure her and ask her to continue.”

Both of Feisal’s eyebrows shot up. “And she did?”

“Yes. I liked it so much, I had it painted on the wall. Amazing to see her like that, especially how quickly she manages. It took me a long time to figure out how to make her come.”

That was a sore spot with Feisal, because in their entire thirteen years together, he wasn’t sure that he’d actually made Salwa come and he’d been afraid to ask.

“It’s not easy to tell if you’ve never seen it before,” Asad said with surprising gentleness.

“It would be a lot easier if women were more like men!” Feisal burst out with an anger that surprised him.

Asad sat down on one of the divans and patted the cushion next to him. “So it would,” he said with the same mildness as Feisal sat down. “A man knows best what pleases another man.”

Feisal, catching a hint of seduction in the other’s words, began to panic. His aversion to homosexuality wasn’t just cultural, it was personal. He found men coarse and crude, their bodies clumsy and awkward, designed for utility rather than beauty, and the idea that a man might find him attractive appalled him.

Asad laughed. “You just said you wanted women to be more like men.”

“I didn’t mean it,” Feisal objected. “Not like that anyway.”

“But it would be useful in other ways, wouldn’t it?”



Feisal, relaxing again, sighed. "Yes. She's a good wife," he added quickly, finding to his surprise that he still wanted to defend Salwa.

"I never said she wasn't," Asad said, "only that there are things she cannot instinctively understand. She has to learn them."

"She doesn't seem to be able to," Feisal said sadly.

"No? Or have you never tried to teach her?"

"How?" Feisal asked.

"The easiest way," Asad said, "is to simply let her know when she does something you like. Here." With a strong firm hand placed in the center of Feisal's chest, he pushed him down on the divan and stretched out beside him.

"What are you doing?" Feisal asked, the panic rising into his throat.

"Teaching you how to teach her," Asad said.

"No," said Feisal.

"Try to stop me," Asad said, laughing.

Feisal reached up to push the other man away, but found that he couldn't move, and then he remembered that he was dreaming. This didn't so much ease his worry as shift its ground. Did he harbor a secret lust for men?

"No," Asad said, smiling. "Nor will tonight change you into anything you don't want to be. It will change you, though."

Before Feisal could ask how, a warm, wet tongue burrowed into his ear and he moaned as the sensation traveled down his neck and into his gut. The tongue lingered before it traveled down the side of his neck, sucking and biting, coaxing more moans from Feisal's throat. Asad's hand rested on Feisal's naked belly and in spite of himself, Feisal felt his cock harden, pushing up toward that hand.

Asad was right. A man did know best how to please another man. Asad's touch was expert and sure, and he responded instantly even to a catch in Feisal's breath, adding or easing pressure, biting a little harder on a nipple, letting a finger trail feather-light down Feisal's ribs until the hand pressed hard against his ass. One of Asad's knees pinned Feisal's thigh as Asad's teeth sank in just above Feisal's collarbone and Feisal cried out in a mix of plea and protest.

Asad's hand crept slowly up the inside of Feisal's thigh, settled at last on his aching cock, and Feisal found his eyes drawn once again to the painting of Asad's wife masturbating. Was that what Salwa did



when he was at work? His inhibitions in tatters, he was no longer disturbed by the thought that she might need something other than him. Instead, he was rabidly curious. He knew Salwa didn't own a dildo because he knew the contents of their bedroom, but from the looks of that painting, a woman didn't really need one.

Asad's hand knew its work well. It gripped Feisal's cock firmly under his pajama pants, massaging and squeezing, a thumb planted at the juncture of shaft and head, where Feisal was most sensitive. It was a teasing touch, one intended more to arouse than to induce orgasm, and Feisal felt his balls pull up toward his body, anticipating then letting go again as a thick trail of precome leaked onto Asad's hand.

Asad shifted his body, letting go of Feisal's cock long enough to pull Feisal's pants down over his ass, and Feisal's whole body tensed with anticipation. He did not need to feel Asad kiss his way down his chest and belly to know what was coming, and as Asad's tongue traced the outlines of his cockhead, Feisal's eyes flew back to the painting.

Could it really be that simple? The woman in the painting was doing nothing to herself that Feisal couldn't do, and in some ways, Feisal might be able to do it better. He knew all too well that he wouldn't get the pressure or rhythm right on the first try, but with practice--delightful practice!--he could learn. He knew very well the exquisite difference between his own hand and the hand of another, knew that while his orgasms from masturbation might be more physically intense, they were far less emotionally gratifying. He was suddenly aware that Salwa had probably never experienced something he took for granted, orgasm a sexual encounter, and it wasn't that Feisal had never tried, only that what he tried had never worked. Here, on Asad's wall, was a woman showing him exactly what she liked, and he found himself eager to take over, to take that nipple into his mouth while his fingers played between her legs. He felt the warning tension in his balls, which were cradled in Asad's hand, and his thoughts shifted to driving his cock deep into that round, soft belly. It didn't matter that she wasn't his wife, that she was someone else's wife, he wanted to fold her beneath him and screw her as hard as he could. His back arched, he thrust his cock up into Asad's mouth and cursed in Farsi as he came.

Asad did not try to kiss him, for which Feisal was grateful. He was also grateful for the best--and, in fact, only--blowjob of his life. It



had been a perfect mix of lips and tongue, decadently wet, and without any hint of teeth, but when he opened his mouth, another question came out instead. "Did you really catch her like that?"

Asad nodded toward the painting. "Yes. The servers where I work rarely go down, but when they do, half the company goes down with them. When I got home, our daughter was still in school and my wife was on the living room floor with the laptop in front of her, exactly as you see her there." He laughed. "She was reading, of all things, a story about a woman in bed with five men. She'd never told me she had fantasies like that. I had the portrait painted for me and that one painted for her." He gestured toward another scene in which a woman was surrounded by men, all sporting raging erections, who looked set to devour her. Sure enough, it was the same woman, this time on her knees with both her mouth and her cunt being entered at the same time.

An alarm went off in Feisal's head at the mention of a job and a laptop and servers, but once again, the question that came out of his mouth was a different one. "Did she really pose for that one with all those men?"

"No," Asad said. "She likes to imagine group sex, but it's not something she really wants to do. She knows she couldn't control the outcome, but it's fun to tease her with it. If she's willing but a bit slow to warm up, I start talking about inviting the neighbors to join us and telling her exactly what they'd do to her. The effect is incredible."

Feisal's head whirled at the thought of a wife and mother imagining herself at the center of an orgy, at the thought of sex with such a woman. "How do you know...?"

"That she's mine?" Asad's grinned. "She keeps me busy! And we love each other. She trusts me with her fantasies. That means a great deal to me."

If Salwa had sexual fantasies, she had never shared them with her husband. Then again, Feisal had never shared his, for fear that she would be offended or hurt. He had always done his best to be a considerate lover and husband, which had meant sparing her the more baser aspects of his sexual impulses. He had never asked her to go down on him, although he had tried to go down on her, and he had certainly never shared his fantasies. It wasn't so much that such things were unknown in Iran, only that Salwa had always seemed so shy, and he hadn't wanted to hurt her.



“A girl outgrows her shyness after a while,” Asad said.

“Salwa never did,” Feisal said.

“Only because you haven’t let her.” Asad patted Feisal’s shoulder, the gesture of a man rather than a lover. “Give up the girl. Perhaps you’ll find that your wife is a woman after all.”

Feisal woke suddenly, jarringly, to the sound of his daughter’s outraged cry, and he blinked at the sunlight creeping in around the edges of the curtains. It was later than he’d expected, but still too early to get up. Salwa, of course, was up, but someone had to see the children off to school and Feisal was glad it wasn’t him. Then he realized that he didn’t have an erection, which he should have after a dream like that. In fact, he felt much the way he did after he came, and it worried him. Still, no question that it was a dream. He had, after all, woken in his own bed. What was there to worry about? He rolled over and pulled the covers over his ears, blocking out the voices of his fractious offspring as he drifted back off to sleep.



## Chapter 4

Salwa forgot, every year, how she could get used to Ramadan. Deprivation was something one became accustomed to, or perhaps resigned to. She still got dizzy and bitchy, but she got used to being dizzy and bitchy, although whether she was adequately compensating or not was anyone's guess.

This year, though, was different. Salwa's nights were spent in that room, not with Habibeh, but with the people on the paintings. Sometimes Salwa watched as the paintings came to life, and she listened to the sighs and groans as men and women pushed themselves and each other to the barest edge.

Sometimes she took part. On those walls was every fantasy Salwa had ever entertained and a few she hadn't thought of. In her dreams, she could take part, try the things she had never dared to ask for, feel two hands on her or ten. She could explore without fear of criticism if she didn't do things exactly right. Her limited experience and her wedding band, no longer mattered. The walls were a playground where the rules didn't apply, and Salwa woke in the early hours relaxed and pleased. It felt good to let go, even if only at night.

Her good mood distracted her. The children's squabbles took on less significance, and when Daoud started quoting some of the more inflammatory passages from the Koran, Salwa just told him to shut up. It was, after all, only a young boy's bluster, and she realized that it had to be hard for Daoud. He had a long, proud heritage that he was now being asked to disavow, or at least be a little ashamed of. It couldn't be easy for a boy right on the edge of manhood.

At the beginning of the third week of Ramadan, Salwa woke, as she always did, about a minute before the pre-dawn call to prayer, but instead of lying in bed, she got up, padded into her oldest son's room, and sat on the bed, stroking his shoulder. "Daoud, wake up!"

"What?" he asked.

"Listen very carefully," she said.

Daoud, frowned, then glanced out the window and his eyes widened, fully awake and astonished. He swung himself out of bed and went to the small prayer rug set carefully against the eastern wall of his room. "Now, Mom?"

"In a few seconds," Salwa said, feeling the warning tingle at the back of her neck. The call was not a sound. It was more like a touch



that had words, a touch that it took a mix of faith and experience to feel, and Daoud, while he had faith, still didn't quite know what he was supposed to be feeling for.

Ordinarily, a mother would not pray with her son, but Salwa knelt beside Daoud, bending as the chant began, and Daoud followed her example, going through the ritual and listening, she knew, for something he could not quite hear. It was a shame, really. The call was a song, not just a chant, and she remembered how glad she was when she learned that she could hear it in Spellfire, in this strange, magical way. She wondered how much of her son's anxiety was due to the fact that he could not hear this essential thing. Would he be so militant if he could?

Afterward, as the sky outside lightened, they shared a plate of dates, cheese and toasted walnuts, eating quickly and quietly together. Salwa did not ask if Daoud had heard the call because she did not want him to be forced to answer no. Instead, she watched as he wolfed down that small meal, his only one until sunset. He was trying so hard to grow up, but to Salwa, he still looked like a child. The only sign of impending maturity was acne, the curse of adolescence, and telling him that he would outgrow it would do nothing, she knew, to ease the embarrassment.

He drained a glass of kefir, a yogurt-like drink Salwa had picked up from a Turkish friend. "Can I stay up, Mom?" he asked.

He would be tired, Salwa knew, but he was old enough to cope with the consequences himself and anyway, it was a weekend. He had nothing pressing to do. "Yes," she said. She was not sanguine enough to think that she had just solved all of her problems with Daoud, but she did have some hope that she'd made a start.

She got back into bed, but she didn't fall asleep right away. Instead, she lay thinking, first of her son, but then of her husband. They were much alike, both strong-minded and strong-willed, and she realized with a start that that was one of the things that had attracted her to Feisal in the first place. He'd had the guts to go to America and to get an engineering degree. Even the stupid restaurant was an act of bull-headed faith, and although they weren't rich, it hadn't done poorly, either. She realized that although this was not the life she hoped for, it wasn't such a bad life. They had, after all, enough to feed and clothe the children, to put a roof over their heads, and although Daoud would not get a car for his sixteenth birthday no matter how



much he begged, there was enough for extras here and there. Spellfire was a strange town, but it had good schools and strong communities. Had they stayed in Iran, it might not have been even this good.

Feisal lay on his back, snoring lightly, and Salwa sighed, but not at him. She was no longer sure what she wanted, or perhaps of what she should want. Expecting from childhood to channel her ambitions through her husband or her sons, she was now uncertain of where she should go next, aware that she wanted more than she had and that Feisal would not give it to her only because he could not. Nobody could.

Would he have married her, she wondered as she drifted off to sleep, if he had known what she was capable of wanting?

She was back in the room again, running her hand over the cold, painted lines of a male thigh, and she realized suddenly that when Ramadan was over, the dreams would be over, too, leaving to rely indefinitely on fantasy and silicone. "I hate being a good wife!" she said aloud, feeling tears prickle at her eyes. "I'm so sick and tired of being a good wife!"

"Don't move," said a male voice behind her, and Salwa froze as she felt hands on her hips.

"Don't worry," the voice added. "It's only a dream."

It didn't feel like a dream. Salwa felt him push her forward, against the wall, felt an erection rub against her rear through several layers of fabric as two hands crept up under her nightgown and reached for her breasts.

In real life, she would have fought as hard as she could, left bruises on every part of his body she could reach, because as a Muslim woman, her honor was everything and Salwa's faith wasn't window dressing. But in a dream, she could revel in this unseen stranger pulling her panties over her hips and sliding his fingers over the dewy folds of her cunt because she really was tired of being a good wife. Feisal, she knew, was being considerate when he made soft, careful love to her under the blankets, but Salwa wanted so much more. When they were young Feisal's consideration had made the transition from girl to wife much easier, but she had outgrown it long ago. She was a woman now, with three children. She knew the facts of life. More importantly, she knew what was possible.

She felt the hot, blunt head of a cock place itself at her opening, and she arched her back to take it, feeling for the first time in her life



a man other than her husband enter her. It was wonderful, and she smiled as she braced her hands against the wall and pushed back, taking him in all the way. He didn't feel any different, which surprised her, but he felt exquisitely good.

Then came the old worry. This was more like real sex than her dreams had been and she knew her body, knew that this wasn't enough for her. He would finish, she knew, leaving her still wired and unable to ask for what she needed. After all, a good wife made no demands, accepted what her husband gave her.

"Do what you want," the man behind her said, a bit breathlessly. "Whatever you want. Be a horrible wife for me, the worst you know how."

Her hand shaking, Salwa reached between her legs and put two fingers on her clit. It was something she had dreamed of for years, something she had always known she would love because quite unknown to Feisal, she had purchased a dildo a few years ago from a store in Houston and kept it hidden at the bottom of a bucket of cleaning rags. She had done precisely this to herself ever since, mixed the touch on her clit with penetration, only now it was a real, live cock instead of seven inches of silicone.

It was incredible. She whimpered, sagged against the wall, barely able to keep up the steady rhythm on her clit, it was so good. Her legs were about to falter, and then she realized that she was about to come in the way she had always wanted to, mixing the touch on her clit with a cock inside her. Salwa caught her breath, shuddered, then wailed as the man inside her picked up his pace, driving hard into her orgasm and making it even better as he did.

It stunned her to realize that he had not come yet, and she smiled, feeling him thrust even harder. He definitely wanted to come, and in the wake of her own orgasm, she was happily anticipating his. Yes, this was a good deal more like it, no irritation, no disappointment, just two happy people. She felt the man behind her press his body against hers, felt his cock and balls pulse with his orgasm, and smiled down at the floor as she took it in.

