

ELLORA'S CAVE PRESENTS

ROLL PLAY



Rowan West

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Roll Play

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ROLL PLAY

Rowan West

Dedication

To my parents, who accept and appreciate the art of erotic writing.

And to my husband, who inspires it.

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Prologue

The first erection Griffin Curtis could ever remember having, not including the ones that woke him in the morning, was caused by her smile. He had been fourteen and she was not only a little younger than him but she was his best friend Eric's little sister. She didn't look anything like the women in the magazines he loved to sneak peeks at but clearly that didn't matter. It also didn't matter that she was wearing jeans and Eric's old sweatshirt at the time or that she was tiny and the only thing remotely feminine about her was her long dark hair. All he saw was the light in her eyes and the joy on her face as she whooped in wonder at a spell he had cast unexpectedly during the Dungeons and Dragons game they were playing.

He had been looking forward all week to using the new magic spell he had created but when the moment arrived, his visions of victory and treasure disappeared along with his power of speech and thought. All he could think about was what was happening in his pants and that he was glad the lower half of his body was tucked under the card table where they met weekly to play.

He had kept his growing feelings for her a secret for years after that, even when he thought she might be flirting with him as they got older. He'd lain awake nights wondering about her and if there was a way to approach her. Nothing he thought of seemed right and he hadn't been willing to do anything that could hurt his friendship with Eric. But long after he'd stopped seeing her he never stopped thinking about her, or having the fevered dreams she continued to inspire.

It had been hell when he'd had to move away in the middle of his junior year but his father had a new job and he had no choice. He knew Eric would keep in touch but he was angry about leaving before anything could develop with her. So much for his ideas about the junior prom. She'd been at the going-away party his friends had thrown

and they had managed to steal some quiet time together when he'd seen her walk out of the kitchen and onto his back porch. He knew she didn't feel comfortable in crowds and she must have gone out for some quiet. Without thinking, he'd grabbed two sodas and followed. He found her sitting on a bench that surrounded an apple tree. He'd offered her a can and they drank and talked for a while.

He'd thought he was managing the situation well, keeping things light, until after a moment of silence she'd turned and with tears in her eyes, told him that she was going to miss him. He'd told her he would see her again—and then without planning or thinking he'd pulled her close and kissed her. His fate was sealed at that moment. She sighed so gently at the touch of his lips and molded herself to him. He knew he should push her away but he had no desire or will. When he'd finally looked into her eyes again, he saw his own feelings reflected there. Only the threat of discovery had stopped him from drawing her back to him. Someday, he'd told her, the choices would be his and then he would come for her.

College, business school and building a successful company had taken most of the next eighteen years. So had finding a real sorcerer who could help him learn the magic that would take him into her heart once he could bring her back into his life. It was a thrilling surprise to learn through some fraternity buddies that there was a real side to the games he'd played as a boy—that the world was filled with actual warriors, clerics, sorcerers and mages. Well hidden from most, they could be found if properly and purposefully sought. Griffin pursued the Mage he needed for years. When his journey finally brought him to the one he was looking for, he bared his truth and the story of his heart. He spoke of how women had come and gone from his life but none ever touched him. When the Mage was convinced of his sincerity, she granted his request but warned him that the spell did not guarantee the results he wanted. It was a means, the end was still uncertain. The heart of the other person was theirs to control, theirs to give. If, however, he did not win her love during the time of the enchantment, no other magic would be granted. He cherished the dream spell he had been given and waited for the right time to use it.

As he grew more powerful personally and professionally, he consistently followed her achievements. The day he read her latest book he knew. There were blood-heating scenes in her story, giving him erections reminiscent of that first time and showing him she had grown into the passionate woman he had seen hints of years before. The time had come to call her back to him, to see if he could build on what they had felt for each other as teens. He also knew that if he pursued her now, he wouldn't be risking the connection with his oldest friend. That relationship would stand.

Besides he wasn't planning on pursuing her. He was planning on winning and keeping her with him always.

Chapter One

The leather in first class felt and smelled appropriately decadent and Amara couldn't help but snuggle deeper into her seat after accepting a glass of champagne from the flight attendant. It was barely afternoon but she had already decided she was going to indulge herself with every extravagance on this trip. Especially since the expenses were part of her salary package and the bill was being taken care of by Champion Studios.

As she sipped the drink and felt the cool bubbles slide down her throat, she thought about the phone call that had led her here. It was hard to believe this all had started only a little over three months ago. After the early-summer publication of her newest book, *The Sword's Fire*, she had done a series of East Coast book signings, a few science fiction/fantasy fairs along with other authors from her publisher and by October she had been happy to retreat back to her writing desk and her imagination. When she got the call from her agent telling her there was a studio interested in buying the rights to her story and making it into a movie, she couldn't have been more surprised. In fact she hadn't believed it at all.

"This is a joke, right, Veronica? Some sort of really late April Fool's prank? Early trick-or-treat? Or are you trying to find out if my sense of humor disappeared after that last public appearance." After three books and two anthologies, Veronica James was now one of her closest friends as well as her agent. Amara knew Veronica understood how she always felt exposed and nervous when meeting the public.

"It is completely on the up-and-up. I have checked and rechecked the offer. They want to turn *The Sword's Fire* into a small-budget fantasy romance movie. They are planning to hire a professional screenwriter but they want to bring you in at the end for revisions and to be certain that the essence of your story hasn't been changed. The

studio, of course, has final say but you get to have input into what shows up on the screen. Trust me, Anne Rice didn't get to do this for her vampire movies and I'll bet she would have loved the chance."

"Well, that's obvious. But then again they are not talking about putting Brad Pitt in my story, are they?"

"Not as far as I've heard but you never know. Indie films are very 'in' right now with a lot of A-list actors. Besides, I've always pictured your hero looking more like Hugh Jackman. You know, more tall, dark and handsome."

Amara laughed and hoped it covered her nervous surprise. There was a man she based all her heroes on and Veronica wasn't far off in her guess on her visual inspiration. "But casting aside, Amara, it's a great opportunity. They are paying well for the rights and extra to have you come out to California to work on the revisions."

"I don't know, V. It sounds great and I know you are going to tell me how it would be good for book sales now and in the future, but I've never pictured one of my stories as a movie."

"No one does when they are writing. Or not when they start. But think about it now. Your stories are so exciting, so erotic. You put the fantasy in fantasy. Hey, that's pretty good." Veronica suddenly interrupted herself and Amara could hear her searching her desk for a clean piece of paper and a pen. "I've gotta give that one to the PR boys for the next book. They'll love it. Okay, back to this opportunity. Imagine that passion you create made larger than life. You deserve a bigger audience. And you deserve to spend some time in southern California in February."

"February? That's only just over three months away. Can they write it that fast?" Amara thought about the months she'd put into her novel and wondered at the quality of something written so quickly.

"I guess so. That's the timeline they are talking about according to the initial paperwork I received. Come on, say yes, Amara. Or I'll set you up on another blind date."

"Ouch! Now that is a threat." The other woman laughed but Amara couldn't quite bring herself to. Since they'd become friends, Veronica seemed to have two goals—make her a best-selling author and see her hooked up with a wonderful man. One of the few things Amara had never told her friend was the truth about her love life. After all, who lost their heart in seventh grade? And so effectively that she hadn't been willing to offer it to anyone since.

"Okay, if threats don't work, how about this," Veronica said, breaking into her thoughts. "Too many women writers don't get this chance."

Low blow. Veronica had hit her artistic hot button and she knew it. Amara always hated that, even though women writers were as strong as or stronger than the men in the industry, it was, with a few notable exceptions, the men's names that were better known. It was a large part of the reason she agreed to the in-person publicity she did with all her books.

One last pause and then on a sigh, she gave her answer. "Okay. I'll do it."

"Great." She could hear the relief and confidence in Veronica's voice. "I'll send over the contracts. Read, sign and send them back by the end of the week. Call me if you have any questions. And Amara?"

"Yes?"

"Don't worry. It's going to be great. Think of it as a journey. That's what you always tell me you send your characters on."

A journey. Amara knew that while writing was always a journey of sorts for her, she had not ventured much past her pages recently. Quite the contrary. She had been playing things rather safe for the last several years. Surprisingly, she realized there was something truly tempting about a new journey, an adventure.

She had tried to focus on that temptation rather than all the doubts that had flooded her head over the next several weeks. Sometimes it helped. Usually she still worried. It was almost all she'd done for the weeks that followed her agreement. Most of the work on her next book had stopped because she hadn't been able to focus. The upside was

her house was immaculate since, when she needed a distraction, she tended to clean. But in the last week she had been having nightmares that her story would be unrecognizable as a movie or would suddenly be all about sex and have no characters or plot at all.

She took another sip of her champagne. She didn't know if she deserved all this as Veronica had said but she certainly needed the drink. Maybe even a second one. It was a long flight from Massachusetts to California. Letting the champagne linger on her tongue, Amara realized how few extravagances she had allowed in her life recently. There had been a time when she bought her own flowers, the best chocolates and soaked in a candle-lit bubble bath at the end of a long writing day. She couldn't remember the last time she had done anything like that for herself. Her life was all about her books, her characters. All her passion went into them. Perhaps this trip would be a good time to start changing that. She lifted her glass slightly and toasted herself with the promise of doing things differently on this trip.

* * * * *

The sign read *Champion Studios, Amara Kennison*. She felt the eyes of everyone around her as she approached the driver waiting for her. "I'm nobody," she wanted to say to them but that wouldn't really do for a first impression on the people of California. Instead she walked up to the chauffeur and said, "I'm Amara."

His good looks and white smile suggested he probably wanted a career in front of the camera, not behind the wheel. He reached for her carry-on as he said, "Welcome to Hollywood, Ms. Kennison. I'm Robert. We'll pick up your luggage and then I'm to take you directly to the studio for a meeting. I hope that works for you." Whether it did or not, he started walking and Amara dutifully followed.

Thanks to Robert's efficiency, she was soon seated in the back of a limousine as luxurious as the first-class section of the airplane had been. She'd never known that so many amenities could fit into one car. She could watch television, movies, listen to the radio or CD player and there was probably enough booze to get thoroughly sloshed

before arriving at her destination. She decided instead to look out the window to get her first glimpse of Los Angeles but after a few palm trees went by, she stopped seeing the scenery as her mind wandered and she started worrying about her meeting with the head of new projects and the writer who had been trying to turn her two-hundred-and-fifty-page book into a one-hundred-page screenplay. She wondered what would be left.

Soon enough she felt the car coming to a stop. Robert opened the door, escorted her to the elevators and then to the reception area on the sixteenth floor of a tall glass building.

"Your bags will be taken directly to your hotel, Ms. Kennison," she was told. "Have a nice stay."

Before she could thank him, the receptionist asked, "How may I help you?"

"I'm Amara Kennison and I have an appointment with the head of the writing department, Michael Murphy."

"Of course, Ms. Kennison. I will let him know you are here and someone will escort you back."

She had a seat on the black suede chair to the side and tried not to fidget as she waited. Bold modern-art prints decorated the wall along with movie posters of the films of Champion Studios. She thought about what it would be like to see her movie up there with the others. She was lost in that daydream when Mr. Murphy came to get her a few minutes later. He was a slightly balding father figure, wearing a shirt undone at the collar and a tie that was almost completely off. He took her hand in both of his, shook it warmly. She was surprised to find herself instantly at ease with this smiling man.

"We are so thrilled that you agreed to this project, Ms. Kennison."

"Please, call me Amara."

"I'm called Murphy. Too many Mikes and Michaels around. Well, Amara, John Daley, the screenwriter we chose, has been working hard these last few months to create a script that does your book justice and I hope you will be happy with the results.

We have a copy for you to read in your office. For now though I want you to meet John and Mr. Curtis.”

“Mr. Curtis?” Amara felt a tingle of unease start in her stomach when she heard the name. It was a coincidence. It couldn’t be who she thought.

“The president of the studio. He has been quite anxious to have you here to make this project the best it can be.”

She tried to remember what she had read about the president of Champion Studios but didn’t think that was something she had noticed when she’d tried to find out more about the movie business and the studio. They passed by offices and cubby areas with people busy and rushing about. Finally they came to a corner office where Murphy stopped, knocked and opened the door. He motioned for Amara to step in.

The first person she noticed was the man in casual clothing sitting in front of the desk and she assumed that was John Daley. Then her eyes met those of the man behind the desk and she could see nothing else. There were obvious changes. He was taller, his skin tanner, but his eyes still had a mischievous look. Visually, he was everything she remembered and so much more.

She barely heard Murphy’s voice say, “Amara, this is Griffin Curtis. Grif, I’d like you to meet Amara Kennison.”

Griffin came around the desk and reached for her hand, which Amara had completely forgotten to extend. He covered her hand with both of his and in a rich baritone voice that had also changed since she had seen him last said simply, “It’s my pleasure.”

Amara couldn’t help her reaction. Her mouth went dry and her pussy got wet.

Even though her eyes told her the truth, her first thought was, *It can’t be him*. After all this time, to see him again, and for him to look so good, so strong, was too much of a surprise in a day that already felt surreal. Griffin, *her* Griffin, was the head of this studio. Okay, he wasn’t hers and never truly had been. No matter how much she had wanted him to notice her and no matter how much she had thrown herself at him with

all the energy of a teenage girl in love for the first time, he had looked at her as if she were a kid. Well, of course, they had kissed—that one magic kiss—but then he'd left and he'd never seemed to notice her again. His disinterest had broken her heart.

"Why don't we sit down," Griffin said, bringing her back to the moment and guiding her to a chair with one hand while his other hand remained holding hers. He didn't let her go until she was seated. She could still feel the warmth of his touch as he moved away to sit on the other side of the desk. She wasn't sure she had released a breath since seeing him and she realized she was glad to be sitting. Everything felt tightly caught up inside her.

"So, any first impressions of Hollywood so far?" he asked her.

Your eyes are bluer than I remember was what she thought and she was grateful she had the wherewithal to not say it out loud. "It's sunnier than I imagined," she managed weakly.

He smiled. "Yes, I felt that way when I first came out here too. You get used to it but I hope you brought a good pair of sunglasses."

"Only a cheap plastic pair. I always lose sunglasses so I never buy anything over ten dollars." *Very impressive, Amara. I'm sure you're dazzling him now.*

"Perhaps you'll take time to treat yourself while you are with us." Something about his tone made her shiver when he said that as if he had some ideas as to what those "treats" should be. She shook her head and tried to concentrate on what he was saying to her. "First, I want to tell you how excited we are to be working on bringing *The Sword's Fire* to the screen. Since the creation of the Harry Potter books and the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy of movies, the public seems to have an insatiable appetite for good fantasy. Most of these, however, have been geared to the younger market and their parents. I've wanted to do something that will appeal solely to adults, a stronger combination of fantasy and romance, or better fantasy and the erotic. Your story was the blend I've been looking for and I'm thrilled you agreed to be a part of this project." His accent on the word "thrilled" distracted her again. He seemed to have a knack for that. He

continued to talk about the studio's plans for the movie, including releasing it at a national sci-fi/fantasy conference, rather than a traditional theatrical or film festival release. "I want to create a buzz as unique as I hope the film itself will be. How does all of that sound to you?"

"It sounds like you know what you are doing and have this all thought through."
Wish I could say the same for myself.

"That's my job, Amara. I hope you don't mind my calling you that. We're fairly casual in California as you'll see."

Casual wasn't quite the word she was thinking of. She was amazed that he could sit there in his oversized leather chair and act like they had just met and not like he was the first boy to ever kiss her. *I guess you learn to act when you live in Hollywood.* She steeled herself, deciding if he could do it so could she. "That's fine," she answered more confidently than she felt.

"Great. I am going to turn you over to Murphy and John for the next few hours. I'll let them show you the office we have for visiting consultants that will be yours to use while you are with us and then, when you are ready, a car will take you to the Sunset Tower Hotel where we have booked you in for your stay with us. It's very old Hollywood. I think you will appreciate it."

Everyone stood, hands were shaken again, and Amara left with the two men who would guide her through the rest of her day. For a while it didn't matter what anyone was saying to her. All she could think about was Griffin and how stunned she was to see him after so much time. Fortunately there was a lot to absorb quickly, including a tour of the offices, a discussion of the screenplay so far and questions that John had for her before they started their collaboration. He gave her a copy of the script, reminding her over and over that this was a work-in-progress and she shouldn't judge it too much or get concerned if something wasn't right. That's what she was here for.

From their reactions she guessed she was giving all the right or at least expected answers, but for her the day was passing by in a blur of introductions and instructions

that didn't seem to be sticking in her head because there was only room in there for Griffin. She was sitting in her new office staring at, but not reading, John's script when her new assistant came in to say she was leaving for the day.

"Ms. Kennison, are you okay?"

