

Viola Grace

The background of the cover is a warm, golden-orange landscape. A large, glowing full moon dominates the center. In the foreground, a silhouette of a woman with long hair is sitting in a meditative pose on a rock. To the left, there are dark, gnarled tree branches. The overall mood is mystical and serene.

Sisters of Silverwood
Book 5

Tricking Tara

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Tricking Tara: Book 5 of the Sisters of Silverwood

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Tricking Tara
Book 5 of the Sisters of Silverwood

By

Viola Grace

Chapter One

She missed having Caro underfoot. Tara's days were bland and filled with nothing but preparation for the holidays without her friend. Phone calls just did not cut it.

The mechanical tricks in the house were just about set up. Only one task remained to her, the selection of staff from a series of volunteers. She hated volunteers.

Each person who came into the Simmons Haunted House was trying to capture some of her secrets. She changed them every year to preserve the mystery, and to protect her secret. She was the main source of effects in the house. Special effects indeed, if you could call telekinesis special. Mostly, she called it a pain in the ass. Hiding in her tower and controlling the effects around the house while three tours at a time ransacked her personal space was difficult, but controlling the curious ones who wanted to find her control centre was the hard part.

If only they knew that the engine for the

haunted house was her in a room, sitting in a lazy boy, eating Ding Dongs and slurping Dr. Pepper. Not exactly a mysterious electrical system to the special effects, but it got the job done.

With brisk movements she pulled her t-shirt into straight lines and moved down the stairs from her tower. It was show time.

Taking a deep breath she opened the door to her home and stepped out onto the porch. There on the grass of her front yard were the applicants that she had contacted to work in her Haunted House for the season. Six men and three women stood in companionable silence, but two of the men stuck out. Damn. She had hired her elves by mistake. With only a paper resume to go on, she had selected the guys who stood out on paper as being up for a little silliness. So one Lios and one member of the Wild Hunt were standing with her workers. Crap. She had been dodging their introduction for weeks.

They had haunted her at the coffee shops she frequented, offered to carry her groceries and obviously, had finally decided to apply for the openings at her business. Because her business did not depend upon looks once the workers were all in costume, a phone interview was all that she gave. She may have to adjust her policy in the future. Their names had been carefully chosen to blend in, so Michael and Alexi were now just part

of her monster crew.

Well, her boys were determined, so it was time to see what they could and would do. “Ladies and gentlemen, you have been selected to be this season’s employees and we are running on the theme of old torture devices and unsettled victims of it. Four of you will be selected as tour guides and storytellers, the rest will participate in scaring the clients on the tours.” The grins that were lighting their features made her smile in return. Things were about to get fun.

“Oof.” The arrival of a half-transformed werewolf who scooped her up and ran off with her was unexpected, and since there was an audience, she did not free herself immediately. He didn’t drop her, but kept running with her over his shoulder and into the woods behind her home. This was not the day that she had so carefully planned.

It was less weird and more creepy than anything her mind could have come up with, and Caro should have learned to clean up her loose ends. Her friend deserved a pinch.

Chapter Two

The absurdity of being hauled through the woods over the shoulder of a werewolf soon overtook the panic that his lunge had caused. Her shirt rode up with every step that he took and soon the rough texture of his fur was rubbing against her abdomen. She was going to have raw patches when this was all over. She hoped it was soon, she still needed to train her tour guides.

His fluffy tail wagged as he ran and she tried to keep her eyes off of his ass, but it was the only thing in her field of vision. Werewolf heiney was not high on her list of recommended views.

At long last he stopped and opened a door. They were deep in the woods and he dumped her on the floor of an abandoned gardening shed. Her landing was not graceful. "Oof. You could have put me down more gently."

"Carolyn. Where is she?" His muzzle had trouble forming around the words and he chewed them as he spoke in his deep snarl.

"Caro has been taken by her mate. She is gone." Tara flinched as his claws dug into the floor on either side of her.

"No! She is mine." He started to use those sharp claws to peel the clothing from her. In seconds she was clothed in her hair and skin with a few red and raw scratches put in for good measure. "They will come for you and then I will make them bring her back to me."

"Why did you remove my clothes?"

"There are a number of thorns and brambles surrounding this place. You will be clawed to hell if you try to escape." The deep boom of his voice was sincere.

She felt a resounding pity that conflicted with her irritation. He really did seem to think that Caro was his mate, but she was in love with the handsome and inventive elf who had swept her off her feet. "Why don't you pursue her at Silverwood?"

"They will keep me from her. I know those elves. They are all focused on humans as the next source of magic."

"And you are not?"

"The Lios are pure magic. We do not need the contamination of human genes to produce our magic." Pure pride was glowing through his half-shifted form.

She carefully kept herself from mentioning his

less than appealing state. It did not seem to be a deliberate shift. If she guessed right, he wanted Caro because he was stuck. "Why don't you ask Alexi for help? He is one of yours."

"He is one of your courtiers. He will not help me to get my own mate."

She couldn't control her surprise. "That is odd. The members of the Wild Hunt all work together to win the ladies."

"They are fools who need the help. The Lios win their own women." He was menacing her with his claws again and she was naked. She wisely shut up.

The small room was covered with a layer of dust and rubble, some of which was now digging into her unclothed backside. A corn husk broom leaned against one wall, showing the care that this little shed had once been blessed with. The waning daylight coming through the grimy windows gave her a burst of relief. As soon as it was dark she would leave. With or without a rescue by her suitors.

She had staff to train.

The wolf's head jerked to attention as the angry whinny of a horse broke the silence. Cursing followed confirming the brambles that her captor had mentioned. She was on her feet when he turned to her and snarled for her to sit down. She

grudgingly complied when he waved his claws at her. He was out the door in an instant.

There was a banging, a crash and a lot of snarling coming from outside the little shed, so she decided it was time to leave.

Tara lifted her hand and pulled the broom toward her. As it came to her hand and she took her position astride it, one of her rescuing heroes came *through* the wall. Nice trick. She didn't bother waving at him, merely used her talent to tear away the roof and fly into the night sky, using the broom for balance. Michaels's eyes grew wide as he watched her nude form fly into the inky darkness, the last she saw of him was him standing with his hands on his hips, laughing like a loon.

She gained the altitude that she needed and located her house, then made a beeline for it. There was no time for taking a leisurely flight, she was getting really cold. Her nipples were beaded and rock hard, her skin chilled and rough. Naked broom flying was not a sport that should be indulged in after August, certainly not in October. Her feet skimmed the treetops, the telekinesis was a pillar of power under her, bending the limbs as she passed. Most people thought that you could actually fly when telekinetic, it was a little less than true. What she could do was to propel herself upward on a column of her talent, pushing against

the ground. As the ground rose and fell, so did she. The tree line gave her the stability that she needed to gain the speed that was required for forward movement. So home she went.