He rubbed her back afterward, holding his body close to hers so his cock would stay inside. "Was that so difficult?" he asked.

"It's different with you," she said. "I don't have to worry about whether or not you'll be angry."



“Are you that afraid of your husband?” the man behind her asked.

Salwa considered it, and found that she had no intelligent answer. No, she was not afraid of Feisal, but she was afraid of losing his respect. Behaving like a slut seemed like a sure-fire route to exactly that. “He’s very proud.”

“Has it occurred to you that he might be shy?” the man behind her asked.

Feisal shy? At first, it seemed unlikely, but then Salwa remembered that neither of them had had any partner but the other. It was what they had expected of each other, but Salwa had never stopped to think about what it might mean, at least where Feisal’s sexual prowess was concerned.

“Perhaps he loves you,” the man said, “and doesn’t want to offend you.”

The cock inside Salwa finally softened too much to remain, and the man to whom it belonged finally raised her up and turned her around. He was young and handsome, entirely naked, and the muscles under his brown skin rippled as he moved. He brushed a tear from Salwa’s face, the first warning she had that she was crying. “What can I do?” she asked. “We’re stuck.”

“You have to take a risk,” she said.

“And lose everything?” Salwa asked. The good things about her marriage flashed through her head, first of which was the companionship of one of her dearest friends from childhood. She and Feisal shared a long history.

“Think of what you might gain, he said as the sunlight finally woke her.



## Chapter 5

Feisal came home one night to find a bit of artwork on the refrigerator. It was a picture of a space shuttle, with an anonymous figure in a space suit standing beside it. Underneath, in bold red crayon, it said, "When I grow up I want to be an Astronaut Aida age 6."

Feisal smiled as he opened the refrigerator door in search of any food leftover from his family's sunset meal. He found a container full of polo chirin, rice with raisins, orange and almonds, and a container of kefir. In the cupboard, he found the dates that were traditional for Ramadan, and poured himself a glass of kefir while he waited for the rice to warm up, and he ate without much attention to his food. Salwa wasn't a bad cook, but he was a professional chef. He could do better.

Salwa, of course, was asleep when he got into bed, and he lay beside her for a while, unable to drift off. It occurred to him that he had no idea what his wife would have drawn. He'd known Salwa since she was a girl, which was lucky in a country where young women traditionally went veiled. He knew what she had looked like when she was small, so he could easily guess what she looked like as she grew up and he'd been right. The sweet, spunky child had become a lovely woman.

Iran was not the medieval, backwards country that most Americans assumed it was. There were women doctors, women scientists, and women running businesses, but most of the women in Feisal's life had been wives and mothers. He had only one sister, who was a teacher at an excellent girls' school, but she had children of her own and had taken several years off to raise them, so Feisal had never stopped to consider what else Salwa might have wanted to be. When they were young, it had never occurred to him that she might have wanted anything other than marriage and children, and he had been so busy handling his end of the marriage and children that the thought hadn't crossed his mind since.

But now, in the wee hours, he considered it and came up with nothing. He had no idea what Salwa would have drawn when she was six. No idea at all.

Feisal was remembering his dreams now, and grateful because he was spending his nights in that erotic room. Thankfully, he had not seen Asad again, but he'd seen a great deal of Asad's sex life, at least



the parts of it that Asad had had painted on the walls of that room. It was a lot more interesting than his, which left Feisal dealing not only with the arousal, but with a bitter envy. He spent his nights dealing with those murals and with his reactions to them, and although he always woke spent, he also woke melancholy. It was difficult in all ways to fast while surrounded by feasting.

Before he even knew he was sleeping, he was in the room again, the one with the murals on the wall, and he lay on the divan and just looked around, feeling no arousal this time because it was too real. Also, Ramadan was coming to an end, and he had a sneaking suspicion that his nocturnal sojourns would end with it, a thought just as bittersweet as the time he spent there.

"You like this place a lot, don't you," said a voice just behind his shoulder.

He turned, and there she was, Asad's wife, far more beautiful in person than on the wall. She was, in fact, perfect, with sleek black hair and dark, almond eyes. She was dressed in a belly dance costume, dripping with rubies and gold that were warmed by her brown skin. She sat on the divan and let a single finger trail over his neck. "It's nice to meet you, Feisal," she added. "My name is Habibeh."

"How did you know my name?"

"Haven't you guessed," she said as her finger trailed down over his bare chest, "what we are?"

"You're djinn," he said as the light dawned. "You and your husband. Why?"

Habibeh laughed, a sound like gold bells. "Why are we djinn?"

"No, why are you tormenting me?"

"You call this torment?" Her finger ran over the ridge of his erection. "No. You're not suffering here."

"Not now, but waking up is hell," he said.

"Why?" she asked as her finger traced his balls through his pajama pants.

"Because I love my wife, but she will not let me love her."

"Do you really love your wife?"

Ordinarily he would have said yes, but in light of his evening musings, he realized that he had to think about it. Perhaps the question should have been phrased differently. He loved Salwa, but did she know it? She should, he thought. He provided for her and for



her children, but deep inside he knew he would rather die than be supported by his wife, so that didn't count for as much as he liked to think.

What did?

"Tell me about her," Habibeh said as she stroked his thigh.

"She might have been an astronaut," Feisal said without thinking. "No," he went on, trying to clear his head, "that's my daughter Aida. Salwa...Salwa's smart," he realized. "My son's taking algebra, and she helps him with his homework. She's giving. When the kids are in school, she takes care of some of elderly neighbors. She keeps the house neat."

"That's the wife," Habibeh said. "Tell me about the woman."

Feisal had to think about that, and it made him blush with shame. He had to go back almost fifteen years to remember his wife as a woman. "She likes cats," he said, "especially Siamese. Her favorite color is yellow. She knows how to draw; I think she could have been an artist. She cried with happiness the first time she heard the call to prayer in Spellfire. She said it made her feel less homesick. She wasn't happy when she found out that Aida was a girl because she said she was too used to raising boys, but afterward she was just fine." Feisal hadn't realized until then how much Salwa's worries about Aida had frightened him. He'd been afraid they meant she wouldn't treat Aida well.

"No," said Habibeh. "They made her extra-careful." She leaned into him, still the seductress. "A woman's worries aren't a sign that she's weak, they're just her way of thinking about things. Salwa worried, so she took care to be a good mother, to be fair and loving. It's not been easy to raise her daughter properly in a different country, but Salwa is doing it. Aida fits in at school, but she is not losing sight of her heritage. Other mothers don't do as well."

This was true and Feisal knew it.

"A woman is not weak, not fragile, because she is a woman."

Habibeh straddled Feisal's legs, pinning his arms to the divan and rubbing herself against Feisal's stiff prick. "A woman's strength lies in a different place, not in her ability to strike, but in her ability to endure. A woman pushes on, putting one foot forward after the other, long after hope has been lost. A woman leaves her family behind to move across the ocean, learns a new language, makes the best possible home in a country she doesn't understand, and yes she cries



when she knows no one can hear her, but she still pushes on. That,” she said, her face within an inch of Feisal’s ear, “is strength.”

Feisal nearly lost his erection out of sheer horror. He knew what the move to America put Salwa through, but he ignored it, in a large part because he took it for granted. It was what he expected of her, so he had never thanked her. “Will she ever forgive me?” he whispered.

“She might,” Habibeh said, “if she knows you mean it.”

“I don’t know how to tell her so she’ll believe it,” Feisal said.

“You know nothing about women,” Habibeh said, but it was a statement of fact, not a criticism, and delivered with surprising kindness. Then she stood, let the bottom of her costume fall to the floor, and Feisal was hit by a surge of excitement. What he did not know about women, he was about to find out.

She straddled his face, her request unmistakable, and Feisal got butterflies in his stomach. He knew the anatomy, but had never quite managed to make it work. Still, he reached up with his hands to steady her hips and reached up with his tongue to taste her.

Yogurt sweetened ever so slightly with honey. The flavor of woman was a subtle delight that wasn’t really entirely a matter of the tongue. There was something primal to it that hardened him nearly to the point of pain. Oral sex was maddening. On one hand, he enjoyed it for its own sake. Habibeh’s cunt was soft and sweet, and the sounds she made as he licked her heated his blood, but that was the problem. It made him want to fuck more than anything in the world. He wanted to get inside that sweet softness more than he wanted anything in the world.

“Right there!” Habibeh gasped.

Right where? Feisal wondered, frantically trying to backtrack. He hadn’t been paying all that much attention to precisely what he was doing. He slowed down, played his tongue over her clit, trying to find the exact “there” on a small, finicky nub.

“Yes!” Habibeh said, her voice much higher. She told him when he had the rhythm right and really what Feisal needed to do was quite simple. She wanted to be licked, back and forth, not too hard. When he tried to change the stroke, she begged him not to stop, so he went back to what he’d been doing until she came.

He knew then that he had never made Salwa come. Part of it was that he had never done to Salwa what he had just done to Habibeh, but part of it was that he had never felt or heard Salwa do



anything like what Habibeh was doing. Her cries were like birds, not one but many, all calling out together, and her legs trembled with the effort of holding herself up.

It took a surprisingly long time before Habibeh seemed to be finished, and when she was she slunk down his body to impale herself on his shaft. It was absolute heaven as far as Feisal was concerned. She ground herself against him and he groaned from pleasure.

“Did you enjoy that?” she asked, smiling impishly.

“Yes.” Feisal sighed, “but Salwa’s a proper wife. She won’t tell me what she likes.”

“Don’t worry.” Habibeh’s smile got even more impish. “I just did.”

Feisal’s own orgasm roared through his body like a freight train.

Habibeh let her weight rest on Feisal’s chest and he stroked her back, drifting in a drowsy, post-coital bliss. Then he remembered Asad and got worried. “Is your husband going to be angry?”

“No,” she said, raising her head and looking down at him.

“Humans don’t count. Not for us, anyway.”

“Are we not as good?” Feisal asked, his worry shifting ground.

“It’s not that,” Habibeh assured him. “It’s that Asad and I are spirits. We’ve loved each other for so many centuries that the rest of your life will pass in the blink of an eye. There’s no infidelity in this for Asad and me, although djinn do sometimes fall in love with humans. It never goes well.” She gave Feisal a long look. “Your great-grandmother never got over it.”

“My what?” Feisal asked.

“Your great-grandmother,” Habibeh said. “Did you ever wonder why she has no grave? You have djinn blood, Feisal.”

“Is that why you’re here?” he asked.

“No,” she said, “but that’s why you are.”

“What do you mean?”

“Why do you think you knew to come to Spellfire?” she asked.

“Most people don’t even notice this town, but you were drawn to it, weren’t you?”

“Yes,” said Feisal.

“And your plans have an astonishing way of working out, don’t they.”



“Yes,” he said again with a rush of recognition. It was true, all true, except... “What about Salwa? I was so sure she was perfect for me and now...”

“She is perfect for you,” Habibeh said, “in every way. You just need to let her be perfect.”

And on that rather enigmatic note, Feisal woke up.



## Chapter 6

Salwa greeted the end of Ramadan with mixed feelings. On one hand, it was nice to be able to eat, but on the other, it meant an incredible amount of cooking, which was not Salwa's favorite thing to do. She wasn't a bad cook, just an uninspired one, and it was a bit of an embarrassment, given that she was married to restaurateur.

Se woke, as she so often did, a bit before the morning call to prayer, this time with tears in her eyes. She was going to miss that erotic room. She rolled over, looked at her sleeping husband, and sighed. She would not leave him because she really did love him and always had. Her Eid al-F'tr, the feast at the end of the fast, would come only when she got the reward promised to all martyrs.

Salwa got up, as she had done so many mornings, and went into Daoud's room to wake him for prayer, but that morning, he was already up. "Mom!" he whispered, and his eyes were wide with astonishment. "I can hear it!"

The hair on Salwa's arms rose and tears of excitement prickled in her eyes. "That's wonderful! Come on!"

They knelt side by side on the prayer rug, and the tears began to stream down Salwa's cheeks. It would be, she knew, the last time she prayed with her son because it was the last time she would have to. At twelve, no one would call him a man, but his mother knew that he felt like one just then.

He even behaved like one. He was still awake when Salwa came down later that morning, and he had put out cereal for the younger children, bread, buffalo cream and honey for the adults--and himself--and set the table with his mother's best china. The kitchen was already decorated and Daoud was grinning broadly.

"Thank you," Salwa said simply.

"You're welcome, Mom."

It was nice to eat. It was nice to have excited children, even though they were bouncing off the walls. Salwa sent them outside so they would not wake their father, sighing inside because she knew it would not matter anyway. Feisal wouldn't even notice.

Because most of Spellfire's Muslims didn't have extended family nearby, lunch would be at a rented hall near the mosque, a family affair in the sense that they were family to each other. Spellfire's phone lines would be buzzing, though, and at all kinds of



hours as the Americans, Eastern Europeans, Arabs, and Africans called loved ones back home. There would be presents later, too. Eid al-F'tr was Christmas and Thanksgiving all rolled together.

Salwa ate with the kids, listening to their happy chatter, well aware that only Dauod understood what had been asked of them. Still, the ritual itself had meaning, and Salwa remembered how it felt to grow into it. Dauod was feeling it now. In a few days, he would be back to his usual, surly self, but Salwa wasn't going to complain.

After breakfast, she took care of the dishes, sent the kids outside so their excitement wouldn't wake their father, and then braced herself for the morning's cooking. Some things she had done the day before, but there were several tasks that could only be done in the hours before the meal, and that was now. Salwa took a deep breath before she opened the refrigerator.

She let out a small gasp of shock. The fridge was stuffed with food.

There was no doubt about where it had come from. Feisal's restaurant was closed for the occasion, but it had been open the night before and the kitchen had been working at full capacity. Or perhaps overcapacity, from the looks of Salwa's fridge.

Feisal had done her cooking for her.

Or his staff had, but Feisal worked in that kitchen himself. Odds were good that all of this had passed through his hands one way or another.

Feisal had done her cooking for her.

Feisal had never done any such thing in his life. Salwa was the wife. Salwa was supposed to cook.

A tear ran down her cheek, hardly the first she'd shed that day and not, she realized, the last. Hope was the most dangerous feeling of all and Salwa knew it.

\* \* \* \*

Feisal lay in bed for a while, listening for the sounds of his children in the living room below, and wondering why he couldn't hear them. Salwa, he knew, had sent a note in to the school excusing the kids for the holidays, just like every other Muslim mother in Spellfire, so they had to be somewhere. Outside? Usually, she let them wake him, and snapped back when he suggested that she quiet them.



Feisal was sure that Salwa now knew that she didn't have to spend the morning laboring over a hot stove. He wondered how she felt about it. He was almost afraid to find out.

He would have to, though, in a large part because he was hungry and could actually do something about it. He'd gone onto his Ramadan autopilot about two weeks into the fast, but his body was urging him to get off of it now that he could.

So he did. He got up, and glanced out the window through the curtain. Sure enough, all three kids were outside playing with the neighbor's dog. Feisal smiled, then showered, dressed, and went downstairs in search of food, mostly for lack of anything better to do. He would, eventually, have to face the music. Might as well get it over with.

He found Salwa cleaning up the living room, and he had to stop himself from kissing her. "Thank you, Feisal," she said softly before he said anything.

He heard a lot in those three words, a great deal of which he was afraid might be wishful thinking. "I should have done it a long time ago," he said.

