

The background of the cover is a dark, atmospheric illustration of a winter night. It features snow-covered evergreen trees, a full moon in a dark sky, and a wooden fence in the foreground. A bright, multi-colored starburst or lens flare is positioned in the upper left corner. The title 'Midnight Showcase' is written in a white, elegant script font at the top. Below it, on a black horizontal band, is the text 'Erotic-aah Digest ISSN 1555-5496 Vol. 06-31'. The main title 'A Spellfire Evening' is written in a large, stylized, light blue-green script font across the middle. Below this, a list of stories and authors is presented in a white sans-serif font. At the bottom right, a short paragraph in a light blue-green font describes the theme of the issue. The artist's signature 'S. TOWNSEND '89' is in the bottom left corner.

Midnight Showcase

Erotic-aah Digest ISSN 1555-5496 Vol. 06-31

A Spellfire Evening

Electrafied, Mae Powers
A Mission of Thyme, Emery LaRue
Nastie Business, Anna Fallon
Cuts Both Ways, Bridghid Parkinson
The Will of Warts, Jewel Adams
Shifting Passions by Leanne Strange

The Shadows of New Year's Eve
threaten to haunt Spellfire forever...

S. TOWNSEND
'89

A Spellfire Evening

MIDNIGHT SHOWCASE

Erotic-aah Digest Vol. 06-31

A Spellfire Evening

Happy New Year

MIDNIGHT SHOWCASE

www.midnightshowcase.com

A Spellfire Evening

Published by
Midnight Showcase
PO Box 300491
Houston, TX 77230 USA

www.midnightshowcase.com

Electrafied, *Copyright © 2006 Mae Powers*
A Mission of Thyme, *Copyright © 2006 Emery LaRue*
Nastie Business, *Copyright © 2006 Anna Fallon*
Cuts Both Ways, *Copyright © 2006 Bridghid Parkinson*
The Will of Warts, *Copyright © 2006 Jewel Adams*
Shifting Passions *Copyright © 2006 Leanne Strange*
Dark Edges, *Copyright © 2006+ Mae Powers*

Names, characters, and incidents depicted in this book are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously.

Any resemblance to actual events, locales, organizations, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental and beyond the intent of the author or the publisher. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Erotic-aah Digest ISSN 1555-5496 Vol. 06-31

Credits

Editor – Zena Quick
Copy Editor – Mae Power
Format Editor – Jewel Adams
Cover Layout: Mae Powers
Painting by S.Townsend, used with permission.
Printed in the United States of America

A Spellfire Evening

Electrafied, Parts 1-3, Mae Powers

Electra and Alex are celebrating their one-year anniversary on New Year's Eve. Yet, an evil from her past disrupts their celebrations with their friends and family. Can everyone in Spellfire band together to stop the horrible madness haunting the town?

A Mission of Thyme, Emery LaRue

The Mayhems and the Jacksons pair up to help Electra. Discovering the Thyme of Creation does in fact grow near the Selkie Falls, two rush to retrieve it, as only a Selkie may swim the falls. While the Jacksons wait to flash it to Electra with magic. Will they make it in time?

Nastie Business, Anna Fallon

Aussie Scott, his faery love Topaz and best mate Barry are back to celebrate New Year. Pure evil erupts and this trio may not survive.

Cuts Both Ways, Bridghid Parkinson

Old-fashioned Jack Taylor discovers the right man to find the Dagger of Destruction is his wife Rosie. Can he accept the hazards they'll face together?

The Will of Warts, Jewel Adams

Dan answers Bess' call, together with Electra they fight to obtain the potion needed to save Spellfire. Dan fears it may cost him...Bess.

Shifting Passions, Leanne Strange

Harpy, Derek, Adam, and Tris must find the Heart of Knowledge before the clock strikes midnight. Will lurking dangers keep them from achieving their goal and helping to save Spellfire from evil?

Electrafied
by
Mae Powers

Electra and Alex are celebrating their one-year anniversary on New Year's Eve. Yet, an evil from her past disrupts their celebrations with their friends and family. Can everyone in Spellfire band together to stop the horrible madness haunting the town?

www.maepowers.com

Don't miss the surprises ahead coming from
www.midnightshowcase.com.

Preview included of Dark Edges, from Spellfire Shadows, the newest in the Spellfire Digest Series. Be warned...

(*Author's Note: Pieces of Electrified Part 2 are taken from the Commemorative story, Shadow and Darkness to amplify and recap the story's flow. Journey onward...)

Electrafied, Part One

**by
Mae Powers**

Chapter One

Electra looked over the ballroom where hers and Alex's first anniversary party would be held tonight. She smiled,. glad so many were going to show up. She thought about the struggles to get this party off the ground. So much went into it earlier this evening and a few days ago.

It had been a tossup where the party would even be held. Alex's mother wanted to hold it at their new restaurant Garnet's, and others suggested different places around town or in Houston, perhaps even Galveston. Electra set her foot down and said Havoc House. The Havoc Hotel looked grandiose, yet austere. The semi-Southern, English mansion stood tall amongst lush old trees and the grounds. All around it were a variety of intimate garden walkways, flowing fountains, and aromatic varieties of floral and foliage plant life. It contained the largest ballroom and party area in town. That's where she decided it should be held. The huge room looked festively decorated, with chairs and tables standing read to one side of the wide circular room.

There must be at least two hundred people coming here tonight, she thought. And that's not counting the late comers or party-busters that would straggle in. She'd only wanted a dozen or so and make it an intimate party, but, after Alex and his mom, along with others, kept adding to the list of guests, it drove her nuts and she capitulated.

It would be a wonder if the whole town didn't show up. Well it felt like they already did, in various ways. She had dinners of congratulations all week, from various friends and business acquaintances, both good parafolk and seedy ones. Barnabas' Bar

A Spellfire Evening

held an Electra night there, with half the Fae in town, and she even went to their Underground Festival. They'd gave her some of the most luscious lover-jewels her and Alex ever saw.

Oh the list of her friends, true ones, that is, was long indeed. Yet, there were a few she could have done without tonight. Frightful Frieda and Perry Normil were two of them. And of course, Horrible Henry charmed and badgered Alex's mom for an invite. Then his cousins the Boodoors. Talk about a strange ghostly trio. But she liked them. Henry with all his ranting, booing and mischief making still held a crystal heart of softness in him. Just like her Alex.

Alex had been supportive and a sweetheart through their first year of adjustments to being married. She'd been close to moving to Houston with him, but he saw how much Spellfire meant to her. So he closed up, sold his Houston holdings, moved his staff and himself to Spellfire, to run his large Internet business. She'd loved his cooking team, they were the ones doing the catering tonight. Plus his co-chef Dak Loombottom took over running Garnets, with her ex manger from Sinful Sundaes, Paula Vandress, since Harpy now almost completely manages the ice cream parlor. Electra still lived above the Shoppe with Alex, using the spare bedroom, a few days during the week when she needed to work on potions and Sins new ice cream flavors, otherwise Derek and Harpy occupied the place. Alex's base of operations were in the old building, converted for his use, right down the street near Spellfire House, an old warehouse building Adam and his family once owned. It worked out well for them all. Now, Adam and Tris were even happier, one less thing to worry about.

Her other newly married friends were at the party tonight. They just started trickling in to help with last minute preparations. The party wasn't officially starting until about 6 pm and she figured they would go through at least until just after midnight, since that's when she and Alex said "I do" in a simple ceremony in Sins, last New year's eve. She loved it and never regretted it. Now everyone wanted to wish them the best and so the party became somewhat more than their anniversary party. It also turned into a New Year's Eve party for her close friends and then some of the town's councils. Spellfire had a lot of paranormal councils. Well it seemed like it did to her. There was the Witch's Board and the Council of Elders and some more, that were run by werewolves, vamps, faeries, and an eclectic mix of other

A Spellfire Evening

paranormal beings. She was pressed, or invited to have a seat on most of them.

She didn't figure herself to be the governing type, but she did become a defender. And she defended Spellfire. She moved around the room, checking all the tables to make sure names and arrangements were properly made. She sighed and waved at a few people there helping with last minute setups and thanked the ghostly spirits, seen and unseen, for helping to be servers tonight. She left the room shortly and headed out the first veranda doors she came to. She looked up into the overcast winter sky. It darkened early here and sometimes it looked like dusk before dusk even got here, in the afternoons, instead of it's usually creeping evenings. Yet, Texas had some of the most gorgeous sunsets and skyline's she'd ever had the pleasure of beholding.

Dark blues and Mauves, with smoky gray, sometimes filtered with the last lingering rays of orange red, like leftovers of a dwindling sun. They calmed her soul, and often sung to her heart. Just as the town of Spellfire did, and just as the secrets of it's parameters and citizens did. And through it all, LifeCore hummed its ever-growing needs to her. She had been brought up knowing she would be it's guardian one day. Not everyone knew it, and there were some other guardians too, but it was in her very core to be part of LifeCore and the magic it brought to Spellfire. Spellfire came to be, nearly as soon as LifeCore did. They were synonymous with each other. And she loved this town and cared for the essence of LifeCore.

When it didn't show its split personality.

It had always been there for her and she for it. And it liked Alex. It's heart sang with hers when she'd gone down to get it's approval on her love for Alex. It glowed with a yes and a hiss that he was meant for her. Yet, part of it darkened. But that was something she kept to her self all these long months. That, and she felt it in her deepest recesses that LifeCore had been developing some motives of its own.

She'd kept the secret for as long as she could and humored it, watched LifeCore and kept its desires at bay. Only a few months back, Maejika and her friend took a trip back in the past and things concerning LifeCore's secrets were now filtering to the open. If she did not find a way to contain it, the town would be in more trouble than if Gremlorr showed up unexpectedly.

She shivered at the thought of her ex-husband Mikhail de-Gremlorr. He was buried, entombed in the caverns below Spellfire,

A Spellfire Evening

and the Underground Fae kept guards around the walled up chambers to ensure he didn't escape. She sighed and pushed thoughts of Mikhail out of her mind.

* * * *

"You know that we were meant to be together forever, right my love?"

He looked down into her lovely face, and knew Electra would always be part of his soul, heart and destiny. But she did look a bit stressed lately, he wasn't sure if it was the preparations for the party tonight or other things, or both. He knew she needed some time to gather her wits about her and de-stress before the party got into full swing.

"Why don't you take a walk, I'm sure a few minutes to gather your thoughts would be a huge help, don't you think?"

She nodded and her curls swayed seductively around her face. Her curls seemed to react of their own accord, turning a golden russet brown with almost live sparks, when she moved her head in a thoughtful stance.

Her golden brown eyes darkened to russet amber. "You know what's best for me, sometimes better than I do. I adore you, Alex. I promise not to be too long, but I have to agree. I need a few minutes to myself before the party gets in full swing."

He watched her luscious body sway and walk down the patio pathway until she was out of sight. For a moment, he became lost in thought about her. He loved Electra with everything he had to offer. No one before her, even now, could compare. He knew he'd do anything to see her happy.

There were times she tried to talk to him about her ex, and they finally did, but then she still kept secrets. Every chance, she seemed to want to open up to him, something seemed to stop her or interrupt them. Alex couldn't shake the feeling it had to do with LifeCore. That mysterious energy being, who inhabited some of the lowest depths of the Fae Caverns below Spellfire.

He'd actually followed Maejika down there one day, who followed Electra. He knew where LifeCore lay buried, he felt the energy around the unclosed opening. No one other than Electra seemed to be able to enter the Cavern where it lay.

For some reason, he hadn't stayed, nor did he ask her about LifeCore. The time would soon come for them to speak about it. That day, however, he had a good conversations with Maejika about a few

A Spellfire Evening

things. That powerful witch knew a lot that went on around and outside of town.

Just like Frieda Faraday did.

Alex never trusted that bitch. He couldn't understand why she wasn't run out of town. Perhaps because no evidence was found yet, on the evil she committed through the years. Or people were afraid to come forward. Whatever the case, he made sure that the vile, self-spelled beauty wouldn't harm his beloved.

Nothing was more important to him than Electra's happiness, not even his own life and dreams. Nothing.

A hand on his arm made him look down. His small mother smiled up at him. Her rosy cheeks were as bright as her emerald eyes. He patted her hand affectionately.

"Dear boy, your father sends his regrets, but he'll come visit as soon as he comes out of hibernation again. The old fart."

Alex threw back his head and laughed. His mom's favorite pet name for his father never ceased to amaze him. She didn't say it that often. "That's fine, mother. How are you tonight?"

"Going around in circles. That nice chef Dak is a great tease. I think Paula is smitten with him. This is going to be spectacular. You don't think we overdid it do you? Electra does look a bit peaked. I can't help thinking it's something other than the festivities we pressed her into."

He patted her arm reassuringly. "Electra puts her foot down when she's had enough. She cut your guest list in half or more. Now, not to worry. She is just tired from all the invitations and parties this year. And her power cycle is still in it's rejuvenation period until later tonight."

"Ah, that makes since. You know she's an extremely talented sorceress. Everyone keeps calling her a witch but she's definitely a sorceress of a high caliber. I understand she only had one prior life before this one. She's probably older in some ways than your dear father."

"No doubt," he grinned. "She told me she lived up until the founding of the town, then relatives begat the current Spellfire lineage. We still have a few things we need to learn about each other, mom."

"It's always a learning process, son. Why your father and I have been married over two hundred years and he still keeps me on my toes with his antics. I think he's going to like Electra and Spellfire."

A Spellfire Evening

“Oh,” Alex wasn’t sure he liked where this was going.

“Oh yes, I think I’m going to move here. Well someday perhaps. Not to worry. I have more traveling to do and my place in Galveston is still home to me right now.”

He let out a sigh of relief and chuckled. “You had me worried there. Shall we get back in and go help Dak and Paula. I think Harpy and Derek, as well as Adam and Tris are helping too with the catering.”

“A delightful bunch there. Yes, and don’t forget my new friend Dreema is coming with her daughter, and Calista’s new beau. Oh you should meet some of the people I’ve met since visiting here. Why I could help Maejika and Sianna write a history about them all.”

“I recall the Dead Librarian’s society commission Sianna Connors to do that with Maejika’s help. Why don’t you tell me all about that as we go back inside. That’s a lovely gown you’re wearing tonight.”

“Why I got it at Cosmina’s place, you know the owner of that lovely boutique Bella Vestiti, where you got Electra’s lovely gown for her. If I recall, Cosmi said Frieda was trying to play up to you...”

Alex groaned. “Stop that right now. That harridan will get hers soon enough. Just the thought gives me the shivers. Why they keep her and Perry Normil in this town I’ll never know.”

“Balance of good and evil keeps the world running, son. Now I’m getting the nibbles, let’s go in.”

“You don’t need to snack, mother,” he escorted her in. “There’s plenty to eat and do tonight. Now let’s go find Dak, and have a nice coup of tea instead.”

Yet, as they walked through the veranda doors, a sudden shiver overtook Alex. He clamped his mouth tight, determined once more, not to let any thing upset his and Electra’s anniversary party.

Chapter Two

Electra walked further into the well-kept garden-walks of Havoc House. She needed a few minutes alone before the party started in full swing. Alex was with his mother and a cousin of his, all going over last minute details and getting other things situated. It was a precious thing, him doing that and giving her some much needed time alone this day. She'd been busy with running too many things, it was time to start cutting out those burdens and such that she'd always been part of. Pass time to make more time for Alex in her life. With him, she started considering having a family.

They were going to talk about that more after the New Year, but not right now. Now was their time and they were working on being able to spend more time together. She felt very happy about that. She walked further into the bushes and her mind dwelled on the past few months of her marriage to Alex. In the beginning, everything had been fantastic and new, and then reality set in of them being married, after two months of dating and wild lovemaking. Her heart belonged to Alex and it would never know such a love again.

He made her whole and complete in many ways. Their opening of Garnet's together became an endeavor of love. People from beyond Spellfire came to eat at their restaurant and entertainment area. The location lay on the outskirts of Spellfire, not too far from I-45 and Psycho road. A large restaurant, it held several areas, both for events or private parties and the main customer dinning areas. They decorated the place together. It'd only been opened since around Valentine's Day and already proved to be a huge success. Tonight Alex's business manager and their great team of workers took care of the place. Which left her and Alex free to have their special evening.

She thought of her life with him and it pleased her. They still made love often, but they also found time to date and keep that

A Spellfire Evening

wondrous spark in their relationship. She knew though that she and Alex still had things to tell each other. Her first secret and her deepest one, she found it extremely hard to tell him, but after their wondrous wedding night, she knew she could tell Alex anything. He'd told her so much about himself, she'd felt she could do the same. They shared secrets no one else knew about. She told him that night about LifeCore and about Mikhail, the Gremlorr. He had heard, even in his more elite paranormal circles, about Gremlorr. He hadn't known what was true or untrue about the shape-shifting, horrid man-demon, but she filled him in. Alex took it well that the Gremlorr and her ex husband Mikhail, were one and the same. He'd been very protective of her since she told Alex of that past episode in her life, early one morning on their favorite day of the week, a Sunday.

Pieces of it filtered through her mind of what she spoke of to him.

* * * *

That morning she finally told him, he woke her up with breakfast in bed and more, and she freely answered any questions he asked of her.

"...Mikhail and I were complete opposites. It's like I told you before our wedding, I'd never really felt comfortable with anyone completely. Mikhail and I were predicted to get together. He was a Havoc, genetic spin-off, which very few in town knew about. A very distant Havoc strain lay within him. His last name wasn't Havoc, but de-Gremlorr. I just wanted you to know all this."

"I love you completely, Electra. I don't care about your past. He can't bother you again. I'm here for you in everyway." He told her, clearing off the breakfast tray when she finished, then once more getting back into bed with her.

"There's more, Alex."

He turned her in the circle of his arm. His eyes searched hers and she felt herself open up to him. But as she started to speak, he put a long elegant finger to her trembling lips. "We'll talk about it later. Now is for us, my sweet."

"You don't make this easy do you?"

He shook his head and his long maple colored hair swayed sensuously with his movements. The gray tips sparkled like silver fire when he leaned forward, placing his arms gingerly around her. His gleaming emerald green eyes, with their golden irises glittered back at her as he grinned, showing his gleaming fangs.

A Spellfire Evening

“Right now I don’t intend to.” His sly grin widened. “I can think of other things my body would like to talk to you about.”

“I love you, dear Alex. I just don’t want any thing to ever come between us.”

“I won’t let it.” He hugged her closer to him and brought his lips down upon hers in a hard, fierce kiss.

The heat of his lips soared into her very being, making Electra vibrate erratically against his hot, hard body. She opened her mouth to speak again, but he deepened the kiss, making her forget what she wanted to say. She arched against him and returned the kiss. His rod pressed against her belly. Alex’s hand snaked down between their bodies.

He felt her moistness. She wanted him too. He loved her plush body and her high, rosy tipped breasts. He pressed her back down, into the pillows and sheets. Rolling over her slightly, he started kissing her breasts adoring each one in turn.

She leaned into his hot body and his lips mesmerized her soul. His soft white-brown body was a turn on next to her darker skin tone. They complimented each other in every way, and that too made his passions stir her maddeningly.

He deliberately suckled her trembling bottom lip. She felt sweat and the heat mingle between her upper thighs. She tried not to moan, but that soul-shattering kiss sent her sorceress psyche into realms of psychically charged sexual worlds that she never before experienced with any other man but her husband, this gloriously fabulous man making love to her now.

His fangs lengthened and explored her throat. She shivered as those wet sexy tips trailed, almost scraping over her long neck. He kissed and nibbled with teasing bites of his lips, fangs and tongue. Slowly, he moved down over to her breasts, tasting and teasing each one in turn. His front fangs and lips suckled and scraped over her dark nipples.

His hands slowly caressed her body. She writhed beneath him in pleasure. Alex groaned and his amorous caresses became bolder. His hand went down between her thighs again. She opened her legs wider for him. He felt her heated core, sliding two fingers down into her moisten channel. She mewled and thrust upwards to meet his hungry fingers. He loved touching her with his hands, and feeling her desires wet his fingers.

A Spellfire Evening

No man could want for a better partner in bed and in his heart. His lips and tongue followed the direction of his hands. He suckled gently at first on her clit. She moaned her pleasures loudly.

“Oh yeah, that’s the best way to wake me up, Alex. Mmm...more.”

“You’re so hot and sexy, babe. I can’t get enough of you. Touch me now.”

She curved around to feel for his shaft and took it into her talon tipped fingers. Alex moaned with vented pleasure as she stroked him hard, up and down his long shaft. Yes, that’s how he liked it. Her hands were hot around him. He moved to adjust his position so that she had easier access to stroking him. They were almost in the old sixty-nine position, but not quite doing that.

He stroked her outer lips as his long tongue teased her tiny nub. She jerked beneath him and he teased her repeatedly. Then he suckled her as she started stroking him, faster and faster. He pressed into her hands. Such wonderfully wicked hands they were too. He liked the silky smoothness of her hands rubbing him up and down. It was almost as good as being inside her hot, slick cunt.

“Oh gosh, I want you inside me now, Alex.” She started to pull from him.

“Not yet, baby. I want to taste more of you.” He moved back, away from her hands and turned around so that his face was just a breadth away from her womanhood. “Heavens, you’re so sexy. You drive me wild with desire. I want to taste you some more. Now.”

Alex used his palms and thumbs to open her wet labia and glanced with appreciation at her pink, dewy crevice. Damn she was gorgeous everywhere. He lowered his head and lapped hungrily at her slick channel. She tasted of wild heated passions. He grew hard as he tasted her delicate flesh. He would have her soon.

Electra bucked beneath him, opening her legs as wide as she could to allow him his pleasures. No, her pleasures. Oh, he knew how to make her hotter and slicker every time he feasted on her moist inner flesh. She lay her legs over his large shoulders as he kept up his amorous attack on her hot depths. Electra shuddered and felt the first waves taking their tolls. He suckled on her clit eagerly as his fingers slid into her again.

She jerked beneath him. Wave after wave of bliss hit her. “Damn you, Alex. Oh fuck me now, baby. I need that hard, sweet cock of yours inside me, now.”

A Spellfire Evening

Alex thrust into her a few more times, her juices flowing over his fingers. “How bad you want me, my love?”

“Damn you, get inside me right now.”

He chuckled and leisurely made his way back up her, only stopping long enough to suckle her pebbled nipples and give her a long, deep kiss. He felt her hands on him and she started working her magic again. Only a naturally heated one as she stroked his cock rapidly, up and down. Oh yeah, her hands held a magic all their own. It felt great, and hell he wanted to be inside that hot pussy of hers. He couldn't wait any longer.

Alex positioned himself completely between her thighs, and in one large swift dive he was inside her dripping cunt. Damn, her slickness felt good around him. He shoved deeply and swiftly, in and out of her. He put his head on either side of her beautiful face, looking lovingly down upon her.

“I like being inside you, Electra. I fill you perfectly. I want you to come hard with me.”

“Oh hell yes, Alex. Fuck me hard. You are so fantastic. Damn, you feel good in me.”

Alex grinned, but passion and need for release overcame him, and he increased his fast rhythm into her. Stroke for stroke she bucked up under him as best she could. Her efforts to please him increased his need for release. She drove him wild, to the sky and beyond.

Electra wrapped her legs and arms around him, tightening her hold on him as she jerked and met his thrusts. Her body sweated and heated with intense build up. Their desires rose further and further until the deep satisfaction of mind blowing orgasm sated them completely. They lay entwined for long moments. Both breathing hard and deep. Then Alex slowly rolled off of her, and she was as thankful for the cool air in the room, just as much as he was.

Every morning and every night, since they'd first become a couple, it seemed she couldn't get enough of him. Yet, halfway through their marriage of nearly a year, she'd started having these weird feelings. She visited the LifeCore mound and it glowed quietly.

Yet, it didn't talk to her or let her feel its inner warmth, like it use to., She felt it's power was ebbing, yet it still remained within him. She sensed it, and felt some comfort in it, as it did her. She almost felt like the alien entity was in contemplation over things.

When she asked if it was sure that it still gave it's approval of her and Alex, it let out only a warm glowing ember.

A Spellfire Evening

She couldn't help but feel something was still wrong. It hadn't talked to her since then. She just went on with her plans. Things felt right between her and Alex, and she knew, she wouldn't even let LifeCore stand in the way of that.

Chapter Three

After her thoughtful excursion through the gardens, she returned to the party, finishing some last minute preparations before refreshing herself and changing into the long gown of garnet, Alex's favorite color. Tonight, Electra's heart soared with warmth. She felt comfortable and secure with Alex's arm around her as they danced. His mother Elenor had been quite courteous, but something seemed to be preoccupying the woman. She'd been in more company with the town newspaper owner and chief editor, Maejika Maelstrom, than anyone else so far tonight. What the two needed to talk about became a curiosity Electra tried to keep to herself. Yet, her best friend and mother-in-law were becoming good friends; albeit her mother-in-law appeared to be the livelier of the two.

As Electra danced with Alex, she felt as if the gaiety in the room soared to new heights. A door stood slightly ajar on the patio and a soft wind, ever so gentle, caressed the air. Electra immediately felt it. Dinner hadn't even been served yet, so it wasn't the warmth of too much food and groans from that, which suddenly filled the air. No, a very deep, sudden dread crept into her. As the dance ended and the people mingled around, she drew Alex to her side. Something didn't feel right. She looked to the patio door, again. It looked like it creaked open just a little bit more, she saw mists and moonlight beyond it.

She felt the sudden irritation of mystical magic going on. Electra stopped, mid pause to go to their table. Alex, concerned, put a second hand on her and she pulled from him. She glanced around uncomfortable. A soft sigh whispered into her ear. *LifeCore was awakening and a warning.* Or did she imagine that?

Someone or something whispered a warning into her ear.

That's when the first rumble hit. Everyone stopped what they were doing and looked immediately at Electra and Alex. Alex saw all the faces staring at him. There was only one person usually that could make the town rumble, or a room vibrate with that kind of energy...Electra.

A Spellfire Evening

“I didn’t make her mad at me.”

“Electra, are you alright?” Maejika came to stand next to her.

Electra brushed off the woman’s concern. “Something isn’t right.”

Alex started to remove his hand, only for a second. He felt pain—only for a fleeting second, then he too felt her tenseness and knew something was wrong. Electra’s extra sense of “knowing” was not something to be trifled with.

Yet, shit happens. And in Spellfire, it happens big time.

A large curdling scream echoed through the room, curling almost everyone’s toes. The room rumbled and groaned, the floor shook violently beneath everyone’s feet.

“The floor!” Alex heard Frightful Frieda Farthington-Farraday scream out. Everyone glanced at the floor just as it started bowling upward like a geyser, in the middle of the ballroom.

The floor cracked in the center in several directions, a gust of vapor arose from it. Then it stopped. Everyone looked around at each other. Yet, within a few seconds, before Electra or anyone else raised their magical hands to do something, the quaking became more violent. Several people were knocked down as the room quaked with dark, ferocious energies and the fissure in the center of the ballroom opened up wider. Dark clouds rolled over the opening, making an outline around the mound. A dark cloud of vapor arose and soon a form came up from it.

Then the doors around the room flew open. People screamed as every patio door entrance filled with paranormal creatures of all kinds, floating and standing, looming around. Staying there as if waiting an order. All this happened in moments

The form above the fissure became clearer. People gasped and screamed.

“Hello, Electra, dear wife.”

Electra brushed off Alex’s hold and moved a few steps closer to the Gremlorr. “Get the hell out of Spellfire. Now.” Her hands balled and energy balls twirled in her palms. “You should have stayed buried.”

“But Electra, I’ve come to take you back.”

“Like hell you’ll touch her, you abomination!” Alex moved in front of her.

A Spellfire Evening

Gremlorr looked down at Alex, his face contorted by evil and jealousy. “She was always mine, you fucking grossity. And what’s mine, I take back. Now.”

Hell broke loose in Spellfire. And it’s name was Gremlorr.

All of the paranormal people with powers, big and small, grouped to fight as the Gremlorr waved his hand. His minions scrambled and burst into the room. Electra’s balls of fire shot out at him. With a flick of her hand she put up shields around most in the room, which would allow them safety, but still let them fight back the attacking ghouls and horrors the Gremlorr unleashed.

Electra screamed, because as the invisible protective shields came up, the Gremlorr’s first energy blast hit Alex. He crumpled at her feet, but her sense to protect everyone overcame her need to see if her love was safe and still alive.

The room shook so violently then that even the Gremlorr looked startled for a nano second. “A little present for you, Electra. You shouldn’t have divorced me.”

He waved his arms, causing mists and swirls of sparkling magic bursts to shoot around the room. Ghosts, vamps, werewolves and monsters, all kinds of ghoulish creatures battled. Wizards fought witches. Sorcerers and sorceresses fought each other. Fae fold fought elves. And Gremlorr fought Electra.

Then just as suddenly as it happened, the evil dissipated from the room in a flash of bright light. Yet the darkness of gloom and doom stayed within the room. The floor magically went back to normal. The patio doors banged closed. Only residents of Spellfire remained in the suddenly quiet ballroom.

Electra kept up the magic shields for a few moments. The silence remained. People contained their energies with some difficulty. Electra moved to the middle of the room. She knelt to where a single dark spot remained on the floor, where the fissure and cracks once appeared, where the Gremlorr first came through. She touched the spot. A heat and a sparkle emitted from the spot. Electra jerked her hand back. She glanced around the room at everyone, their expectant faces were looking upon her. She knew they waited for her answer.

“He’s not dead. He will be back. We all must prepare. The battle isn’t over.”

Then she turned and looked to where Alex fell. His body was no longer there. Electra balled her hands and tightened them. Then she

A Spellfire Evening

tilted back her head and let out a blood-curdling scream that quaked the building, which startled and frightened a lot of people in the room.

“Electra, stop now!” Not many people possessed the voice to calm her temper. Her brother Derek moved over to her, softly placing a hand on either of her upper arms. “Sis, we’ve got to stay in control. He wants you out of sorts.”

Her friend Maejika came closer and smiled wanly. “It’s what Mikhail wants. To get you out of sorts. To weaken LifeCore. There’s only one way to finally get rid of him.”

“The warding spell, Electra.” Derek said. “It’s dangerous, but we can do it.”

Electra took a deep breath and nodded. “You are both right. I will believe Alex is alive. Mikhail...the Gremlorr will die this time.”

People, friends, and acquaintances gathered around her. Electra felt a pride of trust and warmth surround her. She knew she wasn’t the town leader, but she could pick up on everyone’s feelings with her empathic skills. Hope and fear, comradeship and willingness to help, filled her heart and the room. Most here would aid her in anyway possible.

The plan quickly formed in her mind, and her leadership skills took over. “I’ll need some volunteers. There are five elements needed to make the warding spell. It will be dangerous, because the Gremlorr will know we are planning to do this. I can feel he or his minions will be back for a second attack soon. We don’t have much time to leave here and do what must be done.”