The flash of red and blue lights made her sigh. One of her eager recruits must have called the cops when the freak took off with her. Damn, now she had to try to land on the roof. She slowed her approach to a slow glide, dipping into her backyard before rising slowly to the tower on the third floor. As soon as she settled her feet on the rough asphalt, she used her mind to pop open the small window leading to her private sanctum. Keeping a locked door between her and the police that were now crawling all over the house, she got into the pyjamas that she kept in a small drawer in her study and went to confront the panic mongers who had called the cops on a werewolf.

“Can I help you, Officers?” Her hair was wild, she could feel it, but her calm demeanour belied the report that she had been kidnapped.

“Sure, Tara. We had a report that you had been kidnapped by a werewolf and taken from your home. With *witnesses*.” Odd things tended to happen around her so the stress on the witnesses was a signal that they had to take this seriously.

“He was one of the rejects that had applied for a job. He was trying to prove that he had the costume and was ready for the work.”

"Then how do you explain how you came to be back here and in your study?" It was Officer Matt that asked that one. He had been one of her monsters the first year that she had taken over from her parents. A good zombie, but no imagination.

"That is a mystery that will have to remain, gentlemen. I am here. I am sound. The goober who took off with me has been dealt with in a humane manner and I have no doubt that I will see him here soon."

"You are expecting the kidnapper to return?"

"Well, the police knew I was taken from the house and yet, here you are. Some things are inexplicable." She delivered that line with a wink. Matt had been trying to get into the brain of her home for years. She couldn't blame him for taking the opportunity. However, she knew that if she had been anyone else, who could not simply make a shield between herself and her attacker, she would have felt differently. "Can we continue this discussion tomorrow? I am really quite exhausted by my ordeal."

"Yeah. I suppose so." Matt was once again taking charge of his companion. "Let's go, Scott. She can come and make a statement tomorrow morning."

"Thanks guys. It's appreciated." During the entire course of the conversation, she had been

moving them down the stairs by the simple matter of walking toward them. When they turned to see the front door behind them, she smiled. "See you tomorrow." She punctuated her statement with a yawn.

The instant that the two officers were out of her house, she heaved a sigh of relief. She locked and bolted all the doors and turned to view the interior of her home. A lot of people would not be comfortable living in a house that was a torture chamber with disorienting floors and paints along the walls. For Tara, it was home.

First on her evening's agenda was a shower to wash off the grit and dust that her body wore beneath the PJ's.

She was just towelling off and wandering into her bedroom when she got another surprise. Michael and Alexi were coming toward her *through* the walls.

As one, they asked, "Are you all right?"

The towel wrapped around her in record time, they had both seen enough of her for this evening. The appreciation in their eyes was flattering, but the sneak attack was unwelcome. "Yeah, how are you? I mean, I didn't fight a werewolf."

Alexi looked embarrassed. "We gave him enough magic to complete his transformation. He had run out of power and was too proud to admit to his problem."

Michael followed up, "Alexi and I work fairly well together. It will be hard for you to choose. We also share the same talent and I didn't think that that was possible." He seemed to have come to a sort of brotherhood with the Lios, and Tara hadn't heard that *that* was possible.

"Well, aren't we just the best of friends all of a sudden?"

"When you meet a warrior who is your equal, you have to admit it. We both admit that you are our equal, possibly our superior. It is a knowledge that we must have or our pursuit of you will be in vain." Michael was speaking again.

Alexi was nodding in agreement. "It was a fact that Ranal forgot. He should never have challenged Carolyn's mate, he should have wooed the woman, not fought the man."

"Sound thinking. What did you do with him?"

"After we witnessed his transformation, we helped him to his steed and instructed it to take him to a portal. Hopefully he will be home and safe soon."

"And not showing up on my door again. But did you guys actually work together to recharge him?"

"We did." They spoke in unison, the sun and the moon in appearance, and one in thought.

"Then did you need to reclaim your charge? I mean, you would have been depleted by the

expenditure.”

“We are fi...” A sharp elbow from Michael stopped Alexi’s sentence.

“We are weak. Replacing our energies would be very thoughtful of you, Tara.”

She laughed. She couldn’t help it. Fiona had told her about this little peculiarity. With a deep sigh, she stepped forward and took Alexi by the shoulder. “Here you go.” She laid a kiss on his lips that started slow and soon took on a heat that caught them both by surprise. Magic flared between them and she used her mind to touch his body in several places that had him jumping in surprise. Giggling, and not a little aroused herself, she turned to Michael. His silver eyes glowed in his pale face, the black silk of his hair falling to his shoulders and begging for her fingers.

She took two steps toward him and he met her in the middle. Their kiss blew immediately from hot to scalding. She shuddered against him as his hands settled at her waist and she simply surrendered to his kiss. Magic was flaring all around her, sparking in the dim light of her bedroom, and it was only when the cooler air of the room kissed her breasts that she came, too, and stepped back. She slapped her towel back into place and backed up. “You should go now.”

They were both aroused and their eyes were glowing with power. “Why should we go?”

“Because I don’t fuck on a first date, this wasn’t a date and I don’t double team.” She pulled an invisible barricade between her and her advancing paramours. Slamming into it stopped them cold. “I will see you tomorrow for dress rehearsal.” She thought of something, “Can you walk through walls all the time?”

Alexi nodded, “It is my one great talent.”

“And mine.”

“Then you will be assigned to work inside the house.”

“And you will need to keep us well charged with power.”

The frank gaze of both of them made her blush. She was wishing she had a whole lot more clothing on than simply a towel, and when they disappeared into her walls, she breathed a sigh of relief.

How was she going to deal with wanting both the Light and the Dark? It kept her up half the night. The residual arousal kept her up the other half. Dammit.

Chapter Three

All of her recruits from the night before were still willing to be employees and it was a relieved Tara who finished her calls and then headed over to the police station to give Ranal's general description to the police.

"Hey, Tara. What is the theme this year?" The desk sergeant was all smiles. He loved to come in with his wife and she clung to him every step of the way. It was his favourite time of year and the cards that he sent to her in appreciation were very graphic on that front.

"Murder and mayhem in the name of justice." She had the attention of all four working members of the Shadow Falls police department. "A look at torture and haunting in ancient executions. Should be a lot of fun. Lots of stuff to pop out and scare the ladies." She winked and signed the statement. The charge levied against Ranal was mischief as she wasn't going to endorse anything else.

"What kind of things?"

“Nothing that doesn’t earn the eighteen or over rating.” She lied to them about her theme every year, it was part of the tradition. With another wave and a flip of her hair, she exited the building—right into the arms of her suitors.

“Good morning, Tara.” A short bow by Alexi greeted her. His blonde hair slithered over his shoulder in waves and fell almost to his hips. As he stood, she stifled a sigh at his golden good looks. Lord, he was pretty.

Mind you, with Michael standing next to him with his marble skin and midnight eyes, she was spoiled for choice. The timbre of his voice when he kissed her hand and said, “Good morning, Tara,” had her insides turned to jelly.

“Morning, boys. What brings you out this morning?”

“You of course, my lady. We wait for your choice.”