Amara suddenly looked up and stared at the woman. She had no idea how long she had been standing there. "I'm fine. A little jet-lagged, I think, and a touch overwhelmed." She paused. "Okay, a lot overwhelmed."

"That's to be expected. It's nearly six so I'm about to leave. I wanted to know if you would like for me to call for your ride to the hotel now."

"Yes, thanks, Cindy. That would be great."

"It's Stacy," she said with a smile. "And I'll take care of that right away."

As Stacy went to her desk, Amara put her face into her hands and rubbed her eyes. Stacy. Right. *Can't I at least remember one name other than the one I keep thinking about?*

Stacy was back quickly. "All set. The car will be waiting for you downstairs in fifteen minutes. Your suitcases have gone on ahead of you. Anything else you need?"

"Yes, to apologize for getting your name wrong. Sorry about that, Stacy. I'm usually good with names. My best friend says it comes from years of watching soap operas."

"No problem. I would think after a day like you've had it would be amazing if you could remember your own name."

"Thank you. That's exactly how I was feeling."

"If you're ready, I'd be happy to walk out with you so you don't get lost."

"That would be great."

"If it makes you feel better I couldn't find the ladies' room for my first week here." Amara gave her a genuine smile, realizing she liked this open young woman.

It wasn't a long walk to the elevator bank but Amara could see how she might have easily made a wrong turn in her current muddled state. Stacy told her she had been with the studio for almost a year and a half as a floating assistant, working with

different executives when their assistants were on vacation, when a project needed extra help or when someone new came in who needed support. It was usually full-time but had some flexibility to allow her to concentrate on her other work.

“Are you an actress?”

Stacy laughed. “Believe it or not, no. Not everyone with a second job is around here, although it seems like it at times. I’m a writer and I’m working on a mystery thriller.”

“That’s wonderful,” Amara said genuinely as the elevator opened up into the lobby. “I’d love to hear about your work if you are at a stage where you are willing to share.”

“I’d like that. There’s your car, ready and waiting. Have a good night, Ms. Kennison.”

“I will if you call me Amara.”

“See you tomorrow, Amara,” she said with a nod and a smile.

A surreal end to a surreal day, Amara thought as a different driver from the one she had when she arrived opened the door to the limousine for her. She didn’t think she would ever get used to amenities like these. She sank into the richly overstuffed upholstery with a sigh and closed her eyes. A moment later, the sound of another person made her jump up, startled. An overhead light clicked on.

Sitting next to her, looking completely at ease, was Griffin. She didn’t know what to say. Fortunately he already had something planned.

“Hello, Halfling,” he said as he leaned over, pulled her to him and kissed her fully on the mouth.

Chapter Two

Amara now knew what was meant by the expression “kissed breathless” since the air seemed to leave her lungs the instant his lips covered hers. This wasn’t anything like the soft kiss he’d given her on the day he said good-bye. This wasn’t even how he had kissed her in the hundreds—maybe thousands—of fantasies she had indulged in since that day. This was much better. And it was real. When she put her hands on his chest and felt the hard muscle underneath, she was certain of it.

His mouth left hers to travel to her jaw and then to her neck. Kisses had never felt like this, had never made her quiver like this. She wasn’t sure how to respond to the overwhelming sensations. His lips were sending jolts of fire through her body and she moved her hand to the back of his head to bring him closer, to feel more. His moan told her that she had given him the response he wanted. When he reached her ear and lightly grazed her skin with his tongue she gasped. For some reason, however, putting air in her lungs also seemed to bring reason back to her thoughts. She became aware of everything around her and how crazy it was to be passionately kissing a man she hadn’t seen in eighteen years.

“Please, Griffin.” She could hardly hear—let alone recognize—her own voice and from the fact that he continued she assumed he hadn’t heard her either. “Griffin, stop.” She pushed against his chest to get his attention.

“Something wrong?” he whispered in her ear. The closeness of his voice brought on another round of shivers.

“This. You. Now. It’s wrong. Please, I can’t think when you are doing that.”

“I am not asking you to think. Perhaps it would be better if you didn’t.”

"But I want to. I need to." With a more decisive shove, she managed to finally put a little distance between them. Taking advantage of the moment, she slid another few inches away from him on the smooth seats.

"Amara, my Halfling, what's wrong?"

His use, once again, of her Dungeons and Dragons game nickname softened her. When she had finally been allowed to play the adventure game with her brother's friends, they'd said her character had to be a Halfling because she was so little. She would have agreed to anything to be a part of their circle. Their game was so exciting and captivating that she had sat silently for almost a year watching them whenever they played at her house and begging Eric to let her go with him when the game was somewhere else. Griffin had called her that ever since.

With a nearly two-decade gap, she now reminded herself. "I haven't seen you for a lifetime. You bring me out here on the pretense of working on a movie and then act as if you have never met me when we are introduced. Now you think you can kiss me as if we had gotten out of the same bed this morning."

"That sounds like a delicious recommendation." He moved toward her again but she crossed her arms and leaned back.

"It was not an offer. It was a statement of fact."

"Then let me correct your facts." Griffin's tone now matched hers. "Asking you to California wasn't a pretense. It was a smart business move. Your book is going to make an exceptional movie and be a tremendous success for your career and my studio. It was also, I confess, a perfect excuse to see you and see if the spark we once had could be rekindled. I chose not to admit to our previous relationship in the office so that no one would think you were getting or deserved *special* treatment." The way he pronounced the word made it all too clear what he meant. "I thought you would prefer that."

"Only you could be arrogant in one breath and thoughtful in the next. No matter how many spells you created or used, regardless of their success, that combination of

deadly but kind was always one of your sorcerer's more dangerous characteristics," she said, now referring to his game role. "Seems that time hasn't changed that."

"No, in fact it's a skill I've worked on and since it's one of my more useful qualities, I don't plan on changing it. And before you try to find out, my ability to read people has improved too. Let me take you to dinner. You look hungry." She decided to take the sentence at its most literal, rather than sexual, meaning and since she was starving and didn't know where to go in this new city, she agreed.

He took her to a small, dimly lit restaurant where a hostess in a figure-hugging dress made Amara feel somewhat self-conscious of her simple pants-and-blouse outfit. They were taken to a table off to the side where instead of sitting across from each other they sat side by side at a banquette. She assumed this was a way for patrons to see and be seen, but she would have felt more comfortable and a lot safer with a table between them. They were so close she could swear she felt the heat of his skin coming through his clothes. Every movement of his body moved her, both in her seat and inside her. They were handed their menus and the hostess asked if she could place a drink order for them.

"Nothing for me," Amara said immediately, thinking that alcohol would not be a good idea on top of the jet lag and the kisses that she could still feel on her lips. Griffin declined as well and they focused on their meal choices.

As she read her menu, Griffin finally had time to take her in. The professional author photo he had seen of her didn't do her justice. Young-girl awkwardness had bloomed into womanly grace and feminine curves. Nothing about her appearance was specifically designed to attract a man and that alone in Los Angeles made her fresh and appealing. She wore her dark hair long and pulled off her face. He would have liked to reach over and pull it out of its functional ponytail and run his hands through it. What hadn't changed were her eyes, which were as intense as he remembered. Once she closed her menu, he watched as they darted around the room taking in details of the restaurant. Her writer's brain at work, he assumed. Her lips seemed fuller to him but

that may be simply because he needed to kiss her again, or because of the way he had so thoroughly kissed her in the car. She certainly wasn't wearing any lipstick anymore, although he couldn't remember if she had been to begin with. His cock tightened immediately in his pants when he saw her rub her lips gently with her index finger, her eyes focused again on the menu. Was this a habit that appeared when she was making a decision or was she thinking of his mouth against hers? He certainly was thinking just that right now. He ached not only to kiss her but to learn all her habits.

He called himself ten times a fool for thinking he could get through a simple dinner with her and not want to ravish her on the table. His need for her had been overpowering and intense from the moment she'd walked into his office. Hell, it had been intense for twenty years and for most of those he hadn't had her near enough to touch. He had wrongly assumed that maturity and experience would keep him from wanting to jump her like the teenager he had been when he saw her last. But having her here, feeling her close was maddening beyond any fantasy he had ever had.

A waiter, as polished and professional-looking as the hostess, came over to take their orders. Amara settled on a light vegetable soup to start and shrimp risotto with grilled vegetables. Nodding at her decision, Griffin ordered a garden salad with the house dressing, the Chilean sea bass with polenta and asparagus and selected a bottle of California Sauvignon Blanc. She smiled at his choices. The last time she saw him he ate nothing more exotic than microwave nachos. The menus were removed, the waiter departed and they were left with each other. And a dangerous silence.

"It's a beautiful restaurant. Do you come here often?" *And if so, with whom?* The question rang in her mind and she was glad she didn't speak it. She was sure that a man of Griffin's position and power had a woman in his life. Or perhaps several. Wasn't that the way things were done out here? It wasn't her business but she couldn't help but wonder about other women who he had kissed and how recently he had kissed them.

"I've actually never been here. It was recommended to me by my assistant. Her daughter got engaged here recently so it seemed like a good place for reconnecting and for quiet, intimate conversation."

Intimate. The word alone caused her heart to race and made her twitch in her seat, a movement that Griffin was aware of since he was only inches from her. She was spared from coming up with a comfortable reply when the waiter arrived with their wine and he and Griffin went through the dance of tasting, accepting and pouring.

"A toast," he said, his glass raised.

She picked up her glass. "What should we drink to?"

He thought for a moment and she saw a small half smile at the corner of his mouth. "To memories, to movies and to magic." He clicked his glass to hers and drank. Out of habit and good manners, she did the same.

"Other than the lovely alliteration, which as a writer I of course appreciate, that was a simultaneously vague and dramatic toast. What is going on, Griffin?"

"I'm not the Game Master, Halfling. I cannot predict that."

"Perhaps not, Sorcerer, but that doesn't mean you are not doing your damndest to control the game." She decided to match his bravado with a little boldness of her own. She could play games too. His laugh was loud and natural and, for the first time since their meeting this afternoon, she saw the young man whom she had looked up to and fallen in love with so long ago. "You have a plan. I can sense it. Are you going to tell me about it?"

"Not at the moment. Men deserve to have some secrets and mystery too. Isn't that how you keep your readers turning pages? By not revealing everything too quickly? I want to reveal my secrets to you slowly and over time." He reached out and stroked her jaw and her neck with his hands. "There is a lot I plan to reveal to you and I hope to have the time to do it." His fingers were cool, probably from the wine bottle. She shivered. Every sensation he caused was stronger than any she had ever felt with a man. How was she supposed to make it through their collaboration? Or even dinner?

She took a swallow of wine and tried to bring her heart rate down a little. Griffin continued, "But I am in no rush. Let's not anticipate and instead see where each turn leads."

"Okay, enough with the game-speak." Amara decided a touch of anger would provide the distance she so desperately needed for safety at this point. "Clearly from my writing you know I still love the world of fantasy and, from the film posters I saw in your offices, the same is true for you, but that doesn't explain why you cornered me in the car and at this table."

"Do you feel cornered?"

"Yes."

"Good. Makes everything so much more interesting."

Before she could come up with a retort, the waiter brought their appetizers. The food was presented beautifully but Amara took only a passing glance at it, still feeling on guard with Griffin. The first sip of the vegetable bisque she ordered, however, had her forgetting everything but the tastes in her mouth. She realized that her hunger wasn't only for him and she closed her eyes and moaned.

God, is that what she's going to look like when she's pleased in bed? His fork stopped in mid-motion and he experienced another surge of blood to his cock. He was certain she had no idea of the expression of delight that had passed on her face as the spoon lingered in her mouth before she hungrily dove back into her bowl for more. *Is it possible to envy an eating utensil?* He wanted to make her moan like that. *Patience*, he reminded himself. *You have waited this long. Let the magic and your time together do the rest.* He tried not to growl but he couldn't stop himself from stabbing at the greens in his salad. Displaying patience had never been something he did easily or well.

Needing a safe topic, he turned the conversation to comparisons of restaurants in California and Massachusetts. She seemed as ready as he to find a comfortable topic and soon a friendly argument ensued. He maintained that L.A. restaurants were on the cutting edge in cooking and food presentation and there was always something new to

try. She insisted that to be able to go to a handful of restaurants where you were known and welcomed was better.

“Don’t you like adventure?” he teased.

“Not in my food. No one here knows how I like my corned beef sandwich with a combination of both lean and fatty meat. How will I have what I want in my refrigerator at two in the morning when I can’t sleep?”

“Corned beef? That’s what you eat when you can’t sleep? Or is that why you can’t sleep?”

She smiled. Veronica always made fun of her odd eating habits so she was used to defending herself. “When I get into a story, I can’t stop. I’ve been known to be up until all hours and I eat when it occurs to me.”

“That I can understand. I’ve been known to forget the time when I am into a project too. But I have to admit that it has never occurred to me to eat deli food in the middle of the night,” he said with a tone of mock-horror in his voice.

“Don’t knock it until you try it. And speaking of trying it, you have to taste this shrimp. It’s amazing.” They had moved on to their main courses and, before she thought her actions through, she had placed some of her meal on her fork, reached over and put it in his mouth. As she watched his lips close over the fork, she realized her mistake. She had brought intimacy back to the table and they were both caught in the moment of it.

She slid the fork slowly from his mouth and, unable to avert her eyes, watched him chew. He was still staring at her when he said, “Yes, amazing,” and she was nearly certain that he wasn’t discussing the food. She finally broke eye contact and went back to her meal but, with her next mouthful, she could swear she now tasted him mixed with the flavors there. Her thoughts were no longer about food but filled again with him. The way he’d felt against her in the car, the smell of his skin, the touch of his lips. She needed another safe conversation quickly because the silence was making her thoughts spin out of control and causing her body to tingle again.

"California is a long way from Massachusetts. Do you like living out here?" Geography seemed a harmless topic and she was curious about how he ended up here so far from where he began.

"It took some getting used to and I have to take at least a few trips to the Sierras up north to see snow every winter or I forget which season it is, but generally, yes, I'm glad I moved out here. I wanted a place I could make my own. I thought about New York but the creativity of and the possibilities in the movie business appealed to me so here I am."

She was grateful the subject lent itself to a conversation about his career choice and she found she enjoyed listening to him talk about how he worked his way up in a business where newcomers had a particularly hard time. She didn't even notice that they had both finished their meals until their waiter asked, "Do you want dessert this evening?"

When Griffin looked to her she simply shook her head. "No, thanks," Griffin said to him. As the waiter left, he turned to her, leaned forward and said, "What I want is to kiss you again and feel your skin heat under my hands. I want to touch you until we are both breathless. I want to bring an end to eighteen years of wondering what things might have been like if Dad's employer hadn't laid off all those workers and I hadn't had to move away from you."

Even in the candlelight of their table she could see his eyes darken and his muscles tense. As a writer she didn't like being without words for a response but the honesty and passion of what he'd said had robbed her of a reply. Knowing that, like her, he had wondered about a relationship between them made her pulse speed up. She had been heartbroken when he had left but she had never dared to imagine that he had felt the same way.

"I didn't know you thought about me. Why didn't you say anything?"

"I certainly couldn't tell you back then. You were my best friend's little sister. We all looked after you. What could I say that wouldn't make me sound like a hound dog teenager? Or cost me Eric's friendship? You know he and I stayed in touch."

"Yes, he mentioned when you two had gotten together and sometimes when you'd spoken. He said he invited you out for the holidays but you always turned him down." Remembering that made her wonder more. "If you wanted to see me again, why didn't you accept his invitations to visit?" She hoped she kept the longing out of her voice but she could hear some of the ache slip in. "Why did you stay away?"

"Because the time wasn't right. Because I wasn't ready."

"And you're ready now?" She knew as soon as she saw the dangerous sparkle in his eyes that her response had sounded more like a sexual challenge, but instead of making a lewd remark he surprised her again.

"More than you know. But I will allow you to discover that for yourself." He motioned the waiter over to pay the check and she knew from the slight way he edged away from her that he would not take any more questions on this subject. She finished her coffee, thinking that it was surprising how well she could read him already after only a few hours together.

The limousine was waiting outside for them when they came out of the restaurant. She hesitated before stepping into it, wondering what would happen this time when they were alone. Continuing to surprise her, he was a perfect gentleman, keeping his distance and asking her about her first day. She shared her impressions of the people she'd met but said that, honestly, it was mostly a blur at this point. She didn't mention that seeing him was the reason she had trouble concentrating and that his earlier kisses made it hard for her to think of anything at the moment. There was a lull in conversation and she thought he might fill it by drawing her back to him. Before anything could happen, however, she felt the car slow down.

He glanced out the window then turned to her. "Here's your hotel. You must be exhausted."

"I am actually but I suppose if you wanted to come up for a drink or..."