Electra told everyone what must be done, but she also listened to everyone’s suggestions. The town, at least most she knew in it, would band together to save all of Spellfire, and find Alex.

“The council’s and I will watch over Spellfire, while you and the others gather the ingredients that will make up the warding spell,” Maejika said.

“Everyone, keep in touch with the councils, and protective units will be put around the town and surrounding areas. The Gremlorr has many followers. I can feel that. I will go to LifeCore and work on finding the Will of Warts. Who will help gather the ingredients and objects needed?” Electra said, listing out quickly what items needed to be gathered.

Derek laid a hand on her shoulder. Immediately his friend Adam Spellfire and their wives, Harpy and Tris were in the group. “We four will find the Heart of Knowledge. Count us all in.”

A Spellfire Evening

She patted brother's hand and smiled at her cousin and their two female friends. Others she knew and counted as friends also, came up to her in pairs and groups. Before long, she had Missy and Garland Mayhem volunteering to go after the Thyme of Creation, along with help from Candy and Trevor Jackson.

Her other close acquaintances, Jack, James, Rose and Sarah volunteered to find the Dagger of Destruction.

The Australians and the Fairy Topaz, the dears, opted for the Soul of Seers. Then Dan and Bess volunteered to help her to look for Alex and the Wart of Wills. She instructed them all to meet back up here before midnight, when the spell had to take place. The war to get rid of the Gremlorr began. They needed to win, or Spellfire and LifeCore would be doomed to chaos.

Electra vowed she would do her damndest not allow that to happen. And almost more than anything, she would find her beloved Alexander. Gremlorr would pay for his nefarious, gruesome doings.

To Be Continued...

A Mission of Thyme
by
Emery LaRue

The Mayhems and the Jacksons pair up to help Electra. Discovering the Thyme of Creation does in fact grow near the Selkie Falls, two rush to retrieve it, as only a Selkie may swim the falls. While the Jacksons wait to flash it to Electra with magic. Will they make it in time?

www.authoremerylarue.com

A Mission of Thyme
by
Emery LaRue

The party of the year had commenced, and the laughter and well wishes for the New Year were on everyone's lips. Electra and Alex danced, and all could see the love they shared. Not only would this be a new year, but it was a celebration of the love between Electra and Alex. It was their first anniversary, and all who knew the pair loved them. It was an honor to celebrate such an event at Havoc House.

Laughing into her husband's eyes, Missy squealed as he lifted her high in the air. It was their first real night out since the birth of their daughter, Kora. It had been hard for her to leave the precious little bundle, and Garland almost backed out of coming all together.

Suddenly she stopped, gasping as a pain sliced through her head. She was very *sensitive* to those around her, and something felt very wrong. Before she could answer her husband's concern, the floor trembled and rolled, shaking as if it would collapse at any moment.

Mistletoe Mayhem clutched at her husband. Her eyes searched frantically about the room for the source of the disruption. The floor shook violently, and it was all she could do to maintain her balance. Black smoke seeped through the cracks in the floor, and then the form of a man, or beast began to take shape. Missy experienced a sinister feeling of dread seeping into the room.

"What the hell is that?" Candy spoke up from beside her.

Mistletoe shook her head at her friends, Candy and Trevor Jackson. She had no answers. She let out a sigh of relief that they were unharmed, but her husband's eyes were glowing. That meant only one thing. He was preparing for a fight.

"Garland? What is it?"

"You just stay behind me, Missy."

A Spellfire Evening

She followed his gaze and gasped. All around the room, each exit was blocked by creatures of evil. She could literally feel it, smell it. Whatever it or they were, evil radiated from them. She'd heard the stories of the power of Spellfire, and of Mikhail, but she never thought to see this horror. Electra was very powerful and she guarded what belonged to her well. Spellfire was very much a part of Electra.

Electra did all she could to protect those around her. It seemed it ended as quickly as it began. Words were exchanged between the lady of the hour and the thing that seemed determined to end the festivities. However, Alex was gone. The pain and anger couldn't have been mistaken in the magical woman's scream. The room trembled with its force.

Everyone gathered around Electra Spellfire and Maejika Maelstrom, listening as the two explained what they were up against, offering support and volunteering for whatever task might be necessary to bring Alex home and stop the Gremloir.

Garland stepped forward with Missy by his side.

"I recall that the Thyme of Creation grows deep under Selkie Falls. Missy and I can retrieve the herb, but it will take some time. Getting it to you in time will be the challenge."

"I can help with that," Candy Jackson spoke up from her place beside her husband Trevor. "We will wait beside the river. Once you have the herb, I can use my magic to flash it to Electra or Maejika."

"Are you sure, Candy?" Garland seemed skeptical. "That hasn't been your strong point."

"Garland Mayhem, I may have had problems in the past, but I think I can handle a little flash."

Her indignant tone was almost enough to ease some of the tension. Candy had many mishaps with the one spell she never could quite get the knack of. Every time she tried before, something went wrong. At one point, she and Trevor ended up naked on top of a very cold mountain.

However, this time, a whole town would be depending on her. Not to mention Electra. There was no possible way she could do all of this alone. The look of anger and pain on her face now was enough to break a heart. But inside those eyes lay a determination to see this through. Candy wouldn't let her down.

After Electra instructed them on what to do, and warned them of the dangers, the group of four rushed out into the night. This evening had been so perfect, as most Spellfire evenings were. But tonight,

A Spellfire Evening

even the magical town itself seemed darker, almost as if it were dying from the evil lurking in the shadows.

* * * *

The plan was they would meet at the falls. As only a selkie may swim below the falls, Candy and Trevor would retrieve what they needed from their home, mainly Candy's cloak. It always seemed to enhance her abilities, and they would need all the help they could get.

Missy and Garland hurried up the hill toward Spirits. The falls ran behind the café style pub, and would give the two the privacy needed. They stopped inside long enough to grab a water proof container, not knowing if the herb could be used when wet.

"Poor, Electra. I can't imagine what she must be feeling," Missy said while removing her clothes. "I would be insane with worry. She truly is a strong woman."

"Yes, she is. But she has one more thing on her side that will make her even stronger."

"What's that?"

"Love." They stood naked beside the falls. Garland pulled her against his chest, kissing her deeply. "I would move heaven and hell to get to you. So I know she will do the same."

"When this is all over, I expect you to kiss me like that again."

"I know. We don't have time. But I needed you to know how much I love you."

"I love you, too." She took his hand and entered the water until they were waist deep. "Now, let's get that herb."

While looking into each others eyes, the change began. Missy remembered a time when Garland fought the change. He'd never truly accepted his other half until he came to Spellfire. Now, she watched and was still in awe at the beauty that overtook him.

His selkie body looked as black as the night, and even in this form, he was strong. She watched the ripples of his muscled body as he circled her. He waited for her, his mate. Any other time, they would swim to the hidden falls and make love. She conceived in that special place when they first mated. Together they made the perfect daughter. The thought of little Kora not only made her smile, but added to her fear. If the Gremlorr wasn't stopped, all would be in danger.

Her selkie form took over, and unlike Garland, her fur looked as white as snow. Often she wondered what color their daughter would be when she reached shifting age.

A Spellfire Evening

Together they dove under the only part of the falls that could be seen from the shore. Where she and Garland were going, lay deep and well hidden. They swam at lightening speed, knowing time was precious. This deep under the falls, it got darker. Though she swam it a time or two, Missy shivered at the foreboding chill. She knew it was more what they faced than the darkness itself that frightened her.

"We are almost there, Missy."

"I know, but the evil seems to lurk even here."

They spoke to one another in their minds, and she smiled to herself. The intimate touch pushed the fear away, and made her feel stronger for it. He always seemed to know when she needed his strength, and never failed to share that with her. Like a true mate, he calmed her and she allowed her potency to sooth him as well.

Shooting upward in the water, they cleared the surface. Once they could touch bottom they shifted again.

Missy gasped as her eyes adjusted. Though it was still beautiful, the colors of the flowers and the mineral walls seemed to be fading. She knew that if one piece of Spellfire became affected, all of the town would be. In her heart, she hoped this beautiful place would be out of the horror's reach. As she watched, the colors around her very slowly started to fade even more.

"We must hurry, Garland."

The one flower that stayed unaffected was the special herb they needed. From the beginning, when magic and life came together, this plant had been a piece of that essence. Though it wasn't particularly beautiful or colorful, you could feel the life inside of it.

Working quickly, Missy held the container open while Garland snapped the stem. She quickly sealed it in the container as they hurried back to the waters edge.

"What the hell?" Garland said, looking into the water. "What is that?"

Missy glanced into the pool and a cry escaped. Black swirled and flowed until the once crystal water began to turn a muddy, murky color.

"It's the evil, Garland. We really must hurry."

"You stay here. I will take the herb to Candy and Trevor. I don't want you breathing that in."

"No."

"It could make you ill," he all but snapped. *"Think about Kora."*

A Spellfire Evening

"I am thinking of her, Garland, her and the whole town. We are in this together. We can share strength. Not to mention you could get sick as well."

"Missy..."

"I refuse to listen to this and will only follow you." Her chin came up. "Now, let's go."

"Stubborn woman." But a smile was on his face. "Okay, let's go, but breathe as little as possible. I have no idea what this stuff will do."

Again they shifted and dove into the murky water. She held the container tight in her teeth. It broke her heart to see the beloved falls like this. But it made her all the more determined to succeed. This was such a special place.

As Garland had instructed, she waited as long as she could for a breath. When she did slowly inhale, her lungs felt a slight burning. Each time she needed air, the burn became harder, much deeper, until finally she felt almost on fire. He'd been right. Whatever lay in the water, it weakened her.

"Garland, take the container."

"What is it?"

"Please, just take it."

With his teeth, he took the container, his eyes surveying her. The white of her skin dulled to ash gray.

"I knew it. Swim faster, Missy. We have to get out of this water."

"I'm trying, Garland. I feel so weak."

"Almost there, love. Come on, you can do it."

Garland slowed his pace only enough to get behind her. He would push her if he had to. Missy was incredibly sensitive to emotions. He should have known this would be no different. Evil was, in a sense, an emotion. Hate, disdain, pain and darkness.

Just as they would have cleared the lower falls, she began to shift. She was too weak to hold her form, and without it, she would drown. He knew he had to act quickly.

Swimming between her human legs, he sighed with relief when she wrapped her arms around his neck. With all his strength, he shot forward and under the falls. He cleared the surface, and Missy took in large gulps of clean air. He sighed with relief to see Trevor and Candy at the water's edge. Then his eyes widened when he spotted the danger.

* * * *

A Spellfire Evening

Candy rung her hands and paced while she waited. What could be taking so long? “Something is wrong. I just know it.”

“Candy, try to calm down. Your emotions will affect your magic.”

“I’m trying, Trevor.”

She knew her voice shook, but damn she was scared, for herself, her friends, Electra and the town.

“There they are,” Trevor announced and then frowned. “What’s on his back?”

“Oh no, it’s Missy. I knew something was wrong! For whatever reason she couldn’t hold form.”

Before either could move into the water to aid their friends, Garland’s warning reached their ears. “Look out,” was shouted from across the river.

Trevor spun around just in time to avoid a club swung by the most hideous creature in all of creation. Slime oozed from every part of it. If Trevor had seen it on the road side, he would have thought it a dead animal.

“What the hell is this thing?”

“It’s a Grimlark, Trevor.”

He picked up the biggest log he could lift and swung, hitting the creature and knocking it to the ground. He sighed in relief, until it rose before him once again.

“What the hell?”

“I don’t think you can kill it,” Candy said, moving to the back of the zombie-like creature. “I believe it is already dead.”

“Well, that’s just perfect.” He swung again, but the Grimlark continued to move forward. “Why this surprises me I don’t know..” his words were cut off by a blow that knocked him back and onto the ground.

Candy reacted out of instinct and an energy bolt shot from her fingers, slamming into the creatures back. When the eyes of the Grimlark turned on her, she paled.

“Oh shit.”

“Freeze him, Candy!” Trevor shouted, trying, but failing to pull its attention back to him.

Candy tried to think of the words, but her mouth went dry and her brain didn’t seem to function. The scariest, not to mention ugliest thing she had ever seen was licking its lips, or at least she thought they were lips, and slowly stalking her. Just as the hands made a grab

A Spellfire Evening

for her, she reacted and all became still. She'd done it. Its eyes moved, but its body stayed immobile.

Trevor hurried to her and pulled her against him, kissing her for all he was worth. When he pulled away, he shook her gently though he wanted to make her teeth rattle.

"You could have been killed, Candy."

"I had to help you."

"Don't ever do that again."

Before she could say another word, Garland pulled Missy from the water and they rushed to his side. Trevor turned away until Candy covered her friend's naked body with the large shirt Garland removed before entering the water. She paid no attention to Garland's naked state.

"What's wrong with her, Garland?" Trevor asked, kneeling beside them.

"It's infecting everything. The evil was even in the water, like a poison."

"Will she be all right?"

"She just needs to rest for a minute. We will meet you at Havoc House. Take the herb and hurry." He tried to hide his worry, and hoped Candy would be reassured, but Garland knew his wife was far from okay.

"Watch your back. There are some scary things about tonight."

"I see that."

Garland watched the couple leave, hoping that they would make it on time. Candy was a very talented witch, and her freeze technique seemed to be in working order. Her flashing that worried him though. She always seemed to end up in the wrong place.

"Missy, come on, sit up."

"I feel so sick. Please don't lecture me on listening to you."

She stood slowly and Garland helped her to dress. Even after their daughter's birth, Missy's body looked perfect. If she wasn't so ill, he would make love to her right there on the river's edge. As if reading his thoughts, she leaned forward and kissed him.

"There will be time later," her voice creaked with weakness.

"I'm counting on it." They turned and headed back toward the town. "Let's hurry before ugly over there snaps out of it."

Hiding his fear, his wife leaning against him, Garland hurried up the hill to Spirits. His mother would know what to do. Because damned if he did. And it scared the hell out of him.

A Spellfire Evening

* * * *

"Candy, honey, now would be a good time to use that flash technique."

"Don't pressure me, Trevor." He eyed the small army of Death-Merks that were slowly surrounding them. Electra had spoken of these evil pains in the ass, and Trevor felt in no mood for another fight with something he could not possibly beat. Spellfire accepted him, but he was non-magical. He'd been told that he possessed a certain magic, and he wished like hell he knew what it was now. They told him when the time was right, he would know. He really wanted to know right now.

"Baby, me pressuring you is the last thing you need to worry about," he pulled her behind him, ready to die first, "but in case you didn't notice, we are surrounded."

"I'm working on it," she snapped, but the fear lay in her voice.

Her hands wrapped in his coat, and he checked to make sure the container with the herb stayed secure in his inner pocket. When she flashed, he had no idea what would happen. He felt the tingle, and then the sensation of falling. The wind left his body as he hit the ground with a thump, and his wife landed directly on top of him.

Candy sat up, surveying their surroundings.

"Damn, damn, damn," she muttered as she stood. "We are in the Mystic Meadows."

Trevor fought for air as he stood, checked the herb and looked around. This was the one place he'd never been. Everything he ever imagined in his childhood roamed these meadows. He always hoped to see it, but now was not the time. He couldn't contain the gasp however when a solid white unicorn raced passed.

"Was that what I think it was?"

"Yes," she paced.

"That was a unicorn?"

"Yes, Trevor, a unicorn. This is Spellfire."

"Easy, Candy." He rubbed her shoulders and pulled her to him. "Concentrate and try one more time."

"Who was I kidding? Electra is counting on me and I will fail her."

Trevor turned her in his arms and held her to him. He loved her so much, even when her magic was never guaranteed to work.

"You will not fail, Candy. Your love for the town and the people will help you."

A Spellfire Evening

Wiping her eyes, she hugged him hard, holding close as she cleared her mind. The tingle began again and he closed his eyes, praying they wouldn't find themselves in the middle of the henchmen. They were running out of time, and that alone was enough to distract her. He held her tighter as his head began to swim.

Opening his eyes again, he gasped and scooped her up, swinging her around.

"You did it, Honey. Take a look."

Candy was relieved to see they were only a block away from Havoc House. But her eyes remained watchful. It looked a little too deserted on the street.

"Come on," Trevor took her hand and they walked quickly up the street. "I have a feeling we are not alone."

"Have you felt your magic tonight? Like something was trying to get out?"

"When we were at the river, I thought I had for a moment. Maybe they were wrong and I really have no abilities."

"The Council is never wrong. Even Missy felt it in you."

"When I thought you were in danger, I felt a burning inside me, but it ended when the threat passed."

Suddenly, Candy gasped and fell to her knees, her hand pulling from his. He spun around and was face to face with a Death-Merk. Before he could act, it snatched Candy from the ground and pulled her with him, down a side alley between the buildings into a back lot.

Trevor raced after them, stopping when he saw his wife being held in the center of at least a dozen of them. She stood calmly, though her eyes were heavy. He could see a little blood on her cheek and guessed the blow had been to the back of her head in an effort to daze her and weaken her magic abilities. The anger began and the heat started.

"Let her go," his voice was calm, showing nothing of the rage building inside.

The Merks hissed, and then a large Merk stepped forward. He had to be at least two feet taller than Trevor. The term brick house came to mind. The Merk sniffed the air.

"What will you do? I can smell the power in you, but you have no idea how to use it. I could snap her neck before your next step."

"I will not warn you again." Heat built through him. It felt like a fire in his gut, but he was too terrified for his wife to contemplate the strange feelings.

A Spellfire Evening

"Give me the herb, and I will give her over to you."

Trevor looked into her beautiful face, knowing he couldn't let her die, but knowing to give up the herb would be the death of them all. She shook her head, and a tear escaped, rolling down her cheek. It mixed with the blood there, and he felt his eyes burn. Not from the tears that gathered, but from rage. Her eyes widened, and for only a second he wondered what she saw in him.

Then, like he'd known all along, he knew what his power was, and just how to use it. From his finger tips flames sparked and ignited. They gathered there, building into a ball of flame. He smiled, noticing the confused looks on the Death-Merks' faces. Trevor's arm shot out, and the Merks holding Candy ignited.

He waited until she was safe at his back. The other Merks stepped forward, but turned to dust before they could take another. It was the big one, the leader, who engaged him fully. Pulling a mighty sword, he deflected the fire, working his way to Trevor.

Candy who stepped in then. Raising her arms, she called upon the elements, until a bolt of lightening flashed beside the Merk, and drew his attention away. Trevor had been building the forceful heat within himself, and the fire ball he sent at the Merk shot out powerfully. By the time the flames died, nothing but ash lay around.

"Trevor?"

"Don't touch me, Candy."

"Why?"

"I feel like I'm on fire."

"Well, you were." The moment she touched him, he sighed as his body cooled. "And you kicked ass."

"My power is fire?"

"Don't take it lightly," she said as she tried to sooth him. "Being a fire starter is something you will have to control carefully."

"I thought they were going to kill you." He hugged her close. "I have never been so terrified."

"It was your fear for me that brought it out. You saved me, Trevor."

"Let's talk about this later. Time is almost out, and the others are waiting."

Nodding, she took his hand and pulled him back through the alley. She had a headache, but that was nothing compared to what had happened. Her husband was a firestarter. She would have to seek counsel, to understand how to help him control it.

A Spellfire Evening

For now, a whole town needed them. Electra would end all of this. She was very powerful, and Candy couldn't wait to hand over the thyme.

When they entered Havoc House, she sighed in relief then the fear set in as she looked for Missy and Garland. They were not there.

* * * *

"Garland."

Looking away from Missy, he searched his mother's eyes and tried to control the fear rolling through his body.

"She is very ill, son." Lorvena knelt beside her daughter-in-law. "Your father and I have no idea how to stop this."

He watched as his mother bathed Missy's face. His father, Samuel, stood to the side, his eyes cast in shadow. There was a time he thought he hated the man who was his father. But it had been Missy who turned him around and opened his heart. If he lost her, he'd never survive. What would happen to Kora?

No, he refused to think that way. He would find away to beat this.

"She looks so pale," he rasped, his throat tight with emotion. "Why am I not sick?"

"Well, I think you were able to control your breathing more. Since having Kora, Missy has spent little time under the falls."

Garland stood and paced. Outside, the lights of town were still bright, but he could feel the changes. It was close to midnight. He prayed Trevor and Candy made it safely. Electra needed that herb to make things right.

He turned suddenly, looking at Mistletoe. He needed to take her to Havoc House. Electra, or even Maejika would know what to do. Both were powerful, and if anyone could save his wife, they would be the ones to do it. He trusted them.

"Mother, I need a blanket." He hurried to the bed and lifted Missy into his arms.

"She shouldn't be moved, Garland."

"She needs to be at Havoc House."

"You can't take her out there. They will kill you."

"I can't sit here and watch her die." He kissed Missy's forehead. "Electra will know what to do. She will defeat this evil and she can help Missy."

Samuel placed a hand on his sons shoulder offering his strength.

"Then I will go with you, Garland. You'll need help getting her there."

A Spellfire Evening

“Thank you.”

Lorvena straightened her spine and her chin lifted.

“I’m going to.”

“Mother-“

”Don’t bother trying to stop me.” She looked at Samuel. “You may as well save your breath too. This is my family.”

“What about Kora?”

“She is with her nanny, and she is safe.”

Garland released Missy long enough to wrap her in the blanket. She never opened her eyes, and her breathing remained shallow. She was very sick. Damn, he wished it had been him.

“Let’s go.”

With his wife in his arms and his parents beside him, Garland prayed. He needed to get there in time. He just had to.

* * * *

The herb delivered to Maejika, Trevor pulled his wife with him into a washroom to examine her head and to reassure himself she was safe.

“I’m fine, Trevor. It just itches now.”

“I still want to see for myself.”

He’d been so terrified. Never in his life could he remember feeling such gut- wrenching fear. He could have lost her tonight. That thought alone made him want to hold her close and love her senseless. He almost felt like he was overloaded in lust and desire now.

She leaned against the counter while he looked her over. When her eyes connected with his, he brought his mouth to hers with such force their teeth met.

Candy knew he had been afraid, and this to be the only way she could convince him she was safe, whole, and still alive.

There was no time for loving play. His hands lifted her skirt, removed her panties and pulled her tight against him. Life as they knew it could end any second, if things didn’t go as they hoped. This might be their last time to touch. The thought drove her passion for her husband higher.

She released his cock, stroking him with her hands, needing him as much as he needed her. She gasped when he lifted her. She wrapped her legs around his waist. Then he thrust deep inside her heated core. She bit back the cry that threatened to escape.

Trevor took her against the wall, his movements hard and demanding. He took her like it would be the last time. He tried to tell

A Spellfire Evening

himself to take it easy. He didn't want to hurt her, but the fear and anger were still with him, and it drove him on.

She climaxed in his arms, yet, he couldn't stop. His fear of hurting her was erased when she wrapped her arms around his neck and urged him on.

Candy used her teeth to gently nip his neck the way he liked, and he moved as hard and deep into her as possible. She took his lips in a passion- hungry kiss, her tongue stroking his as she whispered her love to him.

That was all it took to push him over the edge. His shout became lost in her, as her cry was lost in him.

They slowly slid to the floor, and she held her husband, stroking his hair as he cried. Her tears mixed with his.

"It's over Trevor."

"I'm sorry I was so rough with you, baby."

"I understand. I felt it too."

"Coming so close to losing you almost killed me."

"But I'm here, and you saved me."

They each dried the others face. When he stood, he pulled her up with him.

"I can't believe this."

"What?" she asked, doing her best to straighten her skirt.

"We are in the middle of a crisis, and I just ravished my wife in a washroom in Havoc House." He tucked his shirt into his slacks. "Electra will have my hide."

"Trevor, she is the one person who will understand." Her smile died. "I'm so afraid. I have no doubt that Electra will overcome this. But Missy looked very bad, and they were not here when we arrived."

"She will be fine. Garland said she was just tired. Whatever was in the water must have sapped her strength."

"No, I know Mistletoe Mayhem better than most." Candy nibbled her lip. "I feel it, Trevor. Something is wrong."

"Maybe they are here now. Let's go back to the others. Electra will need everyone's support."

"When all of this is over, we also need to speak to the Council."

"About?"

"Your power."

She didn't need to say more. He knew if he didn't learn to control the fire it could be a danger. After washing up as best they could, he

A Spellfire Evening

followed his wife, hoping others wouldn't suspect just what occurred in the washroom. Trevor still couldn't believe he'd done that.

Candy surveyed the room. Others had arrived, but still no Missy. Her fear grew until she was almost sick.

"We wait a few more minutes, Trevor. Then we go and make sure they are safe."

He nodded knowing to argue would be pointless. She would go with or without him. His wife was a stubborn witch at times. He wouldn't change one hair on her head.

* * * *

"Garland?" Missy's weak voice sounded through the blanket.

"Hang on, baby. Just a little longer and we will fix you right up."

"Stop for a moment, please."

"We can't honey."

"Please. I need to be sick."

Garland sat on the curb of the street, his mother and father keeping watch as he uncovered her face. She was so pale she looked almost transparent. She weakly rolled from him, and was promptly sick. He held her through it.

"Garland, we have got to hurry." Lorvena wiped Missy's brow with a tissue from her pocket. "Her insides are infected."

Nodding, he lifted her once again and tried to ignore the moaning each step brought from her. He witnessed what her body was trying hard to fight. It had been whatever dwelled in the water.

"Almost there," he chanted as he started to run. "We will make it."

They made it less than a block away, when his father stopped him.

"What? We can't stop now."

"Look around you, son."

"I don't see anything."

"Exactly," Samuel watched with narrow eyes. "It's almost midnight. If they are set on keeping Electra from making this potion, why is it so silent right here?"

"He's right, Garland," his mother turned worried eyes on Missy. Missy began to shake in his arms, and his determination grew.

"Then they will have to kill me, because I refuse to let her die."

"Then we die together."

"Go back to Spirits. This is my fight now."

"No, we do this together."

A Spellfire Evening

Garland knew there was no sense in arguing. His only thought now was Missy, and getting her inside that building.

Together they walked out into the street, watching and waiting for the danger they knew lurked there. When the doors of Havoc House opened, and Candy stood there with Trevor, Garland breathed a sigh of relief. They would make it.

“Why are we not being attacked?” Samuel asked still alert. They were almost to the doors.

“Because we don’t have the herb and pose no threat,” Lorvena answered, breathing a sigh of relief. They had made it.

Candy rushed to Missy, kneeling and holding her hand.

“I thought you said she would be fine?”

“She is infected with whatever was in the water.”

“I need to speak to, Electra.” Candy stood and searched the room. “Wait, Maejika is here. She will know what needs to be done.”

“Want to tell me what you really think?” Trevor asked, watching his wife hurry away to find help.

“I think my wife is knocking on death’s door,” Garland whispered. “I think I may go mad before this is over.”

Trevor flinched at the pain in his friend’s voice, and tried not to feel guilty about his relief that it wasn’t his wife fighting for her life. He had come so close, and knew he would be crazy with fear if he was in the other man’s shoes. He knelt and offered his strength to them both, hoping that it could help in some small way.

Candy returned a fake smile on her face that she knew was fooling none of them. She again knelt beside Missy, close to her ear.

“Can you hear me?”

Missy’s eyes fluttered and opened slightly.

“I hear you. I hear all of you.”

“You must remain awake. I know it hurts and you are very sick, but you must not go to sleep.” “But I am so very tired.”

“Mistletoe Mayhem, you listen to me,” Candy used her most stern voice, trying hard not to break down and cry. “Until this battle is over, and it will begin very soon, you must remain awake. I spoke to Maejika. If you fall asleep you will...” her voice broke as she swallowed back the tears.

“What? What will happen?” Garland spoke up, desperate to know, but terrified of the answer.

“If she falls asleep, she will die,” Candy swallowed. “But that’s not the worst of it.”

A Spellfire Evening

“What the hell could be worse?”

“She will become lost and she will never find peace.”

“You mean she could become something evil? Something like the things outside?”

Candy nodded and Garland blanched at the thought. This couldn’t be happening. She was too good, too pure.

“But, if she can remain awake, and once Electra has won the battle, then she will be saved.”

“How?”

“When the evil dies so will whatever is inside of her.”

“So, we just keep her awake,” Garland said, again some hope in his voice. “Come on Missy, get up. I know it hurts, but you have to fight.”

Candy watched with worried eyes. Garland had no idea just how hard this would be, but she saw no reason to kill the hope in his eyes.

What Electra fought was a force of great power, and it would be a mighty battle. Never mind what they faced in their quest to retrieve the Thyme of Creation. Compared to the Gremlorr, they were minor little skirmishes.

Yet, the determination in the man was strong. He would not give Missy up without a fight. She was fighting, but her body hurt with the sickness within her trembling form. Candy could see the pain on Missy’s face with each step her friend tried to take.

But this would all end soon, and Missy would be fine.

“Candy?”

She turned and looked into the eyes of her husband. She read the relief and the pain there, as well as the guilt.

“What is it?”

“I feel so sorry for them, but I can’t help be relieved it isn’t you.”

They embraced, and she could not fault him for his feelings. It was a scary time now. However, she felt it in her bones that everything would work out and be fine. It had to be for all of them.

Candy’s feelings of surety faltered when she caught a glimpse of Missy, and the look of horror on Garland’s face. Another battle, and Missy was slipping away from them. Candy held on to her beliefs, hoping the magic of her faith would aid in whatever else was in store for all of those here and around Spellfire.

The End

Nastie Business
by
Anna Fallon

Aussie Scott, his faery love Topaz and best mate Barry are back to celebrate New Year. Pure evil erupts and this trio may not survive.

<http://www.annaf.net/>

Nastie Business

by

Anna Fallon

“Electra,” Scott placed his hand on her shoulder, he could feel Electra’s emotional vibration. “I will find the Soul of Seers.”

“But you have only been in Spellfire for just over a week, you have no obligation or required loyalty to me or Spellfire.” Her voice cracked a little and Scott knew Electra Spellfire Ruveaux verged on the brink of losing control. The last thing he wanted was for such a proud and accomplished lady to be brought down by the evil of the Gremlorr.

“Electra, ever since the first day I set foot in this town, you and Alex have made me feel like Spellfire is my home. You both have helped me adjust to my new life as a faery. Crikey, without you I’d never have the guts to face me mates.”

Electra nodded and the others called for her attention. “Be careful, Scott. Gremlorr is powerful and desperate. He will not stop until either he controls every ounce of magic in this town or he is dead. It’s me or him in the end.” Electra stood tall, her shoulders back, and Scott could see Gremlorr had a fight on his hands.