“Well, the open street isn’t the place to discuss it. Come with me.” She strode purposefully to her home, just five blocks from the station. Tara also studiously ignored the two cars that kept pace with them. The two driverless cars. Caro had warned her about that one as well.

The horses that could become cars, unicorns and anything else that they chose. It was a little much for a girl from a small town.

They walked a few steps behind her, one on the

right and one on the left. They didn't say anything, just kept pace with her all the way.

The instant that they entered her home, she turned on them. "Guys, I am not going to make any decisions about my personal life this week. I have to get the haunted house up and running, get the other staff trained and take a long and hard look at my life in general and you two specifically."

"So which one of us do you favour?" They were both so earnest, her sun and moon.

"At this point, I will say neither. I cannot choose one of you over the other when I know neither of you at all. You will have one week to court me."

"What manner of courtship do you wish?"

"Traditional. I want to learn what I can about each of you, your histories and families. Why you chose to become involved with the Silverwood project? All of it." She looked them each in the eye. "For now, I want you to each go and to return at two-thirty with your version of a frightening costume for the house. Each of the employees will try and come up with a scary visage and their rate of success determines where they will be stationed, in the house or running the tour."

"Yes, Ma'am."

With a set of snappy salutes, her elves left her home and proceeded to their respective cars. She

had three hours to make some phone calls.

“Are you sure that she is out running?”

The deep chuckle on the other end of the line had her smiling, “Yes, Tara. She is out. She has begun the Silverwood Running Club.”

“Cool. Who joined?”

“All of the steeds, some goblin born elves, pure elves and a troll or two. They are all trying to keep up with her and ask her questions about human women at the same time.” Another laugh punctuated his statement, “It is finally a challenge that she looks forward to every day.”

“I am really happy to hear that. I know that you just want her happy.” She paused for a second and then just jumped in, “I need to know a little bit about elves. Would you be willing to answer a few questions?”

Axom snickered on the other end of the line. “Sure. What did you need to know?”

“This is so embarrassing.” She took a deep breath. “How exactly do your people execute a regular courtship? I have kind of challenged my two to engage in a week of courtship and I have no idea what that will entail.” Caro’s fiancé laughed out loud at her predicament.

“It isn’t as bad as you are making it out to be.”

“How bad is it? And stop laughing.” She wasn’t very irritated with him, just a little irked that she

had not thought to ask about the circumstances before throwing out the challenge.

"It isn't bad at all. They will bring you gifts, impress you with physical feats and try and convince you that they are the best match for you. That they are your soul mate."

"That isn't too bad, but I know that you didn't do all that with Caro."

"Do you think that she would have let me live if I had? It isn't her style."

A laugh bubbled up within her from the place that was reserved for loving amusement. "You are right there. She would have kicked you into next week and run off with that psycho just to piss you off."

"Psycho?"

"Yeah. Ranal. He has been sleazing around here, but Michael and Alexi ran him off."

"Who is Alexi?"

"The Lios that is here to persuade me to run off with him."

"He and Michael worked together?"

"Yeah. Axom, what are you getting at?"

"It is simply odd, that's all. We don't usually mix with those of the light court." There was a pause. "If they get along, it will be easier for you to make your choice. And easier for your neighbours. Do you know his talent?"

"Michael or Alexi?"

"Either, both."

"They can both walk through walls."

The whistle on the other end was pure Carolyn. He must really be bonding with her to be so *in tune*. "This is going to be interesting. Keep me posted, Tara."

"Uh, okay. I will talk to you later, Axom. Say hi to Caro for me."

"Will do. Bye."

At the click in her ear, Tara blinked in puzzlement. Either Axom was rapidly coming into the twentieth century or he was absorbing Caro's vernacular some how. Either way, it had been like talking to a baritone Carolyn. It was comforting really.

Now if she could only figure out the sub text of their conversation she would be a lot less uneasy. Elves were nothing if not cryptic. And tall. And a pain in her ass, but a sexy one.

Chapter Four

Tara went up to the first room on what would be the tour. *Heh*. This year was going to be fun. Each room was not about torture and justice, it was a fairy tale. The living room was her depiction of Red Riding Hood. It was slightly grotesque, but Red was standing by as the Wolf—who had obviously consumed Grandma—faced the animated portion of the room, the Woodsman. So it was the moment before the Wolf was cut open and Grandma was freed, but it was a gory moment. The axe came down as she controlled it and sliced the belly of the Wolf open to expose the recently eaten senior. It all worked like a charm.

Onto the next depiction and tableau in what usually was her dining room. She faced the horrible scene from Briar Rose when the mother-in-law was slaughtering the children. This one called for a second tableau when the evil queen mother got her comeuppance, and the children came back to life. Despite the horror that she

wanted to instil, she wanted to leave each room with a feeling of a happy ending just a moment away.

She picked up the large iron key that she had had made for the next room. Bluebeard's chambers. The first room depicted the bride and her sisters gossiping and discussing the new wealthy husband that the youngest had landed, the second room was the chamber of horrors with the previous dead wives in various states of dismemberment, after which the key in Tara's hand took on a reddish cast. Even though she had designed it, she still thought it was cool. Bluebeard getting hacked to pieces was just the icing on the cake in the final cupboard. It was a fairy tale that had always made her uneasy as a very violent view of the married world.

Not exactly what you would want if you were thinking about finding a man and settling down, but it was one of the more brutal tales.

The final room depicted the ball featured with Cinderella, the next tableau however, showed the horror of the stepsisters and the butchery of their feet that had been involved in trying to fit the glass slipper on. One had hacked off her toes and the other her heels at their mother's insistence.

She shuddered a bit at the brutality, but it was part of the original stories and what made them such great morality tales. Those who engaged in

wickedness or deception were punished, even before the hero had won his or her way in the world.

She triggered the action with the remote and the knife came down. Ick. Well, it should get some shudders and screams from the ladies as they left. So should one of the elves coming through the wall and picking up the shoe to offer it to one of the ladies. That should have them freaked out in short order.

Tara sighed and made sure that one by one all of the mechanics were operating and each room had its proper music. The music was key to setting the tone and a cheerful note offset the horror a little to well. Classical was always best.

When the doorbell rang, she was ready.

“Ladies and Gentlemen, I commend you on your choices of horrific costumes. This year’s theme is the Horror of Fairy Tales so small concessions may need to be made by you. There is a trunk full of costumes inside, and I know that some of you are very eager to see what you will be escorting people through, so come along.”

She led the two trolls, the corpse bride, two deaths, three vampires and one werewolf with mange into her home.

She finally heard the question that she was waiting for. “I thought that this year was crime

and punishment?"

"You, my dear werewolf, have struck upon a portion of my madness. Every year I lie about the theme when I am asked. This goes back to the first year when I shared my theme and all local houses took up the same one. So now I tell everyone different stories and see who has been talking to people."

Sara, the werewolf, looked embarrassed. She was the niece of the Sherriff and Tara had no doubt as to where her information had originated.

"Here, ladies and gents, are the costumes that you can choose from. You are welcome to keep the costume after the haunting is over."