Salwa turned away, mumbling a second thanks, but Feisal was sure he saw tears in her eyes, and he didn't dare ask what they meant.

Luckily, the morning was sheer chaos. The kids were no calmer when they came in than they had been when romping with the dog, and even with most of the cooking already done, some dishes had to be reheated and everyone had to get ready. There was very little time in which to do all of it, and Feisal, to make himself useful, took over in the kitchen, finding himself resenting it less than he expected. After all, he was better at cooking and Salwa was definitely better at handling the kids. Somehow or another, she got them dressed up and out the door with time to spare.

The rented hall was brightly decorated and smelled divine. There were traditional dishes from all over the Muslim world, a celebration of plenty after the reminder of famine. There was chatter in half a dozen languages, and Salwa greeted friends in both Farsi and English.

"Oh, look at you!" one of them said, eyeing the restaurant cartons with obvious envy. "You're so lucky to be married to a man who cooks."



"I know," Salwa said, giving Feisal a smile he had not seen in years.

There was a lot he wanted to tell her, that he still loved her, that he was sorry for so many things that he couldn't list them, couldn't even remember some of them, but that he would find a way to make it up to her whether she met him halfway or not. Words, though, were not what was needed. He would have to show her, over time, earn back the things he had taken for granted, but for the first time in years, he had a feeling that he could. He chatted with other husbands, feeling less alone than he had in a very long time.

He caught sight of them out of the corner of his eye, and the incongruity of the setting was almost enough to make him ignore them. Still, there was something familiar about the couple down the table, something in the flash of the man's grin and the wide, liquid light in the woman's eyes...

No. No way. Not possible. But this was Spellfire, a town where myths and legends sat down at the table with human flesh and blood, where the call to prayer was silent to all but those who knew how to listen. Djinn were nowhere near as strange as the mummy who came in to his restaurant every Friday forty-five minutes on the dot before closing time, or the imps who complained about his rice but ordered it regularly anyway.

Hadn't Asad said something about working with computers? One of Spellfire's biggest employers was Blue Ice Games, a company that wrote console games and simulation software, and thus relied heavily on computers. And Asad also said that he'd caught Habibeh masturbating while the kids were in school.

Feisal's cheeks burned with embarrassment.

Asad winked, and raised his glass. Feisal was about to return the gesture when he realized that it wasn't intended for him. He glanced down, out the corner of his eye and saw Salwa blush, but she was grinning under that blush, a sly, secret grin.

For the first time since Ramadan began, Feisal considered the possibility that he hadn't been the only one to dream about that room.

Part of him was fiercely jealous, but another, more reasonable part recognized the fact that Salwa had been sleeping, as he had been, and there hadn't been anything she could do about it. And they were djinn, which was different from Salwa sleeping with another man. If humans didn't count to djinn, why should djinn count to humans? A



third, baser part of him wondered which of the paintings Salwa liked best, what she had done in that room, and if she would consider doing any of it with him. Perhaps his wife was not the woman he had always thought she was. Perhaps this wasn't such a bad thing. He laughed silently inside and caught Asad's eye, nodding in both acknowledgement and thanks. Asad smiled back, then said something in his wife's ear, and the djinn somehow faded into the background. Feisal was thinking again of Salwa, of things he had never asked or told her out of a mistaken notion of respect, thinking that perhaps their longest fast could finally end in a feast beyond his wildest dreams. He let his hand brush Salwa's thigh under the table, and Salwa smiled, making Feisal's heart leap with a wild mix of hope and desire.

\* \* \* \*

"What do you think?" Asad asked Habibeh. "Will they be all right?"

"I think so," Habibeh said, considering the couple down the table. On the surface, they were quite ordinary, a tall man of medium build with a bit less chin than ideal and an unfashionably plump woman with a pretty smile. Habibeh had enough centuries of experience with humans, though, to know that looks weren't everything and she had, after all, slept with them both. Salwa was responsive and passionate, and Feisal was a quick, eager study. The potential was there, even if they had yet to meet it, and everything else was already in place. Whether they knew it or not, they were suited, as the matchmakers said, and there was something special under the years of resentment and anger, a deep, lasting love that began in childhood and could take them to the grave if they let it. "Yes, I think they'll be fine," Habibeh said. "After all, we wouldn't have been called to them if they weren't meant to be together."

Asad's touch to Habibeh's thigh was soft but not fleeting. He let his hand linger in a caress that should have been accompanied by a kiss. "And how often have we failed?"

"Not in ages." Habibeh was speaking literally. "But we're very good at what we do."

"That's because we get lots of practice," Asad said in a language that was no longer spoken.

"We can't get complacent, though," Habibeh said.



“No,” Asad said, feeding her a bit of lamb from his plate. “We should practice more when we get home.”

“Good idea,” Habibeh said, glancing coyly up into her husband’s eyes. “A very good idea.”



**Tamara James**  
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# **Spirit's Bells**

**By**

**Tamara James**

## **Chapter 1**

"I'm not going to bell you." Spirit's cousin Electra crossed her arms over her ample bosom. The move threatened to spill them out of her low cut peasant blouse. Two fingers flicked up from her fisted with each point. "First it's illegal and second you're a werewolf not a werecat the spell won't work."

"No, the law states it's only illegal to force someone. I'm asking you." Spirit twisted one of the charms that dangled from her amber and jade necklace. "And you know very well the spell will work, I'm no pure bred, my grandmother was a werecat." A fact Dominick liked to point out every time he cornered her. The moron thought a mutt like her should be grateful for the attention. Yeah, right.

Electra's eyes narrowed. "Spirit, why don't you explain to me why you have to have this spell performed right now?"

The moisture evaporated from her mouth, Spirit wasn't sure she could rip the bandage off and tell her cousin the humiliating truth. The wound left by the pack elders was just too deep. Tears threatened and her ribs hurt from the aching hole left by her packs rejection. Dam him. If only Dominick had just left it at groping. Spirit could have handled the hassle, but last month he'd upped the stakes and announced that they would wed in two months, Christmas night.

None of Spirit's well-planned arguments had moved the pack elders to reverse Dominick's decision. Bloodlines and purity were more important to them than the risks of a forced mating. They'd rather her dead then loose the Tredmane line.

Her finger moved from coin to coin. She traced all three lucky pieces and attempted to look casual. "What's to explain? I'm ready and want to find my true mate."



“From what you said about your affair with your pack leader, I’d thought finding a true mate was not even close to being on your to do list.”

“It’s something I’ve always wanted. My business is going well. Christmas is a month away. So why wait?”

Electra snorted. “Because you’re young and there are a lot of yummy males out there to play with.”

Spirit smirked. “Miss. Married Lady, what do you know about the males in this town? And what would Lexi say about your knowledge, hum?”

Electra burst out laughing. “I’m married not dead, Spirit. Lexi knows that.” Her foot tapped and her arms crossed. “Now tell me about this sudden burning desire to settle down because when you moved here, you told me you wanted to get away from your pack’s strict rules and backwards laws. I didn’t question you. We knew how they treated Grandma Brennon when she married Grandpa Tredmane.”

Leaning back against a crate of supplies, Electra continued. “I was thrilled when you emailed me and told me you were moving to Spellfire. All of us were.”

From dry to desert Spirit’s throat felt too tight and the room blurred. Spirit blinked back the tears, burying her face in her cousin’s wild red mane. “I can’t tell you how grateful I am. If it wasn’t for you and the rest of the cousins, I don’t know what I would have done.” Spirit released her. “You gave me a home, a space to work, loaned me money to buy supplies. You’ve made Spirit Designs possible.”

Electra tucked Spirit’s errant curls behind her ears. A light smile tipped up her lips at the corners. “No, sweetheart, you already had Spirit Designs in here.” Electra placed her hand over Spirit’s heart. “Now that you’re away from your pack, you can make what you want and sell to whom you want. No one here will ever tell you what or how to do it. Trinkets is only the first stop on your way up. The only thing I don’t get, is where the whole Belling spell idea came from.”

Creases formed deep grooves between delicately arched eyebrows and her gaze spat fire. “It’s because of Dominick, isn’t it?”

Ugh, Electra was too perceptive. Spirit knew she would smell her lie, but there was no way she would risk telling her the truth.

Normally there’d be no risk to Electra, but because Spirit and Dominick weren’t true mates the elder’s decided that prior to the



binding ritual they would undergo a forced mating. If they survived the spells and drugs, binding would follow.

When she couldn't talk them out of the matting Spirit begged to be allowed to visit her mother's kin one last time. They'd agreed to her request.

Dominick had been furious. When he couldn't stop her from leaving he'd told her not to try anything or she would pay. Spirit didn't doubt he would follow through on his threats, but she had a plan. She would use her pack's laws against them. If the belling spell worked she'd be free.

Only werecats could be belled and no matter what bloodline she carried the elders would be forced to release their claim on her. As for Dominick, pack law demanded the Alpha marry only a pure blooded wolf. No matter how much he wanted her, Dominick would never step down to have her. Some other suitable mate would be found, plenty of her pack mates would give their canines for a chance to be the Alpha bitch, no drugs required. The binding ritual would be performed and once a werewolf mated, they mated for life and didn't stray.

"Why can't you just accept my reasons and do it?" The bumps of the worn symbols carved on her lucky charm warmed under her fingers. Spirit circled the room.

She would've never involved her cousin in her problems, but she'd tried to perform the spell herself and failed. Frustrated, she contacted the Alpha of her grandmother's pride. Apparently a cat couldn't bell itself.

"Why? Because I would rather have the truth." Electra bounced onto the crate. Arms crossed, her legs moved in a lazy back and forth rhythm.

Fresh and green the scent of pine boughs tickled her nose. Laughter filtered through the stock room door. Riding on the strains of cheer, well wishes and holiday greetings swirled about her. Their warmth settled around her. An ache pulsed through Spirit's lungs and heart. She used to love this time of year, all the wreaths and lights winking in the shop windows and shining along the roofs. People laughed and helped one another. Children's faces glowed with anticipation, eager for vacation and toys. It was a time of magic when the world took a deep breath.



Now she dreaded each sign of joy. Every tree trimmed and present bought. Every smile and well wish meant time sprinted toward the finish line.

“Fine you caught me. Yes, being belled would get Dominick to back off. And yes the man is getting on my nerves.” Spirit licked her lips. She was loosing her cousin, time to open a vein and tell her at least part of the truth. “But I’m also lonely. I see you and Lexi and the love you share and I want that. I’m tired of meaningless nights with nothing but sore thighs and some brief satisfaction to show for it. I want someone to love and to love me back.”

Electra slid off the crate and started toward Spirit, her expression a cross between pity and disbelief. “I know you want to find love, but the bells aren’t a guarantee that you will find it. What if he’s a norm? Or what happens if your true mate is dead or on the other side of the earth? It could take him years to find you. And what if he does hear them, but chooses not to listen? They can’t force him to answer their summons.”

“I’m aware of their limitations.” Spirit dodged Electra’s embrace. If she let her cousin hold her, the whole truth would tumble out. Electra would go postal. She’d get her husband involved, then he’d call in his mother. Lexi’s mother sat on the Tribunal of Elders, the highest court in the Council of Paranormals. Other than pissing off Dominick there wouldn’t be anything they could do.

Back at the crate, Electra tucked one leg under her butt. “Do you really understand what it means to be belled?”

Spirit shook her head. The short curly brown hair fell forward and back. Several strands stuck to her lashes. “You do a spell on the bells. I put them on and they ring when I meet my true mate. What more is there to know?” Spirit played with the charm on her necklace.

Electra’s eyes narrowed, Electra stared at her for a full minute. Spirit cringed.

“That’s only part of it. Once you’re belled they won’t allow you to be with anyone but your true mate. That means no affairs, no quickies, no sex of any kind.” Waving an index finger in Spirit’s direction Electra warned. “You won’t even be able to get yourself off.”

“Fine, no sex, I can deal with it. Besides if they don’t work I’ll have you remove them.”



“No you won’t.” Electra wove a path through the boxes of napkins, to go bags, and supplies. “Once the spell is performed you can’t remove the bells, ever, only your true mate can. It’s the reason the werecats forced the Council to make belling illegal.”

Her cousin headed toward the door to the main shop. “Take a few weeks and think about what you really want. I’m leaving tomorrow. When Lexi and I get back after Christmas if your still interested we’ll talk.”

By then it would be too late.

Panic set in and the change crawled over her flesh like a horde of ants, then she went numb. Both sets of canines lengthen, her nose elongate, and fur started to cover her body. “Electra, wait.” Spirit dashed over the boxes separating them and grabbed her cousin’s arm.

Electra raised an eyebrow and looked down at the four red marks on her forearm.

Warmth rushed to Spirit’s face. She retracted her claws, but didn’t release her hold on her cousin’s arm. She’d come too far and was too desperate to let her go. “I’m so sorry.” Her voice hitched. “It’s just.” Tears stung her eyes and the whole humiliating story spilled out.

Warmth seeped into her hand. Electra covered Spirit’s hand and her wedding band, a circle of blood red rubies, glinted in the bright lights of the storage room.

“Sweet heart. I’m so sorry no one should be able to tell you who to love.” Electra wrapped her arms around Spirit, her voice hard. “But you’re here now, even if Dominick were to come no one here would force you to mate with him. Things aren’t done like that anymore.”

Spirit pushed out of Electra’s arms. “That’s where you’re wrong, they can force me to. When the Council of Paranormals formed, my pack wouldn’t join until they were guaranteed that in certain matters our pack’s law took precedence over the Council’s. Even the Tribunal can’t interfere. Matting contracts is one of them. Not only can they force me to mate with Dominick the Council will send enforcers out to make sure I do. Unless I can prove that he’s not my true mate.”

“Well do the spell tonight.”

Relief and guilt swept her. “You could get in trouble for helping me.” Spirit pulled out of the embrace.



Electra's eyes glinted with anger. "No bunch of old dried up wolves is going to force my baby cousin to mate with a man she hates."

Moisture spilled down Spirit's cheeks. Less than a quarter of the way through the change the fur on her cheeks wasn't thick enough to absorb the tears. "I don't know how to thank you."

"There is no need to thank me, you're my cousin. I love you." Electra brushed the tears off Spirit's cheek fur. "I have to go prepare. I'll meet you in your room tonight at nine."

The doors swung shut.

Tremors spilled over her in cascading waves. Emotions struggled with each other for dominance, shame, pride, fear, and relief. Relief won. Pride could be rebuilt, fear overcome, but only if she survived and to do that she needed her cousin's help.

Spirit played with her necklace and paced off the energy that always accompanied the change. The small polished beads of jade and amber slid through her fingers, she used the stones calming protective properties to sooth her.

Breath in, one jade bead passed between her thumb and index finger, exhale, amber warmed to her touch. Several minutes passed. Calmer, Spirit focused on reversing the partial transformation her rampant emotions triggered. The thick black claws lost their pinked and withdrew. The itch and burn went numb and her fur was replace by skin, her hand shrunk back to human form with a bone snapping, knuckle cracking snaps.

With her cousin's help she would be free. Spirit headed out to the main room of the ice cream parlor. Boodiors, the bed and breakfast where she was staying, was across the street from Sinful Sundaes. She felt blessed to have Electra as a cousin. First she welcomes her with open arms, putting Spirit up in her own rooms in the inn, then she introduced her to the owner of Trinkets. As a jeweler, Spirit could make her necklaces, bracelets, and rings anywhere, but finding a store open that understood the value of her unique pieces was rare. Now Electra was going to risk punishment by the Council. She would have to create a special necklace for her. Perhaps an item both her and her husband Lexi could enjoy.