“I’ll let you worry about him. I’m going to find this Soul of Seers thing and get it back here before a quarter to midnight. Failure is not in my dictionary, and I won’t stand by and let the friends I’ve made so far get taken down by some overgrown evil bloke with an overblown sense of self importance.” Scott clenched his fists in determination.

“Dear Scott Robson, you are a Robson all right. Just like your uncle, old Virgil. God rest his soul. Stubborn as a mule and with just enough naivety to make him think anything was possible. You just had to want it bad enough.” With that, Electra touched his hand and went to speak to the others about gathering the Dagger of Destruction and some wart thing.

A Spellfire Evening

“It’s beyond me how a wart can save anything, but there you go,” Scott said to himself, placing his hands on his hips. He felt arms encircle his waist.

“Not now, Nancy. Topaz will be back any minute!” he joked. He heard the familiar giggle of Topaz Sinclair, the faery who’d won his heart over the past week. Scott couldn’t be sure if he would stay in Spellfire or if he and Topaz would have a relationship beyond the here and now, but he sure as hell wanted Spellfire to be around long enough for him to make up his mind.

“Scott! Who is Nancy?” Topaz asked.

“Oh, Topaz! It’s you. Oh, Nancy, no one, just a friend I met,” he answered with a chuckle, “but now you are here she probably won’t come back to talk to me.”

“She better not!” Topaz let him go and walked around to stand before him, her golden wings glittering in the light. Her elvin face held a soft glow, and Scott just wanted to reach out and stroke her skin.

“I’m going to find the Soul of Seers,” he announced.

“Not without me, you’re not. Do you know how dangerous that necklace can be?” Topaz placed her hands on her hips now and looked quite the school marm.

“Oh, how hard can it be? Do you know where it is?”

“Perhaps, but one wrong move with that thing and you could be struck with many afflictions. Every evil curse ever inflicted on anyone by demons and the like is contained in that pendant. If you don’t treat it carefully you may just end up scarred for life.” Topaz spoke seriously and her frown looked like the cutest thing he’d seen in a while. Scott roared with laughter.

“What is so funny?” she asked him, sounding slightly offended at his mirth.

“In the last week, I have met every weird and wonderful paranormal creature in existence. I drank tomato juice with a vegan vampire. I talked to the skeleton in my closet, who just happens to be the local shrink. I have even discussed excess hair problems with a werewolf. Now here I am, a six-foot-four Aussie bloke sporting a thumping great pair of neon pink wings out my back.” He fluttered them to make his point. “You can cut off both my legs and give me a hump, it would be easier to deal with! Trust me, Topaz, nothing can be harder for me than to have become a faery.” Scott chuckled a little.

A Spellfire Evening

“Well, the neon wings are rare. You are quite lucky,” Topaz defended the power of the Fae with a steely smile.

“Oh, yeah, leave it to me to be the lucky one,” Scott answered. Topaz giggled at his humor.

He loved it when he made her laugh.

“Come on. Time is running out, and we need to find this piece of bling on a string. Electra Spellfire Ruveaux has always been there for my family, even though I didn’t know it at the time. Now it is time to return the favor. No decent Aussie bloke would ever leave a mate high and dry. Now, where is this Soul of Seers?” he asked.

“Actually not that far away. It’s not so much distance that will stop us as the evil along the way. I’m not too proud to admit I am scared, Scott,” Topaz confessed.

Scott knew in that instance that not knowing what awaited him might well be his greatest weapon. He would protect Topaz or die trying.

* * * *

Barry Barnes was having the time of his life just before the theatre started. He couldn’t believe how realistic they could make this hatred between Electra and that bloke called Gremlorr. He’d been to theatre restaurants before, but Spellfire really knew how to make it real.

Since accepting and learning about the paranormal beings of Spellfire, Barry felt quite at home. After all, he wasn’t exactly perfect, so he had nothing against anyone else. That and the fact a couple of very nice looking witches seemed to have made it their duty to keep him entertained. He would have preferred it to be Maejika Maelstrom, but she’d knocked him back severely. He recalled the conversation he had with the two witches now sitting with him, before the excitement started.

“Well, I must say every fairy and witch I have met here is bonza. I thought you paranormal people were all mongrels.” Barry saw their confused expressions. “Sorry. I mean you have all been so nice to me, and I’d always thought Witches were bad and faeries mischievous.”

“Oh, we can be bad! Trust me.” Magdalene with the streaming red hair, ran her hand up his leg.

“There are many types of good and evil in Spellfire. Every good creature has the ability to be evil and vice versa. Take the Nasties for example...” the golden blonde, Eliziah, explained.

“Nasties?”

A Spellfire Evening

“Yeah they are a cross between a witch and a faery gone bad. They would kill you in a flash but if you offer them some aniseed they’ll be ga-ga in seconds and stay that way for ages.” Eliziah laughed.

“Don’t blame ‘em. I love aniseed balls myself. In fact, I have a whole stash in my room at the Boo Bar. I might share ‘em if you ladies are good.”

They’d both giggled. Then this Gremlorr and his henchman had made a grand entrance and broke Barry’s line of thought. Eliziah and Magdalene disappeared, literally, in a puff of smoke. Must be part of the show as well. *Bet those two are actresses.* Sipping on some Spellfire Ale, Barry watched the show with interest. Boy, could these guys act.

The very best part was watching Maejika in action. Man! What a woman. Even if she had called him all the names under the sun and threatened to turn him into toad Hell, because of that he wanted her. If he didn’t know better...he’d say she had a soft spot for him too. At least he thought that, but kissing her under the mistletoe at Christmas proved a huge mistake.

Electra grabbed Maejika’s hand as she raised it. Maejika cursed and muttered something about stupid Australians thinking they had the right to touch anyone and stomped off. Since then she’d flat out refused to speak with him, or even look at him.

Barry’s lips still buzzed when he thought about that kiss. It was simply electrifying, no other way to describe it and he knew she felt it as well. He might have pursued her a little more, but to tell the truth the intensity scared the Hell out of him and Barry was not a man to admit easily to fear. No way, he wasn’t ten foot tall and bulletproof.

When Gremlorr and the other henchmen left, Electra looked concerned and Alex was gone. Maejika looked afraid. *What the...?* Scott and Topaz seemed deep in a serious conversation and a chill hung in the air.

“I better get over there and see what’s going on and if the Bazzmeister can help. Ain’t nobody scarin’ my woman.” Despite everything Barry knew his feeling for Maejika ran deeper than any he’d ever felt and he would do anything he could to protect her if needed. The humor of the thought hit him. She could vaporize his body at any given time and he would protect her? Yeah right.

* * * *

A Spellfire Evening

“Maaate! How about that display? They really go all out for entertainment here at Spellfire.” Barry, Scott’s best mate who’d traveled to Spellfire with him, slapped him on the back and chuckled.

“That was for real, Bazza. Spellfire is in danger. And watch the wings, mate.” Scott rippled his new feathers to straighten them out.

“Yeah, sorry, I have to get used to them.”

“You and me both. Listen, Topaz and I are going to track down a Soul of Seers necklace for Electra. It will be dangerous, it could even be a matter of life and death, but we must find it and return it here before a quarter to midnight,” Scott explained.

“Sweet! When do we leave?” Barry was always in for a challenge and game for anything. Scott laughed at his friend’s enthusiasm. *You can always count on Baz.*

“C’mon outside you two, the noise level is too high in here. I also don’t want to risk anyone else hearing us.” Topaz glanced around the room suspiciously. “Never know who you can trust around here.”

Scott noticed Barry looking around the roomful of paranormals and shuddering slightly. *Poor bloke, he’ll get used to it.* Then he noticed a locked gaze between Barry and Maejika. Some note of understanding seemed to pass between them, then they looked away. Scott realized for the first time in Barry’s life he may just have met his match in a woman.

“You in love Bazza? Ooooooh!” Scott had meant to tease him, but was surprised when Barry answered.

“She’ll do me for a woman, Robbo, she’ll do me.”

* * * *

Topaz Sinclair loved Scott Robson, that much she was certain of. After Scott stood up to Rotten Ronnie, the leader of the Fearsome Faery Pack, Topaz knew she wanted to be with him forever. Such a loving heart and seemingly no fear. Well, not physically anyway. Emotionally was another story altogether.

Scott struggled with the fact he’d transformed into a faery. He worried about what his friends would think. She suggested that he could just stay in Spellfire and none of them would have to know he was now a faery. He’d muttered that he’d never run away from a problem and he wasn’t about to start now.

This meant he would be returning to Australia, which meant Topaz couldn’t tell him of her feelings. She didn’t want to make his life any more complicated. Anyway, it would be expecting too much for him to love her in a week. The sex had been mind-blowing, but

A Spellfire Evening

Scott still was a man, after all, and he probably hadn't gotten attached to her because of their torrid love-making.

Topaz needed to simply enjoy the time they had together and make the most of her Australian man while she had him. He didn't need to know her heart would break the moment he left her side.

Huddling with the two men outside, Topaz whispered, "There are tunnels under Spellfire, Fae tunnels. Hard to navigate, but I know the way. We have one thing on our side."

"What's that?" Barry whispered hoarsely.

"We are of Fae blood and the evil Nasties who hold the Soul of Seers have Fae blood, mixed with witch. Some are intelligent and rule the others who cannot think for themselves so much. If we get really lucky, the less intelligent ones will fear us when they sense we are Fae." Topaz looked at Scott. "And we have one thing against us."

"What?" Scott looked into Topaz's eyes and saw the depth of concern in them.

"Barry isn't Fae. He has no paranormal power. They will target him immediately. These creatures mean business. It will be them or us. Gremlorr will not have left much room for error."

"Bah! Who cares about them? I'm not bothered. It can't be any worse than walking King's Cross in Sydney at night," Barry answered. "Don't worry about me Topaz. I'll be okay. You two just get that Seer whatzamadoover. Hang on a second, I forgot something." Barry ran in the direction of the Boo Bar. He and Scott had now set up the bar for service again and had planned to open it next week. They both stayed in the small house attached to it.

Scott nodded to Topaz to let her know Barry could look after himself. Topaz took in a deep breath, fluttered her wings, and hovered. "You'll need to call all your new Fae powers. You have neon wings, so your powers will be greater than mine. I know how to use mine, though, you don't. Let's hope it will come naturally. If a thought or feeling becomes strong, go with it no matter how stupid it seems. Okay?"

"Okay." Scott felt a little nervousness settle in the pit of his stomach, but he pushed those thoughts aside. A soft touch traced the outline of his cheek. Then her hand cupped his face. Her emerald eyes glittered with unshed tears.

"Scott, I just want you to know, the time we've had together this past week has been the most special of my life. Even if it all ends

A Spellfire Evening

tonight, it has been worth it to have this week with you,” Topaz declared quietly.

Scott took her in his arms, right where she belonged, and placed his lips softly over hers, savoring the taste of her ruby red lips. Unable to help himself, he kissed her harder, and she opened her moist mouth to his. Scott’s senses reeled. How could he leave Spellfire and this remarkable woman he had come to love? But how could he expect her to live anywhere other than her home? Scott finished the kiss and held her close.

Topaz murmured in his ear, “If we fail, no one else will be able to get it. Understand? We simply cannot fail or we can kiss Spellfire good-bye.”

“Let’s go,” Scott decided just as Barry ran back to them. “What you get, your lucky charm?”

“Something like that, Robbo, something like that.”

“Follow me, and let me do the talking. Oh by the way, the Soul of Seers pendant is blood red, like hellfire, and it hangs on a golden chain, thick and bright. If you get your hands on it, you must wrap it in black silk. This soothes it. Wait here a minute.” Topaz flew off in the direction of the general store, and the men saw her disappear through the wall of the shop. A few moments later, she came out and whizzed back over to them. “Here, take these.”

Topaz handed out a pair each of black silk women’s briefs.

Scott had to chuckle. Bazz laughed aloud and slid them over his head. Scott thumped Barry in the arm, and he sheepishly pulled the panties off his head and stuck them in his pocket. Topaz motioned them to follow and they walked around behind Sinful Sundaes Ice Cream Shoppe.

“Join hands and clear your minds.” She held their hands in hers.

Scott could not believe the power he felt from Topaz. He concentrated on nothing and let the feeling of freedom take over.

“Open your eyes,” Topaz instructed after a few seconds.

“Why, what went wro...” Scott gazed around him. The darkened tunnels were lit by what looked like large fireflies’ lights.

Will o’ the Wisp, he heard Topaz’s voice in his head, and he made eye contact with her. She nodded.

Scott spoke to her in his mind. *Aren’t they supposed to lead you to your doom?*

A Spellfire Evening

Perhaps, she answered. Now, remember the smarter of the Nasties may be able to hear our thoughts, but not Barry's. Do not think anything you don't want them to know.

Bazza just swore quietly as Scott watched him look around at the wonderful twinkling of faery lights lining the tunnels. It did look impressive, better than anything Scott had seen on television

"This way. Nobody ever comes in here. The ones who have, never returned. The Nasties enjoy playing with their victims, and they do not know the meaning of mercy. If they smell fear on you, they use it against you, and it fuels their powers." Topaz led the way winding in through the tunnels.

Scott followed. After about half an hour of quick walking, the tunnel opened out, and a foul smell assaulted Scott's nostrils.

"Nasties are here. Beware. Don't get into a fight. There are too many. You and I could overpower four or five, but not this many. Barry, don't be afraid. These things are ugly," Topaz said in a hurried whisper.

"Ugly? Sheesh, you oughtta try waking up next to his ugly mug." He indicated Scott with his thumb, his eyes twinkling as bright as the faery lights. "Now that's ugly!"

Scott glanced at Barry giving him a grin and saw him nod and sink back a little. *Trust Bazza to get in a joke.* Scott tried to tune into the newfound senses swirling inside him. Not an easy task for a man, but he knew Topaz depended on him and he couldn't let her down.

In the center of the cavern stood as many as thirty Nasties, all shapes and sizes--angry looking, warted faces, oily hair, pointed teeth. One a little taller than the rest and infinitely better looking stood in the middle of the pack. Around his neck glowed a pendant of hellfire red -- the Soul of Seers

"Pretty looking bunch," Scott said, his eyes firmly on the prize. Scott knew The Soul of Seers in an instant, even though he had never seen it before.

"Gremlorr has said to kill you all if we have to." The leader spoke. Well, it was more like a growl.

"You should give up smoking, mate. Voice is a bit croaky there," Scott spoke up and crossed his arms firmly, letting his wings go to full stretch. Their pink glow filled the darkness.

"Give us the Seer and we will let you live," Topaz ordered, sounding very intimidating. Her voice boomed across the cavern and resounded off the walls.

A Spellfire Evening

Remind me never to get stuck at the pub with the boys, she'll cream me! "We might let you live," Scott added. "Gremlorr will be stopped tonight, you know that. So give it up. Don't make me have to come over there and hurt you."

Scott stood beside Topaz, Barry, he assumed, was somewhere behind them. Then Scott felt something pressed into his hands, which he held behind his back. It felt like a paper bag. What it contained, he had no idea, but he held fast.

"Gremlorr will not fail. He has planned this for a very long time. Holding Alex captive will be the way to get Electra Spellfire Ruveaux to surrender to the darkness," one of the Nasties standing forward of the leader blurted out.

The leader slapped him up the ear. "Shut up Neville. I do the talking, remember?"

"Yes, Lord Zapem," the one called Neville replied quickly.

"Alex is not dead then" Topaz sounded pleased. Obviously, the Nasties weren't the sharpest tools in the shed.

Scott felt a tickle in his brain. A communication danced around. *Open the bag and throw the contents behind you...Open the bag, throw behind.* Remembering what Topaz had told him about trusting his instincts, he rustled the bag open at the top and slid one hand inside.

Small, hard balls rolled around his fingers and the smell of aniseed filled his nostrils. *Aniseed Balls, Barry's favorite treat. But what the hell was Barry doing giving them to him.*

Then almost all of the Nasties pointed their noses in the air and their nostrils worked on gathering the smell. The small folk became restless, and doubt flashed momentarily in Lord Zapem's eyes. Before Scott could think anything, he acted on his feelings.

Scott gripped as many balls as he could in his hand and turned to throw them all the way back up the tunnel. He quickly followed with two more handfuls. A lolly scramble erupted. The Nasties squealed and screamed in delight, and the whole army dispersed and ran to find where the sweets had gone to rest.

Topaz laughed. "How did you know Nasties are addicted to aniseed? That stuff will render them useless until morning, they enjoy it so much. I heard about it, but I thought it was a myth. Maybe they aren't as powerful as Gremlorr would have us believe."

"You can thank Bazza for that one. I just went with a feeling after he put the bag in my hands."

A Spellfire Evening

That left three Nasties with Lord Zapem. “Fools!” he roared, “come back!”

Then he stood with his feet apart and raised his hands in the air, flexing and relaxing his fingers. The three in front of him automatically crouched.

“He’s going to send out fireballs! If one hits us, we’ll go up in flames. My shield won’t hold them off,” Topaz cried out, a noise like roaring wind filling the tunnels.

“Jesus, they play for keeps here, don’t they?” Scott considered his next move. Then he spied Barry behind Lord Zapem. In all the commotion, Barry must have slipped into the shadows and around behind. Just as Lord Zapem stretched his arms over his head, he stared directly at Scott and his hands made small circles as his arms circled down and around.

“Get ready to duck. These aren’t big, but one will kill you. Once activated, they must travel the trajectory until they hit something, so don’t duck until it’s on the way. They go fast. Can you avoid it?” she asked, sounding concerned.

“If I can face up to Barry’s speed bowling with the cricket ball I can dodge anything.”

Barry stepped forward, and Scott could see the large rock gripped in his hand. He swung his arm down then up, apparently connecting the base of Lord Zapem’s skull and the enemy fell forward onto the ground. “Shit, Bazza!”

“Ah ain’t nuthin’ or nobody a well-timed rock to the head won’t stop.” Barry dusted off his hands. The remaining faithful three promptly ran away. Reaching down to the neck of Lord Zapem, Barry carefully lifted the Soul of Seers off the Nasty.

“Careful, Barry. Treat it with care and reverence,” Topaz told him. Barry took the silk panties from his pocket and lovingly wrapped the necklace inside.

“Give your knickers,” Barry ordered Topaz.

“Barry, you mongrel!”

“Fer Crissakes. You moron, not the ones she’s wearing. The black silk ones,” Barry pointed out in not to fine a manner.

“Oh, sorry.”

Topaz giggled at the two. They were like big kids sometimes. But time was quickly running out for them. They had only an hour until midnight, and they must travel the half hour back to the entrance point

A Spellfire Evening

yet. That one would bring them out in the safest place. Barry took the panties from Topaz.

Taking his own gold chain and medallion from his neck, he placed it inside the underwear and wrapped it. Then he gave the real Seer to Scott. "If we get caught again. You just get that to Electra, or Maejika, and defeat this bastard Gremlorr. I will go decoy if I have to. I'll show them the glint of gold and as nobody can read my mind...it's blank most of the time..." He chuckled. "I'll run the rabbit, and with any luck, they'll follow me."

"Barry, that is awfully dangerous." Topaz put her hand on his shoulder. This man would risk his life for his friends.

"Danger is my middle name, faery girl."

"Barry how did you know about the aniseed?" Scott asked.

"If I tell ya, I'll have to kill ya!"

"C'mon, we gotta run," Topaz ordered.

The trio headed to the exit point.

* * * *

Now back behind Sins, Topaz felt a little more reassured. But so far it had seemed too easy somehow. She made herself invisible and went to scout out any danger between here and Havoc House where Electra and her friends and allies prepared for the largest battle of everyone's life.

Outside, the town seemed in the grip of a deathly silence and everything was eerily still. Topaz did not like this feeling at all. Something wasn't quite right. Landing on the ground she felt a searing pain in her head. A blinding white light encased her, and she could not move. Every time she tried, the sharp pains shot into her brain.

"Now, you naive faery, you did not honestly think it would be so simple, did you?" Gremlorr's eerie voice resonated all around her and fear struck a chord in her heart. She quickly forced that feeling away and thought of Scott. Gremlorr would feed off any negative feelings, but positive feelings would decrease his hold on her. Topaz let the love she had for Scott encompass her, radiating them outwards.

Gremlorr laughed out loud, "You are not strong enough to stop me."

"My love is stronger than any evil power you have, Gremlorr. I do not fear you."

"You have no need to fear me, Topaz Sinclair. I mean you no harm. I merely want the one who holds the Seer."

A Spellfire Evening

Topaz realized Gremlorr was right. Blocking Gremlorr from her mind completely, Topaz concentrated her love. She had to get out of this spell holding her to help the men.

Scott sensed something wrong as Topaz entered his mind. *Run, get the Seer to Electra. Gremlorr is here for it. I love you, Scott Robson, and I want to be with you the rest of our lives and hear the flitter flutter of little wings.*

The feeling of love welling inside his body now surpassed anything he'd ever felt before. He loved her and he would marry her. Just as soon as this was over. They could worry about the rest later. Never did Scott have more incentive to succeed in anything. His future children depended on getting this object to Havoc House.

"Bazza, that Gremlorr wants the Seer. He's here. He has Topaz."

"You only have a hundred meters to run that thing over to Havoc House. Scott, don't worry about me. I'll lead him away. By the time he realizes I don't have the real thing, you'll be in there."

"But..." Scott started.

"Shut up Scott, you have more but than a billy goat. Just think about that woman who loves you – God knows why she'd like an yobbo like you – and get that damn thing over there!" He grinned widely. "Just do me a favor, and tell that sheila Maejika she's one fine woman."

Scott knew Barry only ever called him Scott when he was deadly serious. The Gremlorr seemed like a pussy cat in comparison to his mate's bad moods.

Barry took off and stalked right up to Gremlorr, poking him in the back. Gremlorr towered over the big man. Scott watched for his chance. That Barry was one reckless bloke.

Scott could hear him clearly, goading Gremlorr, distracting him away from Topaz, who seemed in a trance-like state, the circle of bright white light still around her head.

"Hey, tough guy," Bazza prodded, "why don't you pick on someone your own size, leave the sheila alone. Or maybe you aren't as tough as you say you are?"

Gremlorr swung around. "You fool, you are human. Nothing you can do can stop me. Human's are weak."

Gremlorr raised his hands and Barry took a step back.

"Uh-uh. I wouldn't do that if I were you." Barry wagged his finger at Gremlorr like chastising a naughty child. "I'm not human, mate. I'm Australian and an Aussie never backs down from a fight. Haven't you ever heard of David and Goliath?" Then he took the

panties from his pocket and carefully revealed a flash of gold. “This what you want, Grumblelorr?”

With that, Barry took off, his loping strides taking him quickly away from Gremlorr. Scott readied himself for the dash of a lifetime. Topaz’s voice entered his mind. *Think of love, Scott, and you will block Gremlorr momentarily. His greed and anger will have him focused on Barry. Hurry, we have only five minutes to get in there with it.*

Gremlorr wasted no time, striding quickly toward Barry and putting his back to Scott and Topaz. Scott bolted out from behind Sins and made for the door of Havoc House. He could see Electra’s friend Maejika standing in the doorway. She must have sensed Gremlorr and come to investigate. Scott was halfway across the lawn.

Barry tripped up. Somehow, Scott knew he’d done it purposely. Three quarters there. Gremlorr descended on Barry.

Topaz broke through the shield and screamed. “Noooo, Barry!”

Scott focused on Maejika and slid his body to the ground holding up the Soul of Seers as he crashed along. Gremlorr roared, and Scott knew the game was up. Maejika took it from him and immediately rushed inside.

Scott stood and ran back toward Barry. Gremlorr had disappeared, and Topaz knelt next to Barry on the ground.

“Bazza? Bazza, mate. You’ll be okay. Fight it, Barry.” Scott saw the gaping hole in his best friend’s abdomen and tears streamed down his cheeks.

“Cut the waterworks, mate. Only fairies cry,” Bazza managed to squeak out.

“Yeah, well, I am faery. So I’ll cry all I want.”

“Good for you, mate...I’m proud of you, Scott, real bloody proud...” Then his head flopped sideways, and Scott knew his friend had died.

“Jesus, Barry! You weren’t meant to die, ya bloody idiot. So help me, I’m going to get that Gremlorr!”

“Scott, we need to get back into Havoc House before they begin the spell. We’ll be safe in there. We’ll take care of Barry, when all this is over. He died a hero and will be treated as such in his burial.” Topaz urged Scott to go with her.

The whole thing seemed like a dream now. If only it was one and not the living nightmare the Gremlorr had caused. Scott slowly got

A Spellfire Evening

up, taking the gold medallion from Barry's hand. He placed it in his pocket and ran inside with Topaz. She led him to a private room.

"Thanks, I'm not quite ready to face everyone yet."

"I'm so sorry, Scott. I'm so sorry I couldn't help him."

"Now don't you go blaming yourself. Bazza wouldn't have wanted that. That bloke was as stubborn as a mule. He did what he did because that is just Barry. A top bloke and a true Aussie. Come here." Scott took the shaking Topaz in his arms. Her trembling ceased immediately. He wanted her more than ever now. Holding her hands in his, he knelt down on one knee.

"Topaz Sinclair...would you do me the honor of being my wife. I love you and do not want to live without you." Scott felt a surge of love rush through him then a nagging worry about what he would do if she said no. "I know Spellfire is in danger and I know we have to work out just where we will live. But Topaz, none of that matters. Right now, I need you to know that you are the one woman in my life I cannot live without, and if I die, I want to die knowing you loved me, too."

"Oh, Scott. Of course, I love you. And yes, yes, I'll marry you."

"Oops, I don't have a ring!" he confessed.

"Well, we'll have to seal it some other way." She knelt down with him, capturing his lips in a kiss. A kiss that meant forever.

Scott kissed her back and surrendered to the fact that he would never make another decision in life without Topaz. That was a good feeling. She had his back, he had hers. Their passion rose, and it would have been so easy to have taken her there and then, but Scott did not want to ruin the magic for Topaz and their wedding day. Her hand went to his hardened shaft.

He put his hand over hers. "No, Topaz. I want you to have everything a bride deserves on her wedding day. No sex until the day we marry."

"Are you sure, Scott? That is so romantic!" Topaz kissed him again.

"Oh, and I believe in short engagements. Very short." He laughed at the look on her face.

"Oh, I may just need two years to plan this wedding."

"I have great powers of persuasion, you know. You are dealing with a mastermind here," Scott added.

Topaz giggled. Then her face looked serious again. "Come on, the clock is about to strike midnight. Let's go and see if Electra needs

A Spellfire Evening

us and let her know Alex is still alive. We can't let Barry's death have been for nothing. He died to save Spellfire and us. The least we can do is do him proud and see Gremlorr is finished off by Electra once and for all."

"Yes. We will do Bazza proud."

The End

Electrafied, Part 2
by
Mae Powers

Get ready for more hell to come, and surprises of an eerie nature, as the battle with the Gremlorr continues.

Visit Mae's site at www.maepowers.com
Or email her at maepowers@yahoo.com

Electrafied, Part 2
by
Mae Powers

Chapter Four

Maejika Maelstrom couldn't believe all the people at Electra's and Alex's New Year's Eve and anniversary bash. There looked to be over two hundred people crammed in and out of the huge Havoc House ballroom. Poor Tris, must be going bananas with all the extra work. She reminded herself never to let Alex's mother, Elenor, in on a party she would ever plan.

The party and celebrations were in full swing and everyone didn't show up late. Boy, they were early in fact. Witches, vampires, goblins, ghosts, sorcerers, werewolves, and all kinds of paranormal beings, as well as non-paras and humans came for the event.

She just walked into the ballroom herself, with Sianna Conners, when that blasted Aussie hunk Barry stole a kiss from her, right under that damn mistletoe hanging up near the front entrance. If Sianna and Electra hadn't stayed her hands, she'd have blasted the man to smithereens or at least into a different dimension. Didn't he realize that he was meant for Sianna.

The poor girl went white and slinkered off to another part of the room when he did that to Maejika. Hell and Brimstone, if there wasn't some spell cast here she wasn't a two-thousand year old witch. Oh Barry was a good kisser, and probably worth a romp on the old broomstick, but her premonition didn't have her in it with Barry, but Sianna instead.

A Spellfire Evening

She'd have to be careful the rest of the evening and keep away from him. It should have been Sianna having a nice evening with him instead of those two witches Magdalene and Eliziah—damn hussies. Maejika knew fortune-telling wasn't one of her fortes, but when she did have a premonition she paid attention to it. When she didn't, things went to hell on a motorcycle rearing it's wheels. She'd foreseen Barry Barnes and Sianna kissing under that mistletoe on New Year's Eve.

Although, she was good at knowing how to tell who or what spell to cast over another being, she was too close to this episode to count on being impartial. Either someone was trying to keep the two apart or someone put a spell on Barry to protect or harm him. She believed the latter, since something didn't bode well with her gut instincts. They were never wrong. She put the matter out of her head for the moment as friends waved to her and came up to talk with her a bit.

Dreema and her daughter, as well as future son-in-law, said hi to her and then were off mingling around to say hi to others. She narrowed her eyes as Perry Normil and Frightful Frieda Faraday-Farthington walked in together arm-in-arm. The two needed to get a permanent bedroom together or get the hell out of Spellfire. No way, would Perry win this next year's mayoral election. He'd been mayor too many times already, probably thanks to Frieda or friends that owed him a favor. Kiss-ass bastard that he was.

She waved hi to Shai, Morgan LeHavoc and Damien Spellfire, Electra's twin brother. Now those three were a happy threesome item. Ah, some women did have it great. She glanced over at Electra who was starting to move on the dance floor with Alex. Now there was a match made in any paranormal heaven.

With their tall lithe frames and elegant natures, the two looked like a Fairy King and Queen all decked out in their finery, minus the wings of course. She smiled to herself, feeling good that the two were amongst her closest friends. A sudden shiver nearly blanket her as she watched them dance. Something wasn't right. She moved slowly around the floor, barely saying hi to others as she tried to figure out what was wrong. It would come to her soon, she hoped.

Across the way she saw the town sheriff, Malaci Spellfire and his wife Moonshyne swaying in each other's arms as best they could considering her ballooning tummy. Maejika let out a soft sigh. One day, one century, she might decide to have a child, not any time soon though. She had things to take care of in this century first.

A Spellfire Evening

Moving stealthily across the floor, she chuckled as she saw Horrible Henry pestering some of the guests. Cosmina, whom she bought the gown from that she wore tonight, laughed and played back with Henry's antics much to the woman's amusements. Near them stood Captain James Dallingham, Jack Taylor, their loves Rosie and Sarah, chatting away with Manny (who did a table-top jig for his love interest Taffy), while others nearby enjoyed the sport of the evening.

Maejika enjoyed herself too, but still couldn't shake this wary feeling of something being amiss. She continued around the room, saying hi to various people, while checking out with her extra senses. With so much paranormal power going on in the room, it proved hard to focus or pin point exactly where the disturbance in the para-air came from. Then she had a feeling of being watched. She stopped near a patio door and stepped outside.