"No. Thank you for the invitation but I should be getting home myself." She wasn't certain if she was relieved at not having to have him in her hotel room or if she was a little put off by his abrupt and decisive no. "You are all checked in and your bags should be in your room. All you need to do is get your key from the front desk."

"Thank you, Griffin. I..." She didn't know how to say goodnight as her door was opened by a uniformed attendant.

He solved her dilemma when he leaned forward, put his hand on her cheek and pulled her to him for a deep kiss. Different from the others, this one tasted more of tenderness than hunger. "Sweet dreams, Halfling."

She couldn't help but smile. "Goodnight. I'll see you tomorrow."

He nodded when the door had closed behind her. He settled into his seat, smiled and said to himself, "I'll see you sooner than that, my Amara."

* * * * *

The lobby of the Sunset Tower Hotel made her stop in her tracks after she had taken only a few steps. She couldn't help staring at the opulence around her. The hotel had been brought back to all its former glory in a recent restoration and it was as if she had walked back in time to a Thirties movie, surrounded by art deco fixtures of brass and wood. She wished for the chic clothes Claudette Colbert wore in her movies. The concierge came to greet her and brought her to the front desk where her key was waiting. After a quick proof of ID and a signature, a uniformed bellman took her to her room. Suite, she corrected herself as she sat and looked around the living room. It was remarkable how the right decorator could make a place so stunning. The furnishings had been expertly selected for luxury and comfort and the various shades of the soft mocha-colored upholstery added to the relaxing atmosphere. On the table behind the living room couch was a huge bouquet of sunflowers with a pair of oversized Chanel sunglasses sticking out. *I'm going to feel like Audrey Hepburn when I wear these!* she

thought. Next to the flowers was a pound box of Godiva chocolates. There was no card with either. None was necessary. He still remembered her favorite weaknesses. Was that marvelous or unnerving? Probably a bit of both. The whole evening had been filled with comforting connections and unsettling realizations.

Since it was late by East Coast time, Amara decided to go straight to sleep. She brought her cosmetic case into the bathroom and got ready for bed. She put on her most comfortable cotton nightshirt, grabbed the Anne Bishop book she was currently reading and climbed into the king-size bed. *Seems like a waste of space*, she thought to herself and blushed when she realized she was thinking what it would be like to share a bed with Griffin. *I cannot start down this path again. No man measured up to the fantasies I had of him and that was before seeing what an amazing man he has become. And learning what a great kisser he is. I can't let anything happen. How will I be able to return to reality after this California dream is over?*

Before she had read more than five pages, her eyes were closing. She remembered to dial the operator for a wake-up call and reached to turn off her bedside lamp. It was then she noticed the small black velvet jeweler's box. This time a card was attached. It had to be from Griffin but she couldn't imagine what he would leave for her in a box this size. She opened the note. Inside was a short but clear message. *Open and Roll.*

Chapter Three

It had to be the most unusual and intriguing note ever attached to a jewelry box, Amara thought. Of course he was being vague again, but without further thought she did as it read and opened the box. Inside was another piece of paper, which covered whatever was inside. On it was written a short poem.

Roll the die before you sleep

The jewel will be your guide

Waiting there in dreams for you

Is a passion from deep inside

The words sent a shiver through her. She removed the piece of paper and what lay beneath confirmed who had left the gift. Gently she took the ten-sided adventure-game die and looked at the unusual markings. Instead of numbers there were jewels, two each of diamonds, rubies, sapphires, emeralds and amethysts. It was beautiful and unique.

What are you up to, Griffin? And how do you expect me to be able to fall asleep now?

She smiled at her thoughts. Nothing rolled, nothing gained. He knew she wouldn't be able to resist the temptation and she didn't mind that he was right. She tossed the die on the nightstand and saw the ruby glinting at her.

"Now what?" she wondered out loud as a yawn overtook her. She turned off the light thinking about the rhyme. *A passion from deep inside*. What did he have planned? Sleep took her before another thought could.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

It seemed like only moments later Amara found herself waking in a forest. The light of the moon allowed her to see the woods all around and what could only be a castle

was in the distance. She looked down at herself and found that she was wearing a simple Juliet gown of light gray with contrasting embroidery that fell in a gentle A-line to her slippered feet. Seeing it, she smiled and couldn't help but spin around and watch the dress flare out gently. It was feminine and soft with a deep scoop neckline and long sleeves. It felt as if it were made for her.

She took in her surroundings and realized there was something about the location that seemed familiar. She wandered for a while, not knowing what was expected of her or what she would discover, until she found a flowering apple tree with a bench surrounding it. The tree resembled the one in her childhood backyard that they all used to climb on warm spring and summer days. Where they'd sat when Griffin had kissed her on his last night in town. Deciding that it was as good a place as any to wait to see what would happen next, she walked over and sat. She closed her eyes and felt the breeze in her hair. It moved the fabric of her thin, long dress. After a moment she thought she heard chiming. She opened her eyes but no one was there. As the wind blew again, she heard the chiming once more and this time she looked around to see something that caught the moonlight.

Something was dangling from a low branch. She stood and reached for it, finding a beautiful key ring and on it a large golden key inlaid with rubies. She smiled as her heart warmed. She knew that Griffin had left this here for her to find. He knew she would join him on whatever quest he had created for them. Her curiosity had always been both a virtue and a failing of hers.

As she held the key in her hands, she heard the sound of horse hooves. When she looked up, a sleek black mare had stopped by a nearby rock. Walking over to her, Amara stroked the nose of the beautiful animal. "Hello, Dusk," she said, reading the name on the harness and the horse seemed to bow her head in acknowledgement. She used the rock to lift herself into the saddle, grateful that the skirt was full enough not to require her to ride sidesaddle. Even in a dream, she couldn't imagine wanting to fall off a horse. Settling herself as best as she could, she said to the animal, "You know better

than I how to get where we are going. Off to the castle, please.” She gave Dusk a nudge and the horse broke into a canter.

The ride was exhilarating but fortunately not very long and soon she arrived at the castle. Up close, the building was dark and imposing but the front door was open, if not completely welcoming. She slid off the horse and stroked her nose. She found some carrots in a velvet bag around Dusk’s neck and gave her the treats for her service. “Until I need you again.” And the horse galloped off.

Amara walked through the heavy outer doors and into the main hall, noting the quiet and the gloom. There was no one around and only few candles lit. Now she felt uncertain. Reaching on tiptoe, she took a torch down from the wall and went to a staircase illuminated by wall sconces. Once at the top of the stairs, she went to the right when she noticed the only other lit scone was outside a room halfway down the hall. Arriving at the door, she saw a ruby embedded in the wood. She looked again at her key. The matching ruby confirmed this was where she and the key were meant to go. Inserting it smoothly into the lock, she heard an immediate click as the key turned. She set the torch into a scone then pushed open the door and stepped inside.

The chamber was as ruby as the stones. A fire burned low in the fireplace. Red pillar candles were lit throughout the room, giving it a warm inviting glow and releasing the scent of cinnamon into the air. The bed was covered with a scarlet silk comforter and pillows that matched. Walking over to the bed, she saw a red negligee had been carefully placed at the foot along with a delicate bracelet with a ruby heart dangling from the chain. Amara gave an excited gasp when she saw the gifts and immediately changed into the clothes and jewelry that she assumed had been left for her. Like the gown she woke up in, the negligee fit perfectly, hugging all her curves. It was nothing but lace and satin, clearly meant to heat the blood of the man who would see her in it. Her skin warmed the material as she carefully put the bracelet on.

By the fire, she saw two goblets of dark red port. She took a sip, felt the wine warm her as it traveled down her throat. She brought it with her, placing it on the side table.

She slid into the center of the bed, feeling dwarfed by the size of it, closed her eyes and waited. Everything felt so real, so vivid, beyond any kind of dream she had ever had before. *But it must be a dream, she thought, right?*

Before she could wonder more she felt *him* with her. He had not touched her or made a sound but her body tuned into his presence and she knew immediately that he was near. She felt herself react, her nipples hardening under the thin negligee. The mattress shifted beneath his weight as he sat by her. She opened her eyes.

Seeing him there, looking down at her, made her breath catch. As he looked deeply into her eyes, she did not, could not, blink. She was caught in his gaze. Taking in his appearance, she saw that he wore simple medieval-style clothes with a loose-fitting white shirt, black britches and black boots that came up to his knees.

"Griffin," she whispered.

"I am here," he replied. "Welcome to my realm. Our realm."

It was all she needed. She rolled toward him and he captured her in his arms. His first kiss was gentle. She meant to match his tender touch but desire bubbled quickly to the surface. Before she could stop herself, her passion for him was in her lips and she returned the kiss more fiercely. She felt him begin to smile against her mouth.

"My lady is hungry tonight," he said.

She smiled at him. "I am. I can't help myself. Here I don't have the need to censor what I am feeling."

"I more than understand. I want you to show me everything you want. As I intend to show you." He licked her lips lightly in between kisses, his taste was intoxicating and she melted under his touch. His lips were hot and she felt every kiss imprinted on her skin. As his kisses moved from her lips to her neck, she writhed in his arms. Her hands moved through his hair and down his back. She felt his breath quicken and knew that she was affecting him as much as he was affecting her. The knowledge brought a heady rush.

"Bare yourself for me, Amara," he said as he pulled away to look down at her. "I cannot wait to see you naked any longer." His eyes held hers and she barely blinked as she slid the straps of the red negligee off her shoulders. She pulled her arms out and then tugged at the light fabric so that her breasts were revealed to him. She was emboldened by the setting and the passion in his eyes. This was a first for her with him, dream or no, yet she was surprised to find herself able to undress in front of him. She could sense the heat of his stare as he watched her progress.

"Completely" was all he said when she hesitated for a moment. She continued to remove the material that had barely covered her. She lifted her hips to slide it over her pelvis and heard his sharp intake of breath when her pussy, trimmed and exposed, was revealed to him. He reached down and pulled the last of the cloth away. She was naked but for the ruby bracelet. He was still fully dressed. The difference excited her.

"So beautiful," he murmured and his fingers gently stroked her pussy as his lips played with her mouth again. "So wet." She hadn't realized how obvious her arousal had become until he touched her between the lips of her entrance. There was no denying what being with him was doing to her. She was soaked. "And all mine."

She sighed deeply as his finger hinted at penetration.

"Say it." His voice was slightly raised.

"Yours. I'm yours, Griffin."

"That's right, angel. Tonight your body, your pleasure, will be given to me." As he spoke, his fingers and his lips emphasized his claim.

"Yes, yes. They are yours. I am yours."

"My sweet Amara," he murmured against her lips and with no other warning his finger plunged deeply into her pussy. Even though she was wet, she still gasped, startled by the swift intrusion and the heightened sensations it brought.

He gentled his fingers and touched her for a little longer, stroking her on the inside. Then he stopped abruptly. His fingers left her. His kisses stopped and he moved away.

Missing his warmth, she looked at him. He had stepped from the bed and had begun to remove his clothes.

"Watch me. Watch me and see all that I offer to you tonight." She could not turn away if she tried. Boots were removed swiftly followed by pants and although he was quickly nude from the waist down, his shirt was too long for her to see between his legs. Her eyes met his and a slow smile came to his face. He started to unbutton the shirt that covered him. Leisurely he began to reveal himself to her, inch by agonizing inch. It seemed to take hours before the last button was undone. Slowly he pulled the shirt from his shoulders and his full strength was revealed. The muscles of his arms, the broadness of his chest and the hair that covered him. Her eyes traveled of their own accord down his stomach to his legs. And to the cock that waited, hard and powerful. Ready for her.

"I can see it in your eyes, Amara. Tell me. Tell me what you want."

"Come to me," she said in a husky need-filled voice. "Be with me and take me."

"With great pleasure." He slipped into the bed beside her, pulled her close and wrapped her legs around his. The feel of him bare and hot brought a fresh flood of wetness between her legs. And when she moaned, his fingers were there before the sound was complete.

"You are so sensitive, so ready for me. I love that you get exceptionally wet. It makes touching you, tasting you, so much more enjoyable. It shows me how much you desire all I want to do to you." He had been kissing his way down her body as he spoke and when he was silent again it was because he had brought his mouth to her pussy. He sucked deeply, drawing out the wetness that he had created.

"Griffin!" Her cry was a shout, a whimper, a plea. After that, only moaning was possible. She'd never imagined anything feeling this powerful.

His touch changed after his first taste. He licked her up and down with the flat of his tongue. Slow and deliberate strokes that made her grasp the red sheets by her side. After he'd let these sensations build for a while, his tongue became pointed as he began

to probe inside her cunt, occasionally flicking gently at the edges of her outer lips. She felt a river of passion pouring out of her. Her clit was hard. She knew he could see it trying to escape its protective hood but he did not touch her there. She ached for more, had never known this sort of sexual need before. It was consuming her.

He added his fingers to the touch of his tongue and she gasped at the feel of him teasing her with first one and then two fingers, clearly knowing what she wanted, but he was holding back, keeping her on the edge.

"Tell me," he whispered against her skin. His breath was so hot. Another sensation that flooded and filled her.

Amara struggled to find her voice. "I want you to touch me more."

"Where?"

"There."

"Be specific, my Halfling, or I will stop."

She took a deep breath, knowing he was telling her the truth. "Touch my pussy, Griffin. Slide your fingers into my slit and lick my clit with your tongue." The words made her feel even more vulnerable than her open position, but at the same time there was a sense of power in being able to ask for what she wanted. Never before had she given voice to her own needs. Only through her characters had she ever been able to show any boldness in the past.

"Very good" was his only response as he began to do exactly as she'd asked. First one and then two fingers were inserted into her. The feeling of being filled was exquisite. She could not imagine how he did it but soon she felt a third finger expose and tease her clitoris.

Nothing prepared her for the incredible sensation that shot through her body at the first touch of his tongue on her clit. A scream slid out of her along with another rush of wetness.

Yes, my sweet, Griffin thought, *let it build. Let me satisfy you.* He loved watching her becoming mindless with pleasure. Seeing her bare for him excited him more than he'd thought possible and touching her without hesitation was intoxicating, but it was nothing compared to how incredible it felt to finally taste her. If she weren't so caught up in her own experience he wondered if she could feel his smile against her skin as he stimulated her. He had found a rhythm that he continued mercilessly. He brought her closer and closer to orgasm and yet kept her from her final peak.

"Please, please," she begged, sure she would shred the sheets if she didn't come soon.

"Please what?" he whispered.

"Please release me. Please let me come. Please, please." She couldn't stop muttering the word repeatedly until nothing but sound was possible. Her moans turned to shouts of encouragement and need as his tongue became insistent on her clitoris and his fingers pumped steadily in and out of her pussy. She could not hold back and he was there to encourage every sensation. Her orgasm rushed through her body, causing her to arch off the bed, pushing herself against him in unrestrained passion. He moved with her, not losing contact with her shuddering body. He continued to lick her sensually as her climax ebbed. He saw every vibration, every aftershock.

She saw him lick his lips before he began to gently kiss his way up her body. Knowing that he enjoyed her taste caused another shiver to take her. When he came to her mouth he was slightly wet from them both. The taste of them mingling was heady and exotic.

"Look at me," he demanded. She did. "There is so much for us to explore in this dream, my Halfling. So many things to take advantage of."

And without any other words of warning he slid his swollen cock deep inside her still trembling body. He felt huge, hard and perfect. The lips of her pussy, engorged from her orgasm, wrapped around him, sealing him inside her. No condoms needed in a dream. Definitely an advantage.

He began to move above her quickly, his strokes measured. He pulled out almost to the tip and then pushed back in fast, his balls slapping against the entrance to her pussy. She was aware of every inch of him and her need grew again.

"I love your body, your skin, your breasts," he said as he licked and bit them, making the nipples hard. His mouth became rougher on them, increasing the blood flow, increasing the sensations. She had never felt more beautiful, more sexy or alive.

"I want you above me," he said as he slowed his movements.

"As you desire, Griffin," she said with a satisfied smile and the sexual confidence of a woman who knew she was wanted. He grabbed her and rolled them both over until she was on top of him.

She was about to slide him back inside her when she surprised them both by moving down his body to take his hard cock into her mouth, to savor herself on him. The taste was intoxicating. Even more exhilarating to her was the sound he made as she took him more completely into her mouth. Her hands caressed the base of his shaft and his balls as she continued to engulf him with her lips and her tongue.

"God, what you are doing to me?" he groaned, his hands gripped her hair tightly. She thought she heard him whisper the word "magic". She continued to listen to his sighs and moans and, when she discovered the places that seemed to excite him the most, she let her mouth and fingers work together to stimulate him more. All she could think of was thrilling him as much as he'd thrilled her. She felt herself get wet again when he said her name in a groan of pleasure. She continued, enjoying her newfound power to please him, until she felt his fingers on her shoulders, pushing her head gently away. "This is not how I wish to come tonight."