Spirit grabbed the small backpack that served as her purse and pulled out a pad and pencil. Maybe something designed to enhance their love and enhance their sexual pleasure; she could use peridot,



pink tourmaline and kuzinte. Spirit dismissed the idea, from what she saw they didn't need any help in that department. At the take out counter she order Electra and Lexi's latest creation Marshmallow ice cream fudge surprise.

While she waited for her order she sketched her cousin, trying out different lengths for the necklace.

"Here you go." Harpy passed Spirit a bag as she passed with a tray filled with a variety of luscious concoctions.

"Thanks. See you." Spirit tucked the treat into her bag and slung it over her shoulder, mind still on the design.

It should fall over her fifth charka. The throat charka is related to communication, and encourages self-expression, creativity and confidence. She could use lapis lazuli for creativity, with highlights of aquamarine for self-expression, or maybe azurite to stimulate her thoughts the various shades of blue would look lovely against her skin. The necklace's stones and design would ensure her cousins continued creativity with her desserts. She would need to think of some others stones to balance the necklace and enhance the design and she could make a matching bracelet for Lexi.

Catching the door on her foot before it could close, she started to exit. "Uff." Pen flying, Spirit mumbled a quick apology to the man she bumped into and headed out the door.

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Gabe stepped back and watched the alluring swish of the woman's behind as she headed onto the street. He sincerely hoped there was no traffic since she continued to mumble to herself and draw in her pad. A perfect heart shaped ass like hers was a rarity and he would hate to see it ruined if a car hit her. He wondered who she was because in addition to her perfect behind she smelled like hot sex and sweet heaven all rolled into one. He'd never smelt anyone like her before. He sniffed his palm, where he'd grabbed her shoulder to steady her. Gods, it made him hard as a rock.

Long ago, he'd given up the idea of finding the woman whose scent alone did that to him. The one who would complete the circle of his life, his true mate. He drew more of her fragrance in, tempted to lick his palm in the hope a small taste of her had brushed onto him.

Everything his father had told him was true. One scent, one brush and he'd know her. His heart pulsed in rhythm with the blood



pouring into his pants and making his cock twitch. Gabe needed to speak with her more than that he needed to touch her.

He started forward. From the tiny bite of her scent she'd left on him he knew she was a werewolf, at least most of her. Something else was there too. Not that it mattered what the other was, but until he had more of the delicious smell in his lungs or better the taste of her in his mouth and on his skin that would be all he would know.

Electra bustled around him with a bag of herbs. "Hey, Gabe."

Dry dust and the sharp smell of the herbs drove his mate's smell from nose. Standing on her tiptoes, Electra brushed his cheek with a kiss. The cotton pouch holding the herbs came along with the hand she placed on his shoulder. His nose wrinkle against the assault and he sneezed. Gabe shifted her hand and the bag down. Electra tucked it into waistband of her skirt.

"You here for the pack's order? It's ready. The coolers are in the freezer."

Gabe twisted, the street was empty, his mate had disappeared. He sighed and followed Electra into Sinful Sundaes. "Thanks for getting the order ready. Do you mind if I pick it up after I grab a sundae and I run some errands."

"No problem, I'll tell Harpy to expect you. All well with you."

"Everything's great. How's married life treating you?"

Red flooded her cheeks, a soft umm hummed past her lips.

"Good. And the pack?"

Gabe was the Alpha of the local werewolf pack. His ranch was ten miles outside Spellfire. "All are well. We've a new addition my brother's mate Rebecca has gifted us with a child. Both mother and son are doing well."

"Congratulations! What's his name? How big was he?"

Pride swelled Gabe's heart. "His name is Gideon, after my grandfather. Ten pounds, five ounces and twenty one inches long."

"And your brother? Did he make it through the birth?" Electra chuckled.

Gabe's brother Jonathan was not a typical were, he fainted at the sight of blood, was a vegetarian, and preferred books to the outdoors. "It was touch and go, but his mate convinced him that staying conscious through the entire birth of his first child was the best course of action."



Gabe chuckled. His sister-in-law Brianna had explained the importance to his brother by grabbing his balls and twisting.

Electra laughed with him. "I can imagine." She glanced at her watch. "I've got to go, but I'll make sure to add something special for her, on the house, to your order."

She brushed another kiss across his cheek. Without herbs clogging his senses a scent hit him. His mates. He pulled in more. Sex and heaven, her scent clung to Electra like a coat. Excitement flashed through him for the scent to be that strong Electra must know the owner intimately. The front of Gabe's normally loose fitting jeans threatened to cut him in half.

"The woman that just left who is she?"

"What woman?"

"The one with the chin length brown hair and the-" Gabe cut himself off before he could say and the sweetest ass I've ever seen.

"And what?" One sculpted red brow inched toward her forehead. She looked amused. Gabe figured she had a right. In most werewolves the mating drive hit about a decade after puberty, but for Gabe he'd been born with the longing. As a young pup he'd cried for her, asking his mother where she was, why wasn't she with him. His mother hadn't any answer for him.

Distressed and unable to console her son, Gabe's mother went to her best friend, a sorceress and a seer, and asked for her help. She explained to his mom that he and his mate had been together over hundreds of lifetimes and that something special happened during this cycle. They'd chosen to come into this plane at the very same moment. When their souls entered their bodies at the moment of birth the two mingled and joined, connecting them to each other forever. She's told Gabe not to worry that one day his mate would come to Spellfire. It was up to him to wait. As a teen he'd gotten impatient and sought her, roaming the globe in vein. Despondent, he'd returned empty handed and settled down to wait. He'd waited for so long that he'd given up hope. May the goddess of the moon bless him, his mate was in Spellfire.

Electra practically snickered at him. Gabe felt heat creeping up his neck. How long had he kept her standing there while he rolled out memories?

"Uh...and the pad and paper. The one sketching, you must have passed her as you were coming in."



Electra's face went from open and happy to a scowl in two seconds flat. "That's my cousin. Stay away from her." One long red painted nail poked his chest. "She doesn't do casual, you need relief type of affairs." She stomped passed him.

A slow smile teased its way over Gabe's face. Good, because he wasn't looking for a quick affair. No, what he had in mind would take a lifetime to relive. Little miss, Electra's cousin who doesn't do casual affairs was his true mate. The one he'd been waiting for.

Now if he could find out her name.



## Chapter 2

Tinkle. Tinkle. The soft chime of bells followed as she made her way across the workroom to the sink. Spirit attempted to ignore the merry jingle.

Her two months were almost over. It'd been nearly three weeks since she'd convinced her cousin to perform the bellling spell. The first few days everything had been fine, well other then the fact that she was hornier then a cat in heat and couldn't do a thing about it. Electra hadn't been joking about that part of the spell. That and the fact that she couldn't get the darn things off, the rest of what she'd told her had been wrong. Either that or there was something hinky going on with the bells, they'd been singing intermittently the entire time she'd worn them.

Mid-tink they went silent. Spirit halted, shook her right foot and listened, nothing, not clink, clank, or tinkle.

Christmas lay like a bloated corpse before her. She had three days to finish her orders and return to her clan's home.

Spirit had no intention of going back and marrying Dominick, but she did have to face the elders. She'd prayed that despite the valued Tredmane blood that flowed through her veins the bells would make her too other for their taste and they would expel her. There was always the slim chance that they would petition the Tribunal and have her striped of her abilities. Bile soured the back of her tongue, she wasn't sure she was strong enough to live as only half a person.

No use borrowing trouble, her mother would have said. Do what you could and face the rest when the time came. Her mother was right. Spirit refused to allow that. She'd worked within their laws. They had wronged her.

Time to work. Worrying accomplished nothing and cost so much.

Gentle chimes followed her across the room. They continued while she gathered her supplies. Small pleasant tinkles rose to greet



her ears each time she moved or shifted. One half hour was all she could make it through before her concentration frayed to ragged ends.

What was going on? The tiny bells on her anklet shouldn't ring unless her mate and her were in the same room. Excitement tickled her belly. Had someone been in the workroom? Were they still there? Had her mate found her?

Numbness spread across the bridge of her nose and cheeks as she shifted her face muscles to enhance her eyesight and smell. Her nose flattened and widened, her iris narrowed then elongated like a cats. For a second it felt odd. It always did. She wiggled her whiskers and sniffed the air. The candy sweet smell of sugar surrounded her. The hunger inducing scent mixed with the burnt iron scent of the clasps she'd just soldered and the greasy smell of french-fries rose through the halls and floorboards from Sinful Sundae's.

No foreign odors intruded her space and nothing appeared out of place.

Everything was as she left it yesterday. Electra's supplies were exactly where she stacked them in the corner. The boxes that held her semiprecious stones and other jewelry supplies were still lined up along one wall. The necklace she'd designed for her cousin sat next to the bracelet she created for Electra's husband Lexi. She made the pieces in complimentary gems so that they formed a circle of vitality and energy between the couple. All that was left to complete the set was the chant to link the pieces together. Once linked the pieces would draw and feed power and healing energy to each other.

Tinkle. On and off the soft jingle of her anklet sung. There was no rhyme or reason when they rung, except that Spirit was always alone in her cousin's workshop. At first she'd been bombarded with a mixture of fear and excitement. The thought that her true mate had found her should be a cause for celebration. The elders would cancel her wedding to Dominick, but Spirit was afraid of how Dominick would react. Her pack leader wasn't known for his kindness, his normal solution was to kill first, then hide the evidence.

The wolf aspect counseled her to wait, but the cat poked and prodded for her to investigate.

She tried to heed the wolf and fight the curiosity that drove her to seek the one who put the music back into her bells. Howling and gnashing the wolf fought to keep her focused. In the end though the cat always won and curiosity had her scurrying downstairs, through



the storage room, and into the main room of Sinful Sundaes only to have her bells fall silent.

After weeks of false alarms Spirit had gone to her cousin. Electra checked the anklet and declared the spell intact and working correctly. Perplexed Spirit explained that she hadn't done anything but work and sleep. She'd been alone every time they'd rung. Electra and Spirit investigated other reasons for the ringing, but couldn't find any.

The spell was designed to attract her mate, but it wasn't a compulsion, he could ignore the pull if he chose. Electra believed that if her mate should happen to come into the shop they would both feel the pull of the spell, but wouldn't be near enough to make the bells ring. Proximity was a necessary.

After her conversation with Electra the bells went silent and Spirit convinced herself that she'd been over tired and went back to work. Today was the first time since that day they'd sung.

Tinkle. Spirit ignored the soothing chime and rinsed off the small rose quartz beads she'd just threaded. Each clean bead went onto a soft cloth. The quartz would be placed on the ends of each necklace, and bracelet. The crystals would provide a pure charge for the other semiprecious stones and help maintain a positive flow of energy in the jewelry.

Today she was making bracelets strung with citrine for attracting happiness and prosperity, and moonstones for protection and prosperity. Finished cleaning and drying the rose quartz, Spirit headed back to her work desk.

Pure tones followed her across the room. They stopped when she sat. Spirit jiggled her leg. There was no denying it. She'd made the turquoise and silver anklet sound, her bells were singing.

Spirit didn't care what her cousin said they were defective, unless Electra got the proximity wrong and her mate was somewhere near here, maybe even in the Shop. Spirit reviewed the research she and Electra pored over. All of it claimed the couple needed to be in the same room. Several minutes passed. A partial memory struggled through the sleep-deprived joke that was her concentration. A spell. There was a spell the un-belled mate could perform if they felt the pull of the bells, but not their mate. It would enhance the pull and allow them to locate their mate. In theory it could affect the bells and



make them sing, when the un-belled mate was in the area and not just the room.

Butterflies performed a high wire act in her stomach. He could be close and seeking her out.

Sweat dampened her armpits, she felt snared between joy at the possibility of finding her true mate and frustration over a complication she didn't need.

What she needed was to get back to work. Not only was Trinkets waiting for the order on her bench, she also had one last commissioned piece to complete. A complicated triple strand design that incorporated pearls, lush deep green tsavorite garnets, and the ever color shifting alexandrite. She'd completed the platinum framework around four last night. All that was left was the final polish and setting the stones. When done the piece would resemble a chain of delicate leaves, dew kissed by gems and natural baroque pearls.

Three steps toward the stairs then two back toward her workbench, pivot back two more back toward the steps. Tinkle, chime, the like a breeze her bells swayed in a soothing rhythm. Back around toward the waiting stones, gold wire, and clasps. First she would finish her orders then she would go down. She gathered the rose quartz. The discordant jangle of her bells complained. Whether in protest or from her impatience to be done, she couldn't tell.

Who was she kidding? Storing the unstrung stones in a soft cotton bag, Spirit covered the rest with a cloth. Her concentration was shot, her hands so slick she'd probably gouge herself. Nothing would be accomplished until she went down to the main room of Sinful Sundae's and found the man who made her bells sing.

\* \* \* \*

Spirit jogged down the stairs and into the stockroom, her bells tinkling with each step.

A large shadow moved rapidly toward her. Spirit halted, one foot on the step the other on the floor. Dominick had found her.

The itching tingle of the change began to crawl through her. More like a shifting then a pain, Spirit felt her irises elongate from human to feline. Something was off with the gate, he didn't walk the same, was it Dominick?

Head tilted like a puppy's. Crouched in a fighter's stance he moved with a grace different then Dominick's. Had he sent one of his



cronies? Her claws slipped from there sheathes. No, it had to be Dominick. Intensely jealous, he'd never trust another male to retrieve her.

Rich and mouth watering, a male scent teased her nose. Muscles loosened and her breath burst from her lips. Not him. Dominick's natural pheromones never smell this good to her. He was a shifter, like her. The werewolf straightened to his full height. Yum. Wide flannel covered chest, thick denim encased legs and height enough for her to climb him.

"Don't be alarmed." His husky whisper rippled over her senses like a warm wave that caressed her from her heart to the tips of her body.

Spirit squirmed. Her bells rejoiced, their tone sweet and pure. Distract by her body's immediate response, she barely noticed their sound.

"I was looking for you." He approached her, palms up, his body was still in shadow. "I left you several messages. One this morning."

Few and casual, his words sunk sensual tingles into her nipples and clit. Could he be the one? Warm male musk embraced her. By the moon goddess, she hopped so. Her reaction to him wasn't normal. She wanted to stand on her tiptoes grab his wide, wide shoulders and climb onto him.

Knots rolled her stomach into one big cramp. "You're the gentleman that called earlier?" The message she'd received this morning was from a man wanting to commission a special piece for his wife. This guy couldn't be her mate, weres no matter the type, mated for life to one partner.

"I've called you every day since the first time I saw you." He paused. Spirit got the impression he was hurt and struggling with his emotions.

"You've not returned one or responded to any of the letters I left with your cousin." He halted. "I thought you didn't want to meet me."

A low sad grumble punctuated his words. It zipped over her skin, the tiny hairs raised and goose bumps shivered from her wrists to her elbows. They leapt to her neck and settled there.

He was hurt. She could feel his pain seep into her and see it in the hunched in way he stood. He'd place one hand on his belly.

One hand stretched for him and she came down the steps she retreated up and moved toward him. "I'm so very sorry, the only



message I've received was today's. I would have called you had I received any others."