Just on the shadowy left side of the veranda she quickly turned around and saw who followed her. She stepped back further into the shadows as Frieda, in her spell-made up beauty, stepped out on to the patio to move near her. The woman, over a hundred to be sure, kept herself magically fit and no older looking than a woman of forty. Even with her dark blonde hair and scathing brown eyes, Maejika didn't see how Perry found the woman lusty or pretty, but to each their own tastes. She didn't blame their exes for running off with each other.

"Evening, Maejika." Frieda drifted to join her, the woman's black, excessively low cut gown, showed off far too much of the alabaster boobs. "I think the party is excellent, don't you?"

"It has been until now." She didn't know why Frieda tried being nice to her, they hated each other.

"Now, Maejika, let bygones be for the night. After all I wouldn't want to see Electra's evening ruined. Those two are so in love, it's kind of uplifting."

"You got Elenor to get you an invite. She didn't know at first how loathsome you really are, Frieda." Maejika wouldn't be nice to her if she didn't have to. "What is it you want. I don't want to stand here any longer than I have to and put up with your stench."

Frieda narrowed her eyes, they sparkled like copper momentarily. "I don't like you either, Maejika, but I'm not stupid enough to cause trouble tonight. I could see you watching me as you moved around the ballroom. You're not the only one that can sense what isn't here, bitch."

A Spellfire Evening

“Why thank you, Frieda, that’s the nicest thing you’ve called me all year. And you’re right, something isn’t right and it doesn’t smell like your handy work.”

“Gee,” Frieda snarled, “guess I should take what compliments I can get from you. Just be on the look out. I have trouble to cause elsewhere. No need to thank me, though you should. People like you are too damn snobby and sanctimonious for Spellfire. Enjoy the evening, Maejika. I’ll be bothering you soon.”

Maejika didn’t get in a last shot as the hell-spawn sauntered off, up to mischief she was sure. However, for once, Maejika believed Frieda. If that could be at all possible. She didn’t stay outside any longer, but made her way back inside to find Electra. If anyone could sense where the waywardness lay, she *felt* sure Electra could.

* * * *

As she glanced around the ballroom, leaving Perry to pester other people, who thought he was really worth something, Frieda Faraday thought about what she’d worked long and hard to accomplish.

Frieda could feel what actually might be coming. Oh they thought they knew how powerful she really was, but the bitches and assholes around Spellfire, and it’s mystic realms, didn’t really know her true might. She wanted what would come, would even help taint and tarnish it, so she looked good. But in the end, they, it, all of them, would never know what she started and worked hard to accomplish.

She’d built upon her plans since even before Mikhail first got submerged in the underground caverns that were suppose to be his prison for eternity. After he tried to take over Spellfire years ago, along with help from his minions, Gremlorr was punished and banished to a living hell, by means of a powerful Warding Spell. He lay now resting beneath an unsuspecting Spellfire, growing in power, anxious to get out.

They would all answer to her in the end. Especially Electra. She knew something about her main nemesis, that even Electra had no idea about. Bitch, so high in her idealisms, looked down upon her. Frieda hated Electra more than anyone else in Spellfire. Well, almost more than anyone else. Maejika Maelstrom ran close to the top of the pole on Frieda’s loathing scale.

She moved towards the back of the room, near the farthest windows where there wasn’t a patio door and not too many stood near. It would be an ideal location to watch whatever went on tonight. Silently, she only nodded at those who recognized and didn’t attempt

A Spellfire Evening

to get in her way. Fools, all of them. She knew playing up to Alex' mother would get the simpleton to send her an invitation to the anniversary and New Year's Eve party. It had been so simple. If one of the guest's of honor's mother invited her, she wouldn't be turned away, like so many other events.

She didn't like their stupid parties anyway. She'd tried to socialize and be friends, but they turned their noses up at her. So she was born on the wrong side of the paranormal tracks. Everyone had a right to a better life. When she felt the fruits of her labors weren't getting to her fast enough, she'd turned to darker magic to influence the obtainment of what she wanted out of life.

And that endeavor aided her in accomplishing her ultimate goal of revenge. She recalled how one particular power of hers, enabled her to get even further than she hoped in her quest for things. It had been a few months back when Maejika and that simpleton Sianna Conners were trying to find out some little known history ,about the magic that lay beneath Spellfire. They should have asked her. Gleefully, she thought about that episode, and how it had helped her escalate her plans...

Chapter Five

For eons it simmered below in the darkness, its shadows of power spilling into everything it touched. It came to find the one, the one to whom it belonged. The one that belonged to...him.

Closed for centuries in a living ball of energy from birth, it waited for the life of the other, the one he would know inherently, to bring him to full life. His life-shell, formed of the stars and the mysteries, and the magic of the cosmos, brought him here, to the depths below a place called Spellfire.

A voice, from some distant past or future woke his energies, making him churn for needful things. Things he could not identify with, at first. But he soon learned what they were, and learned quickly.

He listened to what went on around him as he lay brooding in the darkness. Sparks of light and shadow oozed from his depths, creating little living things, creatures with no thought at first, and then they too learned. And they became free of his control.

Darkness and light. Shadows and life. He was made of all these things, yet he could not be complete without her. So he listened to the life around him from the cavern's dark depths. The Earth energies sang their songs and he heard their meanings.

Some knew he was there, but were afraid to tell others. Some kept away from him; others helped to nourish his needs. The needs of mind and soul.

Soon he developed one. Developed a new conscious. And felt life beckoning to him though he could not escape the shell of his beginnings. Not until he found her.

At least not completely. He'd found ways from learning through the minds of others. Some called him a devil, others called him a beneficial god of sorts. The natives and gods, both of the earth and of the magical sort, could not look upon him without going mad or evil. Yet, he did not worry about them.

A Spellfire Evening

He kept to himself, mostly dealing with those that bothered him in some way. He did not want to surface out of the darkened, fiery domain of fire and shadows, the comforting earth.

He knew she would find him there in the deepest cores of the caverns below Spellfire. She would come soon. And he would know life...

* * * *

It, he, could feel her near. Yet something wasn't right. He'd waited over a century of Earth time for her, growing daily, but too slow for his peace of alien mind. So long he traveled and so long he waited for his true existence to begin. He knew, because of his restless energy running rampant, he'd unleashed them. The creatures of shadow and darkness.

Some he could control, others he could not. Yet they still feared him and left him alone, here in this cavern, his prison. A few kept tabs on what went on around and above him. Sometimes they would give him reports of the lineage, by sending him images.

Yet always, it wasn't her. Not the soul to bind his with. Still, he would wait, because that's all he could do for now, wait and watch for her coming. Be patient until the right moment when he could claim her for himself.

She would have no choice, because the fates meant this to be.

* * * *

Under the protection of sublime dark-magic, Frieda watched with Sianna's eyes, the "knowing" incantations Maejika used on the timescope. The tall woman went through several movements, her dark auburn hair swaying with each movement Maejika made. Frieda never liked Maejika, but respected what the woman was capable of doing.

Though a very powerful witch, Frieda knew Maejika didn't have the ability to sub shift into another's body. It took a witch with powers near to that of a high-level sorceress to be able to slip into another's body without being detected. There were only three people in Spellfire, besides herself, that she knew of who possessed such powerful magic.

And those other three were out of town for the day. She'd made sure of that. Of course, only two of those could tell if another magical being spiritually possessed a person or magical being.

Synkor and Damien Spellfire had the ability, but only Damian and his twin sister, Electra Spellfire could know when another's body

A Spellfire Evening

was silently being inhabited. Even the possessed person acted normal and didn't realize they were being used like a carrier vessel.

Frieda contained her enthusiasm that her ploy worked exquisitely, so far. Damien could tell things like that, but not as well as Electra. Frieda couldn't wait to get even with the sorceress.

The women of the Spellfire lineage were always sorceresses, especially the first-born daughter. Some gene gave them not only supernatural, but also psychic gifts as well. She loathed the Spellfire family, and especially Electra Spellfire.

The damn woman had been a thorn in her side for a long time now. Particularly when Mikhail saw Electra and wanted Electra instead of her. It didn't matter that her own husband ran off, but it infuriated Frieda that somehow Electra had been involved in Perry's wife being the one her husband ran off with. Just another notch of aggravation Electra caused her over the course of years.

Now, she'd have the start of complete revenge on Electra, and perhaps all of Spellfire, Texas. Gleefully, she knew there were still those that were not only afraid of her powers of magic and influence, but also her estranged allies. They would gladly aid her in the quest for final domination and control of this town and its secrets.

Some, of which, held the keys to Electra's powers. Frieda intended to watch with pride and pleasure, as the steps she put in play today would soon cause the downfall of Electra Spellfire and others who stood in her way.

These two would get her as close to LifeCore as she'd ever been able to get. Then he, or it, would wake up and notice her. She learned from the shadowy twits, LifeCore had created, what the alien being wanted more than anything. Frieda would feed his need and let him think it used her to obtain what he wanted. So believing, she kept her mind trained to do what she needed to in order to keep out from under its influence...

* * * *

He knew they stood out there. Knew that she was close by. Yet, she warned herself. His anger grew and his cell tightened about him. She would fight him, his essence. Her powers had grown more than he realized.

The first time, as a child she'd barely escaped him. He awoke to this realization this very moment. Then she interfered. But with her coming, he became more aware of her. And he knew now what he must do to make her his. Within the mind of her bewildered friend he

A Spellfire Evening

found the answers. He let the knowledge of what was, and what he wanted, seep into her mind. And the other one's.

Frieda. He'd heard that name before. She lay within another, searching for him. He read her mind enough to know she didn't want Electra around. He felt uplifted. This other witch would aid him in his desires, in exchange for helping to accomplish her own.

This would work for him. He carefully hid things from the others, especially Electra, but used subliminal energies to affect his will upon being close to her – Maejika.

The witch would carry back with her all the fear he could cause, especially to Electra Spellfire. He would use others to gain what he wanted. And what he wanted lay in the future, Electra's future. In Maejika's void of existence, his energies flowed. He could nip at her life essence. It would harm Electra, but it would also bring the sorceress closer to him.

Life Core reached out.

His thoughts jerked to a slight reality of terror. Maejika felt him coming towards her. He saw with his psychic vision, the sparks of the eerie glow flowing out like slow moving fireflies. *It, no he, meant to harm her.* That's what she thought, he realized. Then he felt like she did—frozen; felt his powers become immobile. No, felt her powers suddenly become useless. Then the ground beneath them all shook fiercely.

He cried out as another entered the space of the time void. His mind wobbled as he saw Maejika shake also, though she didn't fall. Another sparkling glow of light entered the cavern room. Its coruscating brilliance nearly blinded his mind, but LifeCore could see what Maejika and Frieda saw – Electra stepping out from a circular, fiery glow that appeared from nowhere.

Flashes of energy sparkled every where, changing it's colors with her moods. For a split second she'd looked to the opening of the cavern he lay imprisoned in. And within a nth of that split second, he accomplished much. She would forget, Frieda had the knowledge she sought, and Maejika would accomplish something for him, LifeCore needed to be done.

Then Electra turned swiftly and he mind—saw a protective silver-gold glow quickly encompassed her and everything around her disappeared in a brilliant show of bursting energies. Then silence within the cavern.

A Spellfire Evening

His rumbling thoughts simmered down as did the caverns around him. Then LifeCore slept, until the time for him to reawaken came and he could claim what belonged to him.

Chapter Six

Mikhail de-Gremlorr, full of life at nearly thirty, never saw anything more wondrous than Electra Spellfire. She must be the most beautiful and fascinating woman he ever came across. He'd been on his way to a festival in Galveston, when his flying carpet ran low on mystical propellant. He heard through the magical grapevine about Spellfire, Texas, but never went there. The town lay only a half hour drive from Houston or Galveston, so he had time to get to his event before it started.

He had a few hours to kill in fact, so why not explore the fabled town he only read about in magical periodicals or from other paranormals. After he found the shop that would check over and refill his flying carpet, he made his way on foot through town, delighted when he found an old-fashioned ice cream shop. He loved ice cream.

The moment he entered the shop, his life became altered forever. Love attacked him like a swarm of vampire bats in a feeding frenzy. Tall and buxom, dark and exotic, her personality, everything about her hit him full force. He forgot about his carpet, his trip and his former life. Nothing mattered, save that soon she would love him too.

He stayed in Spellfire, always showing up to fluster her. Then they argued and the most erotic night of his life ensued. From then on he'd seduced her until she married him. Then life got more glorious. He could have wanted for nothing more, until near their first year anniversary and she told him about LifeCore. And what it meant to their life together. So he took the plunge and followed her on the eve of their first anniversary to learn what LifeCore was all about.

Then their destinies changes. They drifted apart and later divorced. His mind turned bad, he felt it was due to LifeCore's erratic behavior and the divorce. Both left a tarnish of darkness on his mind. He could no longer control his destiny as he preferred before. If things couldn't be back the way they were then, he believed no one should be happy.

A Spellfire Evening

He fought with Electra and the town of Spellfire, their magics won over his and his followers. They buried him in this blasted cavern prison for over five years. He worked and worked, to secretly build his powers and followers for revenge on them all. Then two unexpected allies came to his aide, or so he thought, at least about one of them.

That no longer mattered as his minions brought him souls and powers to feed him with. Now, he would escape and wreck havoc on the town that imprisoned him, and reclaim the woman that destiny had given to him. Without her, all he lived for was the darkness and loneliness within this dam dreary prison. He would not stay here any longer. He now possessed the power to get back what he wanted. Gremlorr went after all of Spellfire, and to fight the woman he loved for control of their destiny.

* * * *

When hell broke loose in Spellfire, Maejika and those close to her fought together to rid the town of the evil that enveloped it like a death cloud. People screamed and magics went rampant as the Gremlorr and his henchman battled around them. At moments, it was hard to tell sometimes, who were the bad guys and who were the good ones. Just instinct, mainly kept the comrades together who fought against Gremlorr and his minions. She stopped only when Electra did, just after the Gremlorr and his cohorts vanished as quickly as they came.

Then more hell and grief showed itself in the town. Alex was gone, and several were dead or dying. And what tourists there were today, probably wouldn't come back in a long while, unless they were from Los Angeles.

Derek Spellfire, Electra's youngest brother, jumped in with the answer, and all her brothers and friends gathered around to help calm her, and take care of the others that were ill or dying from the magic war.

Maejika knew they used the Warding Spell once before to stop Gremlorr and imprison him. Now it must work again. With this powerful spell that several needed to put together, it would either kill him or halt his evil might, while they could all band their powers as one huge force to locate and put a stop to his supernatural horrors once and for all. It would probably take a varied group effort to accomplish this.

A Spellfire Evening

Maejika and a few others sent out mental and spiritual warnings across the town. People were on their way into Spellfire to help out and to keep other evil out of the town. She knew how to do the spell, and would stay there to watch over things and coordinate with others as Electra and the select groups went after the ingredients to make the spell.

Yet, after they were all gone to do that, others around her were tending to injured and helping in any way they could, she couldn't help but wonder how he'd gotten the magic, while in his confinement, to break free and cause such disaster upon the town. As she made preparations, she wondered if the Gremlorr had developed some antidote—like magic, against it.

The potion needed to work or other wise she didn't want to think of the consequences. If she must, she'd pour all her magic into the endeavor. It suddenly felt as if it were her particular duty to make sure that the ingredients did get here safely. As if some force told her that her mixing it and using her powers within the spell would make it work.

Yet, something else troubled her. There was another task she had to do...no something else she must add to the warding potion...something that would aid Electra. She shrugged, knowing when the time came, it would come to her.

"We can help with preparations of the other ingredients, too, Maejika."

She looked to her right to see a teary-eyed Elenor Ruveaux near her. "He'll be alive, Elenor," she said soothingly to Alex's mom. "Rest assured, with everyone pitching in, no more lives will be lost and Alex will be found."

"I hope so, Maejika. What can I do now to help you?"

She knew the woman needed something to occupy her mind. "Go into the kitchens and find me some sturdy bowls to use. I think Tris Havoc has some spell-mixing bowls there. Take Sianna with you. The poor girl needs some assistance."

Elenor nodded and scurried away, soon with Sianna in her wake. Maejika watched, while clearing off a few tables, as the two women and others of their acquaintance went to the kitchens. Others helped her to pull the tables together so there would be lots of room to work. While friends helped set up the table and read about the making of the spell, Maejika took a moment to herself and went out into the night. She stopped halfway out on the patio, looking up in the sky.

A Spellfire Evening

Even at night she saw the grey smoke drifting, no lingering around from the previous battle. Stenches of evil filtered down from that awful looking gray wisp of evil. She sniffed and almost choked on it. She let out a zap of magic to allow wind to rise and clear it away from the ballroom patio doors.

The others didn't need to be more gloomed. Her fists turned to balls of tightened anger. Somehow, they all would make Gremlorr and whoever worked with him, pay for the friggin harm they'd done this night. She would be on the look out and make sure she did her part to see that the bastard and all involved were sent to the darkest pits of Hell, never to return again.

She sighed, finally returning back inside to prepare for making the potion. She steeled herself against what else may come. With all her powers, she felt useless in some way. She gripped her uncertainty and forced the negative thoughts out of her mind. They would prevail; she would be a factor in helping everyone triumph over the Gremlorr, no matter the cost to herself.

She hoped against all that she held dear, that every one came out unscathed. Especially, Electra. Her friend would know how to defeat Mikhail and if something did go wrong, Maejika would zoom to the pits of the Fae Caverns and kill the bastard some how herself. Surely, LifeCore would not allow this all to happen. What was going on down there, she wanted to know, but because of her expertise in making unusual and hazardous spells, Electra wanted to her to stay here to make sure all went well.

Its the least Maejika could do to aid her beloved friends. She just knew it would come out all right. She sucked in her top lip and began prepping for the Warding Spell. Mikhail would die tonight if she had any thing to do with his downfall. She swore this to herself again, that no matter the cost, he would be wiped off the face of this Earth.

To Be Continued...

Cuts Both Ways
by
Bridghid Parkinson

Old-fashioned Jack Taylor discovers the right man to find the Dagger of Destruction is his wife Rosie. Can he accept the hazards they'll face together?

<http://bridghidparkinson.blogspot.com>

or <http://www.myspace.com/dbparkinson>

Cuts Both Ways
By
Bridghid Parkinson

“Oh, what a lovely evening to have everything so fucked up!” James snorted. Sarah swiped her fan in his direction grazing his arm gently, but giving a clear message.

Jack had to respect her use of the fan. Even in modern attire, Sarah carried a small fan made of sandalwood and decorated with a lace trim. When Sarah was nervous, she removed the fan from her purse letting the gentle fragrance of the wood float through the air. Maejika once explained to him how there was a natural magic in the soothing scent of the wood, and women in the 1800s used a fan as a polite communication device for less than polite situations.

Jack still felt stunned by what happened in the room just moments earlier. The Gremlorr dropped his payload of bad attitude on what should have been a jovial party. What should’ve been the happy, rowdy chaos of a Texas Style New Year’s party, became paranormal pandemonium.

Creatures of all kinds spoke of different spells and things needed to stop Gremlorr. It didn’t make sense to Jack, but Rosie watched people in the room carefully.

The ray of realization hit. Earlier, Jack overheard a couple of men talking about the Bermuda triangle today and he remembered mention of a dagger. Jack had been in his ghostly form at Barnabas’ Bar and didn’t want to upset the men by materializing and making them think he had purposefully eavesdropped on the conversation.

Jack waved to Maejika Maelstrom and she approached them with the tentative look that made Jack wonder if any effort would make a difference in stopping Gremlorr.

“I think,” Jack pulled James closer as the girls joined the two men, “one of the items is in the Bermuda Triangle. It’s the dagger. They can’t specifically destroy it because it’s meant for destruction,

A Spellfire Evening

or something like that. Gremlor may have sent it to the bottom of the ocean to keep people away. I overheard something earlier.”

James nodded. “I don’t know about the other items, but you and I have the better chance of finding that there dagger. If it’s floating around the Devil’s Triangle or under the waters like fucker-face plans, we don’t need to breathe to get it.”

Sarah swatted James again and then went on to fan herself in a staccato rhythm. Jack didn’t envy the tongue-lashing James would get later because Sarah disapproved of ‘boy-talk’ in public.

Maejika’s look of surprise changed to concern as she explained the spell that could stop Gremlorr, but it had to be completed quickly. She described a few problems Gremlorr caused in the past but the new menace was, by far, the worst.

When Jack and James tried to tackle the Gremlorr, just after all of the confusion started, they were ineffective. Anything they tried to do towards him failed. All the works they completed in the past against armies of people meant nothing in the face of the Gremlorr. Jack caught himself in a rueful snicker as he thought how they were as effective as ghosts against this new magical adversary.

Through the fuss, Rosie remained silent. Jack knew her normal reaction to fear and fury were the same—silence. When the Western Union man came with his Army draft notice, she had leaned against the wall and stood still as a statue. Now, she leaned against the wall, staring at the floor. He knew she heard them both mention the dagger and getting it from Bermuda Triangle.

“You’re going?” she asked.

“Honey, I have to go. If we have a chance to stop this asshole, I want to make sure it can be done. If we don’t, and the spells fail, Spellfire won’t be much fun anymore. That’s not what we’ve worked for around here!”

“I just got you back. It feels like you are going to war all over again!”

“I know, but this shouldn’t be as long.” He reached up to the filterless cigarette that manifested at the corner of his mouth. A long drag always calmed him and the cigarette manifested at anytime he felt anxious. He was trying to quit just because it was annoying but during times of high stress, he couldn’t escape it.

“I—just—I—don’t...” Rosie’s words trailed off. She snatched the cigarette away from Jack, tossing it aside and letting it dissipate completely. She stared at Jack, trying to find the words. “I don’t know

what comes after this life. My faith kept me going so long ago, and I knew I would see you again in heaven...or whatever. You heard him! He took sadistic delight in brushing you and James aside like flies at a picnic. If this dagger might destroy even you, where would we go from here?"

"Rosie, in case you haven't noticed...he can't kill me..."

"Jack?" Maejika interrupted by placing her hand on Jack's shoulder. "There is more to the possibility of being destroyed like the warning said. It's possible to have the dagger harm your spirit. We can't ask you to do this."

Jack sighed knowing Maejika didn't have to ask for his help. They had already helped each other frequently in the past.

"See? I just got you back and now what?" Rosie crossed her arms in front of her chest. "I had this idea that Heaven is supposed to go on forever. I get just these last two months and...and?"

Jack watched her and saw an astonishing transformation as Rosie began to age before his eyes. In the time since she arrived in Spellfire, she always looked just as she had before he left for the war. There were occasional changes in her appearance, depending on what they were doing. When they were working in the appliance shop, she looked just like the days he remembered when watching over her in the shipyards after his death. When they had gone out for a special evening, she often looked the same as when he first met her. Now, tiny lines formed around her tightly pursed mouth and frown lines furrowed her brow from worry. He reached out and took her hand.

"Are you sure about this?" Rosie asked.

"I think we can get it strategically and be back here before the foul odor leaves the room from Electra's ex-husband."

Maejika shook her head. "Don't be arrogant, Jack. There's going to be a catch...some trap."

Jack turned back to Maejika and passed his finger through her drinking glass without disturbing an ice cube or a bubble.

"Try that again," she challenged. Maejika leveled her gaze on him with defiance.

Jack steeled himself because he was prepared for some effect. He knew Maejika loved to prove her points, but as his finger passed into the glass, he felt a jolt—like electricity—and a ringing in his ears that threatened to split his head apart.

"He's not going to let this be an easy pick up. I'm willing to bet there is some hitch. Gremlorr probably has henchmen or demon

A Spellfire Evening

friends guarding it that the new owner can't see. It would be like him to set it up so that these henchmen steal it back in a few days."

"I have leather packs. Would that insulate me?"

"Maybe."

"A wood box?" James asked.

"Maybe."

"Can you give us *anything* better than a 'maybe'?" Rosie asked.

Maejika hesitated. "A witch on the Good side."

"I'm going with you," Rosie answered.

Maejika lurched forward and grabbed Rosie's arm. "I haven't had the chance to train you, Rosie. With the holidays, our schedules have been so busy! You are going to need more than our once-a-week afternoon teas with Electra! Your Strega heritage doesn't guarantee anything about handling the dagger."

"Well, I'm all you have...unless you have another witch that can travel almost instantaneously and not need scuba gear if we happen to find the dagger on the ocean floor?"

Maejika remained silent.

Jack knew Rosie's determination. She was going.

Sarah said flatly, "I'm going. I'm not staying behind!"

The silence told Jack that everyone felt determined. Even Sarah stopped fanning herself.

* * * *

"All right...backpack?" Jack listed items he thought would be helpful.

"Check!" Rosie answered with a giggle and she tightened the straps over James.

"Tool box?"

"Check!" Sarah answered. She swung around an old wooden toolbox with a heavy round wooden handle. "Is this going to be big enough?"

"I haven't got a clue!" Jack answered. "I've never seen this dagger before, but it can't be that big."

"You got extra traps?" James asked.

"Yeah, why?"

"Don't they have a magical insulation on the handles?"

"To protect me from the Cordrah, sure. Don't know what it would do against anything sinister. Might be like using a fly swatter against the Columbian drug cartel...pointless." Jack held up three

A Spellfire Evening

traps he had used on the Cordrah. “These might be useless. They need baited and spelled again, but they are the best that I have.

“We can take them.” James wound up the extra traps and put them in the tool chest. “Insulation.”

“I’m ready.” Rosie put her hand on her hip. Her formal evening attire had been replaced with blue jeans, a flannel shirt, a leather jacket like Jack’s, and a bandana around her hair.

“Ditto,” Sarah chimed in, also wearing work jeans and a shirt that manifested without a noticeable change.

Jack patted his jacket pockets, including the sleeve slots, looking for his screwdriver.

James nodded his head. He’d also transformed to wearing his trusted Ranger uniform.

Wordlessly, Jack led the group out the front door and locked the shop. In a silent prayer, he hoped they would come back to see the old store because there wouldn’t be anyone left to care for it if they were destroyed like the warnings they’d been given.

Taking Rosie’s hand, he regretted never seeing his daughters grow up except from afar. The swirling mists they began to travel through only offered him time to think of the life cut short by the war. Now, new dangers threatened Spellfire and the new life they were working on together.

“What are you thinking about?” Rosie asked.

“Just thinking, hoping we find this damn dagger, get it back, and have some kind of normal life.”

“Please define *normal*.” Sarah’s sarcasm came out of the mists.

James could only snicker.

Over the eastern coast of Florida, they came through the clouds and began looking around for fancier ships that fit the description of a playboy on a buying holiday.

Jack saw several cruise ships from their vantage point fifteen thousand feet over the ocean, but nothing that appeared to be the toy of a greedy playboy.

Rosie had finally calmed during these trips. After a trip to Australia, she relaxed enough to hold Jack’s hand as if they were simply taking a Sunday stroll. It no longer mattered to her if they were floating in the clouds or the water.

James’ voice interrupted the surveillance of the horizon. “How about we head over toward Bermuda?”

“Sounds good,” Rosie answered.

A Spellfire Evening

Briefly, Jack looked at the eagle on his jacket and began to wonder why there had been a fuss over his promotion. On a mission like this, there were going to be times tonight where each of their skills shined and no member of the party would be more or less important than any other.

* * * *

Travel was terminally slow because Jack kept scouting the area for boats that looked like the play toy of someone—or some demonic type—with too much money.

Soon, the island of Bermuda showed up in the darkness. In addition to the magical glow of the earthly landmass and the mystical region between the island and the mainland, the human lights dotted the coast as New Year parties continued. The participants were oblivious to the supernatural events around them.

“There?” Sarah asked.

Yet another cruise ship floated in the waters. Far too big to be the boat they were looking for, the energy signatures Jack could see were normal.

Already past eight o’clock now because of preparations, to hope that they had found the boat easily was more than Jack could ask.

James pointed out. “That one!”

As they got closer, they found only a fishing boat.

Jack scanned the horizon. The boats he found sparkled with lights and fireworks in the air, but they were much too large to be the boat in question. Others were fishing boats or large transports making their way through the quiet waters. A sneaking suspicion in the back of Jack’s mind questioned whether the minions of the Gremlorr had already sunk the vessel and stolen the dagger back. He continued to look from one boat to another, but he felt the futility of spotting one boat in an ocean.

“We are wasting time!” James grumbled.

“Hang on, I think it’s close. I’m going to try a spell now.” Rosie hesitated while she reached her hand to her head, like she might be shielding her eyes, and uttered, “*Show me true.*”

Fireworks interrupted the silence as rockets shot off the end of a cruise ship.

Rosie turned and scoured the skyline carefully. “There’s a glow from the direction we just came. There’s a spell, so I can’t see everything.”

A Spellfire Evening

“Hold it in your sight.” Jack turned her so she stood directly in front of him, and he pointed his finger outward. “Use my hand to point it out.”

Rosie moved his hand down to a point about four miles in front of them, but Jack couldn’t see anything.

“Is it under water?” James asked.

“No, and my spell is fading.” Rosie’s shoulders sagged.

“Lead us down there, honey. We’ll just hang on to each other tight.”

They floated downward until they were barely skimming over the top of the water in silent flight. Rippling waves passed hypnotically beneath them, but Jack finally looked against the horizon and discovered a dark zone, like a shadow, resting on the water. He pointed it out silently to the others.

“Sum bitch,” James muttered. “We’d have never found it ourselves.”

“Disguised,” Sarah said.

“There are lights on. They can be seen up close, and they don’t even realize that they are spelled. I’ll bet ya!” Rosie snapped her fingers.

“Can you do that spell again?” Sarah asked.

“Not without getting problems. Something messes up the second time I do a spell in a short time. But that shadow is it. I’d bet on it.”

They moved closer until the lights started to come into focus slowly. The normally bright ship lights were visible at only a tenth of their normal power until they got much closer. Had the inhabitants of the boat needed rescue from mundane coast guard units, they’d never find this boat, and it occurred to Jack that this might have been the intention. A plan to scuttle the ship would simply create another Bermuda Triangle legend.

“Let us go first,” James cautioned as they neared the vessel.

“I don’t see anything unusual,” Sarah said as she floated up to the railing. “Are you sure this is it, Rosie?”

Rosie nodded. After a little consideration, she shrugged her shoulder upward.

“We didn’t even see the boat at first,” Jack reminded the group. In spite of his reservations, the boat now appeared normal. On board, a lively small party in a forward lounge echoed around the boat. Loud music thumped and the people danced and drank champagne from tall tulip crystal glasses. A quick count of the participants showed four

A Spellfire Evening

men and nine women. A male bartender stood watch over the rowdy group, and Jack sensed other people were hiding elsewhere on the ship. Jack reminded the others, "Keep your heads down."