Excited mutterings ran through the group and one bright star asked, "Can we choose after we get the tour? That way our costumes will better match the theme."

It was a brilliant smile that lit her face. She was always so happy when one person was thinking for the group. She couldn't watch them the whole time and one person who was on the ball would naturally herd the others.

"All right people, we are about to start the tour. You can all take recorders or notepads from that table on the left and follow me through the house. Five of you will be taking the tickets and conducting the tours one by one, the other four will take part in the actual haunting. Alexi and

Michael are already taking part in the interior, so it will be up to the rest of you to figure out where and who you want to be.”

“You aren’t going to assign us?”

“Nope. You will enjoy it more if you have the choice. I have selected you all because you have the urge to be a little theatrical in you. The task of taking the tours around and introducing the people to the rooms one by one is a hard one. You need to keep enthusiasm and horror balanced. It is a hard job, but rewarding as the clients jump and shudder.”

They smiled and, with a sharp nod and a *follow me*, they were on their way. She gave them the full monologue and the full experience with her mind flipping the switches and blowing the wind in the scenes one by one. Each one had ghostly fluttering of fabric and the icy caress of invisible fingers on the people who were listening to her every word.

Screams were heard from her audience when her invisible touches were felt and the occasional snarl emanated from the two elves as she let her caresses get slightly more frisky. In their troll costumes, the noises were incredibly to type.

She was having far too much fun, and before she knew it, it was over. “Ladies and gentlemen, please select your costumes for the event and then please return here tomorrow for dress rehearsal after four.” They were a little stunned, smiling and

bemused as she let them go. Her mind locked all the doors leading to the tableaux so that they would not be tempted to explore while she pulled aside her elves.

"Guys, I want one of you to be in the Cinderella ballroom scene and one of you to be in the slipper scene. And I would like each of you to walk through walls as you do it. Is that possible?"

They looked at each other, as if silent communication was occurring, and nodded to her, "As our lady commands." They moved as one and then Alexi winked, "When should I pick you up?"

Tara laughed. "I will see you in an hour. I warn you, there isn't much available in this area at night."

"I will make do, now pardon me as I get my Prince Charming costume." He bowed and moved out into the room where the conglomeration of drama students and local fans of the haunted house were taking their pick of the vast array of costumes that she had available.

"So, Michael? What did you think?"

He stood pondering her for a long moment. "I think that a woman with so vast and vivid an imagination will be hard to please, but I will try my best."

"That is all that anyone can do. Now, as attractive as you are as a troll, could you go and pick out a ballroom costume? I want you to walk

through the ballroom by coming out through the wall." She gave him a quick kiss on the cheek, but let her phantom hands wander over his body lightly. It was a tease, but she couldn't help herself. If her body couldn't do it, her mind would.

He jumped slightly, but merely gave her a look that promised revenge as he joined the others in the anteroom.

She had to get ready for her date.

Chapter Five

Tara moved through her house, unlocking and relocking doors as she went. She was almost running when she moved into her private quarters. She was excited and couldn't help it. It was her first date in years, and despite her tendency to use her phantom limbs to grope men, she had limited experience one on one.

As she got ready, she couldn't help but wish that Caro was here helping her pick outfits and heckling her choices. But her best friend had started a new life without her and that was right and proper. If luck held, she would be joining her friend in a few weeks, and if not, her life would take another turn. Either way, change was in the wind.

She selected dark leggings, cork-soled sandals and a voluminous shirt with dagged sleeves. It wasn't exactly normal, but then neither was she. Tara realized as she approached the front door that they had not set a place to meet. Alexi could

simply walk through the walls so she had no clue as to when he would show. Maybe he would give up on the whole thing? She wasn't much of a prize after her talent was taken out of the equation.

Just as she was wallowing in doubt, her doorbell rang. Her hero was at the door.

It was nine at night and she opened her door to greet the sun. She had simply dubbed him the sun and Michael the moon the instant that they first came into her line of sight. She was drawn to both the same way she was their celestial counterparts. But Alexi was truly beautiful. It made her feel like a brown robin in comparison, even though her hair was a brilliant scarlet for the Halloween season.

"For you, my lady." Alexi extended his hand and within it, was an exquisite rose. Instead of the trite red, it was a gorgeous dark purple, the stem silver and the scent of a thousand years of romance in the petals.

She was entranced, "It's beautiful."

"It will never wither as my affection will never die."

A shy smile crept over her face, "And that is pretty, too." She took the flower and breathed deeply of its intoxicating scent. Alexi was smiling at her bemusement so she finally came to herself and asked, "Where are we going?"

"I have an evening planned for us, please

accompany me to my trusty steed.” He waved his arm toward her walkway and there was his car, gleaming silver and gold in the moonlight.

Tara took his arm and let him lead her to the vehicle, “What is your steed’s name?”

“Sona. We have been together for four hundred years. She has never failed me.”

“Are Sona and I going to have a problem?”

“No, I think she likes Michael’s steed, Rybok.” He tucked her into the car and they were off. Two towns over, he brought her to an Italian bistro and they spent the night talking about their families and their plans for the future. Alexi was excited to be in the new world with the new magic taking hold. He had two brothers, which was unusual for elves, and one sister. His parents were still alive, but had chosen to remain in Underhill instead of making the crossing between worlds.

She responded that her closest family wasn’t related at all, but was her friend Carolyn. Her father was still alive, but her mother had died when she was ten. She had two younger sisters who had followed her father halfway across the country so she was effectively alone and she had pursued the Haunted House as a way of dealing with her powers.

He found it fascinating and asked her questions about her creative process and the funding for the projects.

She told him about her artwork, the jewellery that she created and all of the other items that she made with her hands or mind depending on her mood.

Creative arts were very well received amongst the fey and he delighted in all of the details of the creative process that she would give him. It was too soon when the owner was shooing them out of the restaurant and sending them on their way.

Tara didn't know what the time was when they got home, but she did know that she wanted Alexi with everything in her. And she wasn't going to let herself have him.

When he pulled up at her door and the car turned off, she moved to leave the car as fast as she could, but his gentle hand drew her back. Their lips met in a searing kiss and she shook with longing as his hands slowly explored her body through her clothing. Her nipples were stroked, her breasts caressed and her waist held as the kiss went on and on. When his fingers began to delve beneath her waistband, the sensation was enough to draw her to her senses. "No. Not tonight."

"Why not?"

"Because I don't screw around on the first date and tomorrow I am going out with Michael. It wouldn't be fair to bond to you and then leave him with nothing."

"But it wouldn't be nothing, it would be

amazing.” His hands stroked her arms, wrists, palms.

She drew in a shuddering breath. “I am sure it would be, good. But I am not going to jump into bed with the first elf I meet.”

He pulled back slightly. “I can respect that. I don’t like it, but I can respect it. Just a moment.” He walked around the car and opened her door. With a deft hand, he helped her from the car.