Stuck between the shadows and the small light at the base of the stair, Spirit had trouble seeing his face. Even with her enhanced vision his features were lost in the dark.

A breath whooshed from him and brought with it all hurt tension coiled in his frame. "I knew you'd want to meet me. Seems Electra had other ideas, though."

"Perhaps Electra misunderstood your intent."

"She knew exactly why I wanted to see you. I was very clear." Long thick fingers pushed through his shoulder length brown hair. Amber strands caught the faint light.

Why would Electra not give her his messages? From what Harpy has said he was extremely wealthy, happily married man. Who wanted to commission a piece for wife to celebrate their tenth anniversary, price wasn't an object.

Something was wrong. Her cousin wouldn't send a customer away unless she thought the guy wasn't legit. Electra's dislike of politics was well known. If she thought he'd been sent by the Council to make sure Spirit returned, her cousin wouldn't hesitate to make his life as miserable as possible. Heck, she'd probably sic the rest of the cousins on him too. Hunting a rogue demon would look like a picnic compared to her the combined protective instincts of her grandmother's kin.

With Electra in Houston with her husband, Harpy had been passing on Spirit's messages. Even with her recent distraction, Harpy could smell a liar at twenty paces, she would have warned Spirit if she thought he wasn't who he presented himself to be.

Spirit took a deep breath. Her bells tinkled. "Can we begin over? I'm sure Electra misunderstood."

The deep rumble of his displeasure vibrated the air. Spirit held up her hand halting his coming words.

"I've just moved to Spellfire and started my own line of custom designed jewelry. My cousin has been helping me and she knows how important this business is to me. Because I chose to go on my own during the Christmas Season these first couple of months are critical. Between my new customers and the designs I promised to the clients who ordered from my old company. I've been extremely busy."



Spirit paused to gather her breath. "Due to my work load I've asked Electra and the rest of my family to understand that until Christmas day I'll be working constantly and to please be patient with me. They've agreed to see that I'm not disturbed."

Spirit couldn't help but smile. "You probably don't know them but my cousins are a bit over protective."

"I've known your family since I was a pup." He snorted. "A bit over protective is not how I would describe them. Rabid wolves protecting their young are more pleasant when crossed."

Laughter rolled from her. "And I made the mistake of asking them to make sure I was left alone. Now they think I need protecting."

Deeper masculine laughter joined hers. It felt like a caress.

"You know you're doomed. Your lucky they haven't padlocked your door."

"Please, Adam tried to place a spell on the door so no one but family could enter. I had no idea he'd done it. When I caught him he claimed he was protecting his baby cousin's virtue from unwanted suitors."

"Suitors. Where does he get stuff like that?" Spirit started to chuckle. "The only 'suitor' to cross my threshold since I've been in Spellfire was old man Kinard."

The stooped, balding gnome had fifteen daughters, a face like a moldy prune, and had been married for over three hundred years to the same woman. His laugh joined hers. Meted chocolate couldn't have tasted sweeter. Spirit tried to shake off the desire to climb the man in front of her like a ladder. Spirit Designs was doing well, but not so well she could piss off a rich client, correction a married rich client.

"What'd happened?"

Smiling, she covered her face with her hand. "It was awful. Poor guy just stopped in to pick up a set of soul mate bracelets I made for his ninth daughter's wedding. The second he tried to pass the threshold he ended up on his butt in the alley behind Barnabas Bar. It took me hours to calm him down and figure out who set the spell. He was so upset I ended up having to give him the bracelets."

Still chuckling, he shook his head. "The old gnome took you. With the way he drinks he's been face down in that alley so often he's got a regular spot."



Spirit waved her hand. "I know all about old man Kinard's drinking. He didn't take me. I billed Adam for the rest."

"Good for you. How'd you get Adam to remove the spell?"

Still in shadow his voice was the only clear thing, but Spirit didn't care. Dark and filled with naughty things she could listen to it forever.

"Please, a mule stuck in a tar pit is easier to move than him. I didn't even bother trying to speak with him." Spirit cocked her hip and planted a fist on it. "I went straight to the top and called Tristine. She had the spell removed within the hour."

"An hour, Adam's mellowed." Satisfied pleasure filled his voice. "Finding your mate will do that to a man."

Spirit swayed toward him. She caught herself. Get a grip Spirit. He's a happily married man and you're not the type of woman who poaches. So roll up your tongue. Step up a time to meet with the nice married man. Then get your butt into the main room and find the man who's making your bells sing.

"So I've heard, Mr.?" Spirit pause. "I'm sorry, I don't know your name. Harpy's been a bit distracted recently and she must have forgotten to include it in her note." She held out one hand. "I'm Spirit Tredmane of Spirit's Designs."

He stepped from the shadows and Spirit nearly came. Shoulder length, amber streaked, night black hair surrounded a face designed to cause sin filled thoughts and wet panties. His deep whiskey gaze held serious intent as he took her hand. "Gabe Blackwolf."

Hot sex and dark desires raced up the hand he held, tweaking her nipples as they passed straight to the center of her sex. Spirit's knees nearly buckled.

Ohmyg-d, I need to get away from him, before I jump him. Spirit jerked her hand free.

One of the side effects of being the belled was every time they sung the wearer became aroused. Under normal circumstances her reaction wouldn't be a problem, because her mate would be in the room with her. But the enhancement spell her mate performed to find her had been wreaking havoc. The on again off again tease kept her in a constant state of lust for the past month. At this point Spirit wasn't sure if she would even ask him his name before she stripped him and impaled her needy sex on his shaft.

"Spirit?"



Gabe's expression said he thought she'd gone a bit daft. Who could blame him? First she acts like he's a criminal, then they're laughing, now she leaps away from him like he was a dung-covered beetle.

Spirit tried to think of a way to smooth the awkward moment over. Nothing, her mind was too busy thinking about sweaty-can't-walk-straight-for-a-month-sex. Ignoring her body at the moment, she decided to take the conversation back to business. "Mr. Blackwolf."

"Call me Gabe. After all we are going to be spending a lot of time together." He looked amused, like he just figured something out and it made him want to laugh.

Spirit wanted to lick his closed lipped smile and see if it tasted like laughter. Man, she was in big time trouble. "Why don't I contact you after the holidays and we can set up a time to meet. Between now and our meeting, think about different styles, how they will look and if you can which one you'd want--"

Gabe cut her off. "I've been doing nothing but thinking about different styles. How they would feel against the skin. The taste on my tongue." He hummed a needy growl, his voice velvet smoke. "And I've thought very carefully of how each and every one would look. I don't need more time. I know exactly what I want."

"Uh," Wow. Spirit blinked. His face had the hard stark look of a man cornering his woman. Sensual couldn't even cover the heat and raw need. Her nipples ached. Her sex slick.

"Do you think you can give me what I want? Spirit."

Yes, hell, yes, and twice on Sundays. Stop that. He's talking about the design for his wife, you dolt, not sex. Don't let your libido mess this up. Spirit Designs needs clients.

"Due to other commitments I can't begin working with you until after Christmas. I realize you've waited a long time already. And if you need to go someplace else I can understand and even recommend several excellent jewelry designers." Pride flowed through Spirit. "Turning my clients ideas into the piece of their dreams is my specialty. Your wife is going to love her anniversary present."

"I can be a patient. Your business is important to you. And I respect that." He leaned forward, gaze warm. One large blunt finger brushed and errant curls off her face "But Spirit, I'm not here about a design for my anniversary. I'm here for you."



“What?”

“For you Spirit. Can’t you hear how your bells sing for me? I’m your true mate.” He took advantage of her confusion and closed the distance between them. Heat shed from his skin, spreading his warm male scent like honey over her.

Did he just say he was her mate? “What about your mate?” Notes of love and joy sung from her bells. The suspicion that she’d been talking to him about the wrong note became a reality. “Harpy never gave me your note this morning did she? We’ve been talking in circles around each other haven’t we?

Gabe grinned. “Looks like it.”

Spirit smiled back. Her mate was a hot unmarried werewolf.

“Come here, Spirit. I need to taste you.”

Sounded good to her.

Warm flannel and strong muscle surrounded her. High cheekbones, sun dark skin, and peppermint passed too quickly for her to study. Firm lips settled over hers. Light strokes of his tongue lapped at her bottom lip. The soft butterfly touches teased and begged entrance into her mouth. Spirit melted under his firm but tender kiss.

Dominick had always brutally shoved his way into her mouth. She’d hated them and him, but this subtle caress melted her. Her channel flooded and her mouth parted wider.

Her claws dug and tore his shirt. She wanted him closer while he tried to break the kiss. He didn’t appear to notice her efforts. Instead he groaned and licked her collarbone. Swirls of heat spread down Spirit’s belly. Warmth transferred from his lips to the soft skin under her chin and down her throat.

Spirit cuddled her hips closer to his. His denim-covered sex met her cotton-covered one. She rubbed her clit against the thick bulge that greeted it. His hips jerked.

\* \* \* \*

Gabe grappled with his control. His mate writhed against him, grinding her sex up and down his shaft. The base of his spine tingled and his balls drew tight against his body. He wanted in her slick tight channel so bad he’d considered lifting her skirt and taking her against the steps. Panting, he tried to resist the urge. He didn’t want the first time he was in her to be here in a stock room where anyone could walk in. He wanted privacy.



“Gabe, give me back your mouth.” She tugged his hair. The sharp tips of her nails dug into his scalp. The tiny stings made him want her more.

He gave her what she demanded. Mouth to mouth, lips and tongues twined and slid. So good, her taste filled his mouth. Gabe wanted more of the sweet flavor of his mate. The tip of her tongue licked behind his teeth. Slightly rougher than his, it rasped against the delicate skin. Goddess he loved the feel of her delicious tongue. Pre-cum pearled on the tip of his dick. How would her tongue feel against his balls and cock?

The scent of her arousal made his mouth water to taste more than just her lips and tongue. He wanted to bury his face between her thighs. Feel her juices on his face, against his throat. He wanted to lick her dry then make her cream wet herself again, with just his mouth.

His cock jumped at the thought. How would her channel taste?

“More. Give me more.” Spirit hooked her legs around his back. Breast to channel, she stroked herself up and down his body like a cat in heat.

He panted and tried to separate them before their first time was against the rough wood of the stair. “Spirit, honey, please let me take you upstairs. Is there a bed up there?” He rested his forehead against her, gathering the strength to stop. “We can be alone.”

Claws shredded his shirt. “Gabe, you said you were going to ease me. Please, I ache.”

With her pussy grinding against him, her eyes glazed and her claws biting into his back Gabe didn’t stand a chance. His mate suffered and it was his duty to see to all her needs. His hand burrowed under her skirt. Muscle twitched as he brushed the tips of his fingers up the soft skin of her thigh. Her scent increased, tangy and sweet at the same time.

Hot silk blocked him from touching her. He stroked, the damp springy hair under the triangle of fabric teased him and tempted him.

\* \* \* \*

Sharp teeth nipped at Spirit’s collar. Thick fingers stroked tiny circles up and down her slit. Sensation overlay sensation. Tingles, heat, the dizzy near bursting feel of pending release. Widening her stanch, Spirit rotated her hips in an attempt to increase the pressure. Moisture slipped out of her pussy. Gabe was making her crazy, she



needed his fingers to press harder. Better yet she needed the slide of that thick cock that strained and begged for her attention inside her.

Hot damp bites nipped at her breasts, down her stomach then stopped.

“I need to taste you.”

Each word puffed against the silk covering her mound.

Tormenting her already swollen clit. The sharp scrap of claws against her hipbones shot sensation up her waist, under her arms and across her breasts. Already tight, her nipples hardened even more. The slide of fabric across her clit was exquisite torture.

Then he was there. No hesitation, no dance, just his mouth pulling on the hard ach. Pleasure speared through her. His tongue lapped, a lazy rhythm. Firm slow strokes that made her want to weep from the pleasure of it. Her body clenched. Her womb thrummed in anticipation. Spirit strained toward release.

“Gabe.” Tears spilled down her cheeks, her body sobbed for fulfillment. Spirit arched and ground against Gabe’s tongue.

“Shh, sweetheart, I know, I know. Let me give it to you.” Gabe sucked her clit hard into his mouth. The top of his teeth scrapped the delicate skin. Spirit burst and wave after wave of pleasure cascaded over her.

He released her clit and speared her core with his tongue. Spirit rode it as the last echoes of pleasure.

“So good.” His voice changed taking on the low deep vibration of the wolf. It brushed against her, setting its claws firmly in her heart. “Sweet, sweet Spirit, I want to lap your cream, but I need to be in you. Feel your wrap your body around me.”

Denim brushed against the sensitive skin of Spirit’s thighs. Her pussy clenched. His thick bulge pressed against the damp curls, his hips pulsed. The rough fabric rubbed exquisite tingles up over her mound and belly. Why was he still inside his jeans, she’d cum but she still ached to be filled.

“Spirit, will you let me in?” Before she could answer Gabe pressed his mouth to hers in a soul melting, body burning kiss. The tangy flavor of her juices mingled with his masculine taste. “Please.”

“Yes.”

“You realize what allowing me into your body means? There will be no going back.” The whiskey color had receded leaving gold-rimmed pupils.



She should have been afraid. A man she just met was about to bind them together forever, but she wasn't. Instead she felt like she'd come home. "I know I want this. After, we'll learn of one another. Now move."

"Thank you." Lips closed, the kiss should have been chaste, but love flowed through it. So warm and filled with tenderness, Spirit almost wept. He pushed off her just enough to release himself from his pants. Thick and wide, the blunt head wedged against her entrance. "So wet and slick." He pushed forward inching his way slowly in then out. Shallow bone melting strokes, that teased but didn't fill her empty sheath.

Calluses scrapped against her butt and kneaded, his fingers licked kisses against her anus. Naughty desire speared her. The palm of Gabe's other hand encased her breast. The rough patches scrapped her distended nipples. Spirit wanted to scream from the almost pleasure.

"Gabe, go deeper."

His heavy breath pushed his chest against hers. "I wish I could, sweetheart, your so tight. I don't want to hurt you."

Spirit growled. She sunk her claws into the hard muscle of his butt. "Gabe I'm fragile. I'm a were I can take it. Now move."

Canines gleamed in a wide grin. Without warning he rolled onto his back taking her with him.

"Gabe." Spirit laughed.

"The floor is wood, I'll not have you getting splinters."

Spirit was about to protest when Gabe impaled her on his shaft.

"Yes." He groaned.

He filled her to the brim, bumping the bottom of her womb with pleasure. Spirit started to rise, wanting, needing the friction.

"No, let me." His palms cupped either side of her hips his fingers brushed her spine. "Spirit straighten, just a bit." She moved. "That's it. Now feel."

Keeping her mound flush with the base of his sex, he rotated her against him in small circular rotations. The wide width of him stroked every inch of flesh in her dripping channel. He touched a spot just inside her entrance. Pleasure like she'd never known roared through her body.

"Gabe, yes, yes, yes."



He pulled her body flush with his and started a pounding rhythm. His teeth scraped against her collarbone, sweat beaded along her spine, and she arched her hips forward, so that he touched that spot again.

“Gods, Spirit.” Gabe licked and sucked at the tender spot between her neck and shoulder.