Sarah snickered. "Like a mundane could see us outside of Spellfire!"

James added, "Don't take no chances. We ain't ordinary ghosts!"

The group walked around the upper deck of the boat. Their checks showed a captain in the engine room, a waiter or cook in the kitchen, and a young couple in a back bedroom having sex.

"I don't see the dagger!" James said as he looked in another window.

"I don't think he's going to keep it on the dresser!" Sarah said.

Jack motioned for them to come together on the deck. "There are more rooms downstairs. Hell, this boat is bigger than my shop at home. We can all head down. We have a better chance of getting a gook look by sticking together."

Everyone nodded, and Jack led the way into the lower decks.

* * * *

Inside a dark utility room, they focused again and found boxes and crates of varied equipment for the boat and a small desk.

In the distance, the sound of children singing resonated through the hull of the boat.

"Pat-a-cake, Pat-a-cake, Magic Man..."

Jack was disappointed that one or more of the tawdry party participants had brought their children on board the ship.

"Make me a stake as fast as you can!"

Rosie tugged at Jack's hand.

"Blow-w-w...up...the...glow...Fast as you can! Stick it in! Stick it in! Again and again!"

"Do you hear that?" Rosie insisted. "That's not normal!"

"Define *normal*?" Sarah giggled again.

"Shh-hh-h," Jack said. He looked around but didn't find doors out of this room except where the captain accessed it from the upper navigational area. Passing through the wall to an area he believed to be under the main party, he found a small, darkened room with a door on the other side. From the arrangement, Jack guessed it was a fancy closet, but as the others came in the area with him, a low growl came from the corner.

Rosie grabbed his hand tightly.

The growl dissolved into sinister laughter.

A Spellfire Evening

“What in the Sam Hell?” James asked.

“Hello,” a hissing voice rumbled from the shadows.

“Yessss, hello there,” a second voice came. “*He* said bad people would come to try and play.”

“Yesssss...Magic Man said bad people come to take away our fun, so we have to stick it in...stick it in...again and again!”

Before them in an eerie glow, two impish creatures with a sinister energy, like the putrid muck around Gremlorr, started to step closer. A dagger glistened in the hands of the taller creature.

“Careful Jack, they are children!” Rosie said.

“Children, my ass!” James stepped forward

“*Oohh...bad man...say bad word!*”

Jack assessed the creatures, but couldn’t categorize them. Unnatural in even the paranormal realms, it was easy to see the creatures were created, but the idea they started as children made Jack’s stomach turn.

“No, he’s a good man.” Rosie talked to the imps. “Sometimes good people have to do things that seem bad.”

Jack couldn’t stop her from stepping forward.

“You were singing a nice song. Would you sing it for me again?”

The creatures giggled. “Pat-a-cake, Pat-a-cake, Magic Man...”

Rosie was distracting the creatures, but there was no quelling the apprehension that one of the creatures held an eighteen-inch long dagger, bouncing it to the rhythm of the playground song.

Sarah stepped forward and started chanting the rearranged song with Rosie and the creatures.

Typical of Rosie, she laughed with the spirits and then knelt down to their level.

“What’s your names?” Sarah asked.

“The Magic Man says we can get it done...like Lickety-Split!”

The taller creature had the manners of a six-year-old. “I say I’m Lickety, so she’s Split! The Magic Man says we have to keep the stake safe. When bad people come, we have to stick it in...like this!”

In slow motion, the glint of the dagger glistened, and the impish creature buried it into Rosie’s shoulder.

Jack couldn’t move fast enough. The flash of magic blinded him, and Rosie’s scream rang out in his ears. The magical force of an explosion knocked him backwards and kept him from pulling the knife away from the hands of the creature.

A Spellfire Evening

James screamed for Sarah, but he also tumbled backwards into some arranged boxes.

“No!” Sarah admonished. “You hurt the nice lady!”

When Jack scrambled to his feet and looked up, he couldn’t believe his eyes. Sarah stood above the two spirits the way a schoolteacher would reprimand a student that had just thrown a spitball. As Jack’s head cleared, he was shocked to see that the spirits were responding to Sarah, but Rosie’s glow had taken on a sinister swirl over her back and head and the malignant energy spread quickly. It didn’t appear to hurt her, but she struggled against the energy that spread through her body. Maejika’s warning echoed in his ears. *It’s possible to have the dagger harm your spirit.*

“Now! Pull that out!” Sarah insisted. She pointed to Rosie’s shoulder, but her index finger missed touching the dagger by a mere fraction of an inch. With her hand on her hip, Sarah represented an intimidating figure to the short spirits.

Lickety reached over and pulled the dagger out of Rosie. Slowly, the negative energy receded.

Rosie groaned in pain, but held her hand up to stop anyone from touching her. “You’ve done a very good job protecting the stake. The Magic Man sent us to help. Give me the stake.”

Lickety looked at Rosie curiously, but slowly he turned the handle to Rosie’s outstretched hand.

The gems sparkled in the limited light, but as the dagger reached her right hand, a different, brighter light began to glow.

Both creatures watched as Rosie lifted the dagger.

“You can’t do that!” Sarah admonished.

“I can.” Rosie insisted. “I know how!”

Slowly, Rosie brought down the dagger blade, flat, to the shoulders of the spirits. “For the honor of Lickety...and for Split...I declare that you have both done your jobs with excellence!”

The light brightened again to a blinding level. Jack shielded his eyes, but once the glow diminished, he saw two children stood with Rosie and Sarah. Both children wore old-fashioned nightshirts that hung to their knees.

“Sum Bitch!” James said.

The little girl standing next to Sarah giggled. She looked up and added, “He said a bad word again!”

“I know. Isn’t that awful? Do you think we can get him to stop?”

A Spellfire Evening

The little girl giggled. When she nodded her head, little ringlets bobbed over her shoulders.

“What’s your name?” Sarah asked.

“Melissa.” She looked up to the ceiling and added, “My Daddy calls me Sassy, or Sassy Girl.”

“I’m Miss Sarah. How do you do?” Sarah reached out to her little hand in a proper handshake and the girl responded with what looked like a tiny courtesy. “Where’s your Daddy?”

Sassy shrugged her shoulders. “I looked and looked, and I can’t find him anywhere!” She looked like she’d soon cry.

“What’s the last thing you remember?” Rosie asked.

“We went on the boat. We did that a lot. There was some bad weather and Daddy told me to go to bed early. When I woke up I was all wet, and then I went to sleep again when I got bumped on the head! Then I woke up and all I had was my dolly, but I wasn’t cold and anymore.” Melissa held up a small cloth doll made with curly blond hair and a pretty dress.

Sarah covered her mouth, but she couldn’t hide her tears.

“How about you?” Rosie pointed to the young boy. “Were you with your sister?”

“Ewwww! That’s not my sister!” The boy’s face grimaced as if Rosie just suggested that he eat worms.

“What do you remember?” Rosie asked using the distraction to slip the dagger into the wooden toolbox.

“We were in one of the fancy airplanes...a CD three!”

“You mean a big Skytrain?” Jack asked.

“Yeah! Only my Daddy said it funny. He said ‘Dee Cee three’...but I know how to say my letters and I know Cee comes before Dee!”

Jack smiled. The boy was talking about the planes he flew in life.

“What happened?”

“I dunno!” The boy shrugged his shoulders. “I went to sleep. All of a sudden, I woke up and could move around funny. The water feels like the ground, and the fishies play with me. The big fishies blow water on me! I mean the really big fishies!” The boy held up his arms stretched out as far as possible. If Jack wasn’t certain he was talking about whales, he might accuse the boy of making up a fish story. “Then I found *her*, and I let her stay with me so she’d stop crying. Then the Magic Man came and asked us to help.”

A Spellfire Evening

"And you did a very good job, too." Jack wondered if the boy knew that the events he described probably ranged over a period of almost sixty years, rather than ten minutes. "So, what's your name?"

"Jack, Jr., sir," the boy answered promptly. "But my real name is John Michael Antonopoulos, Jr."

"Well, Jack Jr., they call me Jack, too, only my name is John Robert Taylor."

"Sounds easier than *Antonopoulos*." The boy laughed and rolled his eyes with the pronunciation of his last name.

Rosie looked up at Jack with a broad smile. Any vestige of negative energy had finally left her body. "Would you like to come home with us? You can stay our house."

The little girl looked up at Sarah. "Could I stay with you?" She reached out and took Sarah's hand.

Sarah looked at James, who gave an almost imperceptible nod of his head. If it hadn't been for the cowboy hat, Jack wouldn't have thought he moved at all.

"Of course, honey. There's always room at our house!" Sarah smiled.

"Oohh! We should tell the *others*!"

James, standing with his hands in his pockets, stiffened.

"What *others*?" Jack asked. He had a sudden image of a schoolyard of kids that had also been lost in the Bermuda Triangle. How many would want to go home with them?

"Well, the fishies!" The boy up looked at Jack as if he found it incredulous that he didn't know about the fish.

"We have to make it fast, and we can always come back!" Sarah offered.

"We spent a lot of time looking around. I hope we make it in time!" Jack watched warily as the ladies took the hands of the children and led them through the hull of the ship. He and James followed close behind until they stood again over the boat.

"Let's get out of here. I don't want that ass realizing anything is awry until we are far away."

"Miss Sarah! He did it *again*!" Sassy said.

"Yes, he did!" Sarah's fan materialized in her hand again and she swatted James on the shoulder. "I keep telling him that it's bad manners to say such words! Oh, Gosh. I think I am going to need your help with that, Sassy."

A Spellfire Evening

“Okay, I’ll be happy to help!” She raised her doll to her face to cover the giggles.

As the group moved out over the water, the boy stayed with Jack. Soon, he pointed out a mysterious puff of mist that wafted into the air.

“There!” Jack Jr. said excitedly.

As they drew closer, a dolphin leapt into the air and chattered before landing back in the water.

The boy laughed and made a chattering noise back to the dolphin when the slender nose broke the water again. They continued to chatter back and forth, with distant noises that sounded like horns.

“He says we find good people, but we have to come back once in a while because they are going to miss us, and they want to play. He’s going to tell the others.” Jack Jr. looked up with a smile.

Jack could only nod and wave at the dolphin. The gentle animal flipped onto its back in the water and waved goodbye with a fin.

* * * *

Slowly, they turned and moved through the mist. It wasn’t his own son, but now a boy counted on Jack. The weight of such a responsibility felt as daunting as the orders for a new mission. *Is he ever going to grow up? Is he going to be six years old forever?* The first order of business seemed to be getting him checked out by Heather. With any luck, they were going to be able to build a house, because the small apartment over the repair shop was no longer suitable for children. From the looks of this fellow, he needed room to run and play, and the entire State of Texas and the Gulf of Mexico—combined—might not be big enough!

The glow of Spellfire just began to come into view on the horizon when they crossed the coastline of Texas.

“Look...I used to live right down...there!” Sarah explained. “A big storm came and broke up all the big buildings until they were nothing but little splinters! I got bumped on the head just like you, but I’m fine now!”

“What is Spellfire like?” Sassy asked.

“It’s very pretty, and it’s hardly ever cold,” Sarah explained.

“You guys don’t get much snow in the winter?” The little girl sounded like she might start crying.

“Not in Texas, honey,” James explained. “Just once every few years we do. All the kids have fun when they go out and play in it!”

Jack led the way back to the party.

A Spellfire Evening

As they walked into the front door, Maejika spied them immediately. “I was so worried! I thought you’d never make it!”

Sarah brushed passed Jack holding the toolbox. She worked hard to slip it inconspicuously to Maejika with a wink.

The people gathered around them to marvel over the children, and Jack could see from the anxious faces that they’d taken much longer than they originally estimated. “Are we in time?”

Maejika answered, “I hope so!”

“Maejika, I could use a hand with something.” Rosie stepped toward the elder witch. She unzipped her jacket and slipped off the sleeve. It gave Jack the first glimpse of the dark ooze seeping from her shoulder where the spirit stabbed her.

“Oh, damn!” Maejika screamed for help, “Get Heather, now!”

Two fairies flew out of the room as Rosie wavered and began to collapse. Jack scooped her into his arms and laid her gently on the floor, cradling her head in his lap.

Maejika was desperate. “I need to know what happened.”

Jack gave her the details of the struggle just to find the dagger and the challenge to take it away from the minions created of the spirits of Jack Jr. and Sassy.

“Those children need isolated!” Maejika ordered.

“No, they are fine!” Rosie whispered from the strain, “I learned things when the dagger was in my shoulder. I think that’s negative energy from the blade, but it’s not from the blade itself. You have to purify it under a full moon. The counter spell brought back the children, and I could make it sound like a game for them. I didn’t feel anything else from the blade or the kids.”

“I hope you are right. You could have had the worst energy from the blade spread to your spirit.” Maejika admonished.

“In case you haven’t noticed, that’s all I am.” Rosie snickered. “The dagger isn’t evil—it isn’t anything—but in the wrong hands, it’s just as dangerous as the person using it.”

Maejika tried to comfort her. “Hey, that’s right. You learned a major magic principle there, and I’ll bet you didn’t even realize it. Magic is a source of power and energy, and it’s like electricity. It’s good when it runs the toaster, but it’s bad when it shoots through your hand and shocks you.”

“Nice try. Distracting banter isn’t helping.” Rosie groaned when more seepage from the apparent wound drained onto her shirt.

“You just got shocked, relax.”

A Spellfire Evening

"I'm not going to lose you, Rosie." Jack tried to be comforted, but he was terrified, too.

"Didn't we have this conversation about four...or five hours ago?" Rosie looked up at him, but flinched with pain. "I seem to remember the shoe was on the other foot. Relax. I'm not going anywhere. I'm just tired."

Heather Landry, a witch healer and friend, burst through the door. "Where is she?"

Jack could only move away as Heather worked on Rosie. He felt helpless. When he felt the little hand of the boy on his shoulder, Jack looked up into a small heartbroken face.

"Did I do that?" asked the tiny voice.

"No, it wasn't you...at least it wasn't you because you didn't know what you were doing." Jack looked into an innocent expression that was lost in conflicting information.

"I remember what it felt like. She was scary. She looked like a bad lady, but she talked nice. I remembered the Magic Man told us that the people that come to look for the dagger would be scary. I didn't expect her to be like a Mom or anything. She's pretty."

Jack realized they had both been under a spell because of the children's alarming appearance to them. The spell had been in place to make them hate each other and, ultimately, use the dagger against each other.

Jack finally found the courage to say, "It's not your fault."

Behind him, Sarah echoed that to the little girl. "We're working to make sure the man responsible doesn't get away with it."

Heather looked up at Jack, "You guys sure don't make anything easy, but I think she's going to be okay. Her spirit is forcing out the negative energy on its own, which is why she's weak. I want her at my place so I can keep an eye on her."

Jack nodded and looked down at Rosie, who smiled. Through it all, her bright red lipstick never faded.

Heather smiled. "While you're at it, get your deaf English friend back here. I found something in an Egyptian text that might help."

Rosie looked up from the floor. "I told you I'd be all right!"

The End

The Will of Warts
by
Jewel Adams

Dan answers Bess' call, together with Electra they fight to obtain the potion needed to save Spellfire. Dan fears it may cost him...Bess.

www.jeweladams.midnightshowcase.com

The Will of Warts
by
Jewel Adams

Chapter One

Bess could feel the danger. Twirling in place, she tried to find the source. Nothing stood out, yet the evil felt like it kept growing.

Turing about, she searched for Danu'ell and found him in the far corner of the ballroom. He, too, looked as though he sensed the evil invading Electra and Alex's anniversary party. She spoke to him in silence.

Danu'ell, do you feel it?

He turned and looked at her across the room. *Yes, a very evil presence is close. It feels like the fields, Bess. Don't move, I'm coming to you.*

She nodded and stayed perfectly still, listening for any sign of where the evil might be. Thoughts of telling Electra came over her. When she looked at the woman, she could tell that she felt it as well. *Electra, where is the evil coming from?*

Bess...be careful. I don't know, but it is growing in strength.

I am here as well, Electra. Dan placed his protective hold about Bess, glad now that he let her talk him into coming to the party. He'd spent too much time preparing for the war Mother told him would come soon, and right now, Dan felt the war might be beginning.

Stay by her side, Danu'ell. It is close.

I feel it as well. It is all around us now. Bess trembled in his arms, and he tightened his hold on her as if he feared she might disappear.

They both heard Electra's brother speak telepathically to her, and they searched for what none could see and only sense.

A Spellfire Evening

The explosion came from beneath them as the dance floor began to open. A ghostly mist swept through the room from the veranda, surrounding everyone.

“Danu’ell?”

“Don’t move and stay beside me, Bess.” The last thing he would allow was any harm to come to Bess. Over the last month, he knew the war preparations took preference and he failed to seek her out since she left the farm. Her silent call to him to come tonight surprised him. Something made him accept and meet her here.

He could feel the warring heat flooding his body and that of Bess as the ghostly visions of ghouls and dark creatures flew overhead.

They watched as the Gremlorr appeared, threatening Electra and Alex. Electra’s protective shield gave everyone the time they needed to defend themselves against the ghostly attacks.

Danu’ell pushed Bess behind him as he hurled electric balls of fire at their attackers. Bess, too, fought off the demons with her own magical web of roots, hitting one of the demons and tossing and pinning him to the far wall.

“Remind me not to make you angry, Bess.”

She gave a small laugh. “That is mild, my Danu’ell.”

He took her words to heart and felt relieved to know she held no anger for him in her heart. Nary a day went by that he didn’t remember every minute with Bess. Dan discovered that he still possessed love in his heart, and it was all centered on one beautiful nymph called Bess.

No more words were spoken as they battled the Gremlorr’s army. Many of the demons they saw were those of long lost legends, and Dan remembered the Mother’s words of broken trusts. Sadly, he believed this would be the beginning of many battles to come.

Bess stayed behind Danu’ell as he ordered her to do, but she too continued to fight against the evil invading the ballroom. She heard the silent cries of fear from many of the guests and those fighting back. As an Elfen Warrior, Danu’ell fought with a vicious ease that sent a chill through Bess. All she expected and feared she now witnessed from the man she loved. Mother choose her warriors from the best. Bess’s heart knew that Danu’ell had seen many battles in the past. What she feared is what he would now face from the Gremlorr and his army of demons.

As the battle slowed and the demons left the ballroom with the Gremlorr, they both turned in fear over the cry coming from Electra.

A Spellfire Evening

Bess felt Danu'ell's grip tighten around her waist over the discovery that Alex was missing. When she heard that Electra needed help, Bess silently told her she would help search for the Wart of Wills.

Dan joined in with Bess, refusing to let her go alone into the depths of the Caverns beneath Spellfire. Even if Electra went with Bess, Dan intended to be with them to help them find Alex and the Wart of Wills. They might know what they could face from the Gremlorr and his nasty lot, but Dan felt leery about the LifeCore that the Mother spoke to him about and what might happen when they entered its domain.

"The war has begun."

Bess looked up at Danu'ell, her hand raised to touch his hardened jaw. "My heart is with you."

Dan turned his head and kissed Bess's palm. "As mine is with you." He watched her pretty eyes grow large as the meaning of his words sunk in past the chaos in the room. When she stared up into his waiting gaze, he told her what he wanted to say these last weeks. "Yes, Bess, I love you, and I hope you can forgive this stubborn elf for not coming to you sooner and saying what my heart knew."

She raised on tiptoe to capture his lips. In between her kisses, she spoke to him in silence. *I am glad you finally listened to your heart. My own has held you in love since that first day in the nursery.*

Chapter Two

“Do you know the way, Bess?”

“Yes, Electra, I’ve been to the caverns many time to obtain the special boxtin moss that grows on the walls.” Bess took comfort from Danu’ell’s hold on her shoulders, but her heart cried for Electra over Alex. She prayed to the Mother to help him stay safe.

“We will find the Wart of Wills and Alex, Electra.” For a second Dan’s words of assurance cleared the pain in the woman’s eyes, but he knew it wouldn’t last and time was spinning away.

“Whoever touches the Wart of Wills, be sure that you do not touch the spikes.” Electra’s gaze hardened on both Bess and her handsome elf. “One spike holds great danger and is filled with poison that brings evil to the person and perhaps death. The other spike thrusts the warmth of desire and hope in the holder. It won’t kill, but it can divert a person from their path.”

Dan felt that Electra left out a lot of detail in her warning. When he looked at Bess, all he could see was her desire to help her friend. He reminded himself to be on his guard at all times. Dan didn’t believe the Gremlorr and his minions would let them just walk in and take the magical item they needed, especially as it would be used to stop their evil plans. No, he expected quite a fight.

“Danu’ell, is something wrong?” Bess could sense that he shielded his thoughts from her. She knew he loved her, always believed he did and just needed to listen to his heart, but she also believed he would do what he felt he must to protect her. The warrior side of Danu’ell refused to let her intrude into his thoughts.

“We need to hurry.”

Both Bess and Electra nodded their agreement. Electra told them as they started down into the caverns beneath Sinful Sundaes that she would be trying to sense Alex and locate him, while they looked for the Wart of Wills.

A Spellfire Evening

The farther they went into the caverns, the more worried Bess felt. The evil seemed to swirl all around them as if they were being watched.

We are being watched, Bess. Do not leave my side, my love. Dan waited for her to glance back at him, and he didn't move until she nodded her agreement to his request. His Elfen senses were shimmering in warning over the presence they couldn't see.

"I can feel Alex." Electra's whispered words reached them.

Dan spoke to both women. *I think we should speak in silence from here on. There are too many listeners.*

I agree. Electra continued, *The Wart of Wills gives off a silvery glow, Bess.*

I haven't felt it yet, Electra. My senses are too full of the evil all around us.

Electra reached back and squeezed the girl's hand. *Then the Wart should be easy to locate once we come near its power.*

Danu'ell's sword came forth with the speed of an eagle to strike at the snake-like shadow that reached for Bess. Its cry echoed off the cavern walls, and all the shadows seemed to dart for cover.

Bess couldn't catch her breath, and he watched as Electra muttered something and waved her arm. The action stilled Bess's panic, she nodded she was better. He realized that Electra must have used a spell on Bess to calm her, and though he didn't like the use of witchery, he felt grateful for Bess.

The path they turned down took on steep downward slope, making the going dangerous. More than once one or the other of them slid on loose pebbles. Dan worried that they would be attacked where their defense would be at its worse and didn't breathe easy again until they reached the bottom.

They stood in a circular alcove of the cavern. He saw many small holes that he sensed were filled with the demon spawn of the Gremlorr. Various crystals glowed in the darkness, lighting the cavern room.

He stiffened when Bess moved forward as if she were being pulled by something. Dan moved to grab her, but Electra's raised hand stopping him in his tracks with her magic.

She is sensing the Wart of Wills, it has called to her as we hoped it might.

Dan grew furious that both women failed to mention this would happen. Nor did he like the idea of being prevented from reaching

A Spellfire Evening

Bess. *You best let me free of your witchery! We agreed to help you, but I'll not chance Bess's life for you.*

He watched the indecision on Electra's face before she lowered her hand and released him.

I am sorry, Danu'ell.

Nodding to Electra, he moved past her to catch up with Bess, cautious not to touch her. She looked as though she were in a trance, and he knew if she didn't come out of it very soon, he wouldn't stand silent any longer.

Bess jerked with the sudden release from the Wart of Wills. She could visualize its location as it showed itself to her. Before moving forward, she looked back at Danu'ell and smiled. *I am fine. It has shown me where it hides.*

This time as Bess moved toward the far wall, Dan stayed close to her, fearing that the evil would attack in order to stop her.

She halted in front of the dirt wall, staring at one spot. Ever so slowly, a glowing beam of starlight came from Bess and traveled to the place on the dirt wall that she studied. The light seemed to melt away the dirt, and as it disappeared, the wall began to glitter and spark in a silvery light. It took a moment for their eyes to focus past the flood of sparking light, but they all gasped over the glowing ball of silver.

The center looked like that of a horny toad, all bumpy and oozing warts. At each end of the ugly sphere, the two dangerous, large spikes protruded from the mass. There were many smaller spikes that looked just as lethal and Dan wondered what ill would befall the person that touched them.

When Bess moved to go to the sphere the ground began to shake until the violence nearly knocked them off their feet. Dan drew his sword to fight off the horde of dark creatures coming out of the shadows. Many years passed since Dan called on his warrior skills.

Now was the time...

Chapter Three

Swoosh. The blade cut through the air, slicing through another dark being. Growls and screams bounced off the dank walls, and still the beasts came forward to stop them from reaching the Wart of Wills. Another troll-like being raced at the fallen Bess. Dan stepped in front of her, thrusting his sword through the ugly, smelly demon. As it rolled away, he reached down, grabbed Bess, and helped her to her feet. “Are you all right?”

“Yes, look out!”

Above them, an evil ghost lunged toward them at top speed. Dan knew his sword would do little to stop it. A flash of fiery webs flew past him into the ghost, vaporizing the demon. He threw Bess a smile before they both started fighting again, trying to give Electra time to reach the Wart of Wills.

The ground made another great groan and heaved beneath their feet. Bess and Dan put their backs together to help hold each other up as they fought the Gremlorr’s beasts. They both spun about over Electra’s cry of alarm...

“On no!” Bess cried out seeing the spike sticking through Electra’s palm. She wanted to rush to her friend, but the demons kept coming.

Bess shot a whip of fire through another ghoul that tried to go around her and reach Electra. Danu’ell swung his sword around his head in a wide circle, cutting and slicing through one dark being after another. He looked wild and untamed, strong beyond thought as he killed everything that came near them. Bess’s pride swelled for the man that held her heart.

When the beasts finally stopped attacking, Bess and Dan were standing on each side of Electra. Bess bent down to help her pull the wart spike from her hand. The open wound instantly closed on its own, but they could both see the change flowing through Electra and knew the Wart of Wills had shot the poison of evil into Electra.

“There must be something I can do, Electra?”

A Spellfire Evening

"No, Bess. You need to take this to Maejika as fast as you can." Electra passed the other spiked end of the sphere to Bess, but Dan stepped forward.

"I'll carry it." Both women looked from him to each other and knew he wouldn't allow any arguments. Dan pulled his leather cape off and draped it over his hands as Electra placed the Wart of Wills in its folds. Bess helped him carefully wrap the sphere and secure it to Dan's belt. "It will be safe."

Electra gave them both a slight smile. "I know it will. I must continue." She pointed to the tunnel opening. "I can feel Alex is there."

"But you will need help..." Bess looked from Dan to Electra.

"No, Bess, she must go alone. We need to get the sphere back for the spell."

Dan's hold on Bess's arm kept her from trying to follow Electra. "Dan, can she make it? The poison..."

"I'm not sure, but we need to get this back to save Spellfire. Electra wants this, Bess."

Reluctantly, they started back the way they had come. Bess looked back to see Electra enter the tunnel. She prayed her friend would survive and find her love. "Be safe."

* * * *

Bess felt near exhausted by the time they reached the entrance to Sinful. They fought every step of the way out of the caverns. She would have fallen if it weren't for the hold Danu'ell kept around her waist.

The Wart of Wills still hung from his belt, she could see it glowing through the leather. "We must hurry Danu'ell."

"I don't think they will follow us beyond this point, Bess. Are you all right?"

"I need to replenish my strength, but it will have to wait."

He pulled her closer. She needed to reach her chestnut tree at the nursery. Once they handed the sphere over to Maejika, he would get her back to her tree. Her skin had lost its shine and now carried a dull pale green hue that lacked the shimmer of life Bess usually carried.

As soon as they left Sinful Sundaes, stepping out into the town square, they halted. The town looked deserted. Not a leaf stirred through the streets nor a bird sang. Dan felt Bess's fingers tighten around his. "Come on, Bess. The sooner we get this to Havoc House and Maejika the better."

A Spellfire Evening

Dan was thankful that he left Amanda with Zechariah and Heather at their cabin. He wouldn't want her to see the town like this, he hoped she never would.

He could feel the strength leaving Bess, and he picked her up, continuing to run toward the hotel. When they entered and didn't see anyone, he like Bess feared they might be too late. "Do you sense any evil, Bess?"

"Not like before, more like it is waiting."

Chapter Four

The murmur of voices finally reached them as they drew closer to the ballroom. The knowledge they had arrived at their destination seemed to help give them that needed boost of energy.

Dan carefully lowered Bess's feet to the floor and steadied her as she wanted to stand on her own.

She smiled up at his concerned gaze. "I'm okay, honest."

Before he took his hands off her shoulders, he pulled her to him. His lips felt like heaven, Bess lost herself to his mastering caress. *My sweet, sweet Bess, you are so brave.*

He kissed her deeper, driving into her mouth as he wanted to drive himself into her heated sex. Dan forced himself to pull back, resting his forehead to hers as they both caught their breath. "I never want to see you in that kind of danger again, Bess. My heart can't take the pressure."

She knew he couldn't see the smile his admission brought as her heart soared. "I will try not to worry you again, my love."

His lips pressed into her brow as his hands held her head. Pulling back, he tilted her face up to his. "Good. I want to spend my life with you, Bess. Will you have this wayward elf?"

"With all my heart, Danu'ell, all my heart."

Their lips sealed the vow.

"Come, Bess, let us give this to Maejika."

They entered the ballroom, neither of them noticing how much damage had truly been done to the room. Thankfully, Maejika and the others were all present and standing about a table.

Dan carefully removed the sphere from his belt. "This is the Wart of Wills. Be very careful how you handle it. Electra has already suffered the poison from the darkened spike. The other could be just as devastating." With great care he set it on the table before Maejika and hoped she knew what she doing.

A Spellfire Evening

“Thank you both.” Maejika looked past Dan to the ailing Bess. “Dan you need to see to Bess. We will be fine. I’ve established a protective shield, it is keeping them out for now.”

Dan nodded. “If you need me, call me on this.” He handed her a small wooden whistle. “Only I can hear its call, Maejika.”

Without another word, Dan turned and whisked Bess up in his arms. She rested her head against his shoulder. Her hold felt very weak, he didn’t wait any longer to get her to the nursery and her life-giving chestnut tree.

Maejika watched for a moment as everything littering the room swirled up in the wake of the power of the man who had just left. She looked to the whistle and closed her hand about it before putting it in her pocket. Turning back to the table, she focused on the spell she needed to work, praying for the power she needed.

* * * *

“Bess, Bess, my love, please wake up.” Dan held her head out of the rushing creek bed at the base of the chestnut tree. He felt thankful for the color started to return to her, but it still lacked the vitality she carried.

“You fought like an Elfen Warrior my love. I couldn’t be prouder of you.”

Still, her precious eyes remained closed. He wondered if she would recuperate.