She looked up at him, waiting to learn what he wanted. "Ride me. Ride and look at me. Look into my eyes as you fuck me and bring us both the pleasure we need."

She moved her body up again, straddled his legs and impaled herself on his hard shaft. She began to grind against him and put her arms behind her, leaning on his legs. Her back arched but her eyes, as he had commanded, never left his. She rode him

slowly, feeling the deepness of his cock inside her with each movement. It was as if she had never stopped coming.

Suddenly she felt a light but firm smack on her ass. "Faster," he commanded and he smacked her again. The sharp pain followed by the gentle burn excited her and she began to move more quickly above him. *How does he know?* Amara thought, her thoughts clear for a moment. *How could he know I've always craved that touch of control? For a man to demand the pleasure he wants for us.* Sensations overwhelmed her as she, with each downstroke, took him inside her to the base of his cock. She allowed her thoughts to disappear into the joy of all she was feeling. Keeping her eyes open became a struggle. She wanted to throw her head back and scream her delight but she never broke eye contact, exposing all her growing feelings to him.

When his hands grabbed her hips, she knew that his climax was close. She let him choose the rhythm and followed willingly, easily. He sped up their pace, bringing them both greater and greater pleasure.

"Oh yes, Amara," he called out and then he moaned, deeply and loudly as he came inside her. His climax triggered another in her and she was instantly aware of how connected she felt to him.

She remained on top of him as he pulled her down against his chest, the last of his climax shuddering out of him. She tightened the muscles in her pussy to increase their pleasure and was rewarded with a shudder of enjoyment from him. The warmth of his chest penetrated her body and the hair on it tickled the oversensitive skin of her breasts.

"I have wanted that for so long, Griffin," she said on a sigh, tears pooling in her eyes. "More than I have ever let myself know. But here in this dream you have created, it feels safe to say it out loud." She looked up and saw his warm smile.

"I know. I have waited for and wanted this as well. I told you when I moved I would find a way to come back to you. I hope that soon you will learn to trust me to keep my word and to know what you want."

"Yes, my sorcerer." He rolled her over so that they were lying side by side. She curled into that place on his chest that seemed made for her to rest her head. Tilting her face up so she could kiss the spot on his neck where she saw his pulse beat, she heard him laugh gently.

"You need sleep, little one."

"I'm not little anymore," she said, turning his face to look at her.

"Very true. Still, it's been quite a day for you." She smiled at the understatement. "Sleep in my arms." His words felt as warm as his skin and she burrowed deeper into his strong body. His embrace tightened and she felt herself falling asleep surrounded by his strength.

* * * * *

The wake-up call came abruptly at the time she requested. The room was flooded with sun since she'd forgotten to close the blinds the night before. As she lay in bed and stretched, she realized that she was surprisingly rested and ready to start her day.

That was easily the most wonderfully vivid dream I have ever had, she thought. *So much for fighting old feelings.* Swinging herself from under the covers and over the side of the bed, she gasped loudly when she realized she was sore between her legs. *As if I'd been making love all night.* It had been a dream, hadn't it? She looked over to her nightstand and shivered when she saw the die was back in its box, nestled in the black velvet, the ruby catching the light of the morning sun.

But that was nothing compared to the shock she received as she moved the covers off her body and saw the ruby bracelet still around her wrist.

"I've got to talk to Griffin," she said to herself as she jumped out of bed.

Chapter Four

A company car was waiting outside the hotel to take Amara to the studio offices at nine o'clock. She knew she should be focused on her first day of collaboration but all she could think about was Griffin. What would she say to him when she saw him today? What would he say to her? Or did he even know what happened? Spinning the bracelet gently around her wrist, she realized it didn't seem likely that the dream was only for her. Griffin was clearly a man who took control and if he could manipulate her dreams, he would want to be a part of them. And if he'd been with her... Her thoughts tumbled out of control, back to the passion and pleasure she had felt the night before. She squirmed against the leather seats trying to get comfortable as she found herself getting damp at the vivid memories. If she kept this up, she would be useless on her first full day of work.

After two wrong turns, Amara found her office and was ready for the day. Stacy came in to say good morning and asked if she wanted some coffee. The two women went together to the staff break room, which helped Amara learn the layout better. Stacy introduced her to people as they went and let Amara lead the way back to their desks. She made only one wrong turn this time and walked straight into Griffin.

"Good morning, Mr. Curtis," Stacy said as Griffin and Amara looked at each other silently. It was Griffin who managed to find his voice first.

"Good morning to you both. Are you settling in, Amara? Do you like your hotel room?"

Shooting a glance at Stacy, Amara prayed she wouldn't stutter when she answered. "Yes. It's beautiful and very old Hollywood. It's exactly what I picture when I think of Los Angeles."

"I thought you would appreciate the charm of it, the mixture of old and new. And did you sleep well?"

Was there a hint of knowledge in his voice? Rather than say anything specific with Stacy there, Amara began to play with her bracelet and watched his face for a response. His eyes went immediately to her hands and a knowing smile came to his lips. She decided that his reaction told her enough for now so she continued the conversation with no mention of her thoughts. "Yes, quite well, which was surprising since I rarely get a good night's sleep my first night in a new bed." She felt her cheeks getting warm and the rest of her getting warmer at the simple mention of a bed. So much for not letting him know her thoughts.

"Amara, there you are," a voice called to them as John arrived. "I see you've got your coffee. I have the most recent copy of the screenplay for you, which means we are ready to go. Oh, good morning, boss. Are you going to join us this morning for a read-through?"

"No, I think I'll leave you and Amara to work together for a while, get used to each other's styles."

"Your choice." He turned to Amara. "Ready to go?"

"I suppose I am," she answered, unsure if she was reluctant or relieved to be able to get away from Griffin. At least she was spared from saying something embarrassing in front of her new coworkers.

"I'll see you both later," Griffin said and walked toward his office. Amara wasn't certain if that was a promise or simply another casual comment. No matter their past, she wanted to know the man, not the boy and this morning's conversation was too brief to learn anything new. She took a copy of the screenplay from John and followed him to a conference room.

* * * * *

I'm hiding in here, Griffin thought to himself in disgust, staring unfocused at the view from his office window. *I arranged this, executed it and now I don't know what the hell to do*. He turned away from the skyline and tried to focus on the papers on his desk. He had planned this out step-by-step, as he did everything since he'd been forced to leave her because of the situation of others. From that time on, he'd done whatever he could to have control in his life. It had taken years to find and learn the magic he needed to create a world of passion for them to experience and then he had to wait for the right time. When he'd read *The Sword's Fire*, he had known he didn't need to wait any longer to bring her back to him. He was prepared for her arrival, for seeing her. The magic of the Mage had prepared him to craft the dreams for them to be in. What he had not been ready for was what being with her after a night of passion would feel like. The dream was real for them both, a give-and-take of passion and need. But seeing her this morning, the brightness in her eyes, the flush of her skin, had almost been too much. He felt like the anxious teenager he had been when he kissed her good-bye and swore to them both he would come for her. So much for control.

He had been reading her fiction since Eric had told him about her first published short story in a fantasy magazine almost ten years ago. Over time, he watched her talent and confidence grow. Her heroines took more risks, experienced more pleasure. Her heroes were all secure, bold and knew how to be an active part of the journey. And how to sexually satisfy the heroine. It was all he wanted to be for her.

What a joke. Here he was, one of the biggest power players in Hollywood, sitting in his expensively furnished office acting as nervous as a boy masturbating in the bathroom. He'd almost grabbed her and kissed her senseless when she bumped into him this morning, other employees be damned. Instead he'd stood there almost speechless, praying he wouldn't get a visible erection. Neither response made him feel daring or powerful. What kind of a hero did that make him? When he saw the bracelet on her wrist, it reminded him vividly that she too had experienced all he had last night in their dream realm. But what in the name of reality was he supposed to do next?

* * * * *

For Amara, the day sped by. It didn't take long for her to realize that John was a thoughtful person and, more importantly, a talented writer. He had loved the book and seemed to have a solid grasp on what was at the core of her story and characters. Writing for her was always such an emotional and solitary event that she had been particularly worried about sharing the experience with someone, but John was open and relaxed, making the process of creating the screenplay more fun than she'd anticipated. Walking her scene by scene through what he had done, he showed her how to bring out pieces of the story and helped her to better understand the cliché about a picture being worth a thousand words. When Stacy came in and asked them if they wanted to join her and a few other "grunts" for dinner at a local restaurant Amara was surprised she hadn't even noticed that the bright sun was gone and Hollywood was lit up.

She was reluctant to say yes. Being out with a group of people she didn't know for an undefined amount of time made her nervous, especially when she couldn't leave and go home, since home was a hotel she couldn't get to without a taxi. At John's enthusiastic "Come on, we deserve a break" and Stacy's "It'll be fun" she decided to try to be a little brave. Besides, she reasoned, she knew Stacy and John and liked them. She might have a good time. She smiled, thinking how proud Veronica would be.

John went back to his office to get his things and said he'd meet them at the elevator. Amara backed up everything they had done on the computer and walked out to Stacy's desk.

"Am I dressed all right for a night out in L.A.?" Amara asked, trying to keep her voice light and panic-free.

"You look great. Like a cool East Coast writer. I'm glad you're coming with us."

As they walked to the elevator, she could see Griffin's office down the hall. The door was open, the lights off. He had gone home without saying goodnight. Now that she thought about it, he'd left without saying anything to her after their morning

greeting. Maybe she had misread the sparkle in his eyes and the sensuous smile she thought he had given her. Stacy's call of "Hold the elevator" broke her out of her moment of sadness and forced her to refocus.

Dinner was more fun and relaxed than she expected and she liked getting to know the people in Griffin's world. They asked her questions about her life and work and were open to her questions about the movie business and the man who employed them. They spoke of Griffin as a driven man with a vision for where he wanted both his company and his movies to go. He was hands-on when it came to Champion Pictures but totally trusted the people he hired to do the creative jobs they were best at. He had an unpredictable streak, buying properties no one else wanted or getting involved in the casting process if he had a specific idea of what he wanted. They had learned over time that no matter how many eyebrows he raised, his instincts were very good. She asked about his social life as casually as she could and hoped no one noticed how pleased she was to learn they had never seen anyone special in his life.

She arrived at the hotel exhausted but, when she entered her room, her heart jumped with hope and anticipation as she thought of Griffin and his dreams. She dropped her things on the couch and went directly to her bedroom. The box was waiting and when she opened it, a new poem rested on the die.

Ten sides, five jewels

Five nights to spend with me

The fantasy waiting there for you

Reflects the fever that I see

Fever, she thought, is an understatement.

Deciding to prolong the moment a little longer, she went to the bathroom to wash, take out her contacts and get into her sleep shirt. In the mirror she saw a woman flushed with anticipation. She arranged for her wake-up call, turned off all the lights but the one on the nightstand and climbed into bed with her book. She picked up the die and looked at it—the rubies were gone. The two spaces where they had been were

blank. His employees were right. *Nothing predictable about you, Griffin.* Closing her hand over the die, she warmed it in her hands, wondering what the evening might hold. Taking a deep breath, she tossed it gently on the nightstand and looked—a sapphire glinted up at her. She was certain she would never be able to sleep, knowing a little of what was to come, but she snuggled under her covers and began to read, hoping it would make her drowsy. Within moments, she was asleep.

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She woke under the apple tree and looked for a golden key chain. She found it quickly and the expected inlaid sapphire caught the light of the moon in its blue depths, shining at her. It almost seemed to wink. She couldn't help but smile.

She turned when she heard Dusk arrive and allowed the mare to once again take her to the castle. After treating the horse, she went inside and headed directly for the stairs. At the top, she found the lit wall sconce and soon stood before a door with a huge sapphire set in the wood. She used her key to enter the room.

The chamber was, not surprisingly, completely blue. Velvets and silks of the deepest midnight covered almost everything. On a chair near the fireplace was what she thought was a nightgown but was instead a long piece of material in the sheerest indigo. Next to it lay a gold bracelet with dangling sapphire teardrops. She removed her clothes and found a way to wrap herself in the gossamer material. She was covered and yet still felt naked. The fabric was as light as a butterfly's wing. For the final touch she tried to put the bracelet on, only to find that it fell off her wrist.

"It is an anklet, my Halfling." The sound of his deep voice made goose bumps appear on her arms, although the room was warm from the fire. Tonight she hadn't heard him arrive. Perhaps he had been there the entire time. She blushed as she handed him the chain, thinking about him watching her dress in his gifts. "Allow me to put it on you." She started to walk to the bed but he stopped her with a hand on her shoulder. "There is no need for the bed tonight, my sweet. There are plenty of pillows for us here at the hearth."

She looked down at her feet and noticed that there was a bed of pillows laid out on the floor. She shivered, knowing that soon she would be laid out on them.

“Look at me,” he demanded. She turned and for the first time that evening she looked into his eyes. While they were bluer than anything in the room, their darkness astounded her—and aroused her. She could get lost in their depth. She was fairly certain she already had.

“Good evening, my sorcerer,” she said with a smile. He opened his arms and she carefully walked toward him, the material making her especially aware of her movements. He wrapped her in his embrace, his warmth, and drew her into a deep kiss. She arched into his chest, aching to get closer. He ran his hands down her back, teasing the sensitive area at the base of her spine then moving lower to grab her ass as he pulled her to him.

The taste of his mouth on hers was intoxicating. She let him fully explore her with his tongue. He stopped kissing her only to nibble at her neck, her ears, her throat. She trembled against him and was aware of a rush of heat as she became wetter for him. He stopped his kisses to look at her.

“You look lovely in blue. Exotic. Enticing.”

“Thank you. You have excellent taste in...fabric. I hope I am wearing it right.”

“It matters little. You will not be wearing it long.” She smiled at his courtly way of speaking. It felt right to her in this world. He held out his hand and brought her into his embrace again. As he started kissing her once more, he lifted her into his arms and knelt as he placed her on the pillows. The fire was close to them but she knew he was making her warmer than any flame.

His hands traveled gently down her body until he reached her feet. There he lifted one and, resting the foot on his thigh, he put the gold chain around her ankle. She turned her leg and the fire made the sapphires sparkle. He kissed the top of her foot gently, sending shivers through her before he began to slide his body back up to cover her.

"I thought of you a lot today," she said with unanticipated honesty when they were once again face-to-face. She hadn't planned on letting him know but not being able to connect with him during the day had made her anxious about being with him again in this dream. She knew getting answers from him wouldn't be easy but that didn't stop her from wanting them.

"I thought of you as well. You made for an enticing distraction as I tried to get work done. But now I have you. All of you," he said. "And nothing will distract me from showing you all the ways I want you." At his words, she melted, feeling as if she had dissolved into a pool of hot wax.

Answers, she decided in that moment, could wait. All she wanted right now was him. "I am yours, Griffin."

"I know." She smiled at his confidence and he kissed her smile. After a time his lips left her mouth, moving to her chin, throat and the tops of her breasts that had started to emerge from the makeshift dress. He pulled her toward him slightly, lifting her a few inches off the pillows. He took the end of the fabric and began to unwind it, exposing her breasts to him. Easing her back down, he took a dark pink nipple into his mouth, sucking it deeply, making it sensitive. With his hand he reached for the other and gave it a pinch. She gasped lightly and then more sharply as he twisted the nipple and held it tightly, sending sharp sensations throughout her body. "Tonight, your body is mine to enjoy and to pleasure." He reversed his position then, sucking the other and twisting the one that was still wet from his mouth. "Say it."

"My body is yours, Griffin. I ache for you."

"And how I cherish that ache." He slapped her breasts gently, bringing more blood to the surface, forcing her to be aware of his every touch. He continued to suck while his free hand moved lower, pulling down the loosened fabric so that her stomach and the top of her pubic area were now exposed to his touch.

He stopped for a moment, getting a sense of what aroused her most. Her breath had become more rapid and her hands were running through his hair, down his neck and

then his back. When his touch particularly excited her, she dug her nails into his flesh. The feel of it thrilled him. With all the out-of-control emotions he'd felt about her during the day, he had been concerned he would devour her, blinded by his hunger. Instead he was relieved he was able to control himself and focus on her needs and desires. He never imagined how intoxicating it would be to learn what pleased her. A tug on the belt of his robe brought his gaze to hers.

Amara was lost in all the sensations he created within her but she knew she wanted more and she reached for what was separating them. Only then did she take the time to see how he was dressed. He was wrapped in a robe of blue velvet with a black fur collar. She had a feeling that when she opened it she would find he wore nothing beneath. Sensing what she wanted, he leaned back from her. She pulled at the tie and loosened the knot. It came undone easily in her hands and as she parted the robe she saw with a smile that she'd been right. He was completely naked and a quick glance showed her that his cock was fully hard. The heat that came from him made her sigh as she drew him toward her again.