Spirit’s breast scraped against the short coarse hair of his chest. Her tightly beaded nipples craved the sensation. Clamping the skin between his teeth, Gabe bit. Deep within her womb the muscle clenched, her channel dripped. Her orgasm tore through her. Lights flashed behind her eyes, her mind floated, and her nerves sung.

Spirit’s forehead lay against his chest. Both sets of her canines elongated. It was her turn to mark her mate and give him his release.

Gabe groaned, his head thrown back against the steps, his hands holding her mound flush against the base of his penis. Hot splashes of cum pulsed against the entrance to her womb.

\* \* \* \*

Still hard, Gabe didn’t want to pull out of her. Blood dripped from the matting mark he’d left on his mate’s skin. He licked it clean, knowing his saliva would help speed the healing. Within a day the skin would be completely close and twin half moon scars would remain.

Spirit’s slightly rough tongue dragged over his chest. His cock felt like it would burst from her touch. “Come home with me tonight, stay forever.” Gabe whispered the words.

“I can’t until after Christmas.” Her face still held a rosy blush, the skin damp. Her eyes still held the change they had vertical slits like a cat.

“I have the space, you can put your workshop anywhere you want. In the house, off the barn, or you can build it from scratch.” Gabe planted a series of kisses over her cheeks, lips and nose.

“Its not just my orders. I have to go back home.” Spirit ducked her head, sighed, then looked up.

His heart melted at the sight of sadness mixed with determination. She was trying to swallow her pride and tell him. Gabe put two fingers over Spirit’s lips. He would spare her the pain of telling.

“Spirit, I know all about Dominick and the elder’s rulings.”

“How?”



Gabe hadn't been idle for the past two months, using his considerable resources he'd dug into Spirit's past. What he had learned brought a fury through him unlike any he had ever known.

He explained to her what the steps he'd been able to take as the Alpha of Alpha's. Knowing he couldn't trust Dominick to obey even his own pack's laws. Gabe asked for and received a special meeting of the Tribunal of Elders and while they agreed that Spirit's pack was archaic in their thinking and laws there was nothing they could do. Unless Gabe formed a true mating bond with Spirit, she would be wed to Dominick on Christmas.

"So with our mating marks we'll be able to go to the Tribunal and your pack, and Dominick can do nothing." Gabe held his breath. They were still so new to each other he was afraid how she would react to his meting.

"Thank you. My plan was a long shot. If it suited their purposes my pack's elders wouldn't hesitate to ignore even their own laws. With the Tribunal standing behind us the elders will do nothing against us. Dominick is another story."

"Spirit, Dominick and I have faced each other before. You've nothing to fear from him." Gabe pulled her to him. "Will you come home with me?"

Spirit slid up and kissed him. "Yes."



## Epilogue

People thought of Texas as all prairies and dust and Gabe was happy to let them go on thinking it. Texas was long and wide with pine trees, lakes, rivers and streams, swampy marsh areas, and great stretches of grass and yes, dust too. He and Spirit sealed their mating on New Years day. The binding ceremony had been simple and small.

He'd been gone for two weeks taking care of Council business. Gabe's ranch lay on the Houston side of Texas. When he'd arrived at the ranch instead of his mate there'd been a note. Four miles had passed, slender pines towered over him as he wove toward the river that ran through the grassy marsh. His weight sunk his paws through the dark brown earth as he neared the wetlands. Spirit's tracks blazed a trail for him to follow.

The clean forest scent changed to the slightly musty odor of decay. The frost of winter had given way to the warming of spring. A light breeze blew through the thick fur of his wolf form.

The pines pittered down and the grass grew longer and thicker. Gabe's muscles sang and his stride stretched out to its full length. Ears tilted forward, they strained and caught shushed rustles and...bells.

Panting, Gabe skidded to a stop. A small black nose poked through the grass. Brown tipped gray fur covered her slender frame. Cat eyes shone from a wolf's face. Her beauty took his breath away.

He sat on his haunches just wanting to watch her chase moths and play in the grass.

Spirit swung around. Spotting him she loped across the clearing. She must have heard his bell. On their wedding night Spirit had presented him with a simple silver bracelet. Within the narrow curved band, she's concealed a single bell.

Spirit explained to him about how the bells affected her. She also explained that after their first mating her bells changed. Instead



of arousing her every time he came within fifty yards, they now reacted to his arousal. The hornier he got the more they teased her.

Rather than removing hers she'd offered him one. He'd gladly accepted the magnificent bracelet she'd crafted just for him. Pure wolf, he couldn't truly be belled. Still the sound and mere thought of how the bells affected his mate made him rock hard every time.

Close enough to leap on him Spirit changed back to her human form mid way through. Gabe quickly transformed so he could catch her. Her face glowed. And her lithe body molded to his. "How was your trip? We missed you."

"We?" His hips surged toward her heat.

Spirit licked the mating mark on his chest. She sunk her canines the smallest nip into them and straddled his thighs. Desire whipped through him. "Yes, we. Me and the pups."

"You're? We're?" Gabe wedged his hand between them cupping his hand over her belly. His throat felt full. Joy, built in his heart until he thought it would burst.

Nodding, tears shone in her gaze. "I heard back from the doctor today."

Gabe slid into his mate's slick channel. His dream of finding the women who made his soul sing and having a family fulfilled.

The End.



## **Works**

**by**

**Mae Powers**

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Spellfire Seasons: A Statue For All Seasons

Sweet Seductress

The Mating Tree

The Orb

Fireworks



# **A Statue For All Seasons**

**By**

**Mae Powers**

Geo couldn't believe what he was waking up to. After decades of being teased during the Christmas holiday seasons, some one was doing something to his cock other than putting tinsel on his shaft or hanging bells on his balls. What with all those blasted pubescent kids putting tinsel and bells all over his granite genitals, it made his statute form look silly.

For nearly one hundred years, Geovani "Geo" Leone McMillan hated Christmas. It was more than a humbug feeling for him. If he could feel everything that went on around him his curse would have been much worse. The problem was that most did it during the December holidays, when he came awake completely for one day out of the year – from midnight on Christmas Eve until midnight on Christmas Day.

Geo could see everything going on in town, during those long frustrating twenty-four hours. Sometimes, his mind vaguely awoke, but mostly when Frightful Frieda was around. She'd come around to taunt him sometimes over the years, until these last two decades and now she barely glanced his way.

When she left him, he would be awake for a few hours afterwards and see what was going on in the paranormal country city of Spellfire. Well as long as it was in the Spellfire Park, town square area. It lay close to the Town Hall and Sinful Sundaes Ice Cream Shoppe, so the things that went on there often amused him. His mind sighed. It was the only part of him that could sense or see anything, when he awoke. His body stood frozen in marble. And his flesh never touched ground except during the period between Christmas Eve and Christmas Day.



When no one was in the vicinity mentioning him, he often went back into the deep sleep in his granite form, but if his cock was touched or the spell made him aware of a potential curse breaker, then he came awake for brief moments. However, unless it was the appointed time, he couldn't get down from his stone pedestal. He hated Christmas and horny, frustrated witches.

He heard a soft, grinding, creaky noise. His cock stirred.

Geo looked down, more awake now to the present situation.

He saw a woman kneeling before him in the thick snow covered ground. Her head was bent towards him. He heard what sounded like a muffled "mmffffmm". Was she sucking him?

He felt the creak in his marble shaft this time. Her head came back and her lips puckered. She kissed his cold cockhead and then she widened her mouth and lathered his large mushroom shaped tip with her tongue and lips.

Well by the old bastard bards of Ireland, she was giving him the Devil's Kiss! And oh, he could feel that cock of his shiver with delight in the cool air.

Cool air? Oh that hit him and much more. The more she swallowed him into her mouth, the more his flesh became apparent. Oh, by the ancient gods of Italian lust, he was becoming human once more!

Her head bobbed up and down more voraciously. The stone skin encasing his body creaked and started dissipating like melting snow. Then she stopped.

His cock froze in solid fleshy stiffness. No! She couldn't stop now. NOT yet! Oh shit, not now. He was almost ... well to his thighs anyway... almost human again. Then he mentally gasped as he saw the woman step back and quickly pulled off her dressy jacket and plain black evening gown. If his eyes weren't stone and transfixed, he could swear they widened. His mind's eyes certainly did.

She got completely undressed and mounted him. And it startled him inwardly that she didn't fall or slip and slide on the snow and ice around his statue base. She used his curved arm hold, wrapped herself around him with her legs, and slid a hot wet cunt over his cold but fleshy cock.

Then she fucked him furiously. His stone casing started to heat up, melting away with each heated thrust of her life-giving cunt. Geo grabbed her firmly to him, cupping her delicious feeling derriere



within his big hands. He stiffly rocked back and forth. Oh hell, he was getting his first fuck in about a hundred years.

She groaned. She hiccupped. Then she passed out on him

He groaned, felt his stiffness ebb, felt the cold and wondered what the hell he was going to do with a naked human wrapped in his arms while they were both still standing on the stony pedestal. He heard voices in the distance.

He jumped down from the pedestal, and was relieved he didn't slip and fall with the woman he held close, but had slowly slid off his throbbing cock. Hell and damnation. He slung the woman over his shoulders and moved as quickly as he could, while holding her and gathering up her clothes, before escaping behind the building nearest the statue base. He knew it was the library, but didn't care. No one was bound to see them there.

He glanced over his shoulder, and though he moved stiffly, he got behind the old library before he was spotted with a naked woman on his shoulder or worse, him running naked through the park. She was still passed out. He felt the chill in the air invading his open flesh. The winds of a Texas winter were biting. He glanced at the back door and hoped it would be easy to open. Though fairly modern, it was still a building from the previous decade.

"Oh...good, work..." her head bobbed up and her oval face bore a haphazard smile. Then her head drooped again.

He glanced at her and realized where he recalled seeing her. This was the town librarian. One Christmas she shooed some kids away from him and took off the degrading holiday ornaments. He remembered how her hand touched his shaft and for a brief moment, he'd seen her lovely face. In that split second, it felt like the stone around his heart cracked to a sliver.

He glanced from her to the building again. There was nothing on the back door. It took his unfreezing brain a second or two to recall that most doors in Spellfire didn't need locks. The town was protected against most thieves. A few thieves had some, how gotten into stores and shops over the years, but not too many. He figured the town let them, only because it had a reason for doing so.

The door creaked as it slowly swung opened. He fumbled in the dark, but found a door open to his right. He shuffled in and saw that it must be some kind of room people could relax in. Light from a dim source allowed him to make out objects. Looked like a sofa and a



table and chair set in the room. He laid her upon the couch, thinking that maybe this was where the library employees took their breaks. Although his era was from the early 1900s he listened when he was awoken, and learned about new contraptions.

In addition, he'd remembered it all. He fumbled around and flipped on a light switch. Glancing around quickly, he saw that indeed it was an employee lounge. Then he looked at the woman on the sofa, huddling up against her pile of squished clothing. She looked different without glasses on and her hair piled up on top of her head; or without her regular clothing. His beautiful librarian. No, the town librarian. The current one anyway. The others were ghosts or had left this gawd-forsaken spook town.

Perhaps he shouldn't feel that way about it, since it was his home, now. She stirred and he scrutinized her more carefully. What had this long, languid beauty been doing sucking on a cold stone cock? He ached with need, long overdue, desperate need and fulfillment. His eyes roamed down her sloping back to her rounded derriere. Her creamy thighs were parted and he could see her mons. She glistened slightly there and he was tempted to go fill that wet warmth. However, the curse wouldn't allow him, nor would he allow himself.

Yes, he was desperate for this nightmare to end, but he couldn't break it unless the woman offered, or was willing, and she opened her heart to him. Why the hell did curses seem to need being in love to break them? Ok, maybe she needed to at least care about him. It would be fine with him if they didn't have to live happily ever after. In one hundred years, this inebriated woman was the first to melt his stony exterior.

Oh, others touched him and almost pecked his poker, but none ever kissed it or suckled it, as the curse required. He glanced down at the tall red haired beauty and wondered what made her do it. She was probably in her mid to late thirties, yet she looked exceptionally beautiful. And she had a with a wide pink mouth that put life back into his long-ignored cock. Hell, she felt good around him in both ways. Now if he could just get her to finish what she started and of her on free will, he'd be un-cursed in no time!

But here wasn't the place to do that. He glanced around the room again and let out a sigh of relief. On the coat pegs next to the wall hung a long overused overcoat and some oversized galoshes stood beneath it. So he was lucky, it was about time. He went over and



quickly took the trench coat down, and slipped it and the boots on. They both were slightly snug, but covered the necessary essentials and would stave off the cold winter night.

He moved back over to the woman and glanced at her jacket. He bent down and retrieved the jacket, fumbling through her pockets. He found her evening bag and opened it up, flipping through her stuff inside. Coins, keys, and yes, identification. He pulled out ID and glanced at it. Lillia West. 4848 Twisted Lane #4, Spellfire, TX...hmm, he thought, that wasn't too far from the library. He'd heard of its location, mentioned over the years, Twisted Lane that is. He put the ID back in the bag and that back in her jacket. Then he proceeded to dress Ms. Lillia West. It wasn't easy, considering his schlong still ached for release. That though would have to wait, unfortunately, until he took his sweet librarian back to her place. He just hoped he made it there without encountering anyone, especially Frightful Frieda.

\* \* \* \*

Lillia West was having a marvelous dream. No, her subconscious corrected, a simply irresistibly, fucking good dream. She was hot and horny from the dream, and a little cool. That part she didn't understand. She was leaving the official Town Hall employees annual Christmas party, which was always on Christmas Eve, quite tipsy and not in the best of moods. Perry announced to all that Frieda was now going to be the new Head Librarian. That old bitch didn't know how to wear modern lingerie, much less put books correctly on shelves.

And was Lillia ever pissed. She got so friggin mad she needed to curtail her emotions and her natural powers. So instead, she'd gotten drunk. Rip roaring, nearly plastered to the wall, drunk. Then Frightful Frieda started acting snotty and frustrating, Lillia ended up storming out of the Town Hall diner. She'd been furious and then she bumped into the statue of Horny Geo. Then she sat on the nearest bench and talked to him, just as she did on other lonely, but less frustrating holidays. Only this time, her mind recalled fuzzily, she told him how well he was hung and that at least he didn't back stab her and mock her, or belittle her like some people did. And that he deserved a kiss for that.

Only she couldn't reach his face to kiss him. So, she'd kissed him in a different place. And her mind wandered to that big long cock and wondered what it would be like to taste it if it were real. So she



sucked him and then she'd wondered what it would be like if he were real and what it would be like to fuck him. Oh she was so horny herself, just looking at his magnificent body. It didn't bother her at the time how ludicrous or pathetic she might look. Instead, she suckled him, got horny herself, thrust off all her clothes, got up on the statue, and slid herself onto his cock. Then she screwed him and had been having the best fuck of her life.

Then darkness and the chill came back. Vaguely she recalled the library and now she smiled as she saw his face before her. Mmm, so nice to look at with no stone covering his tall lean body. She reached out to her imaginary lover and he approached her. His smile was infectious and so was that damn beautiful hard-on of his. His hand closed over hers and she jerked him down on top of her. She wanted to finish what they started earlier. Her pussy was wet with need. She wanted him and by the feel of his cock poking against her, he wanted her too.