“Mother, I need her.” Dan rarely asked for help from anyone, but he felt desperate. To find Bess and lose her would be the cruelest blow to his life. One he would never survive.

The glow that began to appear in front of him, on the bank of the creek, slowly formed into the image Dan remembered well from over the years. “Mother...”

She smiled at Danu’ell then put her attention on the woman in his arms. “She fought well, Danu’ell.”

“Yes, Mother.”

He didn’t move as the Mother reached out to run her hands over Bess.

“Can you help her?”

The mother smiled over his soft-spoken request. “Have faith, my warrior.”

Bess’s body seemed to become incased in a glowing cloud of light within his arms.

A Spellfire Evening

“She will survive, Danu’ell. Do not lose what you have just found. She, too, needs you.”

Without another word, the Mother disappeared before him. He watched as the glowing cloud around Bess slowly dissipated, and as it did, the life flowed through her.

It wasn’t long before her eyes began to blink and focus on him. She smiled up at his own smile of love for her.

“What happened, Danu’ell? I feel...funny.”

“You were worn out from the battles.”

“Yes, I remember, but...”

“Hush, love, do you feel all right?”

“Yes, Danu’ell.”

He lifted her out of the water and to his chest. His lips covered the warm essence of hers, and Dan knew he never felt so grateful. *Thank you, Mother, thank you.*

When he pulled back, he smiled at the questioning look she gave him as her hand raised to cup his cheek.

“Let’s go home, Bess.”

“Yes, Danu’ell, my love.”

The End

Shifting Passions
by
Leanne Strange

Harpy, Derek, Adam, and Tris must find the Heart of Knowledge before the clock strikes midnight. Will lurking dangers keep them from achieving their goal and helping to save Spellfire from evil?

<http://www.laniaames.com/leanne/leannestrangle.html>

**Leanne Strange is the
writing team of...**

Mae Powers
www.maepowers.com

and

Lani Aames
www.laniaames.com

Shifting Passions
by
Leanne Strange

Chapter One

“The party supplies are all put away,” Adam Spellfire called from inside the huge walk-in pantry connected to the Havoc House kitchen.

Tristine Havoc Spellfire looked up from the list of things to do to find her husband emerge with a bag of Pluto Pretzels and stuff three of the salty twists into his mouth. Everyone in Spellfire loved Pluto Pretzels, and the stores always ran out long before the next shipment arrived. Ever since Adam convinced the distributor, an alien humanoid from the planet Pluto who came to town on a regular basis, to allow him to place a monthly order to keep him in stock, Adam had been much easier to live with.

Tris handed the list to Harpy Spellfire and plucked the bag from Adam's big hands. She heard Harpy stifle a giggle.

“Wait!” Adam snatched back the bag. “I'm hungry.”

“You're always hungry,” Tris complained good-naturedly and smiled at the man she loved.

“Just like a shifter,” Harpy said with a laugh.

Adam pulled a frown. “Hey, I resemble that remark.”

The back door opened and the air sorcerer Derek Spellfire, Harpy's husband as well as Adam's cousin, walked in. “I put the van in the garage and out of the way.”

“Thanks, Derek,” Tris said.

“No problem.” Derek took the bag from Adam and tossed a few pretzels into his mouth.

Adam emitted a low, menacing growl deep in his throat. Even though Derek ignored him, Tris entwined her arm with her husband's. Adam growled again, and Tris felt it vibrate throughout his body. She

traced her fingertips along his arm.

Adam swung his gaze from Derek to her. His eyes changed from annoyance to ardor and glowed deep crimson.

Tris ran her tongue over her lips. The sound her husband made when threatened and the reddening of his eyes turned her on. She wished she had time to lead him to one of the empty rooms upstairs and have her way with him. Maybe if Derek annoyed him enough, Adam would shift. Then he could have his demon way with her. Her nipples tingled and tightened at the thought.

But Harpy and Derek were here and the four of them had much to do to prepare for Electra and Alex's first anniversary party. She sighed and patted Adam's arm. "You two stop fighting over the Pluto Pretzels. There'll be plenty to eat tonight at the party."

"It takes a lot of calories and carbs to energize a demvir," Adam crammed a couple more pretzels into his mouth. "A shifter needs more food than average to be able to transmogrify from one state to another and back again."

"Don't I know it," Harpy muttered under her breath.

Tris watched Harpy turn red in embarrassment when she realized she'd spoken loud enough for Tris and Adam to hear. She and Harpy had never been friends. Over the years, Harpy had acted almost hostile toward Tris whenever they chanced to meet until Harpy and Derek rekindled their romance and married the previous Valentine's Day. As far as Tris knew, she'd never done anything to Harpy.

Now, having married Spellfire cousins who were also friends, she and Harpy found themselves associating more and more. Harpy seemed to go out of her way to be extra nice to Tris. Many times, Tris thought of asking her why, but always decided to leave well enough alone. No need to chance stirring up Harpy's earlier antagonism no matter what had caused it.

Derek put his arm around his wife. "You might as well tell them. They'll find out sooner or later anyway."

Harpy nodded. "You both know I'm half harpy and half human, and even though I have wings I was never able to fly – until Derek gave me some of his wind while he was stuck in elemental air form."

Adam remained silent, but Tris nodded. "You told us what happened at the Valentine's Day picnic. When Derek gave you his wind, you were able to fly and he turned back into his human self."

Harpy looked up at Derek and smiled. "Well, ever since then, I sometimes shift into a harpy, too. The witch doctor said it's rare for a

A Spellfire Evening

half-harpy to be able to shift into harpy form.”

“That’s wonderful...” Tris began, but trailed off at Harpy’s and Derek’s serious expressions. “Isn’t it?”

“The thing is,” Harpy explained, “it happens out of the blue. I never know when or where. I’ve been lucky it hasn’t happened around normal folks or at other inconvenient times.”

“But there’s good news,” Derek said encouragingly. “It’s taken her months, but she’s able to shift when she wants to now.”

“Yeah,” Harpy agreed, but frowned. “I’m still nowhere near controlling the spontaneous shifting, though.”

“She’s working hard on it,” Derek added.

Tris reached out and squeezed Harpy’s hand. “Well, that *is* wonderful. Sounds like it will take time and work, but I’m sure you’ll eventually learn to control it.”

“Thanks, Tris,” Harpy murmured. Then she laughed. “So if you turn around and see a hag with wings and claws for hands and feet, it’ll just be me.”

Derek laughed, but Tris saw the worry in his gold-flecked green eyes. He placed a tender kiss at Harpy’s temple, amid her tumultuous blond curls, before turning her loose.

Tris looked at Adam, and they exchanged secret lovers’ smiles. It was nice to see Harpy and Derek experience the same kind of devoted love she and Adam shared.

“While we’re all here, how about the tour you’ve been promising Harpy and me? The museum was finished last week, wasn’t it?” Derek asked.

“Yes, all the construction is done,” Tris answered. “Not all of the artifacts are in place because some of the donations haven’t arrived yet. Did Adam tell you he’s going to have a museum built at Spellfire House, too?”

Derek nodded. “I think it’s a great idea to preserve the history of the town of Spellfire. The wax museum on the other side of town is limited to wax replicas of historical figures and some odds and ends that no one knows the history of.”

“Electra and Maejika Maelstrom are donating family mementoes to both museums,” Tris announced.

Derek turned to Tris. “Electra brought some over already, didn’t she?”

When Tris nodded, Harpy’s blue eyes sparkled in anticipation. “We’re finally going to clean out the basement under Sinful Sundaes.

A Spellfire Evening

I haven't been down there since the time I tripped over an ancient coffin.”

Adam took the almost empty pretzel bag from Derek. “Electra has a coffin in her basement?”

Derek laughed and scored a handful of pretzels before Adam pulled the bag out of his reach. “Electra has all kinds of weird stuff in that damp, dark place. Now, let's get this tour started.”

Tris glanced at her watch. “We'll have to make it quick. We don't have much time before we have to start preparations for the party.”

“Tris came up with a great setup. I'll be using the same design in the Spellfire House attic.” Adam put the last of the Pluto Pretzels into his mouth and tossed the empty bag into the trash before they left the kitchen.

At the top of the fourth flight of stairs, Tris opened the double doors to the former dusty attic.

Derek let out a whistle as he looked around. “Wow, it sure is different than when your cousin Haydn and I hung around up here when we were kids. It was unfinished rafters and crammed with trunks, broken furniture, and musty books.”

“It's awesome, Tris,” Harpy praised.

Tris waited while Harpy and Derek looked at the display cases, shelves, and tables. Tris had gone through every one of those trunks and recovered a number of Havoc family treasures to display. When the rest of the donations came in from the various founding families of Spellfire, the museum would be a treasure trove of the history of the town and its people. Everyone had been so generous with their promised donations that Adam decided to construct a similar museum in the attic at Spellfire House to catch the overflow.

Harpy suddenly made a sound of disgust. “Whew, what's that smell?”

Tris watched Harpy follow her nose to one narrow end of the attic and stop.

Adam sniffed the air. “I smell it, too. I don't remember that from when I was up here last month.”

“I don't smell anything,” Derek said.

“Neither do I,” Tris said. “But shifters have a keener sense of smell than us non-shifters.”

Tris, Adam, and Derek joined Harpy in front of several shelves filled with shadow boxes.

“I think it's coming from this.” Harpy picked up a shadow box

A Spellfire Evening

painted black and decorated in silver. She put it to her nose. "It smells burnt, but there's another, stronger odor I can't identify."

Tris took the box from her. Inside the frame lay a piece of charred woody stem and beside it, a small, dried plant with gray, fuzzy fern-like leaves. Tris grinned mischievously. "That's the hearthorn or, as we witches call it, the Heart of Knowledge."

Adam growled. "That's not what I think it is, is it?"

"Yes, it's what my great-great-grandmother Hermione Havoc used to bind the curse she placed on the Spellfire men." Tris replaced the shadow box on the table. "Not to worry, though. Only a few as powerful as Electra, Maejika, or Frightful Frieda have the ability to use it. And this one is harmless. Once used in a spell, the same piece can't be used again."

"Isn't the Shifting Swamp the only place it grows?" Harpy asked.

Tris nodded. "But don't let the name of the swamp fool you. The swamp gas is lethal to shifters. The reason it's called the Shifting Swamp is because it randomly moves from one location to another. You enter it in one place then when you leave, you might find yourself miles away."

"I drifted over it once," Derek said.

"Oh, Derek!" Harpy cried out. "The gas could have killed you."

"Don't worry, baby. Technically, I'm not a shifter like you and Adam. I don't transmogrify when I turn into air form. I disseminate." Derek grew quiet then said. "I saw something in middle of the swamp, something I've never seen before and hope to never see again."

Tris looked at her watch again. "Well, it's time to call a halt to this tour. We have a lot to do to get ready for the party."

The others went ahead down the stairs while Tris secured the double doors. An icy chill raced up her spine, and she shivered, rubbing her arms. She hoped it wasn't a bad omen for the party, but she couldn't shake the feeling the evening would not go as smoothly as planned.

Chapter Two

The nubs of Harpy's wings itched as she walked through the expansive gardens of Havoc House. The weather wasn't too bad for New Year's Eve. Overhead, a zillion stars twinkled against a clear midnight blue sky, oblivious to the chaos that had just occurred inside Havoc House.

Unfortunately, itchy nubs weren't a sign of spontaneous shifting. *Nothing* ever preceded the shift – no tingle, no tremble, no itching, nothing to help her identify what was happening so she could try to stop it.

One second, she went about her business on two feet and the next second, she tromped around on claws, scratching up the hardwood floors with her wings flapping like crazy.

Once, it happened while she and Derek made love. He *said* he didn't mind, but the scars on his back still hadn't faded. How could he *not* mind! When she shifted, she looked like some bizarre, twisted version of herself with claws for hands and feet, long wild hair, and a mouthful of sharp teeth.

Harpy folded her arms around herself and hugged. The night air was chilly, and she had forgotten her wrap. The itchy nubs meant she was either nervous or horny. Or both, she thought as Derek approached her. His bow tie hung undone, and he'd loosened his collar. With his rumpled dark blonde hair, he looked good enough to eat.

"I brought your wrap." Derek set aside a platter piled with hors d'oeuvres on a nearby table and draped the long cape over her shoulders.

The shiny sapphire blue cape matched her backless fancy dress gown. Derek said the jewel tone ensemble matched the color of her eyes and made them sparkle. Her husband looked spiffy in his tux, too.

A Spellfire Evening

"Are you nervous?" Derek asked and rubbed her wing nubs, somewhat relieving the itch.

"A little." She smiled. Derek knew her so well. She closed her eyes and enjoyed his touch.

"I brought a platter of goodies from the kitchen, too. You haven't eaten much all day, and you need to build up your strength to shift."

Harpy nodded and allowed Derek to seat her in a garden chair and feed her a yummy concoction of shrimp, cream cheese, and chives on a buttery cracker. Before she finished it, Adam had joined them with his own plate of food.

"Tris should be out in a minute," Adam explained. "She has to gather her supplies. She found the spell she needs in her great-great-grandmother's grimoire. She wants to cast the summoning spell out here where it's quiet. That's why she asked us to meet her here in the garden."

Adam gobbled his food, but Derek fussed over Harpy, pressing her to eat more. She grew a little irritated with him, but didn't say anything. She knew he worried about her and only wanted to ensure she had enough fuel to make shifting easy. There would be more than enough to contend with without having to be concerned with her energy level.

By the time Adam finished off his plate of food and helped himself to some of Harpy's, Tris joined them.

Adam laughed when he saw her. "What's that?"

Tris, her sable hair pinned into a intricate twist at the back of her head, still wore her shimmering silver gown that clung to her curvy figure in pleated folds drawn up to a diamond brooch pinned between her breasts. She carried a basket and a well-worn leather-bound book, but Harpy didn't think Adam's question referred to those items. A silver strap crossed her chest, and the ragged bristles of a broom stuck in a quiver on her back showed above her right shoulder.

"We don't have time for me to scry for the swamp then travel to it. I found the spell in Hermione Havoc's grimoire and, luckily, have all the ingredients. The spell will summon the swamp to us. I couldn't find a spell to stabilize it, and I don't have the time to create one. So we have to be prepared. When we leave the swamp, Harpy and Derek can fly the hearthorn back here to Electra, and you and I can return on my broom."

"Both of us on that flimsy thing?" Adam's naturally deep voice almost squeaked on the question.

A Spellfire Evening

Tris laughed. "What? My big, strong demon shifter is scared to fly?"

"If I were meant to fly, I'd have wings like Harpy," he grumbled. "But that thing doesn't even look sturdy enough to hold you alone."

"Don't worry. Old Edsel will do just fine."

Adam cocked an eyebrow. "You named your broom Edsel?"

"Of course not." Tris snorted. "He told me his name when I received him as a gift for passing Flying Basics 101 with a perfect score."

"Couldn't you trade him in for a newer, *larger* model?" Adam still eyed the broom warily.

"No," Tris snapped. "Edsel has never failed me, and he won't this time."

"Well...if you're sure..." Adam conceded.

To Harpy, he still sounded skeptical.

Then he ran his finger down the strap that crossed over Tris's shoulder and between her breasts. "I like this Warrior Witch look."

He growled softly and leaned in to whisper into his wife's ear. Tris blushed a pretty shade of pink.

Harpy turned away to give them their privacy, and Derek stuffed another hors d'oeuvre into her mouth. She pushed the platter across the table.

"I've had enough. Really, Derek, I couldn't eat another bite."

He laid his hand on her cheek and caressed her with his thumb. "I just want to make sure you don't have any problems shifting."

"I know, but you don't have to worry about me. I'm fine."

"I love you, Harpy. I'll always worry about you."

She smiled. "I love you, too."

Tris and Adam joined them, and Tris set the book and basket on the table. She brought out a small cast iron cauldron and a glass container of Witch Water, bottled in Spellfire from a local spring.

"Is there anything we can do to help?" Harpy asked.

"Thanks, but I have all the ingredients, and Adam will read the instructions aloud. I just need the time and space to concentrate. I've never cast this spell before, and I want to do it right the first time."

"Of course." Harpy stood with Derek beside her. "If you do need us for anything, just holler."

Tris nodded absently, already distracted by the spell she had to work. "Adam, could you start a fire in the brazier while I go over the spell again."

A Spellfire Evening

"Sure thing." Adam raked the last of the hors d'oeuvres from the platter and ate as he strode to the fire pit.

"C'mon, Harpy, let's get out of Tris's way so she can do her thing." He took Harpy's hand, leading her from the patio and deeper into the garden.

* * * *

Paper lanterns strung along the maze of paths lighted their way throughout the garden and illuminated the flora. On the last day of December, they should have encountered dead leaves and withered stalks with only the occasional evergreen adding a splash of color. So far, Harpy saw only lush, leafy foliage, many sporting blooms and perfuming the air with exotic scents. As with most things in Spellfire, the Havoc garden followed its own rules.

Harpy breathed deeply as Derek's fingers entwined with hers. He led and she followed. He seemed to have a certain destination in mind, but she had no idea where. She'd never visited the Havoc garden before.

Fragrances assaulted her heightened sense of smell from all sides. Just as she detected the hearthorn in the Havoc Museum, she now distinguished one flower scent from another and knew from which direction each came. She smelled lilac and orchid, jasmine and gardenia, each more intoxicating than the next. Roses – pink and red, yellow and white – and knew their color by their scent.

They walked deeper into the garden until the paths changed from paved to dirt and then became grassy and less worn. She wondered why lanterns had been placed in this remote area.

Before she could repeat her thought aloud to Derek, he stopped and turned to her.

"Wait right here. I won't be but a second." He gave her a quick kiss then disappeared around a turn in the path.

Not frightened to be left alone, Harpy crossed her arms and waited. What was Derek up to? Less than a minute later, he reappeared.

"Sorry, baby, but I wanted to make sure no one else was around."

"I don't know what you're doing, but can't it wait? Tris or Adam could call us any second."

"Don't worry," he said. "The spell will take a while to manifest. We have time."

"Time for what?"

He wagged his eyebrows at her. "You'll see."

A Spellfire Evening

He took her hand again and led her around the turn in the path. Just beyond, the garden gave way to a small clearing with a large tree in the center. Long, supple limbs draped down to touch the ground.

“Do you know what that is?” Derek asked with a devilish grin.

“Well, I'm not a botanist,” Harpy drawled, “but I'm pretty sure it's a weeping willow.”

“Nope,” Derek shook his head. “It's a whoopee willow.”

Harpy's eyes widened. A whoopee willow looked exactly like an ordinary willow, but had been infused with special magical properties. Just by looking at it, she couldn't tell the difference. “Are you sure? I've heard about them, but I've never seen one.”

“Tris's cousin Haydn Havoc showed it to me one summer.” Derek spun her around and into his arms. Placing feathery kisses at her temple and across her cheek, he murmured, “Want to try it out?”

She turned her head and caught his mouth with hers, slanting her lips over his. Sweet desire sparkled within, and she arched toward him. The bulge of his erection pressed to her belly, seeking entry elsewhere, and his hands crept between their bodies.

“Yes, oh, yes.” Harpy moaned into his mouth then she pulled away abruptly. “I want to, but we don't have time.”

“I think we do,” Derek said between kisses. “I've seen Electra work old spells. Sometimes it takes her hours.”

“Oh, no! We have to get the hearthorn sooner than that.”

“Tris has Adam's help. I'm sure it won't take that long.” He kissed her again. “And if you're as hot for me as I am for you, it won't take us long either.”

Harpy's teeth worried her lip. It would be fun to make whoopee in the willow. And she was definitely hot for her husband. She looked into Derek's gold-flecked green eyes. “Should we be having fun when the fates of Spellfire and Alex depend on us?”

He nuzzled her ear. “Both of us have to enter the Shifting Swamp, and it's going to be dangerous. We don't know what's going to happen or if we'll even succeed. We need this time alone, baby, because...”

He cut himself off short. Harpy swallowed hard then finished his thought. “Because one or both of us might not make it back.”

Derek didn't say anything. Instead, he swept her into his arms and twirled into a whirlwind, enclosing her in a soft cushion of air. They spun across the clearing and underneath the hanging branches. At the base of the whoopee willow, Derek returned to his corporeal self.

A Spellfire Evening

When he let Harpy slide out of his hold, he leaned her back against the tree. She expected rough bark and ungiving hard wood, but the multiple limbs that grew from the main trunk softened and molded around her body. Derek moved in closer, pulling up her dress until it bunched at her waist.

He pushed her panties down until they fell around her ankles, and she stepped out of them. He placed one of his hands at her mound, his fingers raking through her curls. When they plunged into her slick entrance and his thumb touched her swollen clit, the sparkles of her desire turned into fireworks of passion and consumed her. She writhed into his exploration, a deep moan escaping her parted lips. She shifted her feet apart to open wider for him, and her hips thrust forward, the pliable tree limbs at her back cushioning her.

Her searching hands found the waistband of Derek's trousers and unfastened his belt, button, and zipper. Dipping inside, her fingers curled around his rigid cock, and she pulled it free from the restraints of his clothing. Derek groaned as she stroked firmly up and down, increasing the heat radiating from his long shaft. He slowly pumped into her grip, and his fingers inside her pussy matched the rhythm.

Their bodies moved in unison, and Harpy's hips rose higher with each thrust. She teetered at the edge of orgasm when something creeping along her right arm broke her concentration. Jerking back, she cried out and completely dismantled their sexual play.

Derek chuckled. "It's only the tree. That's part of the magic."

Harpy looked at her arm. Several of the thin, draping willow branches twined around from wrist to elbow. Others began easing around her left wrist and both ankles. "What – "

"Shhh," Derek whispered. "Just close your eyes. The tree knows what we want."

Harpy trusted magic as much as she trusted Derek. She closed her eyes and relaxed, letting the tree and Derek work their magic. The supple branches lifted her off her feet and moved her into a horizontal position while the larger limbs at her back molded to her and flexed to support her.

She felt Derek move into the space between her thighs. The willow branches lifted her legs until Derek was in place. His hands slid around her butt cheeks and squeezed. When his mouth touched her core, she arched into him.

His tongue teased her outer lips with long, even strokes then trailed to her inner lips and gave them the same loving attention.

A Spellfire Evening

Harpy wanted to fist her hands into his hair and guide him to the tingling, thrumming nub he ignored, but the willow branches bound her and prevented her from touching him.

Her hips twisted from side to side against his mouth as he lapped at her slit, the tip of his tongue finally nudging her clit. Bucking against him, the first deep sensations of orgasm sizzled within her. Harpy shuddered as the fireworks ignited, sending flares of heat licking throughout her body.

She tossed back her head and cried out in pleasure. Derek's lips kissed his way over her mound and across her belly, and his hands slid around her thighs to rest at her waist.

Opening her eyes, she gazed at her beloved husband. She wanted to draw him to her and put her arms around him, but the tree didn't release her to do so. Did she want the excitement and exhilaration of being bound more?

The tree branches lowered her bottom half until her pussy was even with Derek's erection. She could see his cock now – long, thick, and pointing up. Derek's hands went to her hips and gripped tightly. He aimed his cock at her wet center and plunged in deep.

He filled her, and she flexed to take him in even deeper. He groaned hoarsely, and his eyes closed. Using her hips, he swung her body to and fro and pumped into her. She thought the first time had depleted her, but Derek's smooth rhythm lighted her inner fireworks again. By the time his even strokes turned to jerked thrusts and his breathing echoed raggedly beneath the canopied tree, she was ready to shoot into the heavens with him.

His last, hard ram sent an array of flaming rockets off inside her, screaming to the tips of her fingers and toes. Derek's body stiffened against her, and they voiced their release and completion at the same time.

As Derek bent over her, she felt the willow limbs slither off her arms and legs, and she could hold him at last.

“Oh, Derek,” she murmured into his ear. “I love you.”

“I love you, too, baby,” he whispered between gasps and placed a kiss at her throat. “Did you enjoy the whoopee willow?”

“Oh, yes.” She nodded then giggled. “We'll have to see about getting one of our own.”

“Sounds like a great idea,” Derek agreed. “Wait. Did you hear that?”

Harpy held her breath and listened. A voice in the distance called

A Spellfire Evening

their names – Adam. That meant Tris had finished the spell and it was time to face the Shifting Swamp and whatever lay in wait inside.

“Time to go,” Derek said and helped her slide from the tree. He held her panties as she stepped into them. Then she helped him fasten his trousers and belt.

Adam called again. Derek answered and took Harpy's hand. Silently, they crossed the clearing to join Adam.

Chapter Three

When Harpy, along with Derek and Adam, reached the patio, Adam turned and put a finger to his lips. Harpy waited with the two men and watched. Tris hadn't quite finished the spell to summon the Shifting Swamp.

The glow from the fire in the brazier cast a golden aura around the witch. Tris held out her hands, palms down with fingers spread wide, and moved them in a mystical pattern above the bubbling brew in the cauldron. She stared at the garden beyond, and Harpy heard her murmur a series of words over and over. Not a witch or sorceress, Harpy didn't understand the language Tris spoke, but she recognized it as a magical incantation.

The plan they hastily concocted after volunteering to retrieve the hearthorn seemed simple at the time. Tris would summon the Shifting Swamp and stabilize it as well as she could. Derek, in air form, would filter and blow the lethal gases away while Harpy and Adam, as harpy and demvir, found the hearthorn and fended off any creatures they encountered.

Now, with the spell only moments away from manifestation, self-doubts plagued Harpy. She'd been able to control her shifting only a few months. What if she panicked and couldn't do it when the time came? As a demvir, Adam could sniff out the hearthorn, but she proved in the Havoc attic that she could find it more easily.

Harpy reached out for Derek's hand. He gave her a reassuring squeeze. Even though neither of them had voiced her fear, he understood.

Then the garden drew her attention. Or, more accurately, the air space between Tris and the garden. Beyond it, the bank of foliage shimmered and blurred like she was looking through heat waves on a hot summer day. Leaves began to melt and trees to disfigure, and the exotic perfumes of flowers gave way to the fetid stench of decay and rot until the beautiful Havoc garden appeared to turn into the

A Spellfire Evening

merciless Shifting Swamp.

Tris halted her spell casting and dropped her hands away from the cauldron. She grabbed her basket and started for the swamp.

“Come on, we have to hurry before it shifts away,” she called over her shoulder and stepped into the shimmer.

On the other side, Tris became distorted and twisted. Adam growled and hurried after her.

“Let's go, baby,” Derek urged and tugged Harpy's hand.

Harpy nodded, and side by side, they followed Adam into the swamp. On the other side, Harpy immediately turned around, but saw nothing of the patio, the fire pit, or Havoc House. The dark, dank swamp surrounded them on all sides.

Tris sat on a fallen log and started digging through her basket. “I'll try to find a way to stabilize the swamp, but I don't think I'll be able to manage a spell this quickly. Y'all get going. The longer it takes, the more likely we'll be farther away from Spellfire when we leave the swamp.”

Adam went to her and began, “Tris, I – “

She kissed him to cut him off. “We don't have time, Adam. I'll be fine. I'm staying right here until you three get back. I have Edsel if I need to make a quick getaway. Now, go ahead and shift.”

Adam growled deep within his chest, the sound reverberating through the air so that Harpy felt it within her bones. He removed his shoes and evening clothes, down to his black boxer briefs, and handed them to Tris. He stood still, a scowl crossing his face as his horns erupted, one at each temple, and his teeth turned to pointed fangs. His muscles grew larger and tauter, and his skin changed to a deep, dusky red. His eyes glowed like garnets on fire.

As soon as Adam finished, Derek kissed Harpy, then spun away from her, disseminating into his air form.

Derek wafted past her ear and whispered, “It's all right, baby. You can do it.”

Adam and Tris watched her expectantly. Harpy had to do her part to help Electra save her husband Alex and the entire town of Spellfire. She closed her eyes.

She imagined herself as a harpy, how she looked the first time she spontaneously shifted – the talons, the claws, the wicked sharp teeth, the untamed tangles of hair, and wings twice the size and twice as intimidating as when she sprouted them just to fly. Within seconds, she felt the change come upon her. Fortunately, her shift was much

A Spellfire Evening

less painful than Adam's. She barely felt her muscles and bones morph.

The first thing she noticed was hearing the sounds of the swamp with acute clarity. She heard and felt an eerie, irregular thump vibrate throughout the swamp, as if it possessed a heart that beat erratically beneath the marshy ground. Other sounds assaulted her sensitive eardrums – the twitters and squeaks, grunts and growls of unknown animals and the haunting piping and melancholy cheeps of unfamiliar birds. Nearby, something dark and deadly rustled through the thick snarl of underbrush.

When she opened her eyes, everything came into sharp focus, and she could see farther than ever before. A harpy screech of exhilaration burst from her throat with the rush of becoming her true, inner self. Completely satisfied to be the human Harpy Spellfire and Derek's wife, pride swelled inside her when she shifted into what her harpy heritage promised. A part of her that longed to be wild and free reveled in the creature she became. Her wings fluttered, their tips brushing Adam and Tris a half dozen yards away.

She felt Derek blow over and under her wings, surrounding her – and Adam, too – to filter out the toxic swamp gas lethal to shifters and to keep fresh air around them. *Fresh* was relative because nothing in this swamp smelled refreshing.

She had no choice but to breathe deeply, drawing in all the different odors. She sniffed again... There, just beneath the malodorous rot and reeking vegetation, between the slightly sweet aroma of the rare Texas trillium and musty cypress, she caught a familiar sharp, acrid scent. The hearthorn!

"I smell it," she trilled and flapped her wings wildly, rising from the ground.

She flew low and glanced down to see Adam streaking through the trees, trying to keep up with her. A snarl of impatience curled her lips. Even though he raced along at what would be a blurring speed to mortal eyes if any had been foolish enough to enter the swamp to see, he moved too slow. She had to hold back and follow a winding trail around the misshapen trees and dense foliage, avoiding the narrow bodies of viscous, slime-covered water.

Careful not to catch her wings on protruding branches and twigs, Harpy descended until she glided above the demvir. She eased her clawed feet around his powerful shoulders and lifted him off his feet.

He growled at her, and she snarled back. Then she soared across

the swamp, her nose leading her to the hearthorn. She felt Derek near, circulating non-toxic air around them.

The scent of the hearthorn grew stronger and she finally pinpointed its location in a blackened cypress grove in the middle of a lake of putrid swamp water. Bubbles of stench silently popped on its slimy green surface releasing the toxic gases Derek kept away from them.

As she gently set Adam down, she saw the bulbous eyes and corrugated head of a creature slice a trail through the slime-covered water. She wondered if *it* guarded the plant they sought, but it swam past them without a glance in their direction.

She settled on the ground, her claws sinking into the boggy land. She took a stomping step and noticed her weight and movement jiggled nearby trees. Adam, too, kept moving to keep from sinking.