Her hands ran down his chest then lower to play with the hair around his shaft. She felt the muscles in his stomach tighten at her touch. She could tell from the soft moans that escaped his lips how she aroused and affected him. The knowledge delighted her.

"I want to see all of you," he said. There was a subtle power to his voice. She felt almost helpless at the sound of it. Letting go of him, she put her arms to her sides and waited. He moved back from her and found the end of the material again. He began to unwrap the rest of her but this time he let her roll over continuously as he pulled the cloth from her. When the last of the fabric came loose, she was facing down, her back and ass bare to his gaze. She lifted her head to look at him but he gently pushed her face back to the pillows. She remained silent and followed his unspoken command.

He began to caress her back, firmly so as not to tickle her. He kissed the nape of her neck, her shoulder blades and slowly moved lower to the base of her spine. Soon his hands were on her ass. His fingers traced the crevice between her cheeks and moved

lower, going underneath her to touch her pussy for the first time that night. She gasped gently as he wet his finger with her juices and began to trail the wetness up to the rosebud of her anus. She shivered with excitement and anticipation. He kissed each cheek while raking them with his nails to further sensitize her skin.

He reached for a pillow and pulled her up to slide it under her pelvis. He kissed her ass again and began to touch her, moving lower until he was caressing her cunt. "Spread your legs for me." She did. After another quick kiss he worked his way farther down and under her body. A moment later he was pulling her legs apart. "Wider," he said against the top of her pubis. She could feel the vibration of his voice against her and she did as he asked. With her legs open, she was fully exposed to him. "I love the way you look all open and available." His words made her wetter still and she knew he could see the effect he was having on her, the gentle river that began to flow out of her.

He reached for her clit with his fingers, making it hard and sensitive. As he teased the tiny pearl of sensation, his touch was deliberate but not firm enough to give her the complete pleasure she was craving.

"I love your clit," he said and licked it for emphasis. "Who could believe that something so small could become so sensitive? Be responsible for such an incredible profusion of feelings?" His words excited almost as much as his touch, given that he had not stopped caressing her outer lips. The feeling of his warm breath and the barest hint of beard tracing the skin of her thighs was maddening.

He continued to lick at her pussy as he inserted first one and then two fingers into her. He pumped them in and out of her steadily and she knew he felt her heat pour out. She used her muscles to grip his fingers inside her and she heard him moan. She started to smile at how she excited him but she was too caught up in her own pleasure to do more than sigh. "I am going to make you wider for me, my sweet." That was all the warning she received before he pulled his fingers out and added a third, guiding them in her again. She groaned. It was almost too much, the stretching, the fullness.

"You want me, don't you?" he asked, not stopping as he continued to coax her pleasure.

"Yes, my sorcerer." There was nothing else she could call him as his sexual magic enveloped her body.

"Tell me more. I've read your books. You can be quite explicit when you want."

Her skin flushed as years of sex scenes she had imagined and vividly written flashed through her sex-fogged mind. *That's how he knows*, she thought. *He's read what I desire. What I crave.*

"Spin the magic of your words for me."

"I want you, Griffin. I have fantasized about feeling you inside me for years. I want you to be in my body, to make you a part of me. I need you to be the only thing I can touch because you are surrounding me. Please, I need to feel your cock deep within me, filling me, connecting."

"How could I resist such an image?" His hands and mouth moved away. She registered the loss for only a moment then she felt his weight behind her and the tip of his cock began to search for her entrance. The pillows had put her at an ideal angle. The hard tip of his member slid into her easily. He held back slightly, teasing her with this part of him until she moaned.

"More, please, Griffin, more." And without any verbal response he slid himself in deeper. She groaned at the feeling of being filled by him and her pussy contracted swiftly in response, heightening the pleasure for them both.

"Push yourself up on your hands a bit. I want to play with your breasts." She did so immediately. As soon as she had levered herself up a few inches she felt his hands on her breasts, fondling them, gripping them hard. He seemed to be all around her and she felt her orgasm building. He must have sensed it too because he unexpectedly began to slow down.

"Not yet, my angel. I am going to make this last for us both." By drawing out the sensations and not allowing her to climax, everything became more sensitive. He slowly

pushed himself into her, over and over, driving in as deeply as he could, his cock stretching her swollen pussy lips. She reached to adjust the pillow to give him a better angle.

"No, no, my sweet. The pillow is no longer necessary." He pulled it away, the velvet teasing her skin as he moved it, leaving her bent forward without support, impaled on his hard cock. "Now I have access to even more of you."

"Oh God" was all she could whimper as she realized what her new position allowed him to do. Before she even completed the phrase, his hand was at her exposed pussy, beginning to tease her lips again, stroking her skin, making her squirm. And then he changed his movement. His thumb was on her clit and he found the rhythm that matched their connection. She was completely filled by him, her every movement brought her into deeper contact with his touch. She moaned louder now, needing to vocalize some of the incredible pleasure that was swelling insistently in her.

The pace of his thrusts and his fingering increased. He was bringing her closer and closer to her climax and she could only hope that his was close too. Even in her sexual haze she ached for him to be receiving as much pleasure as he was giving her.

"Yes, Griffin, yes. Please fill me. Come inside me."

"Oh yes, my Amara. I will. And you will take me."

"Every drop. Don't hold back."

"I want to hear you come." The speed of his stroking began to increase.

"Oh God, yes. I am so close. Please don't stop. Don't stop." After that, all she could do was repeat the words "please" and "yes" as her climax began to build to the point where there was no resisting the shattering release that was only moments away. A fresh flood of wetness poured from her onto his cock, alerting him to the nearness of her orgasm. Her heat was all he needed to go over the top.

"Yes, yes, my angel. Take me. Take all of my passion for you." His moans were nearly shouts as he pumped her fiercely. The excitement that had been building in him

since he saw her enter the chamber that evening could no longer be contained. His strokes became harder, his grip even more insistent.

His final shout of pleasure was so loud it drowned out hers. The sounds of their matched passion sent a fresh tremor of excitement through her. He continued to stroke inside her, more gently, letting his orgasm and hers fade away slowly. His touch on her pussy softened but didn't stop as aftershocks of her climax continued to run through her body. Eventually, exhaustion and release swept over him and he relaxed against her back, pushing her deep into the pillows. She could do nothing but sigh. The weight of him against her, feeling him so near, was everything she wanted at this moment.

When his softening cock slipped out of her, he rolled to the side. "Come close to me. Let me hold you, my beautiful lady." She curled, boneless and satisfied, into the warmth of his body, listening to the still rapid beating of his heart. His hands stroked her arms and her back. Every part of her was so sensitive.

"Who adores you?" he asked.

"You do, my sorcerer. And you were right."

"About what?"

"We did not need the bed." She heard his soft laugh. His response to her humor warmed her almost as much as his response to her body. To be desired physically was one thing but rekindling their special emotional connection left her as breathless.

* * * * *

Amara woke up alone in her bed to another beautiful California morning. She immediately threw back the covers to look at her leg. The sapphire teardrops on the delicate chain around her ankle showed her all she needed to know.

After her shower, she chose a simple navy blue wrap dress since it matched her new piece of jewelry and headed downstairs. As she got into the car she realized she didn't know what she was looking forward to more, seeing Griffin or getting back to work on the screenplay. She couldn't help but smile when she thought of the fun she

was having—both in dreams and in reality. It had only been two days but this was already better than what she had hoped for when she toasted herself on the plane. She made a mental note to send a thank-you gift to Veronica for encouraging her to take this opportunity.

She was proud of herself for arriving at her office without any wrong turns and managed to get coffee for herself and Stacy error-free. She was going over some notes she had taken when John's assistant came in with the new pages from the day before and told her that John would be a little late this morning and hoped they could get together at eleven and work through lunch. Amara agreed and continued with her coffee as she found a red pen and began to make notes. She was fascinated to read how their work from yesterday translated into stronger scenes. It was similar to what happened for her after she had a good editing session with her own work.

"You look so serious, Halfling," said a deep voice.

She jumped in her chair. She had been making some notes in the margins of the script and hadn't heard Griffin enter. He walked into her small office and sat down. His use of the nickname this time told her that they must be alone. A first for them since the dreams began. "Make yourself comfortable."

"I think I will. How are things going? I know it's only your third day, but are you getting a sense of the script and making the transfer from book to screen?"

"Somewhat. John takes one out of every three suggestions I make but I am learning to make them count. I like reading what he has done with my story and when something is missing, he listens."

"He's said some great things about you as well. He is very good when it comes to adapting work from another source. He doesn't let his ego get in the way and he doesn't sacrifice quality."

"He's also a messy eater."

"Excuse me?"

"I went out with him and some of your other staff last night to dinner. He wolfs down food like a three-year-old and enjoys it just as much."

"That may explain the lack of a steady girlfriend."

"And what explains your lack? I've seen you eat recently and you seemed to be a gentleman." It was time to see if she could learn a little more about him.

"Mostly I've been too focused on business to build a relationship with someone. That and I haven't met anyone who lived up to my fantasies."

She blushed at his words, having been part of his fantasies for the last two nights. "Is that why you make films? Trying to make fantasy into reality?"

"Perhaps. Probably. What about you?"

"Oh, I guess I just never met the right..." Her voice trailed off. She knew that was a flip answer and a lie. She had met the right man, a long time ago. And he was sitting in her office, making her think of things she wasn't comfortable with. "I guess I didn't want to take the risk of getting involved with someone and then getting hurt. Or left." She saw him flinch.

"Sorry about the part I played in that concern."

She shrugged. "It's not something you could have changed."

"It's not what I wanted. You must know that. When my dad found a new job, we all went with him. It was horrible, for a lot of reasons. I've never let anyone make decisions for me since then. I prefer to have control in my life."

"And in your dreams?" she asked hopefully.

He smiled. "I wondered when you were going to ask me about that."

"You have to admit, you're making some decisions for both of us there, aren't you?"

"I suppose. Although we both have free will within the dreams."

The phone rang and Amara hesitated before she picked it up. She wanted to talk to him more about what he was feeling but John was now ready to meet and asked her to come directly to his office. "Deadlines beckon," she said when she hung up.

"Your boss is demanding."

"You have no idea," she said with a laugh.

"Then I will leave you to it." He got up to leave but stopped at the doorway. "Amara, I know this seems incredible but I am hoping you will trust me." She didn't know what to say and he left before she could answer. It was a lot to ask of her. And while their attraction was undeniable, she wasn't certain yet of her willingness to trust him once again with her heart.

Chapter Five

As expected, she and John worked through lunch, which they ordered in and dinner, which they didn't. It was exhausting but productive. That night Amara decided to indulge herself with room service. She requested a salad with grilled chicken to be healthy and a dessert with chocolate to be decadent. Sitting on the couch, watching the news and then a rerun of *Sex and the City*, she enjoyed every gooey bite.

She knew she was staying away from the bedroom intentionally but it felt more like delaying gratification than true avoidance. A few doubts still crept in occasionally. What if the die wasn't there? What if it landed on one of the blank spaces? Would that mean a night without him? She was surprised to realize how much she disliked that thought. She had loved him once so completely and it was becoming clear that she wanted that love again with the man she was getting to know. She gave herself a mental shake and decided that, since for now the only answer was another roll, that was what she would do. When she felt her eyes begin to droop, she headed first to the bathroom and then, with anticipation, to bed.

The box was open and the die was there. Next to it was the poem for the night.

Years pass, things change

But passion's heart is true

Roll once again our magic die

To find what waits tonight for you

Passion's heart is true. She liked the sound of that. For all the sexual hunger she had experienced with him the past two nights, she knew her deeper emotions had more truly been aroused. She rolled the die and smiled in relief when an emerald caught the light.

Getting under her covers, Amara closed her eyes and pictured Griffin's face. His smile. His eyes. She thought of his voice, his touch and a moment later, she knew the magic was happening again as she fell asleep.

* * * * *

In his bedroom, Griffin prepared himself to be pulled into the dream realm by reading his favorite, and one of the more erotic, passages from *The Sword's Fire*. It never failed to excite him, usually to the point where he masturbated until he came. In it, the heroine gave a virginity of sorts to the hero when they indulged in the intimacy of anal sex. The first time he read this and every time since, he could feel his pulse beating in his cock. It was both shocking and thrilling to read one of *his* fantasies written in *her* words as if they were sharing an unspoken secret. He had initially experienced a jealous and angry moment, wondering if she had enjoyed this pleasure with another man, but after the initial feeling passed he realized that this was proof that he wouldn't—couldn't—wait any longer to bring her to him. The next day he started the work to acquire the rights to her book. He hated the thought of another man touching her in the past and he wouldn't allow another in her future. It had to be him. It had to be now and he had to be her last.

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She awakened with a shiver and knew immediately that she was not in the woods. Tonight she was already at the castle, lying on the cold stone steps. Looking up, she saw the emerald-inlaid key in the mouth of a lion's head doorknocker carved into the door. As she entered, she noticed across the inner courtyard that a pillar candle had been lit on the ground floor. It was not in front of any door. As she looked down a long corridor she had not noticed before, more lit pillar candles lined the wall. She followed them to the end where she found the door for the evening, set with green stones forming a flower. She took her key and opened the door to find that Griffin had surprised her again.

She was not in a room. Instead the door led to a blossoming garden. The smells of flowers and wet earth reached her nose and she smiled at the tranquility before her. The area was lit by the full moon above. She breathed deeply, easily.

She noticed a beautiful forest green gown draped over a bush at her side. She slid on the dress, a simple sheath of raw silk with thin straps and slits up both sides, nearly to her waist. Dangling from another branch was a pair of earrings, gold links with ovals of emerald at the bottom. She put them on and shook her head, feeling them move with her.

"I wasn't certain if green would suit you but I can see I needn't have concerned myself. You look like an exquisite nymph."

She smiled as she turned to see him. His hand was outstretched. She moved quickly to him, needing to be in his arms. It felt as though it had been forever since she had enjoyed his embrace. And at the same time, it was as if she had never left. His hold was strong and sure. Again she breathed deeply, now taking in his unique scent.

"I have longed for you, my angel," he whispered into her hair. Until he said the words, she had not realized how much she ached to hear them. She snuggled deeper into his arms. She sensed as much as heard his low laugh. "I guess that means you feel the same."

She looked up at him then, her eyes meeting his dark blue ones, which seemed even darker in the night around them. She knew he could see the truth there but she chose to tell him anyway, wanting to say the words. To feel them in her heart and hear them in the air. "I feel the same way and I couldn't be happier anywhere but in your arms."

He drew her into him, kissing her, gently at first, soon passionately. She arched her back to feel all of him against her. His body heated hers.

After a few moments, he pulled away, took her hand and led her deeper into the garden. A short stroll later they arrived at a clearing. The surroundings were lush and exotic. Aromatic flowers in shades of reds, yellows and oranges, bold and vibrant, surrounded them. Instead of walls and windows, they had a carpet of green and the

gaze of the moon. In the center of the sanctuary was a blanket of lambskin, two oversized pillows and a picnic, neatly arranged.

"Are you hungry?" he asked her. She looked at him with a smile she hoped told him she was hungry for him. He led her to the blanket, scooped her up in his arms and then knelt, placing her against one of the pillows. He kissed her again as he reached for the basket and pulled out a bottle of champagne and two glasses. Next, he took out a small platter filled with the reddest strawberries she had ever seen and a covered glass bowl. He opened the champagne and poured them both a drink.

"To passion," he said. They clicked glasses and drank. He leaned forward to kiss her again and, as he did, his champagne spilled on her, soaking the front of her dress.

"Griffin," she gasped. "The dress. It's silk. It will be ruined."

He smiled at her. "It is inconsequential. Wrapping on a gift that I have already opened and intend to open again. Shall I show you how unimportant?" He reached and, after taking the glass from her, gripped the dress at the shoulder and with a pull, snapped the strap. After doing the same to the second strap that held it up, he grabbed the fabric at the side slits and with one strong wrench, ripped it completely up the seams. In moments the dress was in scraps and she was clothed only in the emerald earrings and the drops of champagne that clung to her skin. "You look lovely in moonlight. Ethereal."

"I am very real, Sorcerer. And very much yours." Opening her arms to him, he moved closer to her and she leaned back, the lambskin caressing her back. He arched over her and began to lick the drops of liquid from her, first at her neck then the sensitive skin between her breasts. When he finally reached her breasts, she gasped. She had ached for his touch and now that she had it, her need only intensified. He laved her nipples, sucking and then biting them. The wet of her skin caused her to notice every slight breeze that moved through the garden. She began to moan softly.