Lillia let him slide between her thighs, and as he slid into her she could feel coolness and warmth all in the same moment, but she shivered from desire and wanting completion, instead of the weather or his former stony skin. He moved above her fast and furious and she pushed up against him, meeting him thrust for thrust. He groaned out his need for completion just as she did and moments later he collapsed against her sweating and satisfied, she knew. After all, it had probably been at least a hundred years since her statue lover had fucked.

Lillia's eyes opened wide and her vision cleared. Lying above her was the real form of Horny Geo. She opened her mouth to scream and would have let out a blood-curdling one, but his hand came over her mouth. She jerked beneath him and finally managed to thrust him off of her. Lil backed up against the headboard and took in the naked, sated man half sitting, and half lying on her bed. It hadn't been a dream. She'd actually been making out with Leo McMillan, the statue, no, the real thing in irresistible flesh.

"Don't scream, lady, I mean Lillia. I ain't here to harm you."

"No just take advantage of me." She jerked the covers up around her and didn't like the way he half leered at her. "I can't believe I got so plastered I screwed a statue!"

He sat back down and she could tell he was surprised at her words. "You know about my curse?"



"I've been the librarian of the paranormal section for twenty years. Only person that probably knows more about the curses this town is hiding is Electra Spellfire and Frightful Frieda Farthington."

"Yeah but she couldn't free me. She tried about ten years ago."

She tilted her head to one side. "I don't believe Electra would screw you in public."

"No she's too classy for that. Mentally spoke with her on Christmas that year and she tried to get Frieda to free me. It didn't go to well. Hadn't found a willing person to give me the first kiss or mount me like you did. I am still shocked."

"But not so much you couldn't wait to get me in the sack without my permission."

His chagrined look made her heart tighten. "Well you started it. I mean I've seen you around and you've set on the bench near my statue base and yakked at me when you thought no one was around. I'm sorry, but being in the heat of the moment and having a chance to finally get out of this curse really was foremost. You'd feel the same too if you'd been in my shoes. And you grabbed me this second time too."

She vaguely recalled doing as he mentioned. She'd grabbed him in her dreams and pressed him to fuck her. "Okay, I'll concede to all that. Damn this is the most unusual Christmas Day I've ever experienced. Even in Spellfire."

"Mine have been such for nearly a hundred years." His chagrined smile caught at her heart.

Hell, she thought I'm in predicament now. "What the hell am I going to do with you?"

He pulled part of the covers around himself. "Could you help me to find a way to end this friggin curse? Frieda put a spell on the curse to make it where only I could be freed if I willingly screwed her or someone suckled my staff, followed by mounting me in public, but there's more to reversing the curse that is hidden thanks to her damn cunning."

She let out a sigh and looked him over carefully. Here she was sitting in her bed talking to an ex-statue as if it were the most normal thing in the world. And in a way it was. Spellfire probably possessed more secrets and cursed people than Washington DC. Her senses were coming slowly back to her, and now she really checked him out. She'd seen pictures of his real form in the old library archives, before



he'd been spelled by Frieda Faraday-Farthington. That bitch, even though she looked only in her early forties, was one of the oldest people in Spellfire, and a pretty damn powerful witch whose curses were hard to break.

Only a few people stood up to Frieda, and besides herself, one of the most powerful beings in town was Electra Spellfire. Frieda hated Electra, though the two often crossed paths socially. In addition, Frieda wanted the job as head Librarian for sometime now. Since the bitch had the mayor, Perry Normil, under her thumb, she'd finally gotten it this year; probably by threatening all who were opposed to her. Since Electra had been out of town with some of her friends, Frieda had been adept at slowly getting her way.

Lillia would keep her posts in the archives, but she actually wanted out and to start doing more with the library. However, the job went to the wicked witch of Texas, and mostly cause she turned down a threesome with Frieda and Perry. Bastards. She'd get even with them. She might not be as powerful as Frieda, Electra and some of the other magical folks in town, but she wasn't one to be totally trifled with either.

Again, she looked at the tall, athletically built man. His light blonde hair lay in shaggy waves around his face, and his golden stubby beard was attractive in a way. His nipples were dark against his pale body and she could feel her wet thighs creaming more at the thought of bedding him again. She liked the way his aqua blue eyes were mixed with both passion and worry. It made him human. It made her heart melt. It made her want to get revenge on Frieda.

She cocked her head to one side and asked, "Just why did you turn Frieda down? She's still a looker, and was pretty hot-looking in her earlier days, according to her pictures and some old inhabitants I've talked to over the years."

He shifted his bottom and she felt it must be hard to become accustomed to having to sit again. "I liked her sister Fancy better. Those two were always rivals. However, I turned down Fancy too. They were just too pushy for my tastes then. Of course strong women are more desirable these days, especially ones that know their own minds, but aren't jerks like some men can be."

She nodded and grinned. "Yeah, even some women can be jerks and full of themselves. I can only believe that they thought the same of you, and you got caught in their sibling rivalry. Only someone



temperamental could have brought that upon himself. Turning down both of them, you did have guts, Geo. You must have been furious at their overtures.”

“Lillia,” she liked it when he sounded her name with that westernly southern drawl, “I’m Italian-Irish and I’ve been fucking stuck in a friggin stone cold body for nearly a hundred years and a hard on that’s ached for just about that long. Me temperamental? Sure as hell am my dear.”

“Geo, you’re still a bit of a jerk I bet. It’s no wonder Frieda spelled you for not sleeping with her.” She laughed despite his frown. “However, she was wrong to do so. I read your history and you didn’t deserve that from her.”

His keen eyes were studying her. “I drifted into town looking for some better life. I wasn’t here, but for a few weeks, when Frieda spotted me and started her trouble. With a few months of meeting her, I was a statue. It was a personal hell to be tormented by her when I could only wake between Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. But I’ve watched this town grow, and recall seeing you a few times on the bench near my statue base.”

She pondered his words and grinned. “I often felt as if you could hear me. I bet you saw a lot that went on during those twenty-four hours.”

He nodded. “Quite a bit. It’s been hard, but interesting to see the modern world change so much as the century grew, and listen to others speak about their lives and their passions. Sometimes brief things, other times a whole life of them.”

“You deserve to be freed, Geo. There’s got to be a way to completely un-hex you.”

“I thought all there was to fixing the curse was having to be taken in public as a stone body. But we never finished completely. I’m still hornier than ever. I won’t force you, Lillia, but if you’d care to reconsider I’d appreciate the gesture.”

She shook her head. “I’m like Electra, I’m not about to screw you in public. I was pretty damn drunk. There’s got to be a way around the curse. It’s not Christmas Day yet.”

“Then you must have been a potential curse breaker. I know the recipient must be willing to do it with me completely in public for me to be free.”



“Frieda is a kinky bitch, but I’m damn sure she put more strictures on having that curse removed than just a quick fuck in public. We should check the old spell books in the library archives and the cures for curses in the ancient parchments.”

His demeanor brightened and that sexy fabulous smile of his widened. “Then you’ll help me?”

“We have less than twenty-four hours to get you un-spelled. Since I did kind of uncharm you, the least I can do is to help find a way out of this. However, we have to work hard, because at midnight on Christmas Day you will be back to being a statue again.”

“You don’t like Frieda and her cohorts either, do you?”

“Not one damn bit. No guarantees, Geo. And none of your sexy wiles either. A girl can only take so much of a stiff stud like you.”

His sheepish grin made her nervous. He was hiding something, but she’d let it alone for now. “Agreed.”

“Good, now let me get a shower and then I’ll find you some clothes to wear while you shower. I think one of my friends might have left some things here that will fit you.”

“A beautiful woman like you would have them, I’m sure.”

He started to stand up. His magnificent body caused a thrill of desire to wash over her. Oh, she was so tempted to throw him down and ravish him, but something held her back. And despite her sexual need, that overwhelming aspect kept her from letting him ease that deliciously beautiful, hard-on he had jutting out, into her. She removed her covers and naturally preened at the intense interest his body and eyes vibrated with.

She flipped her dark red hair off her tanned shoulders. “Thanks, Geo, but not that kind of friend. Look around and I’ll be right back. We’ll get going shortly and find out how we can thwart Frieda at her own game and give that bitch the comeuppance she deserves.”

\* \* \* \*

Although winter, like most Texas towns, was still warm during some of the seasonal days, today felt cool to him and he noticed for Lillia too. It had been a long time since he dealt with the weather. Of course, one never knew for sure if a winter day was going to be cold or warm in Texas, especially in the southwestern areas between Houston and Galveston. Lillia took him on a quick tour of the town, plus took him by Sinful Sundaes to get a treat. It was so long since he ate a good meal like hot dogs and an ice-cream sundae. He wasn’t



sorry they didn't run into Frieda or Perry. He'd almost been recognized by a few of the old inhabitants. However Lillia kept close tabs on him and soon they were at the library again. Only this time he wasn't carrying her in. They'd made sure they weren't followed, and then they hit the old spell and curse archives to see what the town's spirit and hex historians had written up about his particular curse.

He glanced at her as she poured over parchments, tablets, and books. She was quite lovely and stirred something within his now-warmed blood. She kept her hair braided back and that's how he'd remember seeing her over the years. Lovely gray eyes that could see deeply into your soul, warm hands to arouse and comfort, and a generous heart she hid beneath that lonely exterior; and a luscious body she kept hidden beneath layers of business or frumpy clothes. He liked everything he saw about her...and felt about her.

He tilted his head to one side as something odd struck him. During the years she'd come to sit near his statue bench at Christmas, and often walked passed him and sat down and ate her lunch or just fed the spellbirds, he'd seemed to be aware of her presence. His heart cracked a bit, just as his stone one did when she'd first humped him. Slowly he rose and moved over to her. As if on cue, her head came up and those large glassy gray eyes captured him completely body and soul.

Geo knew now why the curse could not be lifted by anyone else. He was in love with Lillia West! He bent his head and captured her pink, quivering lips. She tasted of creamy fudge and peppermint. It drove his cock to harden more and he ached with desperation only she could fulfill. His kiss deepened as she opened her lips further for his exploration. Her head came back momentarily and he stopped, looking deeply into her eyes. Her eyes twinkled with a knowing glance that she knew what his mind and body were asking of her. Let me make love to you? Let me have you here and now? She slowly rose and tugged off of her thin sweater. Did she want to really, here and now? Her answer was not verbal; instead, she wrapped her arms around his neck and brought his head down over hers.

His mouth bore down on hers; hungry to taste the warm delights her luscious lips offered him. She groaned her need, opening her mouth for him, letting him know she wanted his tongue inside of her, teasing her mouth as if his cock were teasing her cunt. Her arms came up around his back and she jerked herself up as close to him as



possible. Oh, he wanted her so badly. He splayed his big hands over the lower part of her back, caressing her with hot touches upon her and even lower. She pushed her pelvic into his crotch. Her heat opened to him, drawing his fires into her clothed warmth. If she didn't stop them, he knew he wouldn't be able to halt what would soon happen.

However, she didn't stop them. Instead, she brought his hand down to her warmth. He fumbled with her dress hem and slid his hand under it, finding her core through her thin panties. He loved the new modern underclothing women wore. His fingers slid between her mons, deep into her wet warmth. She was creamy and it thrilled him to know how desperately she wanted him. Her hands roamed his body and his cock hardened even more. His shaft needed release, and so did his soul.

They caressed and touched and kissed, all the while pulling clothes off and laying on the table. Naked they rolled and fondled each other intimately. Her hands felt hot on his cock and all over his body. He finally positioned himself between her legs. When she fully opened herself to him, he drove hard and desperately into her. She wrapped her legs around his buttocks and thrust up to meet him. Geo kissed her all over her face, her neck and her lips. He wanted all of her, completely. She cried out his name and her need for him. He did likewise and all the pent up passions that had been denied him over the years burst forth in the most incredible mind blowing orgasm he'd ever experience. Her nails dug into him and she screamed loudly how good her fucking release felt. Spent, and pleased to see she was fulfilled, he half laid over her, while the two of them caught their breath.

"You know, you're pretty damn good for an ex-statue."

He grinned down at her. "Well for a stuffy, witchy historian you're not so bad yourself."

She kissed him happily on the nose. "Well as much as I'd like to do that again, this is a bit uncomfortable. Shall we use the restrooms and clean up, and then get back to the books?"

With a sigh of regret, he agreed. He followed her to the restrooms and entered the men's by himself. He was feeling more human as he washed away their make-out evidence from his body. The navy blue colored sweatpants and sweatshirt and canvas shoes she'd found for him to wear fit a bit loose but were comfortable and long enough to



cover all of him. He finished cleaning off and then took a nature trip to the john. Relieved, he finished washing up and went back to find her. He started quieting his steps when he heard voices coming from the area of where he'd just left, prior to going to the bathroom, the archive room.

"You shouldn't be here, late like this, Lillia."

He recognized that voice immediately and shivered. That was Frieda. His former tormentor. He had no wish to go up against her right now, but would if she started any trouble for Lillia.

"Your duties as head librarian don't start until after the holidays, Frieda, so get lost."

He liked Lillia's spunk, but he wasn't sure if Frieda left. "Take the spell off the library so I can have access to it, Lil."

"I will once you're head librarian, not before. I've got some last minute work to shelve so leave now, Frieda. The library spirits aren't too happy about your appointment either, so I'd leave if I were you."

"I'll get you for this, you miserable excuse for a witch."

He heard Frieda's heeled feet stomping down the hallway. Once he was sure she left, he peeked around the corner to see if Lillia was alone. Thankful she was, he came up to her relieved form. "You okay, doll?"

She seemed to purr for him. "I'm fine. Nasty bitch likes to get control when she can. Glad you stayed out of the fire range. Let's get to finding your complete cure before she comes back and realizes what we are up to. I haven't heard any reports that she knows you're around, so let's keep it that way for now."

"I quite agree." He followed her to the archive room again, glad that they had the foresight to clean up the area before resuming their search.

It was at least another hour or two before she pulled open an old book, flipped it open and let out a whelp of glee. He moved closer from his set of books to her and glanced down at what she was pointing at. There, within the book, still dark letters, but blotched in a few places was his name listed under curses in the early 1900s. He leaned forward, but kept close to her. Her scent of vanilla spice aroused him, but he kept his eyes on the book and read so that they could concentrate on finding his curse removal.

"...and Frieda Faraday-Farthington cursed Giovanni McMillan into statue form. Local Magic Historian Gilbert Trudo writes that it



can only be partly removed by a willing partner who will do it with him willingly at least three times. And at least one of those places in a public area. The rest could not be detected much by spell adjusters, but it's believed that only the one who'll submit to him completely just after the stroke of the midnight hour of Christmas Day, can free him totally. Most spell historians can surmise it is only Frieda's wrath that stops anyone from taking an interest or trying. Of course the heart seems to play a big part in most curse removals in Spellfire..."

He leaned back in his chair after reading the passages. "Well I'm screwed."

She sighed and placed a hand over his wrist. "We still have time left, Geo. We'll think of something. Come on, I'm getting hungry. How about some pizza and beer? I've got some beer in the fridge, and we can stop over at the all night pizzeria near the apartments."

"Food makes me think better too. Especially pizza. I discovered it when it came to Spellfire. The curse allows me to become human during the midnight-to-midnight hours of the Christmas holiday. Well when Frieda doesn't think to stop it happening." He scooted back his chair and nodded. Thanks for all your help, Lillia. You didn't have to you know."