Harpy listened, but an eerie hush lay over this area of the swamp, the silence palpable. It was as if the swamp waited for an eruption of deafening proportions.

"I can't fly through the grove," she told the demvir as they stepped along. "The trees are too close, and I'd tear my wings."

"I'm not too crazy about going into the air again, but you can carry me overhead and drop me where the hearthorn is," Adam suggested.

"But if the guardian is in there, I won't be able to help you fight it. And how will you get out?"

Adam growled. "Derek! Harpy, you can fly overhead and show him where it is. Then he can go in and get it. He'll be able to smell it that close. The guardian won't be able to see him as air and –"

A tremendous rumbling cut him off and three gigantic creatures surged from the murky water to hover over them. Harpy barely had time to register that it was only one creature with three reptilian heads attached to three slender necks of varying lengths connected to a main serpentine body. The guardian of the hearthorn was a hydra!

She and Adam were in deep trouble. Only two of them to face three heads. If they somehow managed to destroy one head, two more would grow back in its place.

Harpy shot into the air over the water, while Adam stumbled backward in the bog. Two of the heads went after the demvir while the third, the longest, came after her. She watched Adam fall and one of the heads struck out, its fangs catching Adam's upper arm. He yanked free with a howl and scrambled out of reach.

A Spellfire Evening

“Adam?” she screeched.

He motioned to her that he was all right, but how all right could he be after being struck by a hydra?

Fortunately, the hydra could only stretch itself so far in two different directions. She and Adam both kept just out of reach of their venomous fangs. But how to kill it without creating more heads?

Suddenly, wind blasted past her and whirled around the hydra head in a mini-tornado. The hydra head screamed and roared, but couldn't escape the force.

A breeze whispered near her ear, “I'll keep this one busy. You and Adam take care of the other two.”

“No, I'll get the hearthorn if you can keep this head pulled in this direction long enough.”

Derek blew agitatedly against her. “I can, but I *can't* protect you from the swamp gas. With most of my air concentrated around the hydra head, I can't spread that far.”

“I can hold my breath.”

“But the gas might seep into your skin. It's too dangerous. Just help Adam kill the other two heads.”

“He's growing weak from the strike. We don't have time.” Harpy took several deep breaths then another and held it in. She took off toward the center of the grove – the direction where she'd smelled the hearthorn.

“Dammit, Harpy, no!” Derek shouted after her.

If he said anything more, she was too far away to hear it. She found the center of the grove where the oldest, tallest blackened cypress stood. Streamlining her wings straight behind her, she dove directly down, dodging branches and other trees until she landed with a clumsy thud in the soggy bog at the base of the center tree.

Here, the intense pungent odor of the hearthorn burned her nostrils even though she didn't take a breath. She searched the base of the tree, but found nothing and moved on to its numerous knobby knees sticking up out of the bog like mangled aliens ready to march in attack.

Her lungs started to ache by the time she found the patch of a dozen hearthorn plants with their woody stems and silvery-gray fuzzy leaves nestled between two humps of one cypress knee.

Harpy plucked one, pulling it up by the roots, and tucked it in the bodice of her dress, securing it under one breast. Then she clawed at her itching arm. Derek had been right. The swamp gas penetrated her

skin. Time to get out, but how? She didn't have room to spread her wings, and she couldn't take off with them straight behind her the way she landed.

She looked up. She could climb the center tree, but that would take too long. Her pulse pounded in her ears. She had to do something before she was forced to take a breath of the deadly swamp gas.

Looking down again at the rows and rows of blackened cypress knees circling the center tree, an idea came to her. She didn't know if it would work or not, but she didn't have another choice.

She drew her wings in tight against her body so they wouldn't catch on anything. She hopped up on the knee that protected the hearthorn then leapt to the next one and the next. Around the center tree she went, from knee to knee, moving faster and faster, building her momentum. Soon she skipped every other knee then skipped two and three. She moved so fast she felt like she was flying without her wings.

Her lungs on fire with the need for air, she let some of her pent-up breath escape to relieve the ache. Her skin, too, now felt as if flames licked her all over. Time to just do it!

Instead of curving around and using the knees as stepping places, she forged straight ahead and leapt to the low branch of a cypress then a higher one. She bounded her way up from branch to branch until she reached open air, spread her wings wide, and flew.

Luckily, she'd kept her bearings and soon reached Derek still holding the hydra head and the sweet air he provided. She gulped in large breaths and now, with the toxic gases kept away from her, the itch and burn in her skin eased off.

"*Harpy!*" Derek's voice reflected his relief. "Harpy – "

"I'm fine," she told him before he could ask. "I have the hearthorn. Let's get out of here."

"Good, but Adam collapsed," Derek called out.

Harpy swung around to see the demvir hunched over a cypress knee. He had remained just out of reach of the two heads, taunting them, so their attention wouldn't be diverted to helping the third head. She could see the oozing fang marks on his upper arm and his sluggish movements. He wouldn't last much longer.

"When I grab Adam, you can let that one go," Harpy directed. "Then we can get out of this hell-hole."

Harpy swooped down behind Adam and gripped his shoulders. He grunted in pain, but didn't resist."

A Spellfire Evening

“Did you find it?” he asked, his voice sounding weak and tired.

“Yes, I have it. We’re going back to Tris now. She’ll be able to help you.”

She lifted him, and the two heads struck at them. When she and Adam were in the air, Derek abruptly freed the third head. It rebounded from the sudden release, snapping backward into the other two heads. They howled and struck at one another, like young siblings fighting amongst themselves.

Exhausted and continuing to experience twinges in her skin, Harpy still felt good. She hadn’t failed Electra, she hadn’t failed her husband and friends, but most of all, she hadn’t failed *herself*. She proved that even half human she was as capable as any full-blooded harpy.

Then she felt Derek surround her. His soft breeze caressed her cheek, and she trilled her love to him. As always, he was the wind beneath her wings. This time he gave her an extra push to quickly carry them back where Tris waited.

Chapter Four

Tris watched Derek, as a whirlwind, boost Harpy across the night sky toward Spellfire until they disappeared. When Harpy and Derek returned with a wounded Adam, Tris put aside her worry for her husband long enough to repeat the incantation that opened the shimmering doorway for them to exit. None of them recognized the forest that surrounded them. Using a crystal pendulum and a small world map from her basket, Tris cried their location. They had exited the Shifting Swamp near Hexville, Tennessee, another magical city like Spellfire. Harpy and Derek should have plenty of time to get the hearthorn to Electra before midnight.

Tris turned her around to her husband. The nasty hydra bite would have been lethal to anyone but a demvir. She fell to her knees beside him and rummaged in her basket.

Adam groaned. "It hurts like hell."

"It's going to hurt like seven kinds of hell if I don't have all the ingredients to cure it."

Adam groaned again, but Tris ignored him. She didn't have time to baby him. She needed to treat the wound before he lapsed into an endless sleep, and they needed to return to Havoc House in case Electra required their help again.

First, Tris brought out her handheld and opened her electronic Book of Shadows. She clicked on the remedy for hydra bites. With a quick anti-grav spell, the PDA hung suspended in mid-air. Fortunately, it was only a three-headed hydra. The remedies for five-, seven-, and nine-headed hydra bites were progressively more complicated.

She pulled out pots, vials, jars, canisters, bottles, and bags of ingredients. By the time she finished, setting aside the things she needed for the poultice to draw out the hydra poison, she had a stack of supplies ten times the size of the basket.

"How the hell did you put all that in one little basket?" Adam asked incredulously.

A Spellfire Evening

Tris started replacing the items she didn't need. "My great-great-great-aunt Havannah Havoc was a witch-weaver. It's an interdimensional, anti-weight basket – it holds a lot more than its size and only weighs a few ounces no matter how much is in it. She gave it to me as a graduation gift. Comes in handy."

Tris ignored Adam's mumbling about what a strange family he'd married into and quickly set to work. Now was not the time to argue that the Spellfires were weirder than the Havoc's ever thought of being. With her marble mortar and pestle, she stone ground the dry ingredients and placed them in the petrified wood mixing bowl. She added a precise measure of Witch Water while stirring with a spoon carved from the wood of a hazel tree planted and harvested during a full moon. She recited the incantation in five different dead languages.

Fortunately, it was a cold poultice – to draw out the hot poison – and didn't need the time to be brewed and steeped.

She scooped up the yellow goop with one hand and at the last second added a sprinkling of tooth fairy dust before slapping it on the oozing fang holes.

Adam screamed like a banshee.

"Sorry, darling. I forgot to warn you. Shouldn't last but a few seconds."

While Adam writhed and cussed like a drunken werewolf, Tris put the handheld and everything else back into her basket and stood. By the time she pulled Edsel from the quiver at her back, Adam had recovered and climbed to his feet. Tris reached for the poultice that had already hardened to a second skin and peeled it off. She stuck it in her basket because she'd have to bury it at a crossroads on the next black moon – the second new moon in a month – to ensure Adam suffered no lingering side effects from the poison or the spell.

She examined his wounds. The fang marks were almost completely healed. "They shouldn't leave scars."

"At this point, I don't care," Adam said with a rumbling growl.

"The poultice couldn't have hurt worse than the bite itself." She looped the basket handle over Edsel's haft then sat sidesaddle and patted the bristles behind her. "Hop on."

He narrowed his ember-red eyes. "I'm not riding that thing."

"Lucky for you, brooms don't hold grudges because after a remark like that Edsel might throw you. Now, climb aboard. We need to go if we want to get back to Spellfire in case Electra needs us."

A Spellfire Evening

Adam mumbled something she could only half make out but hoped Edsel hadn't understood. Something about sticking brooms where the sun don't shine... He straddled the bristles behind her.

"Hold on, Adam. Up, Edsel," Tris commanded.

Edsel rose sharply, seating Adam abruptly, until their feet lifted off the ground. Adam grabbed her around the waist.

"To Havoc House!" Tris ordered and Edsel immediately took flight.

They soared into the air at an incline, and Tris giggled when she felt her husband's arms tighten around her. As Edsel leveled off just above the treetops, she scooted back snugly between Adam's thighs and leaned against his broad chest.

"You won't fall. Edsel's gravitational system is in peak condition. Think of something besides flying and you'll be fine."

She turned her head to look at him. The rush of wind fluttered his dark hair away from the pair of horns protruding from his temples. Then he bent his head and nuzzled her ear.

"Only two things can make me forget – and we don't have any Pluto Pretzels."

"Well...we could do the other," she murmured.

Adam raised his head. "You're nuts, witch wife."

Tris shook her head. "Course, it's been a long time."

His eyes widened. "Edsel's not an old beau, is he?"

"Don't be silly." She laughed. "I told you I received Edsel as a gift from my parents. Besides, you and I broke the curse and everyone changed back to their normal selves. No, we only started on the broom and finished in the forest."

"Bobby or Josh?"

"Does it matter? You and I are married, and only you share my bed now." She tilted her head toward him and slid her lips over his, kissing him thoroughly. After she pulled back, she added, "And my broom."

"So you never did it completely in the air?"

"No. The witches in Flying 101 used to call it quickie on a stickie." Tris giggled at the juvenile name they'd given to fucking while flying on a broom. "We're in sync now, but Edsel and I were just getting to know one another back then. I couldn't control him very well, so I never did get to become a member of the Broomstick Club."

"The Broomstick Club?"

A Spellfire Evening

“Like the Mile-High Club for witches.”

In response, Adam slid his hands over her thighs and began to gather up the skirt of her dress. “We do have some time to kill. Want to become a member tonight?”

“Are you serious?”

He pulled her skirt up until it gathered at the small of her back, leaving only her panties between them. “Very. Can you keep Edsel steady while we experiment?”

“Oh, yeah,” Tris said, breathless. The thought of making love to her husband while flying on her broom excited her, igniting her passions. “Edsel's practically on auto-pilot anyway.”

With one hand, Adam caught her chin and kissed her, his tongue creating a sensual ballet with hers. His other hand cupped one of her breasts, his thumb fondling her nipple to a point.

Tris reached behind her. After fumbling with the opening in his boxer briefs, she freed his cock and wrapped her fingers around his long, hard length. Adam groaned and thrust into her hand, his cockhead nudging her backside.

“Lean forward, Tris,” he commanded, his voice harsh and unsteady. “Hold on tight to that damn broom handle.”

Tris did so with both hands securely on the broom handle. His fingers slid under the waistband of her panties and pushed them down. The cool night air rushed over her heated skin, and she squirmed against her husband's erection.

She felt his hot hands curve around her bottom cheeks, squeezing her generous proportions, his sharp nails raking gently across her skin. In response, her spine arched and her hips surged back, her pussy seeking the head of Adam's cock. His hands slipped up to her hips, and with precision, they connected. He drove into her while he pulled her back against him.

The broom wobbled with the force of their thrust, but didn't lose its momentum or threaten to spill them. The movement created an even more exciting sensation within her. She gasped and said aloud, “Do that again, Edsel.”

Adam growled. “Madam, I'm Adam. Just what else have you done with your broom?”

Tris giggled, but the sound turned to a moan as Edsel obeyed her command and shook side to side again. The effect sent ripples of pleasure dancing along her nerves, and she slumped back against her husband's broad chest, his cock nestled snugly within her pussy. “I

A Spellfire Evening

only ride Edsel to fly, nothing else.”

Adam didn't respond with words. Instead, he plumbed her wet depths, and Tris mewled her appreciation. The broom responded, too, and adjusted to their rhythm. Soon, they hardly had to move at all. With a gentle rocking motion, the broom did all the work. She felt every luscious inch of Adam's cock slide in and out of her, and with each thrust her passion rose as high as the stars themselves.

As though he could read their minds, Edsel's tempo increased until Adam bucked against her again and again. When she could take no more, she twisted her hips. The orgasm streaked through her body like a comet, shattering her senses. She flung back her head and screamed, now understanding what a star experienced when it went nova.

Adam gripped her tightly, his breath coming in short, quick gasps. He grunted when he made one final thrust, grinding against her, then stiffened and released.

When finished, he slipped his arms around her and placed a kiss at her temple. “Tris, you are amazing. If we had time, I'd like to do that again. My craving for Pluto Pretzels is gone, too.”

She laughed. “I think we'll have to keep quickie on a stickie on our lovemaking menu.”

“Definitely,” he agreed.

With Adam's help, she straightened her panties and dress then leaned back against his chest. His arms surrounded her protectively. She watched the stars as a gentle breeze blew over them. The magic of the broom kept them from feeling the full force of the wind.

Relaxed and satiated, her eyes closed and she felt herself drifting off when Adam stirred behind her. “Hey, we're home.”

Tris opened her eyes to see the skyline of Spellfire in the distance. She rose to a sitting position. “We've got to keep our wits about us now, Adam. I hope all the others made it back in time and Electra has started the warding spell.”

“So do I, Tris. Let's just have faith the others have returned. It's very close to midnight.”

As Edsel homed in on Havoc House and began their descent, she tilted her head back and kissed her husband's cheek. Eternally grateful that Adam hadn't been vanished by the Gremlorr's evil, like Electra's husband, Tris was willing to do everything she could to help find Alex and save Spellfire.

The End

Electrafied, Part Three
by
Mae Powers

A showdown of supernatural proportions continues on, to a climatic closure that will have all of Spellfire in its grip.

www.maepowers.com

Look for more wonderful goodies online at
www.midnightshowcase.com

Electrafied, Part Three
by
Mae Powers

Chapter Seven

She could feel her whole body sweating as she trudged down through the cavern's lower depths. Fighting slowed down in the upper levels, yet mental messages were sent to her that most of the ingredients had been collected. Albeit some mishaps and unfortunate losses were made in the search for the items needed for the Warding Spell.

Electra felt proud of her friends and comrades. Maejika kept her posted mentally about what went on. She needed to find Alex herself, before Midnight. Maejika and the other witches and sorceresses or sorcerers could do the hexing, but she wanted to try to be there when that last battle to stop the brewing of the potion took place.

Her eyes were tired and her powers taxed from all the fighting she'd done with magic tonight. Many thought her very powerful. In a sense, she knew she was capable of much. Yet, there were limits on the abilities, even to 'so-thought-of' powerful witches and the like, such as herself.

The poison and the dew mixed in her system, making it whack out a bit. She fought it's control over her being. Being part human made her susceptible to it, but the natural order of her magical heritage prevailed, mostly. Still, she knew she shouldn't have taken it, but something propelled her to do the deed. Or someone, she believed.

LifeCore came to mind. Had he made her touch the Wart of Wills for some reason? It would be revealed in time, perhaps. It's influence

A Spellfire Evening

over her had gotten stronger, and though, she had been born to be it's guardian, it also fluctuated in its cause and purpose.

She let it drop for now, her thoughts once more dwelling on the poison seeping throughout her body. It would linger, long and deadly, working it's way through her system. None of her skills would remove it, only LifeCore or some thing she didn't know, could remove it.

She'd taken the point of the second end on purpose, but that only slowed the poison. When they walked through the cavern's below Spellfire, they found the odd root in the deepest parts of the caves, way below the Faeville world. The Fae helped her too and didn't interfere with her hunt, but knew from upper friends why she searched for it. Bess and Dan were marvelous how they handled defeating of some of Gremlorr's henchmen, minions, and other odious creatures, who were under his influence. Then Bess and Dan returned to Spellfire with the Wart of Wills.

They didn't know she'd deliberately let the root prick her. The first touch would have been deadly to whomever touched it if they didn't know to prick themselves with the second end right afterwards. It only came to her a few seconds after finding the Wart. It also brought truth to the soul, when one was pricked by first one end then the other, if one heeded it's silent call of *knowing* what to do, of listening to the nature object's secrets.

The thought jolted her to reality and a sudden rush of adrenalin raced through her. She'd done it automatically, not because of LifeCore's influence.

However, with LifeCore blocking magic auras of nature and beings, she had a hard moment of recalling. Yet, she believed that LifeCore, or Mikhail actually caused that temporary flux in her recall. That was the influence upon her will that she felt. One of them, if not both were after her, but her thoughts were stuck on Gremlorr. He found a way to build his power and to release himself, along with his minions, somehow. He exuded the evil that she needed to be taken care of foremost.

And she would thwart him, personally. The Warding Spell could vanquish a lot of evil or stop the horrid minions of darkness, but if she knew Mikhail correctly, especially since she saw his powers had indeed grown immensely, it would only slow him down. Enough time for her and the others to stop his plans and his followers. Even if her powers were temporarily halted to some degree.

A Spellfire Evening

At least she could still track Alex's whereabouts. She sniffed the dryness in the air. Dan and Bess helped her get this far, but her friends needed to go back to help protect the town and get the wart there. Maejika mentally let her know the henchmen were attacking again. And LifeCore got upset and confused by the on again off again balance. Which is why she became more inclined to believe it had been Mikhail's plan all along. Perhaps that's also why she thought LifeCore was going evil; Mikhail must have found a way to seep into the entity's mind, and imbalance the strange being even more.

This disparity came with what Gremlorr sought, she believed. With it, he would have a chance to weaken Spellfire townfolk and the LifeCore, which kept it going and hidden from other places not necessarily paranormal. She felt it in her blood, as one of it's two guardians. Now Gremlorr wanted all of it. She could not allow this to happen.

Since her divorce to Mikhail, there'd been unrest in Spellfire, and in LifeCore. Now she must make it right. Somehow, she knew the fault lay at her feet, she needed to set things right. She would kill Gremlorr before he got his hands fully on LifeCore. And she'd find her beloved Alexander.

She heard growls coming from a short distance away. Murky shadowy creatures shuffled quickly in front of her. She raised her hands, aimed and fired magical blasts at them as they descended down upon her.

At first nothing came out. Anger fueled her magic. The laser—like blasts of fire came out rapidly. She dropped to her knees as the last of the horde fell before her. For a short moment she caught her breath. Quickly as possible, she rose to a standing position.

Electra trudged as fast as she could, making her way downwards, into the deepest caverns below Spellfire. She sensed Alex nearby. She felt his essence calling out to her.

Topaz sent her a message that she, Scott and Barry came across the Gremlorr's Nasties. They said Alex might still be alive. It gave her hope.

She shivered against the strangest and knowable feeling of being watched. Someone or something, knew her every move, despite her shielding spells. Gravel crunched beneath her feet, it seemed too easy to get to the dungeon she sensed Alex being held in. She could feel the poison working faster, the closer she got to the Gremlorr's

territory and dungeons. The ones she and all of Spellfire incarcerated him in once before.

Old buildings of mortar, stone and moss filled parts of the caverns. An ancient city that fell and was buried long ago, lay strewn about like a broken wall of shattered memories. Could it have been one from the ancient times that LifeCore told her about? She would find out one day, perhaps soon, but not now, if she didn't find Alex and she died in the process. At least Maejika could complete the potion to get rid of Gremlorr or at least stop him and imprison him once more. The town would stay in good hands with all her friends and allies. She was needed down here though. LifeCore wanted that. She could feel it in her ancient wisdom and current form.

With some awkward and frustrating movements, she opened the bolt that held the door shut. Why hadn't it been sealed more securely? She crept slowly into the cell-room she had been seeking, just after defeating the first round of lurking horrors.

Electra nearly died in agony, and not from the poison, when she saw Alex hanging from the ceiling by his wrists, bloodied and bruised, beaten. She was frigging gonna kill that bastard Gremlorr. She closed the old door behind her and bolted it. She rushed quickly to Alex and with some difficulty, she waved her hand to his chains and grabbed him with a levitation spell as his body started falling downwards. She caught him as he went towards the floor. Electra set him down gently once he was in her arms.

She held him in her arms and stroked his sweaty, matted hair. "Alex, beloved, speak to me. Breathe, oh my heart."

Slowly his swollen eyes opened. She ached within to see the crushed look in them. "You shouldn't have...come," he said weakly. "It's a trap. It's you Gremlorr wants. The town is second. He needs you to conquer the LifeCore. Go...Electra, leave me now."

"I can't, Alex. He knew I'd come. Come, hold on to me. I am too weak to transflash far, but I think I can get us up a level."

"Electra, leave me." He moaned and tried to pull away.

"Shush, Alex. No." She held him to her and concentrated. The poison and all her previous exertions of her powers were taking their toll on her, but she had to get Alex somewhere safe.

She couldn't allow Gremlorr to use Alex anymore. She hugged him to her and warmed him with her curing aura. He would heal slowly, though his powers were weak. She wanted to share her strength with him, while she could. It would take it's toll soon, but

she must transflash, at least a level up, to get him out of this damning, damp place. Electra concentrated again and felt their bodies tingle. Long agonizing minutes later she was on one of the upper levels of the huge maze of caverns.

She glanced briefly around and sighed, glad they were near a Fae tunnel that she recognized. Just a few yards and she could get the Fae to take him to a witch doctor. She hugged him close, trying to recoup her energies. If she couldn't find another to help her, she'd get him to LifeCore if she could. It would heal him, surely, and know that Alex was the true one. She should have told him long ago about LifeCore's secrets. It would be all of their undoing now.

She wanted more than anything to spend the rest of her life with Alex, but the Gremlorr's jealousy and power madness could very well prevent that. She hoped that if she had the chance, she could convince LifeCore to make Alex the New Guardian partner she needed. She should have tried sooner, but it was going to be a surprise to Alex. She was forced to wait a year, that was the rules, to be sure of her heart. And Gremlorr knew that. Now he used her love for Alex against her.

She would not allow him to win. Nor would he have her again. It was entirely her fault he possessed such power now. He would not triumph. She'd take other matters, somehow, into her own hands if it looked like he even got near to winning. She would die with LifeCore before she let the Gremlorr take control of all things paranormal.

And she really needed to get moving. Now!

"I knew you'd come for him, Electra."

She jerked her head up and saw him behind him his Gobleens. They parted, letting him to move in front of them. There were probably a dozen of them. Or more. Had she her full strength, they'd be dust, with but a thought, by now. And Mikhail too!

Long ago his dark handsomeness captivated her, with his long jet-black tendrils flowing sporadically around his face; his tall, lithe body sensually delighting hers. But that had been long before he turned evil. His coal eyes lurked with devilish intent and his once handsome face now looked like it were plastered with the molds of malevolence.

Electra shivered under his malicious stare, holding Alex even closer to her body. "You'll pay for what you did, Mikhail."

He put a hand to his heart as if in grief and mortification. His words mocked her. "Do I tremble before you as you do before me,

Electra? I can feel the Wart poison in you. I don't think you or your precious Alex are going anywhere. It will be such a pleasure to watch him slowly die, while I take you back in my arms tonight at midnight."

Her eyes widened and she felt Alex gripping her closer. "What's he talking about, Lectra?"

Gremlorr moved in slightly, his henchmen edging behind him. "You didn't tell your beloved, did you, Electra? I have until then to make you mine again. By then he won't be fit to have you or wield the LifeCore with you. For shame Electra. Too late for dear Alex."

"No," Alex said the word harshly, firmly while trying to pull out from Electra's hold. "I won't let you have her."

Gremlorr waved his hand and a force-field barrier came around them, keeping their kneeled forms tightly imprisoned within. Electra knew why he'd thrown up the invisible shield. She wouldn't be able to transflash. Alex slumped on his bottom, trying to jerk her down to him. Weakly, he finally managed. He whispered in her ear just as the Gremlorr motioned for the henchmen to surround the barrier. She leaned into Alex and his fangs punctured her neck. She swayed against him.

To save them both, she'd let him take some of her energy. It gave him the strength he needed momentarily to flashtrans them out from the barrier. His one power similar to hers, was more powerfully effective in situations like this one.

Just as they were fading out of the cavern she heard Gremlorr's "No!" of disbelief and rage echoing throughout the cavernous area.

This time they appeared in a section closer to a Fae opening of the maze-like caverns. Near them stretched an old cavern lake, small, but hidden behind boulders and stalagmites and stalactites. She half pulled him to the water and helped him to lay against one of the smoothest bounders. She tore part of her evening gown off, wet it and cupped some water in her hand. Alex sipped from her hand, coughing as he did so. She washed his face and hands with gentle strokes.

His gorgeous eyes opened up to her. "You shouldn't have come for me. The others need you."

"Shhh. Love. There are many people there as powerful or more than I. There are others who know what to do if I don't make it back. It's here I need to be. Though weak, I'm stronger close to LifeCore."

"What did he mean back there, Lectra?" He touched her softly, stroking her face with tired, faint movements. "I know...there's been

things you've tried hard to tell me about you and your connection with LifeCore, and why you're considered a guardian of sorts for it, and Spellfire."

"Since the beginning of Spellfire's existence, my line, especially the women, have guarded the Fae Cavern secrets. They built them around and below Spellfire when the original townsfolk moved here. I was one of those people, Alex, in a former life. I reincarnated into this body, much what I looked like then."

He nodded in understanding as she leaned down next to him against the boulder. "Your eyes were always full of some mystery I couldn't fathom, until I learned more about you. I know Maejika is nearly four hundred years old though she and some of your friends don't look a day over thirty or forty years old. Tell me what he meant by claiming you at midnight."

"I'm sorry, Alex, I should have told you more. I wanted to, but something seemed to stop me each time. I wanted to tell you before the end of the year, to reveal all to you. I would have taken you there before the midnight hour to show you things. And to have LifeCore and you accept each other. I'm so sorry beloved."

He smiled lovingly upon her. "So LifeCore gave its approval for Mikhail back then?" At her nod he continued. "But I take it he went bad, or fevered with power."

"Yes. His true nature came out. He got greedy for power, especially LifeCore's powers. It's old, even older than Spellfire. It's taught me its secrets and I learned about it too from other generations of Spellfire women."

"I had the feeling earlier this evening that things were unsettling within you and some of the others. Maejika and my mother were antsy. Was it Gremlorr and LifeCore, both, that you felt awakening?"

"I believe it was. Things were mixed up for me, Alex. Especially when you disappeared. I'm so glad you're alive, beloved. I'd have died inside and wanted to outside if anything happened to you. No one's ever loved me as you have."

"And I always will, no matter what."

Weakly, he pulled her against him. Alex could feel her heat, both from her love and the poison. He had powers she didn't know about, things he meant to tell her too. His mixed heritage both blessed and cursed him. Now he would use that additional biting power for more than pleasure. He would make Electra stronger. Yet, he must make her want it.

A Spellfire Evening

“Let me aide you as you have helped me. No, don’t deny me this, please Electra.”

Electra, tears forced back, slowly nodded. If it would make him happy in this dark hour, then she would. “I need to get you to a witch doctor soon. We can only rest here a few more minutes at the most.”

“It is enough, my love. Come taste my lips.”

She leaned down to kiss him, her eyes never leaving his. His eyes widened and then an eerie glow came forth. Electra felt herself tremble with sudden desire and helplessness. What was Alex doing to her? She wanted him now, but knew she shouldn’t. Not in his weakened condition.

It was as if he suddenly took control of her, making her want him to distraction. His blistered hands stroked her softly, quickly, igniting fires within her. She shuddered against him, the fires within her growing in blazing leaps. She’d never known he could make her feel such intense, heated ecstasy within a few moments. He drew closer to her as he distracted her with his hands. His head leaned towards her neck.

Electra cried out as he bit her more deeply than he had earlier, when they escaped Gremlorr. She could feel the blood flowing down her neck, could feel Alex feed upon her life-juice and her soul. Then things changed, the minute she thought darkness and death would over take her. The blood spun with in her whole system, churning with newfound life and energy.

She could feel magic flowing back into her whole being. *Alex, what have you done?* Her mind said into his.

I have other powers too, I never told you about, my love, he replied telepathically. *I can transfer my energies, my natural healing ones too, into another person. You will feel the majics grow within you quickly. Use them, Electra. Stop Gremlorr and save Spellfire. And yourself from LifeCore...*”

He pulled back from her, slumping unconscious near her. Electra screamed out and the cavern shook. Her body shivered and flushed with renewed, heated power. Power given to her by Alex to enable her to carry on. The poison too was gone. He’d taken that into himself in order to give her back life.

Tears streamed down her face as she drew his lifeless body within her arms. He looked paler than usual, his soft tan almost going alabaster now. She shook her thoughts clear. She needed to get him to a witch doctor. Doctor Veindross didn’t live far from the Fae Caverns.

A Spellfire Evening

She quickly tightened her hold on him and transflashed them both to where the old witch doctor lived; hoping against all she held dear, that she made it back in time to save Alex and help defeat Gremlorr.

* * * *

Maejika could *sense* her arrival. With the others barely making it in time, she'd already began the spell, aided too by others. Electra popped in just as the last ingredient was added. She and Electra, with the council of witches behind them, said the words that would bring forth the Warding Spell.