"I hope you are hungry, my sweet," he said. She was about to reach for him when he pulled back and opened the top of the glass bowl. She could not see what was in it

but she noticed that he took one of the strawberries and dipped it in. When he pulled it out again it was covered with chocolate. She simply sighed and he laughed. "I take it that means you like what you see?"

"I do. You know my weakness for chocolate. And for you."

"Do you want a taste?"

"Yes," she answered, opening her mouth. He brought the strawberry to her lips and held it above her, letting a single drop of chocolate fall and touch her tongue. She swallowed and stuck out her tongue for more.

"My little cat," he laughed, dangling the fruit closer and watching her intently as she lapped at the strawberry, licking all the chocolate off. He dipped it in again and offered it to her. "Bite." She did and her mouth was filled with the cold sweetness of the strawberry along with the silkiness of the chocolate. He popped the last of the berry into his mouth and reached for another. He brought it to her lips and allowed her a small bite before moving it away and gently painting her nipples with the juice. She moaned as he licked her, enjoying the treat he had created from her body.

While he continued to suck her nipples, she felt an unexpectedly cold sensation between her legs and she was suddenly aware that he had placed the strawberry on her pussy and was dipping it into her wetness. The sensation of the textured fruit was incredible. She felt shivery and slippery. He stopped and she watched him lick and nibble at the dripping berry, aching to have his mouth do to her what he was doing to the fruit. *Devour me!* He finished the treat and repeated the process, this time giving her the strawberry to eat. She tasted her arousal mixed with the sweet juices that ran down her throat. His teasing seemed to be endless and her hunger for him continued to build.

Finally he said, "I am feeling creative. I think I will paint your body, Halfling. But as we are out of strawberries..." He paused for effect. He dipped his finger in the chocolate and brought it to her mouth. She licked the finger, sucking it into her mouth as if it were his cock. She was rewarded with his groan. When there was no chocolate left to lick off, he took his fingers from her and dipped them again in the chocolate. This

time, instead of letting her taste, he began to paint lines and curves on her stomach. The sensation tickled and heightened her awareness of her nudity and the night air.

He took more chocolate on his fingers now and began to paint her pussy. "I am so pleased that you are trimmed," he said as he outlined the hair covering her mound. His movements were slow and deliberate, enticing and inciting her. "It makes you easier to coat. And easier to eat." With no further warning, he dove into her flesh and began to lap at the chocolate and at her. She could do nothing but moan his name at the first touch of his tongue on her inner lips. "So tasty and sweet, so smooth. Even without the chocolate." She could feel his words as well as hear them but as he continued to lick her all she heard were her own cries.

Her breathing became faster as her climax approached. And when she was certain she was about to peak he stopped. It took all the will she had left not to scream out loud. She heard his laugh and whined in complaint.

"I know, my sweet, I know. But not tonight. Tonight you are going to come with my cock inside you. I want to feel you as you come all over my shaft." As he talked, he positioned himself above her and without another word he slipped himself easily and deeply inside her. She cried out as he filled her. Her climax was so close that her body had been tightening in preparation. He felt huge within her.

His movements were precise, his rhythm gentle at first. Then he leaned over and started to lick at the chocolate that still covered her breasts, alternating between sucking deeply and biting firmly, devouring her flesh beneath the dark liquid. His thrusts changed as her excitement built. She reached for him, touching his shoulders, running her hands across his back. The warmth of him beneath her fingers excited her more. She stretched her arms further and her nails raked his ass as she pulled him closer to her.

Once the chocolate was gone, he sat up and continued to ride her. His hand reached below her stomach and he found her hard clit. He rubbed it with increasing speed as he drove into her heated body. She had been kept waiting too long. His touch set off a chain of feelings that built without stopping.

"Tell me," he groaned.

"I am going to come, Griffin. Oh God, I am going to come. I can't hold back."

"Then don't hold back. Wet my cock with your juices and your need."

"Oh yes!" It was a scream repeated over and over as she came hard against his hand and on his cock.

Before her climax had ended, he pulled out his hard shaft, wet from her. She missed the feeling of him inside her but before she could protest, he was pushing her legs farther back, her knees moving toward her shoulders. The movement raised her hips off the ground, exposing her ass. Looking deeply into his eyes with an intensity born of both desire and wariness, she felt the tip of him at the entrance to her anus.

"Yes," she whispered to him. "Yes, please, yes."

It was all the encouragement he needed and he slipped his cock slowly inside her ass. He took great care as he entered her gently and she was grateful for his control.

"I've wanted —" she started. "I've wondered —"

"I know."

"How?" she whispered.

"From your book."

"But I've never..."

"Never?" He grinned possessively.

"Never."

"Then I thrill to be your first." He continued to press into her until his cock was completely sheathed in her ass. Her body was still shuddering from her climax as she pushed herself against him, showing him her desire. Keeping one hand on her raised legs, he used the other to tend to her clit. His touch kept her excitement going and she moaned again.

"Let me see your eyes," he said. She opened them to look up at him. When she did, she knew he could see everything. Her needs, her passion, the depth of her feelings for

him were all reflected there. She had no shield where he was concerned. And in that moment, she knew she did not need one. She may not have answers to all her questions about him but she knew herself. The knowledge of her trust and love in him thrilled her as much as his touch and she felt another climax begin to build.

He continued to pump into her ass, driving himself as deeply as he could. She could see from the heat in his eyes, the coiled need in his muscles, how tremendously this position excited him and although she'd loved the times when their passion had lasted longer, there was something especially erotic about seeing that he, like her, was beyond control. That he could not stop the peak of his pleasure.

"Oh God," he roared to the night sky and she felt him come inside her. The intensity of his cry electrified her so that she was ready to come again, and she did, hard. Her spasms continued for a while. As his moans became pants, he looked down at her. She was already looking at him as if waiting for his gaze.

"Breathtaking," he whispered.

"That would be one word for it."

He pulled out of her slowly, causing her to gasp a little, before he drew her close. "Forgive me if I do not have your eloquent way with words."

"After what you just did...you are more than forgiven."

They lay sated in each other's arms. His nearness was all she needed and wanted at that moment.

Gently he stroked her skin and when he got to her stomach, he asked, "Feeling a little sticky perhaps?"

"Yes, now that you mention it. I do."

Smoothly he stood up and pulled her to her feet. "Come with me."

She kissed him. "I just did that, Sorcerer."

He laughed deeply and picked her up in a hug, swinging her around. "That you did, my angel. And now you make me laugh. You are so precious and special. Let me show you something that is perfect for you."

They walked naked through the woods. *This must be how Adam and Eve felt*, she thought. They had not gone far when she heard rushing water in the distance. "A waterfall?"

He nodded. "Something to shower us." He directed her through a narrow path that opened up to reveal a large pond with a waterfall cascading on one side.

"It is beautiful," she whispered. "Paradise."

"Only because we are here together." He drew her against him for a kiss. Taking her hand, he led her into the water. It was warmer than she expected but because the night air was cool, she shivered a little. "Swim with me, my angel, and you will not be cold." He dove under the water and she followed. They swam out to the waterfall and stood beneath it, allowing the flow to simultaneously clean and stimulate them. The pounding of the water massaged her languid muscles. She ran her hands through her hair and arched her back. Griffin stepped forward so that her body was pressed against him. Even with the water around them, she sensed his unique warmth. His hands came up behind her head and pulled her to him.

* * * * *

When the phone woke her, she thought she still heard the waterfall in the background. Noticing sleepily that the sun was missing from her room, she realized that it was raining outside. Leaning against her pillows, she put her hand to her ears and felt his gift dangling there. When the phone angrily rang again, she realized she had fallen back to sleep. She answered it quickly and before she could say hello a voice started anxiously questioning her.

"Hello? Amara? It's Stacy. Are you okay? It's eleven o'clock. Where are you? Is everything all right? The driver said you didn't come down this morning. Are you sick?"

Amara smiled in spite of being embarrassed at being found asleep. Stacy sounded like Veronica. "Do you have a Jewish mother hiding somewhere underneath your desk?"

"No?" Stacy sounded so serious. "Why?"

"You sound like a worried momma. I'm fine. I overslept. I guess the work and jet lag finally caught up with me but caught me unaware. I would have called if I had known I was going to be late. Is everything okay there? Is John mad? Is Griffin?" Amara sat up quickly, suddenly concerned. Pleasure was one thing but this was about business.

"No. Well, John was looking for you of course but I haven't seen Griffin yet today. In fact, I don't think he was even in the office. I heard something about him being away in New York for a few days."

"Away? He didn't mention that when I saw him yesterday."

"Well, I could tell you from the times I temped as his assistant he does have a forgetful streak when he gets single-minded about something. He gets completely focused and everything else fades from view."

Fades from view. A cold shiver went through Amara as she hung up with Stacy and started to quickly dress. Was that happening? Like when he'd left all those years ago and she never heard from him again. Could he have doubts about what was happening between them? Was she only an evening diversion?

She felt the emeralds at her ears. That couldn't be it. She was nearly certain that what he felt for her was as real as what she felt for him, even if most of their time together had only been in dreams. He had done a lot of work to create that fantasy realm for the two of them. Unfortunately she had enough reservations about his feelings to make her uneasy. She had fallen in love with him while playing games as a

child, but had his emotions been as strong? Or was this just another place for him to play?

She made it to the office in record time but it was no use, she couldn't concentrate. Her thoughts kept drifting and knowing that Griffin was in New York didn't make it easier to work. Instead she kept wondering about why he left without letting her know and what he was feeling outside their dream world.

She and John took a break at two and Amara went to her office to review a scene that was giving them trouble. The words made no sense to her. She read the same lines of dialogue repeatedly before she groaned with disappointment and put her head on the desk.

"Are you okay?" Stacy asked. Amara's head came up with a start. She hadn't even heard her come in.

"Yeah, I'm just great. Did my head banging alarm you?"

"Oh no, I'm used to that around here. It's part of the business. It's not a good week until someone nearly knocks themselves unconscious on their desks."

Amara found herself smiling for the first time that day. "The scene is not working. Or I'm not working. It's hard to tell the difference at this point."

"Let's get you out of here."

"I don't think I should have more coffee."

"I didn't mean to the break room. I meant out. Retail therapy. Pampering. Seeing the sun. You've been in Los Angeles for days and you've seen nothing but your hotel and this building."

"And two restaurants."

"Not enough. I'm calling John to tell him I'm breaking you out for the afternoon and you're coming with me."

Amara grabbed her bag and followed. Stacy told, not asked, John they were leaving for the day and moments later they were in a taxi. She had been so adrift all afternoon

that having Stacy take charge felt wonderful, even if she had no idea where they would be going or what Stacy meant by pampering.

Pampering started with three hours in a day spa getting nails, toes and hair done. Amara couldn't believe she trusted a stranger to cut her hair but the stylist worked magic, keeping most of her length and creating body, wave and a touch of sexy I-just-got-out-of-bed casualness. This was followed by a classically vegetarian California meal eaten outdoors while people watching. The day was topped off with shopping at some of Stacy's favorite boutiques, which, Amara was pleased to find, were reasonably priced so that she could indulge. And indulge she did—shoes, dresses, even some lacy underwear at Stacy's encouragement. It was a perfect girls' day out and she couldn't thank Stacy enough for her time or her timing.

It was late by the time she got back to the hotel and the phone was ringing when she entered her suite. Her first thought was that she was needed back at the studio. Maybe playing hooky hadn't been such a good idea. She dropped her packages on the couch and answered the phone pleasantly. The reply was barked back at her.

"Where have you been all day?"

"Griffin?"

"Yes, it's Griffin. Who would else would you be expecting?" Was that a touch of jealousy she heard in his voice? A small smile started at her lips. *Now who's following who around?* she thought a little wickedly. She enjoyed feeling the tables turned. "They told me you left the office early today but you didn't say where you were going. Is everything all right?"

"Everything is fine. More than fine. I feel better than I have in ages." She sat down, lazily kicking off her shoes and putting her feet up on the coffee table. She ran her hands through her newly cut hair, looked around at all the shopping bags she brought back with her and realized that she couldn't stop smiling. She felt like a kid with a lot of new toys—and a secret. And she decided that now she had a secret of her own, she was not going to reveal it too soon. "How are you?"

"Me? Me? I'm fine." Her simple question seemed to surprise him. "Where did you go?"

"I was having trouble staying focused so instead of staying in the office and forcing creativity Stacy thought I needed a little retail therapy. John agreed."

"Stacy?"

"The assistant I was assigned. Thank you for her, Griffin, she is wonderful. She's become more like a friend than a coworker, especially after today."

"Oh well, you're welcome." The more calm and unflustered she remained the more agitated he became. "Why didn't you tell anyone where you were going?"

"I didn't realize it was necessary. I'm a big girl now, Griffin, remember?" She had to cover her mouth to keep him from hearing her giggle. He was so obviously uneasy with her playful avoidance. She decided it was time to get in a little jab of her own. "Besides, you disappeared and didn't tell me where you were going."

"That's different. I had to leave on business."

"Well, I guess that is different since I had to leave for pleasure." Was that a groan she heard from the other end? This was quite fun. Stacy had been right. Playtime for herself had definitely been what she'd needed. She felt braver than she had in years. "If I'd known you were going to call and worry I would have left word about where I had gone."

"I wasn't worried."

"Oh good," she said. *Yeah, right. You don't like it when you can't control the game, do you, my sorcerer?* "And has your business been going well?"

"Actually it has. It was touch-and-go for a little while on a project I am hoping to purchase, which is why I needed to be here in person, but it all came together in the end."

She put some throw pillows behind her head and made herself more comfortable on the couch. "Tell me about it." And he did. For the next twenty minutes, she said

almost nothing but “Yes”, “Uh-huh” and “Really” as he went on about the players, the deal and the maneuvers necessary to bring it all to a satisfactory conclusion. Listening to his passion for his work was almost as exciting as listening to him moan when they made love. And it made her realize how real her feelings for him had grown since she first saw him again at the beginning of the week.

“You let me go on for a long time,” he said when his story was complete.

“Seems like you needed to share all of that. I was happy to listen. I like hearing about what you are creating and how it inspires you.”

“Is it completely different from what inspires you when you write?”

“I suppose. New business and hot deals are obviously not what leads me to my story. I look for the idea that excites me, that won’t let me go, or at least I try to notice when an idea like that arrives. I look for the character who I want to explore, whose journey I want to follow and create. And when I find her or him, I become determined to stick with it until the resolution.”

“Would you tell me more?” The question was so sincerely asked that she couldn’t resist. She told him of the discipline of the early days of creating a story that gave way to endless nights of writing when she was caught up in it all. Now it was his turn to listen, her turn to expose her professional passion. She was surprised to realize how easy it was, how good it felt to share this with him.

“You always did like the character part of our dungeon games,” he said when she was done.

“And you liked the adventure.”

“Still, we made a great team back then.”

“Yes, we did.” Silence followed. The “and now?” went unsaid but was there between them. Neither dared ask nor answer it. She heard the ring of a phone in his room.

"That will be the front desk telling me the papers I'm expecting have been delivered."

"Well, you should answer that. I am going to relax with some bad TV before going to bed. Shopping can definitely take it out of a girl."

"So I've heard."

She felt his reluctance to hang up the phone as strongly as she felt her own. "When are you coming back?" *To me*, she added silently.

"Tomorrow. I have an early breakfast meeting and then an eleven a.m. flight out of Newark which puts me down in L.A. at about four-thirty."

"Then I will see you when you return."

"If not before," he said meaningfully.

"Of course."

"Sweet dreams, Halfling."

She smiled at the reference to what might await on the next roll of the die. "You too, Sorcerer."

After channel surfing for a while, Amara decided it was time to enjoy the bath amenities and soak her tired legs. She had gotten more physical activity today than she normally did in a month. She drew a hot bubble bath, arranged towels to rest her head on and to keep her new cut dry and soaked until the water cooled. Amazingly, she managed to let her mind rest along with her body. *California is doing something to me*, she thought as she slipped into her nightshirt.

Her quiet mind, however, got its nightly jolt when the die winked at her from its black box. Knowing he was out of town made her curious about how he managed this part of the magic, but she was too excited to learn what was planned for the evening to wonder for long. As before, a poem lay next to the die, written on a card.

Do you wish there were more for us?

More of what we last shared?

Then roll our die and join me

For more than we ever dared.

“More than we ever dared,” she whispered out loud. She smiled to herself. Well, if ever there was a night she felt daring this was it. She warmed the die in her hands and rolled it. The purple jewel landed on top.

Chapter Six

She awoke inside the plush interior of a slow-moving carriage. Shortly after orienting herself, she felt the carriage stop and a moment later a coachman opened the door and offered her a hand. She stepped out to find she was directly outside the castle. *Leave it to Griffin to keep me guessing.* She began to walk up the stairs when the coachman cleared his throat to call her back. She turned and saw that he was handing her a key on a purple ribbon. As she took it, the amethyst caught the light of the torches that illuminated the entrance.