In silence they walked to her door. He took her key and opened the house. She refrained from telling him that she was able to open her door from a distance as the goodbye kiss that had her flatted up against the inside wall was a little distracting. She had her thighs wrapped around him as he rocked against her and as her body rode his. She gasped as she came. He groaned into her neck as he kept pressure against her and as they both gasped for air. She slowly let her legs assume a more natural position.

“That was not what I would qualify as a goodnight kiss.”

“I think we just raised the bar for that one.”

The modern euphemism coming out of the mouth of the guy who predated Queen Elizabeth I had her laughing like a loon. “Goodnight, Alexi. I will see you tomorrow at our rehearsal. Don’t forget to dress up as Prince Charming.” She telekinetically shoved him out of her door and,

with a gentle smile, closed the door in his face.

She smiled and leaned back against the door. It had been a good night. She was so relaxed that she didn't feel the hand on her ass through the door until it had gotten a firm grip. She yelped and moved away to the sound of laughter from her porch. Damn. That was right, he could walk through walls.

This was going to be tricky.

Chapter Six

“Thank you all for coming back. Today will be the first full dress rehearsal. Have you chosen who will run the tours and who will participate in the tableaux?”

They separated into the two groups. Apparently they had made the decision when they were picking out their costumes. The rest of the training passed swiftly with her only concerns being the actors in the tableaux keeping their hands off her. She didn’t just mean Alexi and Michael either. Richmond, one of the newbies, had made a grab so she gave him a phantom shove. He stumbled back, shocked, and muttered about real ghosts. She had to keep her smirk to herself.

Alexi and Michael were harder to dissuade. She didn’t know if he and Alexi had shared notes, but Michael made his way past her over a dozen times, each one a caress on her breast, hip, thigh or hand. He was getting her a little frisky by the time that the first of the tour guides was ready to

practice.

She went to her sanctum and settled in for the tours. Each guide went through precisely fifteen minutes apart. It gave her enough time to reset the tableaux and let her watch each tour on the hidden cameras she had stashed around her home.

She could have managed it all standing up, but the lay-z-boy just made it more comfortable. The Dr. Pepper and Ding Dongs were chilled and she started on them while the tour guides took turns taking the other guides through the house. By the time seven o'clock rolled around, they were all quite good and used to the effects generated by herself and the actors.

She came out of her tower and told them all that they were doing a fantastic job. They preened with her praise and went on their way. Well, all except for two. Michael and Alexi stayed around until she rounded on them. "Look, guys, you have been great today, but Michael and I have a date in an hour and we both need to get changed."

"Alexi has asked if he may accompany us on our date. I refused, but decided that you should have the final vote." Michael looked a little irritated, but it wasn't the worst expression that she had seen on an elf. That honour went to Ranal, the fuzzy.

"Um, I would have to say no on this one. Alexi, you had your night last night and now it is

Michael's turn to woo me. Be a good sport and I will see you tomorrow." She crossed her arms and stood firm until he looked down on her from a very close proximity.

"I will see you tomorrow then, my lady. I wish you a pleasant evening. He has quite the night planned." He leaned down and gave her a kiss to scorch her toes. One thing about guys who measured their lifespan in centuries, they knew how to kiss.

She staggered slightly when he released her and reached out to Michael for support. "Okay. See you tomorrow." It was the only thing she could think of and she watched the sun swagger out the door while she clung to the moon. "Do they teach you guys how to kiss when you learn sword fighting?" She finally scraped her mind into a coherent mass. Michael was holding her gently, carefully, as if he were afraid to hold on to tightly.

"No. We pick it up as we go. Different partners require different approaches."

"Nice. Classy. So see you in an hour?"

"I will pick you up at nine. We will be outdoors so you should dress accordingly." He gave her a light kiss on the forehead and a more lingering kiss on both cheeks, then took her mouth until she was clinging to his shoulders for stability. His body was smooth and hard under the costume, like limbs carved of warm wood. She hung on for

dear life as his kiss took her blood higher and higher in her veins. When he finally pulled away from her, she was up on her tiptoes trying to get closer to him.

He waited until she was stable on her own feet and then smiled at her. "See you in an hour, my lady. I count the minutes."

She closed the door from two rooms away. She wasn't going near the door again with an elf that could walk through walls on the other side. Well, not unless she wanted to be groped.

She shook herself from her bemusement and ran to get ready for her date. It was a set of tights again, a light shirt and a wrap sweater to guard against the chill in the air.

A nice set of boots completed her ensemble and she grabbed a jacket by the door as she waited for the bell to ring. Her hair was flowing free. She realized that despite the date with Alexi, she really wanted to be with Michael. When the doorbell finally rang, she almost jumped out of her skin. She gave herself a few deep breaths and then moved to the door. "Long time no see."

"Indeed. I have this for you." He extended his hand and in it was a jewellery box.

She opened it with trembling fingers, then startled herself into a giggle. It was a charm bracelet, all in silver, with tiny charms hanging from it with all manner of Halloween themes.

Pumpkins, spider webs, itty bitty brooms, miniature witches, all clustered around with tiny bells. It was adorable. She immediately wanted to put it on. Fumbling with the bracelet, she tried and failed to get the catch to stick.

Finally Michael offered, "May I?" He had it latched onto her left wrist in seconds, but then he stroked her pulse point with his thumb. "Do you like it?"

"I love it. It's gorgeous. Thank you." She reached up to kiss him and only surfaced when he grabbed her shoulders and set her back.

"It is time to leave or we will miss the party."

He sounded smug and she couldn't blame him. If she thought that Alexi was a good kisser, Michael put him to shame. She had almost come just from a fully clothed kiss. Whew.

"Okay. To your steed then?"

"Indeed, Rybok awaits." He wasn't kidding. The black horse with blue flames for eyes was waiting on her front lawn. Right next to the Haunted House sign. What would the neighbours think? Oh, wait. They would just think that it was promo for her opening weekend.

Michael helped her up onto the steed's back and leaped up behind her. Then he turned their ride and they were off into the woods behind her house. She clung to the horse's mane with tense fingers before finally yielding to the pressure of

Michael's hands. He wrapped his arms around her and held her securely as they travelled.

Magic. She could feel it in the air. It called to her and she finally asked, "What kind of party is it?"

"It is the fairy Faire. All manner of local creatures have gathered to hold an Olde-Tyme Faire in your honour."

"Oh, wow." She leaned forward and smacked herself for not dressing more like a lady. "For me? Really?"

"Indeed. The creatures are honoured to have you with them. Your magic amongst them will be payment enough." He gave her a small hug and then they were in the thick of tents, fires and wooden dancing floors. A paddock had been set aside for steeds and that is where Rybok took them. They dismounted and Michael held Tara up until her legs would as his steed trotted off to be with other steeds of the Wild Hunt.

"Tara!" The bright squeal could only belong to one being and that being was bearing down on her with amazing speed.

"Caro!" The two ladies squealed in unison and then collided in a hug and a burst of magic that blew through the Faire and set torches alight. In that hug Caro told her all that she needed to know. She was happy, Axom was kind and she was enjoying Silverwood, though she did miss

Tara, she was looking forward to seeing her soon.