The doors burst open and the Gremlorr's henchmen attacked. The acrid smoke filled the room. Magics of all kind sparkled and shot around the room as every being, good or evil, in the huge ballroom fought ferociously. Many on both sides fell. Electra battled while chanting, it's toll hitting her. She dropped, but Adam shifted into his demvir state to bite off the arms of one of the minions coming after her. Derrick thrust his wind power around the room, and using a little sorcery his sister and elder brother taught him. Tris Havoc joined in, and Harpy with her strong wings and talons, took out some of the minions too. Shai and her two witchy lovers, also took out the evil ones.

Good friends lay before them in bloodied, torn messes. Yet more evil beings were sprawled out around the room. Powers shifted in favor of those that lived in Spellfire and who loved the town.

Maejika saw the groups of people who'd gone after the ingredients getting stronger too. Mistletoe Mayhem had gotten better and now joined everyone ready to fight this battle. Even a new ghost had arrived to help. She'd not made it in time to revive Barry, but knew he'd been brought back otherworldly connections of hers and Electra's, to Spellfire for a reason. For Sianna, she believed, and to help them all out with fighting the Gremlorr's evil. At least her blasted premonition gave forth to hope Barry and Sianna might eventually get together, instead of bringing along disaster, like it did now.

The smoke of the warding spell suddenly heightened the good sides senses and powers. Then a shout of glee was heard even from Frightful Frieda, who all thought might aid the Gremlorr in the long-run, but who probably thought better of it. She and her cronies helped too.

A Spellfire Evening

Electra chanted hard and the smoke surrounded her. “Maejika, I’m going now. I must finish it. His minions are warded too, now. LifeCore beckons for the final round.”

Maejika only nodded in understanding as her dearest friend quickly vanished. Soon, but ever so agonizingly slow at the same time, the minions were dropping faster than any town-folk. A thunderous roar of air encompassed the room. Smoke and screams of agony nearly pierced everyone’s ears.

It became hard to see who fought who for a few moments, or see who fell and who lived. Many like the Tredmanes, the Blackwolfs, the Gaels and the Trinkets also aided in the battle. As did a host of friends both human and non human, like Al the Agloolik and his lady love Gina; plus Kor, a fairy lord and his human interest Jewlie, as well as ghosts like Jace Sawyer, Ella Welles and Horrible Henry. In fact, all evening the room had filled here and there with a long list of Spellfire residents aiding and helping in whatever way they could. And there were loses and triumphs on both sides, she was sure.

The smoke slowly crept away. People fell and rose. Paranormals coughed and the swirls of the Warding Spell finally drifted away. Some bodies lay there. Old friends and newer ones were in an array of positions. Then another smoke, this one of a lighter yellow gray seeped from the cauldron.

Maejika knew it to be the remnants of the spell, taken over now by LifeCore. It drifted around the bodies and one by one it lifted them and then encompassed them in it’s glow. The bodies of both good and evil, mostly evil, dissipated in sparkles of dust. The dust blew out on a strong wind suddenly gushing from the room. Like her, many stood there staring in a blank way, unbelieving, disbelieving even, yet startled and relieved at the same time. The evil had gone, they could all feel it. Maejika knew that with her extra sensory empathic feelings. Yet still, there was one evil left to deal with..

However weak or near dead he was, she knew the Gremlorr could still cause some trouble. Yet, Electra disappeared to take care of him. Both would be in the caverns way below all others, below Spellfire territories and town. None, but the two, could enter the domain of LifeCore. Maejika saw into the room briefly, once, but had never been able to enter it, no matter how great her powers or even those of others. Only Gremlorr and Electra could enter its domain because of their connection to it.

A Spellfire Evening

Knowing both were still weak from the battles, but with some power still left, the balance of control still hung tentatively in the air. Although Gremlorr may not now be able to take over LifeCore and Spellfire completely, if Electra didn't win over him, then Gremlorr could rise again.

She prayed to the powers of all kinds, that Electra would win. Yet, she had been so joyous when the others appeared with all the ingredients. Without those ingredients and their help, Gremlorr's powerful demons and henchmen might have taken over the realms of human, paranormal and Fae, and other magical beings; leaving Gremlorr to take control of LifeCore and then perhaps all.

Maejika bit her bottom lip till it nearly bled. Electra told her mentally that Alex took out most of the poison and refreshed her powers with his unexpected bite. Yet, Maejika knew it had only been a reprieve. The poison of the wart would fester again and mess with Electra's powers. The Warding Spell gave them time, while dissipating the evil aiding the Gremlorr. And probably, even stopped the evil side of the LifeCore for a short while. Perhaps, nearly killing and halting the Gremlorr. However, the two might still be alive, and a battle of wits and power would definitely ensue should that be so.

Maejika knew she must ready the town-folks of all ilk, along with those near and around Spellfire and its territories. Hell still festered in Texas, and its name was Gremlorr. He was the antithesis of LifeCore, just as Electra held mostly good in her. Yet, if he could sway LifeCore, Electra could very well fall under Mikhail's influence.

Gremlorr's plans to make Electra his, failed for now, and he did not get to take over Spellfire. Maejika and all there could still feel an ion of unease in the air. By the fate of all, everyone held dear, Maejika and all hoped Electra would find a way to once and for all stop the evil completely. An evil that was hindered and hollow at the moment, but who still possessed the power to sway the outcome and eventually rise to even greater darkness. Electra needed to live and win.

* * * *

Electra met Gremlorr in the lowest, deepest and less used of the caverns, where LifeCore dwelled. She knew he would be there, some way waiting for her. LifeCore in its mound, smoldered and stopped. It was uneasy, it felt unsure. The alien being wanted them both and it needed both, but it shimmered and simmered its flames in uncertainty. So was the evil magic it brought forth into the world. The

A Spellfire Evening

two were at odds. The strange entity did not know what to do. It could be easily swayed, both sides of LifeCore, or it could be swayed to Electra or the Gremlorr.

Electra waited near the base of it's mound.

She didn't have to wait long.

Gremlorr entered.

Electra saw him standing before her, dressed in dark robes of guilt and mayhem. His long black hair splayed around him like vipers flowing in the wind. Mikhail approached her slowly. He'd been waiting for her to finally show up alone.

"The Warding Spell was a good move, Electra, but not good enough. It's downed most of my followers, but as you can see, I'm here and with more power than I had before. Do not try to fight me, love. I will win."

"No, Mikhail," she balled her palms, "you won't win. But you will wind up dead in...Hell! I'm not your love any more. Now, give up or I will kill you."

"But if you kill me, Electra, Alex will die."

He'd said the one thing that made her stop her movements towards him. "I left him in a safe place. You couldn't have gotten to him, Gremlorr."

In an instant he was near her, pulling her into a vice grip. "No, I lied."

He grasped her by her neck and dragged her up against him. Then his mouth forcefully clamped down on hers. His hands folded tighter around her neck, Electra gulped. she felt Mikhail, the Gremlorr, feasted on her fear.. Yet, it gave her strength. She dug her nails into his wrists, Her powers clashed and fought with his, for control, and more. She thought of Alex and how he nearly died because of her mistakes. She wouldn't let that happen. Alex couldn't die. But Gremlorr must.

She felt the eeriness of his presence, the wisps of what they once meant to each other, felt his powers ebbing back and forth.

And she felt his weakness.

She knew what she had to do.

Alex might never forgive her. If he lived. That split infinity of him was with her. He could feel where she was. He somehow joined part of his essence with her when they were above this stone room, above LifeCore's burial chamber.

A Spellfire Evening

As lights flashed and swirled around her and Mikhail's bodies, his mind and LifeCore's mind-essence crept open to hers. And what she learned from both, turned her disgust to an inferno of molten anger.

Midnight began its toll towards the dawn of a new day.

Alex, Mikhail, or LifeCore. It came down to that. Not just good or Evil. But how much she loved Alex and how much she longed to be with him...and part of LifeCore.

She knew confusion is what trickery Mikhail would use. Would she too stoop that low? Mikhail, Gremlorr. Alex, beloved. LifeCore, her powers, her heritage. The choice stood before her now. She had to make it soon.

In a split second he broke away from her. She stumbled and fell. She quickly got up, starting to turn. She felt him still there. Gremlorr.

Then she looked upon him once more, in all his evil splendor of disuse. Of what he once was to himself and to her. Of the power he once wielded. Of what he could have been and what he became. And never would be become again. And she made up her mind.

She just made a movement with one hand, Alex appeared behind Gremlorr.

Electra's eyes widened. Gremlorr's lips tilted upwards as if sensing her fears.

He sensed the wrong ones. And that's when Alex enveloped Gremlorr.

In a split second, she wondered how he recovered, how he had been able to leave the witch doctor. Those seconds were time in less than a nano-second. Alex grasped Gremlorr from behind.

All hell in Texas, definitely broke loose now if it hadn't before. Electra started to move forward. A barrier, a wall at first, stopped her. She tried again. And this time, she found herself enveloped in a force-field, one that nulled her powers and kept her within its small coned space. Her nerves were frazzled. She worried and thought mostly of Alex...and LifeCore.

Then she knew. Instinctively. Intuitively. Life Core, both of its selves, both good and evil held her there. They wanted to know. It/them wanted to know...What she treasured most. What she wanted mostly. Alex or LifeCore.

Alex held on to Mikhail as the demon lord struggled in his arms. He heard Electra's wails. He tuned them out. She mattered most. He would have accepted it, but even though she might have told

him...could have told him, he knew now that it was his choice. He had been brought into it.

Both by Mikhail and Electra.

And LifeCore.

Now he chose not any of them. And yet, in his heart, it was more than him that made a decision. LifeCore did. Gremlorr had, but mostly...Electra had.

Now he would make things...happen. Or his beloved Electra would not live. That was worse than death, living a life—without Electra. She made the decision for both of them. He'd helped her with that choice really. Not make it for her. A split second a life time and beyond, displayed between them. Now, it was up to her. Her choice would be carried out. He knew she trusted him. Their minds communicated all that was needed to be done.

He helped, but only she could ultimately do what must be done.

Electra realized this. Time clicked by slowly for everyone, every being in the room.

Mikhail...Gremlorr, faltered. He gasped. He suddenly knew. He turned his head to slightly glance at Alex, who held him in a vice grip, him and his powers. What he saw in the man's eyes was sheer determination and a power unlike he'd ever seen before.

He turned then to look at not LifeCore, but Electra.

Their eyes met.

So long ago. So much had been right between them. He shivered with dread. He had had it all. He let temptation, time and alternate possibilities slip between him and Electra. All while she had given her all to him.

Temptation, evil, LifeCore. It had all been Mikhail's destiny, and his undoing.

He grasped for why. The dark forces of LifeCore enveloped him, tricking him to do his bidding, to get Electra for him/itself.

LifeCore played them all against each other. Had fooled with his life and his love for Electra. It connected them all in it's web of deceit.

They were entwined. They were all part of this alien...thing. He groaned and knew he'd erred. He'd lost the one thing that matter most in his life, that made his life worthwhile.

Electra.

And that's where he erred the most. That's when evil and the darkness of temptation came into his life. Temptation from LifeCore.

A Spellfire Evening

The imprisoned creature of energy, who'd worked for centuries to claim her for his own.

For the first time in its existence, it had erred. It grumbled and awoke to their realizations.

Mikhail realized that Electra and Alex must have guessed, and sensed, what LifeCore was up to, what it tried to do. It came after his mind first.

Mikhail fought for control. He fought desperately. He fought...for once, to do what was right and good, completely. Emotions tore at his mind. He felt them all exploding in his mind and body.

He felt Alex's hatred and disgust, the protectiveness he held for Electra that would withstand anything thrown at the Vamperian. Gremlorr felt Electra's guilt and determination. And the sadness she felt inside of her, as well as the betrayal. He also sensed her energies growing.

But mostly, he felt love.

He knew what needed to be done. The power flowed through him. LifeCore Chose. He chose. Alex chose. And most importantly to LifeCore. To all of Spellfire, to all of what any one held dear...the decision had been made.

Electra chose.

LifeCore momentarily startled them all as it blazed out of control. The three of them jumped back. Electra stood between the two men as LifeCore erupted above them, its flames roaring out of control like an angry god lost to madness.

It knew they all figured out what he tried to do. LifeCore would kill them and take what he wanted. He had the power.

Electra saw a face of bewilderment, an alien face that no longer belonged in Spellfire. It did not care for the town, except to grow in might and take what it wanted. To feed on those that believed in it. It fooled them all. But no more. Mikhail and Alex closed in on either side of her. She trusted both men with her life.

Midnight struck its toll and LifeCore struck out at all three of them.

The trio's powers flashed brilliantly and erupted in unison, like a congregation of hurricanes, exploding inside of a volcano, fixing to bring disaster out into the world. In the last split second of the unearthly midnight toll, the three thrust their magical strength towards the alien infestation known as LifeCore.

A Spellfire Evening

It battled with them, shot deadly beams at them, screamed its thoughts into their minds. And they yelled back with their minds, their powers and their determinations. It split itself and its might, attacking them from all sides.

Gremlorr shot deadly force-field blasts at it, which bounced back and struck him in the chest. And when Electra saw it rain its anger towards Alex, she lost control. And lost Alex as she summoned centuries of magic to direct into the mound, the source of LifeCore's essence and alien strength. The room shook ferociously. LifeCore became a blaze of mixed energy shooting sparks of dying energy all around as it tried to protect itself and its mound.

The mound where it laid for centuries began to crack. The dark stones exploded all around Electra, who stood in the midst of the unnatural deadly explosions. Yet only the winds of the blasts touched her, caressing her body with warm breaths. Her powers took control and her anger unleashed.

LifeCore cried out for mercy, but she had none left to give.

Then the mound and LifeCore dwindled, to be sucked up in to a black void of nothing. The earth stopped shaking around her. The winds quieted. And all became deathly still. Electra dropped to her knees, between the lifeless bodies of the two men who'd loved her enough to give their lives for her and all she and they held dear.

Echoes of the town bell filtered into her psychic hearing. New Year's Eve had left behind in its quake, the dawn to come of a new year.

Spellfire would live, but she died inside this night.

* * * *

Like Snow White in the glass coffin, they lay before her.

Alex and Mikhail.

Beloved, and former love.

Electra stood glancing down at both laying in their faceted crystal coffins. She stood between their death holders, their coffins. LifeCore drained the life from her, from them. It had been their choice.

No, they all decided. To fight the real evil together as a team. They were not LifeCore's guardians as it had led them to believe. The alien essence deceived them to what it wanted.

Why her though? Why had it acted as if it cared, pretended to help Spellfire and its inhabitants to flourish over the years if it didn't really want to? Why had it chosen her as a guardian to protect it.

Guardianship was a lonely thing.

A Spellfire Evening

And at times so was love. Their love. Both men had made a choice. Both for dominance, both for their own reasons. Both for her. She would abide by that.

Their decision. And hers.

And LifeCore's.

For a brief second she turned slightly to view the embers of ash and coal that once had been LifeCore. She stared intently.

It no longer smoldered. Nor would it ever again, not if she had anything to do with it. She looked from its ebbing dissipation to the coffins again. Two loves. One former, one now. A choice had been made. For what was and for what had been and now.

Alex. Mikhail. LifeCore.

Her sanity fell into a shambles of cold reality, which bit back. She never guessed that LifeCore used her for various reasons. It made a choice in the end. Between her and Mikhail. The Gremlorr. It pitted them against each other. Against all, both of them held dear. And then it pulled in a third protector, no a new player for its desires.

LifeCore chose wrong. Mikhail would have done its requests in the beginning, until LifeCore wanted more. Mikhail's body to bond with. When the alien entity realized Gremlorr would not comply, it drove Electra's ex-lover mad with the need for darker power.

LifeCore hadn't counted on Alex's stronger mind or his pure heart. Or the love he would always have for her.

Beloved. He saved her with his unblemished and pure love. He'd given her the strength and renewed her powers so she could find it within her to beat LifeCore.

And Mikhail also joined their cause. She could not hate him any longer because of that. But her love for him went away a long time ago.

For Alex, it never would go away. Her heart would be closed for all eternity. Just as she closed up LifeCore in the dark pit below the Earth. It would never come alive again. No one, but she knew, how to unlock it or bring it back. She would never let that happen again. It lay dead to her and the world.

This then would be her guardianship. To make sure none entered here. To bother it or Mikhail's and Alex's burial chamber.

And here was the flux it left her. She knew what she would have to do, she'd made another choice.

But in secret. Away from the mausoleum holding LifeCore, Alex, and Mikhail.

A Spellfire Evening

Spellfire would live again. All would live again. Life and love would continue. And while it did, Electra would know loneliness.

She stood tall between both coffins, remembering.

Electra splayed her hand first over one of the glass coffins then the other.

Her hands stayed above both. The coffin wherein lay Gremlorr glowed for a split second. The same type of glass coffin wherein lay Alex, also glowed. One. Both. Together. They...no he would be with her again. For always. This time, no next, and soon, she would choose for herself.

In time, she would find a way for him to be with her again. Her beloved. She wouldn't give up looking for a way to bring him back. She would fight the last remnants of the shadows and darkness that threatened her love for him and the town above.

Hope flourished within her. And Spellfire.

The End, perhaps...

Coming Spring 2007...

Spellfire Shadows
The other side of town

Even in Spellfire, things are not always perfectly abnormal...

Read on for a haunting peek of things to come.

Dark Edges

Chapter One

She felt a rift in her destiny, closing in on her. She knew it started for her as child when she'd first stumbled onto LifeCore. Meeting the entity caused a rift in the true timeline that had been meant for her. Now she had to fix it to make it what it should have been. There was only one way for sure that she could do that.

She must leave Spellfire, for good.

Electra Spellfire knew what she had to do. LifeCore took too much from her, now she would make him, the alien or whatever it was, pay for the trouble it caused—and she let happen. Part of her felt some split infinitive of its essence still smoldered below the mound of ash and coal she caused it to become. But even though it lay as if dead, something didn't set well within her.

Nor did other things feel right with her any more. Alex was gone, thanks to LifeCore and Gremlorr. How could she go on any more? With the power of time on her side, she was tempted to change it all. But then it would affect so many others, in different ways. What would happen though, if she decided to do that? Would it kill her in the process? And could she alter others' lives for the sake of the man she loved? To bring him back, while others suffered?

No, she couldn't. But there had to be a way to right some things, and bring Alex back to her. She wouldn't give up hope of finding a way. It hit her then—what she knew she must do.

She waited until Sunday, in the late evening, when Sins closed. Then she went up to her loft above the place and made her preparations. Later, taking a satchel of things she might need, she started to go below, down the old stairs that led to the basement and to the doorway that would lead deep into the caverns below Spellfire. She formed a plan, and hoped it would work.

It had to.

With an uneasy grace and step, she made her way underneath, into the caverns that lay below Sinful Sundaes. She walked

A Spellfire Evening

sluggishly, as if something prevented her feet from moving faster. An eeriness crept around her, plastering her body like a second skin of dread and danger.

She halted for the briefest of seconds when she neared LifeCore's tomb. Dormant fear and anger assuaged her mind. An ember of hatred trickled into her mind. She hadn't truly known, after the battle some months back, whether he lived or died.

Now she knew, that faint odor of power simmered, waiting to be released and renewed once again.

She knew he waited for her, he knew she would come. It hummed in the essence of life around her. She felt its power, caught a small thread of it. They would battle. She instinctively knew that things would change in Spellfire, in her life to come.

If she lived through the battle of wills with LifeCore. For it would be mind control they both sought. A battle of wills for energy and dominance. It lay weaker than she stood. She needed to win completely, this time.

How much more agony did she have to go through before it was all over with? Before life could be normal or even a little abnormal again, in this unusual Texas town? If her friends and family knew what she was up to, she felt that they would try to stop her. But she needed to do what her instincts cried out to do. No matter the cost to her personally.

LifeCore wanted her to be his now. To mesh his powers with hers. The only way to do that was to control her love, her life. She thwarted LifeCore, refusing to join him. She'd gone to her past to prevent him from taking over her mind. So he'd tempted Mikhail and wanted Alex, but Alex didn't hear LifeCore's mystic hums.

Both men fell into a death sleep, much like Snow White in the fairy tale. Only this was real. Alex, nor Gremlorr, would ever come back or be freed if she did not do something tonight.

She was just about there when she heard it, a shifting in the magical essence of Spellfire. The town awoke a little, allowing for a visitor of special magic; it's kindred here on Earth. Electra stopped in her tracks and spun around as the image of a lovely woman appeared before her.

The Mother Goddess. The Earth goddess some called her. She was known by many other names too, in different countries. Since the town of Spellfire lay on some of her grounds, it flourished under her

protection too, in some ways. Yet the town some how suffered bruising by both her magic and LifeCore's.

"You've never come down here before, Gaelea, why now?" Electra didn't move from her spot as the powerful being approached her.

Nearly as tall as Electra, but with moon-blond hair, a much lighter complexion, and dressed in a white flowing gown that made her moonshine skin look even paler, the woman stopped a foot from her, studying Electra.

"The town felt you coming down here. Your sorrow is felt by many, Electra. You must not go back in there. I feel it is wrong..."

"Wrong! You dare, tell me, I'm wrong?" Electra tried hard to control her anger. She knew what could happen if she didn't. "Your warriors fought beside me, all of the Fae and Elvin that believed in the hope and goodness of this town. But did you lift a finger that night? No. You sat back in your clouded shell, letting others do what you were afraid to."

The deity looked hurt and the glow about her paled even more. "I...cannot kill, Electra. What if I put up a force field and someone ran into it. An innocent even. That is why I have warriors to aide me...surely you understand that, I can't hurt anyone?"

Electra's brows furrowed. She knew the gentle goddess didn't like war or hurting others. She was a beneficial earth deity, one who healed and granted wishes of prosperity, but who could not lift a finger to aide in fighting evil.

She sighed and calmed. "I know. Still, you could have contained them, done something, joined the others and me. Some of those, who believe in you, died in many ways New Year's Eve. You could have done more."

"And become like you are, Electra? Hollow inside, void of emotion and caring. Feeling nothing but anger for your losses...I'm sorry, child... I shouldn't have..."

Electra gripped her hands tightly together. "No, it was best that you stayed away from here. Why have you come now?"

She hesitated for a moment and Electra knew the earth deity had known unrest. Like LifeCore in a sense, the woman just sensed when things were not right or something awful might happen. Electra possessed those powers too, but hadn't used them much lately.

"I don't know what you are up to, but I do feel the winds of your sorrow. The town has been more watchful for us all. It is a good land

and touches our souls. Especially those with the power of nature in their blood. Like myself, and you, Electra.”

Electra jerked her head to glance into the woman’s dark blue eyes. “What do you mean?”

“Your parents possessed it too. Earth magic.”

“If there’s something you wish to impart, do it, and leave my parents out of this. They disappeared a long time ago. Thanks to you and probably, LifeCore.”

“That was not my fault, Electra. I didn’t take them from you and your brothers. That evil came from another world. Yes, your surprised look says you did not consider this. They came down to visit Fae-friends, the night they disappeared. We all searched all over the tunnels for them. Except that one place where only you could enter, or another guardian.”

Electra shifted her stance, glancing from the Great Mother to the chamber where LifeCore once lived and where Alex’s and Gremlorr’s coffins still were. She turned back to Gaelea. “I considered that, but didn’t believe it would harm them. Why do you tell me your suspicions now, when this might have made a difference before?”

“It held you under its influence, and no one, not even you realized this. It was after I felt the strange entity’s death that the fog of deception lifted from my mind and this piece of memory came back. I’m sorry, Electra. I really wish I could have done more. I have much power, but little strength of character for fights. My powers would diminish should I take away life when the Great Cosmic Energy put me here to help, not hinder.”

Electra finally unballled her fists. Gaelea spoke the truth. There were some, even powerful beings like the nature deity, who could not lift a hand to fight. Why are you here then?”

“To ease your sorrow and pain, and to tell you something I should have told you a long time ago. Back before your birth, here in Spellfire. First your pain, Electra.”

Electra stepped away from the goddess’ outstretched, glowing hand. “No, I’ll deal with my pain in my own way. Get to the point, Gaelea.”

Electra nearly winced at Gaelea’s look of sorrow and guilt. She hadn’t meant to hurt the nature goddess, but it just came out that way.

“I don’t know how much you recall about your former life, prior to being born to Electreah and Darius Spellfire, but when it came, you died.”

A Spellfire Evening

“I recall my first and only life before this one. I was walking in Mystic Meadows, near where the first caves formed. That was back before we founded Spellfire and I was helping to search for a town to build and live within for all para-kind, when we were trying to escape human prosecution. Then stars exploded and...” Electra trailed off as she caught the meaning of the goddesses words.

It all seemed to come back to her at once. Her life before Spellfire, where she’d been born hundreds of years before, part fae, part sorceress. She’d helped to look for a new beginning, a new home for many folks, like witches and fairies. She’d come here to Texas, when nothing more than nature and Texas natives roamed the lands. A free and beautiful land. Then she’d told them about it and her sister came to help with the founding of the town. Just before the town became built, a brilliant blast from the cosmos landed and Electra died within its dark aftermath.

It happened just before Spellfire arose beneath the earth deities’ protection that LifeCore came to life and dwelled beneath, in the oldest cavern levels of the Fae Caverns. She’d died then, and became reborn in the late twentieth century. LifeCore killed her then. So her essence went into a deep sleep before she became Electra Spellfire in this modern world. LifeCore took her life and hid that from her. Or perhaps, he hadn’t known until she resurfaced.

It would explain their connection, why it sought her. His essence came to life as hers died back then.

“To have and to give life, one must find it through death and rebirth.” Her words came from her subconscious.

“That has been a saying of many for thousands of years, Electra. It’s meaning is so old even I have forgotten them.”

Electra felt her eyes widen and saw her dark skin pale slightly as the words hit her full force. “I died to give him life, he became reborn to return mine, to...”

Gaelea edged closer. “Your path has always been meant to cross with LifeCore, Electra. And to be reunited with your kin again.”

Electra jerked back in time before the goddess touched her. “I don’t wish to have the pain eased, Gaelea. Don’t make me say that again. Now, what were you saying about my prior life. I remember a sister then. Now I have brothers.”

“Yes,” the older woman sighed. “Your sister was one of my grandchildren. She founded Spellfire with you and made it grow. She called her first daughter Electris, to honor you. All of Fredah’s first

A Spellfire Evening

born daughters possessed your powers. You were reborn into her line. The last of the Spellfire women, except for...”

“Frieda Faraday, who has a trace of Spellfire and Havoc in her loathsome blood.”

“But no Fae or Elvin, Electra. She was not born of love like you were. Do not hate her for that.”

“Frieda is not your concern.” Electra let out a long sigh. She needed to get the Earth mother out of the caverns so she could accomplish her task. “I appreciate your concern, Gaelea, but please, let me take care of my own inner turmoils myself. I wish this kept confident, but I’m here to say my goodbyes to Alex. I need this time alone to do that. I just couldn’t before.”

This seemed to satisfy the deity, for she smiled and her glow lightened. “I am glad to hear that, it is time to move on with your destiny and be happy again. You deserve that. Come see me soon, Electra.”

Electra nodded, glad the goddess finally disappeared and went away. She turned back towards the cavern opening and entered. She sensed no one around. Moving in front of the crystal coffins that Alex and Mikhail’s bodies still lay within, she turned to look upon Alex, still handsome though buried in this crystal container.

“I will find you again, beloved. Somehow, someday we will be together again. I know of only one way to get rid of the horror that separated us.”

Electra moved over to the rubble and dirt, to stand before the flattened mound where LifeCore lay buried. Dormant, but at death’s door. She entombed it for an eternity, but did not completely killed it when she. Alex and Mikhail fought it before their deaths and it zapped the life from them, just as she struck the last blow that sentenced it to a dying imprisonment.

“You tore up this land, hurt and killed my friends, turned loved ones against each other for your own personal gain, you horrible abomination. I trusted you, believed in you. First Mikhail, then Alexander. I cannot allow you to grow again. I must send you back to where you came from. And if you die, I do not care one way or another.”

Electra pulled off her backpack, pulled a small potion bottle out of it, then put the pack on her back once more. Besides dressing in pair of comfortable dark green jeans and a loose sweater, wearing tennis shoes made it easy to move around as she neared the icy-

smooth ground of the flattened mound. Only a tiny scar of closure lay upon the smooth mound. It gave her enough for the potion to seep in without LifeCore getting out.

“With this you’ll be thrown into another dimension that will keep you from traveling in ours and send you back to where you came from. I worked on this for months now. You’ll not harm this world or its people again, you bastard!”

Electra threw the glass container on top of the mound. She watched as it spread over the surface of the dark piece of rock. She slowly inched back as it caressed around the crack. Electra’s back bumped into the coffin of the Gremlorr. Nearly falling, she quickly reached out to steady herself when the ground shook slightly.

It stopped. The shaking had only been mild, but enough to give her concern. Her view focused on the liquid oozing around the seal on the mound. It started growing and changing colors from pale gold to a dark fiery orange. The potion was working. Soon it would totally seep through the crack and into LifeCore’s tomb!

“You’re so dramatic, Electra.”

Electra jerked her head around to see a slightly tall, voluptuous woman in a knit slack suit of dark brown standing near her, surrounded by a few Gobleens, Gremlorr’s old minions. “What the hell are you doing here, Frieda. Get out!”

“I don’t think so, Electra. And that’s why.” Electra jerked her head towards the mound where Frieda pointed.

Her mouth opened in shock as she saw that the crack opened and steam rose from the widened fissure “No, he’ll come back. Frieda you stupid fool!”

Frieda’s diabolical laughter was one of the last things Electra heard as the ground rumbled fiercely and sparks shot out from the fissure. It widened. She felt LifeCore awaken and an eerie glow emitted from the opening.

Things moved too fast for Electra. The huge Gobleens came up behind the coffins and at least two shoved on the coffins, Electra was thrust forward with the coffins. The fissure opened wider as she tried to stop the creatures from pushing the coffins and herself towards the fissure.

“So long, Electra. I won’t be needing you in this world or this necklace.”

Electra turned her head to briefly see Frieda throwing a glowing necklace towards her. The center looked like a piece of the rock

A Spellfire Evening

formed from LifeCore. It couldn't be, she thought. Frieda had been in contact with LifeCore all this time?!

“You fucking, bitch!”

Electra thrust out a hand and a powerful ray of energy shot towards the Gobleens. They were blown backwards into Frieda and fell on top of the witch. But the room started shaking violently now. The fissure widened to a big maw. Winds whipped at Electra's heels. She screamed out as first one coffin knocked her back towards the opening and then the other slid forcefully against the first one.

The necklace landed on her chest. She fell and lost her balance. The huge hole with its bursting flames glowed beneath, awaited her. The coffins and she slid into the deep abyss below. She screamed out, looking upwards. She thrust her might into the gaping hole as she continued to fall. The hole sealed and the caverns above fell down into the cavernous abyss with her into the never, seemingly, endless pit of doom...