“Thank you.”

“You are most welcome, my lady,” he answered with a bow.

She continued in and as she stepped inside she was overwhelmed by light and noise. Torches were ablaze everywhere and music was coming from one of the rooms. For the first time in the dream world, she saw people walking purposely about.

“There you are, my lady,” a young woman approached and dropped a quick curtsy. Her garb immediately identified her as one of the castle servants. She rose and told Amara, “We have been waiting for you. I have been designated to help you prepare for the evening. I am Mary.” Amara didn’t know what to make of this change in the flow of the dream. *He certainly seems to be relishing the Game Master role,* she thought as she followed Mary up the stairs. They stopped at a room whose door was inlaid with an amethyst. Mary held out her hand and Amara gave the key to the maid.

The door opened to reveal a lavish and beautiful chamber, clearly a lady’s room, with a sumptuous bed, a large vanity table and an enormous armoire. Mary moved immediately to the vanity and pulled the chair out. Amara sat and her new maid started preparing her hair. *I guess Griffin won’t be seeing my new style tonight,* she thought with a smile. The young woman moved smoothly and efficiently, brushing, curling and

pinning. It was an unusual and sensual feeling to have someone caring for her this way. Before she was finished, Mary turned her away from the mirror to gently apply makeup and powders to Amara, including her décolletage. She felt a blush begin as she became aware of her arousal caused by the touch and attention of the girl.

"You look beautiful, my lady," Mary said when she'd finished. As Amara tried to turn toward the mirror, Mary stopped her. "Oh please, not yet, ma'am. Let me help you into your dress first." She gestured toward the bed where a set of undergarments had been laid out.

Amara looked at the delicate lingerie and her skin warmed again. Lacy underwear, garters and sheer stockings, the clothes of seduction. Still looking, she noticed something missing. "There is no bra here, Mary."

"That will not be necessary, my lady. Your dress for tonight is fitted appropriately to provide the support you will need."

Amara said nothing and started to undress, a little self-conscious in front of the beautiful young woman. Sliding out of her clothes she reached for the delicate undergarments. Mary helped glide the fabric over her hips and ensured that the garters were aligned correctly. Putting gentle pressure on Amara's shoulders, Mary had her sit on the bench at the foot of the bed. The girl knelt at her feet and slipped the sheer silk stockings on her mistress's feet. Amara knew she was tingling from the gentle and unintentionally erotic touch of the maid. Everything that had transpired over the last few days had awakened her senses and she was aware of wetting the fabric of the new panties. *Can she smell my arousal?* She was shivery by the time the scant ensemble was in place but modesty had her keep her arms crossed over her breasts.

When Mary was done, she walked over to the armoire, opened the door and brought out an enormous ball gown. Amara gasped when she saw the deep purple silk in the light of the room. The bodice, as Mary had mentioned, was highly fitted and looked like an intricately detailed corset. Thin straps embroidered with dark flowers assured that the dress would stay up. The bottom had a full floor-length skirt that

belled out like a costume for a fairytale princess. The dress was brought to her and as she stepped into it, she was grateful that Mary was there to help. She would never have been able to handle all the laces and buttons. When Mary was finished, Amara found the gown fit beautifully. More than that—perfectly. It was tight at the top, forcing her breasts up and together. She prayed the straps, although slight, would hold the dress and keep her from spilling out of it. After Mary had placed a pair of purple satin slippers on her feet, Amara spun around and couldn't contain a laugh of joy. She sensed from the air on her skin that the gown dipped low in the back.

"You look lovely, my lady." Mary pointed to a full-length mirror. She walked to the mirror and gasped, hardly recognizing herself. Gazing back at her was a woman of beauty, elegance and passion. *So this is the woman Griffin sees.* She hoped. Lost in the image she saw, Amara was startled when Mary said, "Have a pleasant evening, ma'am."

"Thank you, Mary. For everything." Mary bobbed a brief curtsy. Amara gave the girl a gentle kiss on the cheek before she left the room. She was nearly certain she heard the girl sigh.

Carefully, for the dress would allow nothing else, she walked through the corridor to the top stairs. Then her breath caught in her throat as she saw him waiting for her at the bottom.

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I should have had her awaken already dressed in the damn gown, he thought as he paced the foyer. It never occurred to him that waiting for her would drive him mad like this. He was pulled into the dream at the same moment she was. On the other nights he had only had to wait the length of her horse ride before he could be with her. Now, when his hunger for her was greater than it had ever been, he was forced to wait. He was certain it was taking hours for her to get prepared rather than the minutes it had actually been.

Initially he'd thought the call that sent him to New York had been a good thing. It was becoming increasingly difficult to see her in the halls and not grab her and kiss her senseless. Before seeing her again, he had assumed they wouldn't be able to pick up their relationship right where it had left off when there was an eighteen-year break. He had been unnerved to realize that his feelings hadn't changed at all. He could have proposed the moment he saw her in his office. That had unnerved him even more, so much so that he felt like a clumsy teenager around her. He couldn't focus on anything while she was near, so flying to the other side of the country to finalize a deal on a new property had seemed like a good idea at first. Until the plane took off, which was when he knew he wasn't going to be able to concentrate on that meeting either. He missed knowing she was down the hall from him and that he could run into her at any time.

He desperately wanted her to love him as much as he loved her, so he continued with the Mage's dream gift. There was, he knew, a limit to what the magic could create. The dream world, yes, but her feelings, no. As the miles between them increased, the pull of wanting to be back near her grew, as did the panic of what would happen if she didn't return his feelings.

In the end, he had been able to put his thoughts of her aside and concentrate on business but it had been harder than he had anticipated. Everything went well and he had been obligated to go out afterward to celebrate. He had tried calling her several times during the afternoon after the meeting and from his hotel but he was told she was out. Out where? With whom? His thoughts were wild with visions of what she might be doing—without him. He wanted to stay in his hotel room until he managed to reach her to tell her about the meeting, but how could he explain this to his colleagues when, as one of the young “unmarrieds” in the group, he had always led the way in after-business carousing? Truthfully, he would have preferred a good book and her voice to keep him company. After he'd finally reached her and they had spoken on the phone, he was looking forward even more to his flight back to Los Angeles the next day.

And to tonight. His thoughts were brought back to the present when he heard her footsteps on the stairs behind him. He looked up and smiled as the breath left his body.

Amara felt an intense shiver of delight as he turned to her. He looked at ease in his formal dress. His clothes fit him perfectly, accenting the strength of his body and the wealth at his command. She realized that at the beginning of the week his power had made her feel nervous, now it empowered her as well.

She saw him smile and her heart—and other parts of her body—warmed immediately. If she could, she would have run into his arms but given the dress, she continued her slow—and she hoped, graceful—descent. When she arrived at the bottom, she stood before him looking deeply into his eyes. Feeling bold and sexy, she dropped into a deep curtsy while not breaking eye contact. She knew that this would allow him to see the tops of her breasts quite clearly. He held out his hand to guide her up.

Kissing her hand he drew her close and whispered, “You absolutely take my breath away.” He extended his arms, causing her to step away from him. His gaze traveled down her length then he walked around her as if looking for something. She felt his eyes on her skin as clearly as if he were touching her. He stopped in front of her and she was puzzled by his thoughtful look.

“Is something wrong, Griffin?”

“Your ensemble. It is missing something.”

She looked down at herself. “I cannot imagine what. This is the most beautiful dress I have ever seen, let alone worn. And it is so fitted that there isn’t room for anything else.”

“I know what it needs.” He reached into his coat and pulled a box out from an inside pocket. He turned the long thin box toward her and opened it. Inside was a necklace of sparkling amethysts. She looked at him, speechless. He grinned. “Allow me to put it on you.” She turned so that her back was to him and felt his arms come around

her as the necklace was placed against her skin. Not only was there a circle of gems but a center string of amethysts dangled low into her cleavage, pointing the way to her breasts. When the clasp was shut, he placed a firm, warm kiss on the back of her neck.

She faced him again. "And now, my sorcerer?"

"Perfect. You are dazzling." He took her hand and tucked it into his arm. "Let's go to the party and join the others."

"Party? Others?" she said, more surprised than before. She never expected there would be people in attendance. She had pictured a private party for the two of them, like all the other evenings had been. He said nothing as they continued walking. Around a corner she saw a set of open doors leading into a ballroom. A very crowded ballroom. As they arrived they were greeted continually by people who were dancing, eating and drinking. A small orchestra played dance music and everyone was having a wonderful time. He handed her a glass of champagne taken from the tray of a passing servant.

"This is quite a bit of magic, Griffin. I am, as always, impressed."

He smiled at her and as they clicked glasses, he bent to whisper in her ear, "Even among all these people you are mine alone, Halfling. And you shine." A shiver rushed through her as she took a sip of the cool liquid. After circling the room nodding at the guests, he took the drink from her hand. "Come. Dance with me."

He led her onto the dance floor and they started a slow waltz. She had never danced with him before this night but, as in all other areas, she fit beautifully in his arms. They moved together on the floor as naturally as they moved in bed. She sensed his rhythm and followed along. She felt light and carefree with him and she smiled as she looked into his eyes.

"Look around us," he said. She did and noticed that the floor had cleared and they now danced alone in the center of the enormous room. Hundreds of eyes watched their every move. She stumbled for a moment and when she looked at him again she knew there was some nervousness in her eyes. "Do not worry, my love. You are a goddess,

my Amara. Be only with me." With his words, her uneasiness started to disappear and she again enjoyed their dance.

When the music ended, she dropped into a deep curtsy as he bowed above her. "Nice breasts," he whispered as he looked down her dress. She flushed and laughed as she came up from her position.

"That is not proper to say in public."

"That was not all I plan to say – or do – in public."

"What do you mean?" But he smiled and said nothing as he pulled her into his arms for another dance. He motioned for the music to begin and for the other guests to join them. Soon they were surrounded and further conversation was not possible. When the music ended again, he walked her off the dance floor, acknowledging people as they passed. He was stopped by a servant who offered food and drinks and took the platter that was offered.

"Hungry?" he asked her.

"Yes." She was still a little breathless from their dance.

"Then open your lips for me." She did and he put a delicate hors d'oeuvre in her mouth. As she was chewing, he handed her a drink, which she sipped.

She chose something for him off the platter. "And you? Are you hungry?"

"Very," he answered simply. She moved the food to his mouth but, as she drew close to it, he grabbed her wrist and stopped her. "But not for food, Halfling. For you." He smiled a wolfish grin and with a sudden movement snatched the food from her fingers. She grinned back at him. "And I am hungry for you *now*," he continued.

"We must wait until your guests leave, Griffin."

"I do not think so." And before she could protest or question him, he was walking her away from the main part of the ballroom. It seemed to her they were headed to a curtained window when, at the last moment, he pushed the fabric apart and drew her into a barely lit alcove, hidden from the room. He drew her against him and growled, "I

said I want you now. And I will have you now." His kisses were instantly passionate and demanding and she responded in kind.

In moments, she was more breathless than before but the sound of music and people brought her to her senses. "The party," she managed to remind him in a frantic whisper.

"I do not care. And neither should you."

"But there is little space here and this dress does not allow for a lot of...access."

He laughed deeply and from the tone of his voice she could sense he knew something that she did not. He kissed her shoulders, her neck, moving lower to the tops of her breasts, which peeked out farther from the corset top as her breathing became more rapid. "I have thought of that, my sweet. And I am prepared for it." She felt his hands move around and stroke her back. She thought he was about to undo all the lacing but his hands traveled lower to the bottom edge of the corset. He pulled at the fabric and then she felt something undo.

"Griffin?" It came out as a breathless question.

"This dress may have been designed especially for you but it was made with *my* needs in mind. The skirt you wear is attached only by a series of hidden hook and eye closures, which as you can feel, I am undoing. These go all the way around the waist..." His words trailed off as he continued to do as he said, unfastening the skirt from the bodice inch by inch. The weight of the fabric began to pull down. "And when I am finished with my task...it will fall away from you completely." As he said this, the skirt obeyed his words and fell in a puddle of silk at her feet. Now she stood wearing only the necklace, the tight purple corset, lace underpants and garters. "If it is possible, you are even more stunning now." He bent over her and took her lips in a hungry and passionate kiss, his hands beginning to roam over her nearly naked body.

The noise of the ball faded for her as her need for him grew. As he kissed her he pushed her against the wall. She noticed the cold but she was much more aware of his heat. He moved his lips away from her mouth to kiss under her chin then her neck and

her breasts. He ran his tongue along her skin where the fabric started. She sighed and squirmed against his tongue, needing more.

The music the orchestra was playing ended and there was silence followed by gloved applause. This heightened her awareness of their unlikely location. "Shouldn't we continue this in your chambers?" She tried to move away from him but the size of the space and the strength of his desire did not allow it.

"We will continue this – and finish it – here. Here is where we are and here is where I shall have you. I will take no more comments about this." He looked deeply into her eyes. "I will, however, take you."

With that, he unsheathed a small dagger belted to his side. He ran the tip gently down the corset and then to the delicate panties that Mary had only recently helped her to put on. She felt the cold steel on her skin and then the blade slipping under the material of her panties. With two deft movements of his wrists, she was left wearing only the garters and stockings, her pussy exposed to whatever he wanted to do next. "Step out and away from the skirt." She did and he moved it as far to the side as the small space would allow.

As he kissed her again, his tongue probed her mouth deeply and insistently. She moaned and arched herself into him. When her naked crotch touched his erection through his pants, a vision of how she must look entered her mind. He was fully dressed and she wore nearly nothing. It was the image of a courtesan and her possessor. The thought excited her and the wetness grew between her legs. She was not aware that she had made a sound until he asked her, "What are you thinking, my dear?"

At first she could not find her voice. She closed her eyes to collect her thoughts then opened them to look directly at him. "I am thinking of you and me. How we fit together. How you have brought out a willingness in me to do things, to try things and to want things that I never imagined before. Here when we are together and elsewhere."

"And do you like this willingness?"

"I am awestruck by it. I voice my thoughts in meetings and my needs with you. We push desire further each time we are together. I long for you even when you are near and I ache to feel your longings."

"Yes...yes. It is intoxicating. Maddening. And glorious to give in to it." With those words he smothered her mouth again with his, making additional conversation impossible and unnecessary. She moaned under his lips.

While he continued kissing her, she felt his hands moving and was dimly aware that he must be opening his belt. Moments later she heard it drop, followed by the sound of a zipper being undone. He shifted his body and then took her hand. "Touch me. Touch my cock and feel what will soon be inside you."

Her hand circled his hardness. He was hot and rigid. His penis felt huge under her fingers as she worked her hand up and down his shaft. She heard his breathing come faster and his hands roughly grabbed at her breasts, finally freeing them from their captivity with his movements.

"Guide me inside you," he said as he thrust his cock toward her. She took him and brought him to her wet entrance. She was so slick, ready for him. He groaned when her heat touched his cock. She teased them both by rubbing his tip against her pussy lips. When she could not stand the torment any longer, she found that he too had been held off long enough and with one thrust he was buried in her up to his balls. Her groan was drowned out by his.

He kissed her passionately, devouring her mouth with his as he devoured the rest of her body with his touch. There was no warning when she felt her orgasm rise rapidly and crash down over her in a wave of intensity she had never dreamed possible. Were it not for his mouth swallowing the sound, she was certain the entire ballroom would have heard her scream. And were it not for his cock, she was certain she would have collapsed at his feet.

He must have been aware of her challenge at remaining standing for only a heartbeat later his hands were on her upper arms, holding her tightly. He held her this

way as he slowed his thrusts and then pulled out of her. She whimpered under his lips but he ignored her plea. Still holding her arms, he pulled back and then turned her around. She gasped as her bare breasts were pressed against the cold wall.

"Put your hands up," he commanded softly. She did. "The wall will give you support as I continue to take what I desire, my angel."

"Oh yes," she whispered as she felt his cock against her backside. Without being asked, she spread her legs to give him greater access.

"I like the way you open your pussy to me." He snaked an arm around her waist, leaned close and spoke directly into her ear. "But that is not what I want you to expose for me." She shivered at the heat of his breath and his words. "Spread yourself for me. Open your ass for me." She could not believe she was doing as he asked but, without a word or movement of resistance, she took her hands from the wall and reached behind her back, pulling the cheeks of her ass apart. "Very, very nice, my sweet. I love seeing you so willing and ready for all I want to give you. No matter how I wish to give it to you."

And without another word he slowly slid his cock into the tight entrance of her anus. Her breath caught. He felt so much bigger when he took her this way but any discomfort was immediately forgotten with the swift arrival of pleasure at being so completely filled by him. She let go of her ass and placed her hands in front of her again, giving her the support she needed.