A normal human may not have picked up on all that just from a hug, but they were not ordinary, normal or even human anymore. They were women and best friends. Nothing else mattered.

“Caro. Let’s party!”

Chapter Seven

The Faire was incredible—vendors hawking enchanted wares, dancing, food, love potions, potions for illness, luck and forgetfulness. The creatures themselves were vaguely humanoid. Goblins, elves, fairies, trolls and an ogre who was trying to line dance took up the majority of the dance floor.

Tara longed to join them, but she was here on a date with Michael and she would not cheat him by joining her friend. “So, Michael, what did you want to do first? Walk through the vendors? The dancing? Get some food? You know the Faire better than I so take me on a tour.”

That was just the spur that he needed so he gave her a tour fit for an insurance adjuster. She was introduced to everyone that they came across and she marvelled that he knew them all. He was truly a man of the people. It was nice to see.

“So why would Alexi want to be here this evening? Aside from being with us.”

“Ah, there has not been a Faire in Underhill the entire time that we have been there, waiting. So this is a very big first step for the lesser fey.” A pixie flew by them and then came back to land on her raised hand. It was so cute. The eyes were solid black, shining in the lamp and firelight. Its body was tiny and orange and the hair wild and black. A perfect Halloween fairy, right down to the cobweb wings.

“It likes you.”

“How can you tell?”

“It isn’t chewing on you or trying to fly away. They generally are fussy about those whom they will associate with.” He was smiling at their little tableau. “People have died under pixie attack in the past when they tried to push the matter.”

“That is a tidbit that I could have done without.” Her pixie flittered away and she lost sight of it. “Where did she go?”

“She’s in your hair, like a giant ornament.” He chuckled and they continued their slow promenade through the Faire. She waved at several of the ladies who were now living in Silverwood, gratified when they waved back. It was a good night.

She could save the socializing until another time. She was sure that she would be meeting them again in the future. Even now, she could foresee a future with her little ones and theirs

mixing and playing together. The confusing part of her vision was that there was one child with bright gold hair, and one with dark. Neither child had her hair, nor resembled anyone in her family. She pondered it for a moment, then pushed the image aside. It was just plain old fantasy, nothing more.

At that moment, Michael decided that they needed to try dancing. At first they laughed their way through the formal steps and then they gasped and tried to keep up as the other couples whipped around the dance floor in a frenzy. Midnight came and went as she was passed from partner to partner in a round and then suddenly she was caught up in Alexi's arms. That was a shocker. "I thought you wouldn't come tonight."

"It is past midnight, it is tomorrow."

"Sir, I believe you are cutting in. This calls for a challenge." Michael stood aside and pried Alexi's hands off Tara. Laughter broke out at the word challenge, followed rapidly by applause. Two goblins and six trolls put together a battleground and a chair for the lady in dispute.

As the giggling crowd sat her down, she looked for her friend and saw Axom instead. "Axom! What the hell is going on?"

He was grinning like a fool. "First, Tara, this is all in good fun. No one will be permanently injured. It is more to show you that you are

beloved and desired by both of them. A true honour. They are publicly declaring you to be worthy of their love and are fighting to be worthy of yours."

"Oh. Okay." That was a pretty complete explanation, and with everyone forming seats around the circle, it looked like it would be something to see.

Her sun and moon squared off. They fought first with wooden swords until they were both drenched with sweat, then stripped to the waist and started wrestling. The two were so well matched it was ridiculous. Each move that was made was countered, and each new manoeuvre was blocked in seconds. It was truly something to behold.

Finally they just lay and punched each other in exhaustion. "Enough! I declare this a tie. Knock it off."

They flopped to the ground as the onlookers cheered. They had seen a good fight and loved a good tie. The object of the fight was a little bemused, "Okay, so how do I get home now?" More laughter. It was a really good party.

A tap on her feet made her look down, "Tara, I brought you, and I will take you home." Michael's face was swollen, his knuckles were in the same shape, but his dark eyes were sincere. She couldn't say no.

Rybok came to them and this time Michael got on first with Tara swinging up behind him. She wrapped her arms around him, supporting him as well as using his body warmth and then they went home. It was a far more sedate pace than their trip in and Michael was hailed as a hero when they passed the people of the impromptu village.

She closed her eyes and hung on as they rode through the woods. The beat of the hooves on the mossy ground was soothing and she felt herself nodding off. She jerked herself awake as they stopped in her front yard yet again. "Well, I guess this is my stop." She slid more easily than she had the first time and hung onto Michael's thigh as she waited to get the feeling back in her ass. She was a little surprised when he dismounted as well.

"It is only proper that I escort you to your door." When Tara finally looked him in the eye, she was amazed that only the tiniest smudge of bruising was left on his pale skin. He had healed during the ride.

As Alexi had, Michael took her key and opened her door for her, but instead of pouncing on her, he knelt at her feet and wrapped his arms around her. They stayed that way for what felt like hours—she with her arms around his head, stroking his hair and he simply hugging her as close as a long lost love.

When he finally moved to stand and kiss her, it

was sweet, tender and oh-so arousing. Just his lips on hers had her hands trembling, her blood surging, her panties damp and her mind screaming that it wanted the sweet release of orgasm. And all he had done was to kiss her.

If they ever got naked together, she might not survive it.

“Enough. I will see you at rehearsal. Tonight was wonderful, but it is time for you to go.” She stayed where she was, huddling against the sideboard in the hall for strength.

“You know that eventually, you will invite me in to stay.”

“But that is not tonight. So thank you for a lovely evening. And goodnight.” She did not move closer to him for this moment. Alexi had taught her the dangers of that. He bowed to her and left through the front door. Her mind threw the locks and she staggered up to her private rooms for a bath. Horseback riding was not a skill that she had ever gained.

Her ass was killing her.

Chapter Eight

Rehearsal ran smoothly once again. She was able to keep her thighs together and her crew was behaving themselves. Life was good.

Alexi asked her if she would accompany him out that evening and she said yes. Then Michael asked for the following evening and she said yes.

When Alexi arrived, his gift for the evening was a cloth-of-gold trick or treating bag. She giggled in appreciation and gave him a quick kiss with a psychic fondle. It rapidly turned into a heated grope session that soon had her sprawled on the floor, trying to get her carefully chosen clothing off.

His clothing separated itself with far more cooperation and soon she was able to touch his silken skin with her hands and her mind. Bliss. His body was hotter and harder than she had imagined, and when she wrapped her fingers around his cock and stroked him from base to tip, they both groaned. She wanted that length inside

her and she was going to do whatever it took to get it there.

Her bra parted company with her torso with both a snap and a rip. Her panties followed suit. At last she was blissfully naked and his hands were on her. As she stroked him, he stroked her and soon the damp heat between her thighs had her writhing and twisting beneath his hands.