She stood before him, and he loved the way her gray eyes became misty as she studied him. His heart cracked even further. "It's Christmas, and this isn't your fault. Consider it a holiday gift, Geo. I did give you hope for a release and a chance to be free, so we have to figure this out together. And you're right, I think better on a full stomach. Come on, let's get out of here. I can still smell Frieda's stench permeating the library."

He agreed and walked out the back door of the library. The door seemed to vibrate, no hum happily after it closed itself. He shrugged, knowing this town was a life in itself, or ghosts really roamed it in an alternate plane of existence. He was mortal, but he'd always had an empathic sensing of things otherworldly. The town was fascinating to him, and he'd love to make it his home and find out more about it. For some odd reason, he felt very content, although he only had two days before becoming a statue again.

\* \* \* \*

Lillia enjoyed the cooler air as they walked from the backside of the library towards her apartment. It was only a few blocks down a side road, to the small complex she lived in, called Haunted Hills



Apartments. Most of her neighbors were quiet, and except for the occasional Friday night spookings, she didn't hear much booing and screeching from any of the ghosts and paranormal beings living there; or even the few mortals that braved the area.

As they walked, she realized that she felt lighter hearted than she had in years. Absently, she slipped her hand into his warm, willing one. He turned to smile down at her and within that smile Lillia knew she'd lost her heart. Is this sudden creaking of her heart what one felt when they realized the iciness around their heart was finally melting?

She'd been in love before, but Frieda had stolen him with a love potion, so perhaps it wasn't as good as it had seemed. Yet, with Geo, she didn't feel that way. He whistled as they kept walking towards the pizzeria just ahead. His hand tightened over hers and he briefly brought it to his full lips. She quivered with need and happiness. His aqua blue eyes sparkled like a glistening sea at midnight, and the wind blew his blonde hair around his face in a most tantalizing manner.

He opened the door as they reached the Paraboolie's Pizza Place. She was glad that at 10:30 pm on a Friday it wasn't that busy. People were still out shopping for presents and holiday goodies. They went up to the counter and ordered a double dose of pepperoni pizza. While they waited, they sat at one of the far, high-backed booths. Geo's back was to the door and she could slightly see over the big backing of the booth.

"I really appreciate your help and more, Lillia." He opened up to her. Not the most romantic words, but it was a start to her.

"Like I said, I started this, Geo."

"No, actually, Frieda did. At least it led me to you. I could somehow feel you there from time to time when ever you came to sit near me in the park."

"Sometimes I thought the same about you. It's funny we've never met over the years when Frieda's curse allowed you to become human."

"I thought to look you up at times, but I guess you were out of town those rare times. Thing of it is, I could only get off the statue when Frieda was out of town during a Christmas holiday."

"That was the only time you could become human, when Frieda was out of town? Odd, but it seems she was often out of town at the same time I was."



He nodded. "Yes. Maybe she knew you were a potential curse breaker."

"Or something. She's very devious. But, enough of her. Let's try not to let thoughts of her spoil this time, Geo."

"I quite agree with you, my lovely, sexy librarian."

Her heart was really melting now. She studied him and saw a deep mistiness to his eyes. Was he feeling these deep emotions as she was? Most of her hoped so. No, she corrected herself. All of her hoped he did. She felt her eyes widen with sudden realization. The times sitting in the park, and blabbing about her life and the town's people was fun and had come to mean a lot to her. Now she knew why she had not been able to let herself get involved with anyone else for the last ten years.

She was in love with Geo.

Then her heart cracked in a bad way. She didn't think that she could be parted with him again. There had to be a way to break the damn spell. Even if he didn't care as much for her, she hoped that there was enough caring that they could find a way for him to be free from Frieda's wicked spell.

"You look scared or startled by something, Lillia. What's wrong?"

She knew his empathic nature was picking up on her inner senses. She had to know he cared about her. The waitress came over to their table though, bringing mugs of beer and the pepperoni pizza. She waited until the waitress left and she'd served some pizza to herself and Geo before she spoke to him.

"I'm fine, Geo. I'm just worried for you." She picked up a slice and quickly ate several bites before she blurted out the truth.

"I'm glad. This is good pizza. I'm glad we are eating out here. Every moment with you is special, doll." He gave her a quick sheepish glance and then started eating his pizza quickly too.

Had she missed something? He thought this moment special? Did that mean that his once stony heart was cracking too? She felt elated. Was Geo falling in love with her? She ate more bites of the pepperoni. Gawd she loved the double layers of meat and cheese. It made her hungry for more than just pizza and beer. She wanted to feel him inside her again.



"I'm glad you liked pepperoni too. I tried it in the 1950s during a holiday Frieda wasn't around. It's always been my favorite. It just makes me...um...hot afterwards."

She nearly choked on her last bite. Lillia quickly grabbed her beer mug and swigged a swallow down. "It does me too, Geo!"

He put down the third slice he'd been working on and he too washed it down with a few swallows of beer. "Oh hell, I knew we had a lot in common. I wish we had more time, Lillia. There are a lot of things I'd like to say and do to you. Like you are the most beautiful woman I've ever known. And just knowing you were around did something to my heart and soul."

She reached over and clasped her hands around his. "I've felt the same way, Geo. I've just been scared about doing anything, or saying anything."

He nodded sadly, but his eyes said so much more. "I know. I didn't want to put you through anything. Let's face it, normally you're not the type to screw a guy in public."

"No, I'm not, but for you I..." what she was going to impart to him she halted as she caught site of two people entering the pizzeria.

She squeezed his hands in warning, and he caught on quickly. He slid down in his seat and asked, "Frieda?"

She slid down lower too. "And Perry. The loud mouth. Shhh. Listen. "

They both listened to Perry's and Frieda's high-toned voices carry across the small eatery. What Lillia heard made her quiver with a bit of dread. She looked over and saw that her handsome ex statue lover, with his century of hardship and courage, felt the same thing she felt. Dread and fear that Frieda might find a way to stop them from freeing him from his statue curse.

"...I tell you, Perry, if I find out who fucked Geo, I swear I'll curse that person too!"

"But, sweet cakes, there's no need. Geo's been punished enough, don't you think?"

"No one turns me down for anything and gets away with it. Now get that damn pizza and let's get out of here. I need a good fuck before I'm outta the mood."

She heard them shuffle, pay for the pizza and the door open and close to the restaurant. Lillia peeped over the seat and saw the awful couple walking away from the place of business. She let out a sigh of



relief and slowly sat up. Geo did the same. They were both quiet for a few moments and the silence felt good to her. She'd lost her appetite for the pizza, though her body was screaming for more than that tasty stuff.

Glancing over at Geo's face, she saw that he was kind of spaced out. She was a witch, but she had a sixth sense that he was very troubled. She knew he wasn't a coward, and felt that it took a lot to make him scared. Then was he worried that Frieda might find a way to stop them from finding the cure to ease his curse and his worries? They had to talk about it and figure out what to do. Would she be willing to really screw him in public? She'd been totally smashed when she did it in the park. But would she now? She'd often considered it over the years, but couldn't bring herself to mount a cold statue in public.

But did it have to be while he was a statue? The curse removal guess was that it only had to be in a public spot. What if they did it under the table here? Or maybe they could find a quiet spot in one of the seedy bars in town. Or maybe the library? Wouldn't that count as a public spot, even if there wasn't a crowd to watch them?

Realization hit her then. "Geo."

His head jerked upwards. "You've figured something out? Just tell me it doesn't have to do with tinsel on my cock or sugarplums and bells hanging from my balls."

Geo's hopeful look made her feel uplifted. She had to be right. "I hate sugar plums and no tinsel or bells involved."

"Great, tell me!"

"The book stated you had to do it in a public place with a willing person. Then during the minutes of the witching hour you had to command her to do it again with you. Geo, the library is a public place."

He blinked his eyes and she saw it slowly dawn on him what she meant. "Doll, I could love you for the rest of my life. Are you agreeing to the last part then?"

She nodded and smiled his way. "Geo, I could get use to having you around for a long time to come. In just less than twenty-four you've become more special to me than you know. And you are one hell of a good lover."



“Then you’d be submissive to me?” Hope for freedom and more shone in his expressive eyes. She wanted to feel more, to know more about him, and to fuck him again.

“Yes.”

It was then that he pulled her wrist towards him. He tapped on her watch and glanced down at it. It wasn’t too far from midnight now. He glanced up at her and she nodded eagerly. The two jumped out of the booth. Lillia was glad they had paid for the pizza ahead of time, but she pulled some change out of her pocket and threw it on the table anyway. Geo grabbed her wrist again and she didn’t mind as they hurried out of the pizzeria and the two ran to her nearby apartment as fast as they could. They’d beat Frieda’s curse and have a damn good time doing so. She was hopeful that she’d be able to give Geo the best Christmas present he could ever want; and to see that he once more liked and believed in this very special holiday season.

\* \* \* \*

Geo looked down at irresistible beauty he’d come to actually care about. No, not just cared about, but loved. Still loved with all his heart and soul. Hadn’t her eyes responded with her heart in them back in the pizzeria? His empathy told him he wasn’t wrong, though both had not said those words out loud yet. He knew she felt as deeply for him as he did for her. Otherwise, he was sure she wouldn’t be here now, in her apartment, letting him have his complete way with her being submissive to his every whim.

Lying there on her bed, quivering as little as she could, he knew her heart had opened up to him also. Yet, she was having a hard time already not grabbing him and quickly wanting to copulate. He smiled with passion in his heart and knew she’d see it in his eyes. He’d make this session good for them. His hand touched her heat, but she didn’t arch towards him. He knew she wanted him, but she stayed naturally still.

“Shhh, my dear. Let me tease and delight in you. Only move when I tell you to. Other than your natural jerks, you cannot do else or I’ll be a statue again. So, unless I command you and tell you that you can move, please be still. Ok, open up further for me if you still agree.”

She spread her legs, allowing his hand easier access to her intimacy. Taking three fingers of his right hand, he slowly moved



them teasingly up and down her glistening clit. She groaned with want, but stayed still as she'd been asked to.

He stroke her up, then down, in excessively gentle, slow motions, careful at first not to delve too deeply down in between her mons. Oh, she felt good beneath his hand. Wet and warm, and quivering for more of his touch. Yet, he kept taking his time, stroking her up and down, with feathery caresses, pleased as she opened her thighs as far as she could without thrusting up at him. He took it to the next step and pressed the tips of his fingers down further into her velvet fold.

She quivered, and he knew she was having a hard time to keep up the deal. But she couldn't start until he gave her the word. Then he could fuck her, really, really fuck her with abandoned passion. As long as she stayed dominated. He motioned for her to watch his eyes, to keep quiet.

He thought to take it easier on and so for a few moments as he stroked her delightful body, and kissed and explored her luscious limbs in slow long laths of his tongue. He loved the taste of her body and deliberately made the caressing of her heated form last as long as he could, or would need to.

He couldn't resist exploring her wet channel more. His hand slowly slid in and out of her. Still, except for her slight quiver and sweat pouring from her body, she did not move. He leaned over and kissed her rigid nipples.

Geo thrust his hand more quickly in and out of her and then came to a stop. Her juices came out thicker over his hands. He blew on her clit and used both hands to open her lips. Then he lowered his head and slowly began to tongue her softly at first and then deeper and stronger. She shivered beneath him, but she contained her violent reaction to his tonguing.

He was glad. She felt so hot and good around his hand. He could almost feel her sheathed around him now. He lowered his head again, and this time began sucking on her moist clit as his hands roamed her stiff and sweaty body. One hand kneaded her breast; the other went back to her pussy and with the same three fingers he shoved quickly into her. Sweat rolled in near torrents down her body, but she stayed still. He sucked her harder and his fingers delved deeper and swifter into her moist channel. His dick hardened painfully.



Her nails dug into her palms but she stayed still as he licked her wet pussy furiously and sucked her swollen clit with abandoned fervor.

“Open for me more, doll. Ride my hand, but no screaming and hold your orgasm.”

She opened her legs as wide as she could, bending her knees and her hips thrust forward. She rode his fingers and tongue with wild abandonment, and he was amazed that she did not scream out. Her body wracked with needed release, but still she held on for him.

Then he saw the clock near her bed. Like the gong of the clock in the town square was about to hit midnight. “I’m gonna fuck you now baby.”

Then he took hold of her hips and in one swift hard movement, he buried himself within her. He shoved hard and furiously into her. She bucked back against him. He reached around Lillia and kneaded each of her breasts with his big hands. Then his fingers found her clit and he rubbed the moist nub up and down as he slammed against her from behind.

“You want me again, witch? Tell me you want me to fuck you again.

“Yes, Geo, screw my hot pussy again.”

“Now damn it. Come hard for me now. Scream for me baby.”

“Fuck me, baby. Fuck with me as hard as you can.”

Geo moved quickly, and turned her over on her back. Her eyes were full of heated passion, and her body sweated with intense need as his did. His shaft engorged almost painfully. This time he gave it everything he had. She wrapped her legs around him and put a hand between their bodies. She first rubbed herself and then him. He became instantly aroused at the stroking of his wet cock.

“Tell me you love me, Lillia. Tell me and mean it.”

“I love you, Geo. Oh yes I mean it.”

Geo thrust harder and harder into her, as she obeyed his command and thrust up against him with fierce abandonment. His body shook in unison with hers. For nearly a century, he’d waited for this earth shattering moment. And to come inside of the woman he loved, made the moment of reaching a glorious climax with her even more fantastic. He grabbed her tightly in his arms and she wrapped hers around him. Together they screamed out their love and their desires of bliss as the waves of euphoria washed over them.



A scream of pure abandonment escaped her honey lips as her orgasm hit, mingling with his own.. He jerked heavily and their union was worth all the years of waiting for her. Then he almost collapsed over her as she nearly fell faint from the multiple orgasms wracking through her body. And at the precise moment of their orgasm, a gong struck, letting them know that midnight had passed.

“We did it, love.” She cried out just after the fated gong hit. “It’s just after Christmas. We lasted until after midnight. That’s what the removal entailed.”

“I’m not a granite stiff anymore! We did it, sweetheart, we did it! No more fucking cursed years.” He pulled her happily into his arms.

Geo was hers now and not a statue in the park. She wrapped her arms around him fiercely. “I love you, Geo. To hell with curses, let’s fuck some more!”

“With pleasure, doll. I love you and your fantastic body.”

He wasted no time in doing as she suggested. Bringing his hands into her cunt he finger fucked her and made her cum several more times. He quickly grabbed her by the waist and then flipped her over. She pushed her hips backwards. Geo thrust two fingers in and out of her. The fury of need built up to a scorching crescendo. She screamed out her orgasms as he piled forcefully into her. He then rolled her over onto her back, felt himself harden and thrust into her wet folds. He pumped her hard and fast, coming again with her.

The chime on her bedside clock binged, running a few moments behind the tower clock outside. Both laughed in pleasure and satisfaction at the reminder. Now Geo would never be just a statue for all seasons, any more; nor would he have to dread Christmas again. As they collapsed together in happy, lusted exhaustion, a tingling, magical sounding chime echoed within the apartment walls, resounding the days of joy that were before them now. Christmas Day was officially gone, but their seasons of wonder and love had just begun. However, when the next Christmas rolled around, they both knew that she would be the only thing from now on adorning his uncursed shaft. Together, the two fell into a blissful sleep, but neither one of them dreamt of tinsel, bells or sugarplums.

The End