He continued to take her deeply. Sliding the full length of his cock into her and then pulling out almost completely before plunging in again. His hands were on her breasts, pinching and twisting her nipples, adding to the sensations running through her. He shifted and, before she could determine what he was doing, she felt the fingers of his right hand first on her clit then sliding into her pussy.

The double penetration continued as another orgasm rose. Her last coherent thought was that she hoped he would come with her, for she was certain that not even

the wall would hold her up after this orgasm. When the pace of his thrusts increased, she knew she was going to have all she desired.

Suddenly his left hand was under her chin, forcing her head up and back against his shoulder. His head came forward and he captured her lips in a hungry kiss. He left her lips to kiss his way to her ear. She heard his husky whisper. "Take all of me. Take all of my need for you."

With his last words he thrust hard and roared his pleasure. It was all she needed to come again, her pussy contracting violently, wetness running down his fingers and her legs.

She knew her orgasm had subsided when she became aware of the music from the ballroom again. Moments later he slid his cock and fingers from her, turned her around and pulled her into his arms. She looked up at him and she knew he saw what she wanted. He bent down and kissed her lips with deep passion, stroking her neck and playing with the curls that had escaped her elaborate upsweep.

"I don't suppose either of us is in any state to return to the party," he whispered to her.

"No," she said with a contented smile, leaning on his chest. "I most certainly am not."

"Let's continue this upstairs in your suite."

Looking down at herself, the disarray and the wetness running down her legs, she said, "How am I to get there? I cannot cross the room looking like this."

"Do you think I would not have planned for such a situation?" He picked up a cane, which she hadn't noticed before and rapped at the wall next to her. A moment later a door swung open. "Every castle should have hidden passages, don't you think?"

"I am beyond thinking, my sorcerer."

He kissed her deeply and pinched her nipple, sending a gentle shiver through her body. They began to climb the stairs with his arm around her. She was grateful for the

support as she was still somewhat unsteady on her feet from their episode in the alcove. Pleasantly sore and distinctly tingly.

Back in the purple room, Griffin helped her out of her remaining clothes and cleansed her gently with a warm, wet cloth that had been left on the vanity. The touch of the cotton both soothed and stimulated her. He towed her off and led her to the bed. Amara slid in, enjoying the luxuriously cool sheets on her still overheated skin.

“Did you have a good evening, my lady?” he asked, covering her with the blanket.

She didn’t have the strength to answer, only to sigh. As she fell asleep, she whispered, “I love you. I love you, Griffin.”

Before he could answer, they were both dragged from the dream.

Chapter Seven

She should have woken rested and sated. Instead she was agitated. The nights brought such happiness but the days were filled with niggling concerns. Reality and fantasy had become too blurred for her comfort. *Eighteen years and everything and nothing has changed*, thought Amara on the car ride to the studio the next morning. When she looked at all that had happened in the past week she realized that she and Griffin were still playing games together. True, this time, they were erotic and extremely realistic games but when it came to the real world they had only sporadic contact.

Last night's dream had been filled with the most passionate and extraordinary sex she had ever had, could ever imagine having. Unfortunately, in the morning light, she was more than aware of waking up alone. No matter how wonderful the dreams might be, they were only that and she remained unsure of what he might actually feel for her. She was mostly certain that it was more than the sex, but what if she was wrong? What if he was indulging youthful passions, not experiencing lasting love as she was? No matter how wonderful the fantasy they had been sharing—she felt her skin getting hot at the thought of what they'd done at the ball last night—it was reality she hungered for, now more than ever, not another roll of the die. She knew he was living these dreams with her and she could see in his eyes all he was thinking and experiencing. But did he feel more than desire and were his feelings real without the magic world he had created for them?

She was not going to settle for some sort of magical physical relationship that occurred when she slept and only in places and situations he created. She had an important part to play in this new adventure he started and she was determined to take a more active role. Maybe at twelve or fourteen she couldn't have told him what she wanted or how she felt about him, but that was one thing time had taken care of. She

was nobody's "kid sister" anymore and she was going to show him what she needed from him. She was going to tell him she loved him and wanted a life with him.

Now if only she could manage to talk to him outside the dreams and without a crowd of people around either of them. Then perhaps all of this would finally be possible.

* * * * *

Every great adventure requires risk, he thought to himself as he started his second cup of coffee on the flight home from New York. His week of magic was almost up and, although he'd heard her admission of love the night before, he knew he wanted—needed—to hear it from her lips while she was in his arms and wide awake. The Mage's gift had given him more than he could have hoped for and being able to whisk her away to his world for the last four nights had been wonderful. As he had hoped from reading her stories, she had become the woman he saw in her all those years ago—smart, passionate and vibrant. Watching her blossom both in his arms and around the studio made his heart swell.

It was time to not only tell her but show her how much he loved her, how much he always had and how much he wanted her in his life, not just in his dreams.

* * * * *

Although she knew Griffin wasn't in the office, she couldn't stop thinking about him as she toyed with the amethyst pendant she wore. Every minute brought his plane closer to her and brought her closer to the moment when she would take the risk and truly share her heart with him. Still, the day went quickly with more revisions and new scenes of the script needing work. She was pleased that John appreciated and accepted the additions she had completed as well as the ideas she presented. She was exhausted by the time she left the studio for her hotel, ready for room service and a bath. What she wouldn't do, she promised herself, was roll the die again. Not until she and Griffin

could talk face-to-face. She would put it in a drawer if she had to and then there would be no more jeweled dreams. It was time for reality to have a chance.

Amara knew something was different the moment she stepped into the suite. There was a smell of flowers and a trace of...something she couldn't quite name. She dropped her things by the door and moved into the living room area where she found candles lit and arranged in the shape of a horseshoe on the table that had previously held flowers. In the center of the candles was the die with the diamond already lying face-up and, next to it—a poem.

"This is out of place," she said quietly to herself. She picked up the paper and read.

Ruby, sapphire, emerald and amethyst

You've joined me in all four

Do you want to find what the diamond holds?

Then walk through the bedroom door.

Stranger and stranger, she thought. Quite enticing—and real. Votive candles created a path from the table to the bedroom and as she approached she could see the flickering of more candlelight. But it wasn't the way the room seemed to sparkle, the scent of jasmine or the soft music that she noticed when she entered.

It was the sight of Griffin, naked, with his hands bound to the bedposts that completely took her breath away. She wondered briefly how he'd managed to tie his own hands but, given all the other scenarios he'd been able to create over the past few nights, this was probably a small trick.

"Just when I cannot imagine how you could surprise me any more, you do, Sorcerer."

"I hope you find that to be one of my charms."

"As a matter of fact, I do."

"You got a new haircut," he noticed. She walked over to the bed and sat down next to him.

"I did. It was part of my afternoon out with Stacy. You like?" She tossed her head in an overly dramatic fashion.

"I do."

"This is a very inviting situation you've created. Quite a change from what we've been enjoying the last few nights."

"I thought you'd appreciate the switch. I've been the one in control of what we shared together. I know it brought us both a lot of pleasure but, for tonight, I want to show you how much you mean to me by giving the control over to you."

A few days ago she wouldn't have dared fantasize about having him in a position like this. She wouldn't have known how to start. Now she didn't know where to start as erotic images and needs coursed through her. So many delicious possibilities. "How is it," she said, trailing her fingers teasingly down his chest causing his breath to hitch, "that you seem to know exactly what I want?"

"I told you when you first arrived, I read people well. Thanks to your books, for the past several years I have been able to literally read you. And then I hoped that I could bring you what you desired. After finding a Mage who could teach me the magic I needed, I used what I knew of you, along with my own feelings for you, to create the dream world we shared."

"Your desires over the past few days have been very clear, Sorcerer, as have your magical powers. But your feelings? Those you have been rather stingy with."

"I didn't mean for that to be true. I suppose that is an old habit I have when it comes to you."

"A habit you need to break. Of course, with you tied like this, at my mercy, I can punish you for the mistakes you have made." She pinched his nipples and made him gasp.

"I'm starting to wonder if getting myself into this position may have been one."

"Perhaps," she said, delighted with the power she now had over him. "Then again, perhaps it will prove to be the best magic of all." She stepped away from the bed, kicked off her shoes and started a very slow, deliberate striptease to the music he had selected.

She started with her skirt, unzipping it from the back then gently sliding it down her legs, exposing the thigh-high stockings she had indulged in at a lingerie store Stacy had taken her to. "These are also from my afternoon out. Were they a good choice?" She ran her fingers along the lace band at the top as she swayed her hips enticingly and was rewarded with an audible intake of breath from the bed.

"God, yes," he hissed.

Glad she had chosen a silk blouse that caressed her skin, she opened the buttons but didn't let the material part. Instead, when it was completely undone she wet her finger and trailed it down between her breasts then her stomach, all the way to her panties. Now his moan made her bold. She brought her hands up and peeled away the shirt letting it join the skirt on the floor. A week ago, she couldn't have imagined standing before a man in a bra, panties and stockings. Now it not only felt natural, it felt wonderful. She climbed onto the bed and straddled him, kissing him gently and moving away before he could have more than a taste of her. Kneeling above him with her legs on either side of his body, she reached behind her to unhook the bra. She took it off as slowly as she could manage to make him ache to see more.

After the bra was off, she started to slide the panties down but then made a slightly different choice. She turned around and, baring her back to him, showed him that it was only a g-string she wore. From the corner of her eye she saw him grab the bedposts tighter. His excitement made her smile and encouraged her to take things even further. It was her turn to read his responses and it was an exhilarating sensation.

When he'd waited for her tied to the bed, he'd had no expectations, no specific thoughts of what she might do when she saw him laid out for her. The way she had comfortably and immediately taken charge thrilled him. He didn't know what he

expected her to do next. The four dreams in the magical realm had brought out the power of her passion. The slow striptease had made him hard and completely ready for her but it didn't prepare him for her dropping to her knees and placing her pussy on his mouth as she placed her mouth on his cock. Nothing she could have done would have surprised or pleased him more.

Her boldness was as enticing as her mouth and he found himself feeling driven to please her. He ached to use his fingers to touch her but, as that was not an option, he made the most of his tongue and lips and all she had exposed for him to enjoy. Her taste and responsiveness were intoxicating. At first he pointed his tongue to probe her deeply then he flattened it to touch more of her. Her moans of delight sent vibrations through his cock, increasing the pleasure she was already giving him.

His groan of excitement against her skin made her wetter and she felt his tongue lapping every drop of her as she concentrated on pleasuring him with her mouth and hands. In this position she had access to so many sensitive parts. Not only could she tease and lick his cock but she allowed her nails to rake the inside of his thighs before moving them to the responsive skin under and around his balls. Never before had she enjoyed pleasing a man as much as she did in this moment. It was hard to know what was more wonderful—what she was able to do for him or what he was doing to her. As she got into a rhythm of touching him, she became more aware of his mouth and tongue delving into her most sensitive areas. Until he suddenly stopped.

"Amara," he moaned, "you're killing me." He felt her smile against his skin.

"The Sorcerer defeated by such a simple piece of feminine magic? Not possible."

"Entirely and maddeningly possible. And it is far from simple. That is the beauty of your magic, Halfling." He gasped as she moved her body down his, crawling toward the foot of the bed. When her pussy was above his cock she grabbed him and used him to tease the lips of her opening, bringing another flood of wetness that ran down to his balls.

She knew the heat was melting them both. She swung her legs around and repositioned herself so that she was facing and straddling him. "I want to see you when I take you."

"As you wish."

She kept herself slightly raised above him, allowing only the tip of his shaft to enter her. She could see in his eyes and in the strain of his muscles that he wanted to lift his hips and penetrate her, but she knew he wouldn't go back on his promise to let her be in control of their pleasure. Gyrating slightly, she allowed his cock to tease the opening of her pussy and when she could stand the gentleness of the sensations no longer, she moved down on him in a rush, completely sheathing him inside her.

Now his hips lifted off the bed in an obvious effort to be as deep within her as possible. She smiled and moaned at the pleasure of him inside her. Looking into his eyes, all her worries of the day, of what he felt for her, disappeared. The depth of his love for her was unmistakable and she knew it matched her own. As she allowed herself to experience his love, she felt her physical need to be closer to him building. Uninhibited in body and heart, she began to make love to him.

She thought after the last few days of passion she couldn't be hungrier for him, but now that she was willing to throw her emotions into the moment, it became a more intense experience than any they had shared before. She couldn't touch him enough, kiss him enough, feel him enough. Her need was greater than anything she had ever thought possible and she didn't want to hold anything back.

She looked at him, his eyes closed in pleasure. "Let go, Griffin, and look at me." He opened his eyes and she knew he could see all she felt for him. She watched the expression of his face change as he accepted and returned her love.

"Amara, I—" he started but she ground herself against him harder. "I lo—"

"I know. Tell me later. For now feel me. Take in all you helped to create and build for us. Take your pleasure in me." As she moved faster, she needed more from him, more sensations. She lifted herself off him slightly, leaned over him and reached to

untie one of his hands. As she worked on the gently tied knot, she felt his lips on her breasts and she knew he was feeling the way she did – the need for unending contact.

When his hand was free, she leaned back and took him deeply into her body once again. “Use your hand, Sorcerer. Touch my clit. You know what pleases me, what drives me crazy. Make me come and then come with me.”

He needed no additional encouragement. As she arched back, placing her hands just below his knees, he reached to touch the hard wet nub that would send her over the top. She was slippery with excitement. He matched his touch to her pace so that when her pleasure rose, so did the motion of his fingers. Soon they were both close to a climax.

“Now, Griffin. Together. Take me as I take you.” She sensed him responding to her words and movement, letting himself give in to all he was feeling. She leaned forward again. “Look, Griffin. Look at the woman who loves you.” His eyes latched onto hers. She savored his passion as she let herself experience the depth of her love entering him. And then there was no more thought for either of them as they gave in to their shared pleasure, voices mixed in ecstasy as they tumbled over the edge together.

Moments later, feeling boneless, Amara collapsed against his overheated body. He put his free arm around her and held her close. “My sweet Amara. You are mine. Now and always. And I am yours. I love you.”

“I didn’t dream this, did I?” she asked as she lay against him and reached to untie his other hand.

“No, every moment of this was real. You are in my arms and I have no intention of letting you go.” He held her close, his hands playing in her hair and down her back. “I will be here when you fall asleep and I want to be here when you wake.”

“Oh, thank goodness,” she sighed happily as she curled closer to him. “I needed it to be real and in case you weren’t certain, I *do* want you here in the morning.”

“I thought as much but it is good to hear.”

“You? Worried?”

"Don't make fun of a man who had his heart on the line. You were blooming so fast sexually in our realm and professionally at the studio, a part of me started to worry that perhaps you would want to test your newfound powers out on other men. You could have turned me down at any time or even refused to roll the die."

"I almost did that today. The dreams were wonderful but I knew I needed more. But as for turning you down, that never occurred to me. I've wanted to be with you since I was twelve. No man had ever made me feel as happy or alive as the way you did back then. I would have been heartbroken if you hadn't wanted me beyond the bedroom, if this had been another game for you."

"I have taken so many chances in business, some worked and some didn't. It was part of the challenge and the fun. But, Amara, never doubt that from the moment you arrived at my office, it was no game. The risks were so huge and losing didn't feel like it could be an option. I've never put myself in that kind of position before."

"We were in lots of positions, weren't we?" she teased as she pushed herself off his chest, leaned over and gave him a slow loving kiss. "Seems like this time we both won."

"Well, I do have one more move to make," Griffin said, looking at her with love and seriousness.

"What is that?"

He reached into the bedside drawer and pulled out a small black jeweler's box, the same size as the one that had held the die for the last week. He opened it to show her what lay inside. Her heart skipped a beat, perhaps several. There on a bed of black was a brilliant diamond ring and in baguettes inlaid on each side were rubies, sapphires, emeralds and amethysts.

"Will you marry me, Amara, and be by my side for every adventure and journey yet to come?"

Amara couldn't stop the tears. It was all she had hoped for and more and although the word she needed to give him was short and simple, she couldn't manage to speak. She let her kiss answer for her as he slipped the ring onto her finger.

On the table in the suite's living room, two diamonds winked in the waning candlelight before the die disappeared entirely.

About the Author

Rowan West believes in finding pleasure in the everyday and pursuing passion whenever she can. Pleasure comes in the form of her children, uninterrupted naps or hot baths, long calls with friends, decadent food (especially desserts), learning new things, and curling up with a good book. Her passions include her husband, writing, and helping women to trust, believe and accept their sexual power (hence her choice of writing genre).

At her home in New England, Rowan's days consist of an unending quest to balance all her roles (wife, mother, writer, daughter, etc.) while maintaining her sanity and/or sense of humor. She is looking forward to hearing what her children say about their mom's work on career day.

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

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