“Please , Alexi, I want more. I want you inside me.” She begged and breathed a sigh when he moved to cover her. His cock rubbed her clit and parted her lower lips with his own moisture. Their bodies’ lubrication eased his entry until he was finally within her. One inch at a time he rocked and then withdrew, until finally he was fully seated. Her hands ran over him, giving her a river of sensation with every touch. She brought her mind in to play and he was soon groaning again with every thrust. She tickled his balls, stroked his ass and dug her hands into his shoulders as he moved inside her. The more she felt, the more she made him feel, until she groaned her release into his shoulder as he kept moving against her.

While her body dropped to the floor, her mind continued her sensual assault on Alexi, and when she slipped a phantom finger into his ass while cupping his balls, he went over the edge. With several short jerks of his hips, he emptied his seed into her and then collapsed on her in exhaustion.

She held him close, loathe to break the silence, but eventually she had to ask, "What are we going to do for dinner?" His deep chuckle in the crook between her neck and shoulder warmed her right to her soul.

"I suppose that there is a drive through in our destiny."

She smiled in response to that. "But you do realize that we will have to get up and dressed for that to be a reality."

"Mmm. Not yet." He snuggled back into her and then rolled suddenly so that she was sitting above him, and around him.

His erection was once more in evidence and she rocked her hips slowly against him, feeling every shift, slide and tremor in their joining. He leaned up to take her breasts in his mouth one by one, laving the nipple before settling onto it for extended attention that made her hips jerk hard.

She was panting with exertion and shaking with the need to orgasm and still he teased her, holding her hips and keeping her from sending them both over the edge. It was an exercise in torture and an extreme form of sadism as far as she was concerned. So she cheated.

Once again, she let her phantom hands roam over him, stimulating *him* until he was shaking with the need for release and then she slowed down. Defying the grip on her hips that tried to

pull her faster, she rose and fell with a hypnotic rhythm. Each slide of his cock within her getting her closer and closer to her release until she jerked against him with a whimper and shook in his arms.

His release was not so subtle. His fingers dug into her hips and pulled her hard against him as his body emptied into her.

She collapsed onto him, the wet and sticky moisture of their coupling seeping from her. "I think we need to take a shower and order pizza." Her chest was still heaving with the effort of catching her breath.

"Sounds like a fantastic idea. I haven't ever had pizza before."

He started to shift beneath her, but she needn't have worried. He carried her to her bathroom and they engaged in a leisurely shower, followed by towelling off and her refusing more nookie.

The pizza arrived and she used her remote to slide back one of the dioramas and make her couch appear.

"Is your entire house rigged for dual purpose?"

"Pretty much. Although, the lobby is rarely used as a bedroom. Just for the record." She was snuggled in his arms as they made their way through a pepperoni and mushroom slice. With the soda that she had fished out of the fridge, she was in post-coital heaven.

"Nice to know. So are you still meeting with Michael tomorrow?"

"I am." There was no hesitation. Michael satisfied a different part of her than Alexi.

"Even after this evening?"

"Yes. I do hope that that doesn't make you upset. But I need to choose between you both on equal footing."

"So you will let him make love to you?"

"I might jump him, but yeah."

"Good." And with that cryptic word, he turned back to the movie and the pizza.

What the hell had he meant by that?

Chapter Nine

Enthusiasm and excitement was spreading throughout the crew of the Haunted House. It was their first payday. They all received their cheques and she sat back and smiled at their excitement.

They only received two cheques while working for her, one that was for training and the larger for the tours. She had only fired two employees in the last ten years that she had been running the house, but it had been for gross negligence and trying to sneak friends in after hours. Each worker was given five free passes so there was never a reason to sneak in.

Michael was scowling a bit more than he needed to be with the grand opening coming in two more days, so she had a word with him. "What is the problem, Michael?"

"You and Alexi."

"What about it?"

"Have you chosen him?"

"No." Those two letters immediately caused a blooming smile to cross the face of her moon. She couldn't help but smile in return. "I will see you at nine."

"I will see you then." He took her hand in his and kissed the knuckles, then practically skipped away. He was really happy about something.

Alexi merely sighed and left with a promise to see her the following day. Tara qualified it with, "Not before four in the afternoon, please." She wasn't about to get caught up in that one again.

The doorbell summoned her with cheerful charm and she swung the door open before she reached it. There was her date, attired in a black shirt and jeans, which made his moon-white skin glow in the dim lighting. He was holding a box and a picnic basket. Apparently, they were staying in.

He extended the large box with the golden bow, "This is for you."

She smiled and opened the box with trembling fingers. It was a light parcel, but something solid was inside. The solid thing was a dress of silver cobwebs. "It's beautiful." She held it up against her and gave him her best smile. "Can I go try it on?"

"By all means. I will wait here."

"Just a minute, I will get the couch to come

out.” She fumbled with the dress, the box and the remote before she remembered that she could do it via her mind. Her face flamed as she let the dress and box fly into the air, while bringing the house remote to her hand. The home theatre was set up in a few seconds of sliding panels and rising platforms and she led the way for her dress around the corner.

She slipped the gown over her head the instant that she was out of his sight, and of course, naked. The gown clung too tightly to allow for under clothing. She would simply have to go commando. One of the mirrors that lined the small sitting room that she was in showed her that going sans underwear was definitely the way to go. The webs of the gown played hide and seek with the light, concealing and revealing at the same time. Very daring. At least she wouldn’t be wearing it out in public. In fact, her audience of one had gotten tired of waiting.

“You look wonderful.”

She would have whirled to confront him, but she could see him in the mirror. The appreciation in his dark eyes was all the compliment she wanted. She turned to face him, slowly, letting him enjoy the view. “Does it fit?”

“Better than I could have imagined.”

He came toward her slowly, letting her see his desire, love and lust, all in those dark eyes. She

went into his arms gladly, with a smile on her lips. Where Alexi made her feel wanted, Michael made her feel cherished. Both were important, but right now, the cherishing won, hands down. He ran his hands over her curves, learning, memorizing and appreciating with every touch. She took her time learning him as well. The column of his neck, the cool silk of his hair, the breadth of his shoulders and the feel of his body under her hands.

Where Alexi had been fire, Michael was water, everywhere at once with a cool and deliberate motion. She let him wash over her as he took her in his arms and carried her to the couch. He laid her back and caressed every inch of her through the gown, finally sliding his hands up and under the hem to work his fingers toward her heated core. She was more than wet, more than ready, but he took his time. Two fingers moved within her in a slow pulsing, then removed to circle her clit and, after a few of these repetitions, she arched and shook against him. Then he removed his clothing and took up a position between her thighs.

His cock speared her cunt and slowly moved within her. Nothing that he did was hurried, nothing was out of control. She didn't even have enough presence of mind to try and hurry his pace. She was simply along for the ride. And what a ride.

Their eyes met and held, black into brilliant

green, her passion and growing affection meeting his love, lust and attraction. Her body clenched around him as she reached one peak after another and still he thrust slowly within her.

Waves of pleasure swamped her until her world was in his eyes. She surrendered everything that she was to him and finally he gave it back. When he plunged hard into her with his mind and body beyond his control, she simply held him. Waiting until they could recover together.

His hoarse shout rang through the stone rooms of the basement as he spent himself inside her. The cool cement of the floor beneath her back had her squirming under his limp form. She didn't know how they had gotten there until she remembered his talent. "Michael, did you move us here? Through the floor?"

"Um. Yes, my lady. Sorry about that."

He rose from her body and suddenly she was cold. Wait, no she wasn't. The cobweb dress hugged her and warmth flowed from it. "Michael? Is this dress alive?"

"Yes, Tara. The web of a spider goblin. It will keep you warm, clean, defended and as clothed as you want to be."

Ah. Neat. She was wearing a living dress. That may explain why there was no sweat on her, from either herself or her lover. While she was pondering this, her naked elf picked her up and

carried her upstairs, back to her living room and back to the couch.

They cuddled together, she in her gown, he sky clad, and watched a movie while digging for delicacies from his picnic basket. Meats, cheeses, fruit and bread were all munched while watching one of his favourite movies – *The 10th Kingdom*. A tale of people being moved between the normal world and the world of fairy tales. Michael loved it. Tara loved the character of the Wolf and she personally thought that Virginia was a twit.

She and her elf stayed cuddled on the couch until the movie was over, five hours later. As soon as the movie was over, Michael got dressed and left, with another sweet kiss.

Tara was now left with a decision that she didn't want. The fiery Lios or the soothing Svart. This was going to be one hell of a quandary.

Chapter Ten

The crucial week had passed without a hitch. The Simmon's Haunted House had once again drawn a crowd, sold out and had everyone leaving happily. Her crew were delighted with their pay percentage and only three people had escaped their tours to try and look behind the scenes. She had shoved them out without ceremony from two floors away.

Her lovers were confused. They had attempted to engage her in further courting and she had refused them both. She didn't want any more confusion to complicate her decision process. She had spent hours on the phone, days working out pros and cons and still could only come to one conclusion.

Today was Halloween, yesterday had been the last day of the house for the year and today she decided to call her lovers to her. She hoped she wasn't making a big mistake.

"Alexi, Michael, I have to make my choice and I have decided." Tara took a shaking breath, this was far harder than she had imagined. She had no idea how they would take her decision. She had no idea how *she* was going to take her decision.

"My lady, no matter who you choose, we each know that a worthy mate has been found for you." Alexi nodded and took one of her hands in his own. Michael took the other.

"He is right. There is no shame in losing your affections and your heart to one such as he." Michael's voice was calm and his eyes warm. He really meant it. No matter whom she picked, he would find a way to deal with it.

"What if I said that I wanted both of you? I have checked with Artemis and Alexi would be welcomed. Could you two get along well enough to both be my mates?" She rushed to add, "Not at the same time, of course."

They both sat completely still for several minutes and then the moon and the sun smiled. "May we have a moment alone?" They were talking to her.

She blinked in surprise and released their hands. "Okay. Um. Okay." She left them and walked into her kitchen. She was at a loss. She idly turned the taps on and off. The kitchen was spotless. Alexi was one helluva housekeeper. He had taken to polishing her taps every time she

turned him down.

When they finally emerged from her study, they looked quietly pleased with themselves.

Michael asked, "Will it be all right if we adjourn to Silverwood this evening? The Halloween season is now over and you don't need to stay in town tonight."

She hesitated, leave her home? "Uh, that is true, but..."

Alexi piped in. "So you can come with us, meet up with Carolyn in Silverwood and then come back here to work on the house or visit whenever you choose."

"We know how tied you are to this community and we don't want to separate you. We just want you to grow ties to Silverwood. Give it a chance."

"But we will still come back here to run the haunted house every year?"

"For as long as you wish it."

She started to smile. It was a slow smile that lit up her face. She could feel it. "We can try it."

Michael's house was amazing. It had two master bedrooms and after a brief conversation, she agreed to adjourn to one of them with one of her lovers. Their coming together held delight, wonder, laughter and the relief of rejoining after just over a week of seeing each other every day.

She stretched in repletion and leaned over her

lover, putting her elbows on his moonlight chest. "Your home is lovely, Michael. I just have one question."

"Yes?" He was threading his fingers through her hair.

"How did you and Alexi decide whose bed I would be sharing tonight?"

He blushed, his skin flaring pink, "Uh. I don't think I want to tell you."

"Tell me. Please?" She used her mind to touch him all over. To rub and caress, bringing him to arousal all over again.

He hissed and arched as the phantom fingers trailing around his cock tightened and loosened. "We flipped a coin." He finally hissed as his hips were rising to meet her phantom touches.

And for the second time in a month, she flew like a witch, up to the ceiling clutching her sides, shrieking with laughter until her other lover arrived. Life was certainly more complicated in Silverwood, but maybe they could all share whatever was coming their way.

Epilogue

Mythos and Valentine were sitting down to dinner, “So do you think that the boys will be dumb enough to tell her that they were a pair all along? She might take offense to it you know?”

Mythos looked up from his plate and gave her a small smile. “I think that they would be better off if only you, I and Artemis knows. Caro and Tara might react a little violently.”

“A little? Those two could take the guys’ heads off from a distance. You are right. Better to keep it under our hats, so to speak.” Val looked over at her destined lover. “Are you all right? You look exhausted.”

“The dragon finally made it through, but some of the creatures insisted on him going first, so the portal snapped shut on a few of them for about half an hour. We are still sorting out what belongs to whom.”

“Sounds rough. So there is now a dragon in Silverwood?”

"Yeah, he is going to be taking classes with Caro and Tara this week. He needs to learn fast, he has someone to be with by Christmas."

Valentine sat for a few minutes digesting the implications. "*He* is the one I sent for for Holly? A freaking dragon?"

"He isn't freaking. He is very calm."

"What do you know about him?"

"He is well respected and he has been on earth before."

"Really?"

"Yes. In fact, for a few seasons, he helped the one that you call Santa Claus. He flew Santa around the world to deliver the toys and fulfil his curse."

"Okay, you are telling me that Santa is under a curse."

"Indeed. He is currently the Oldest Elf as well."

Val stared down at her food. She knew a lot of the elves and creatures on hand had enjoyed momentous moments in history, but still...Santa?

Time would tell. She looked over at Mythos, her beloved and patient Mythos and only one thing sprang to mind. "Your turn to do the dishes."

Author's Note

See the Christmas Dragon at work as he tries Holding Holly, a fight that he had not been anticipating and feel the ancient weight of the curse laid on the Oldest Elf. Coming in the holiday season from Extasy Books.

As for the fairy tales used in this book, the original Grimm's Fairy Tales were rough, brutal and not intended for children. They were morality tales in which the good were rewarded and the evil punished, often brutally. Yes, Cinderella's sisters were told to hack bits off their feet, the wolf was gutted and granny was munched. Red Riding Hood survived because she kept her distance. So if you like a nice gory read, pick up some unabridged Fairy tales, your hair might stand on end.

About the Author

Viola Grace was born in Manitoba, Canada where she still resides today. She really likes it there. Her hobbies have included cross-stitch, needlepoint, quilting, costuming, cake decorating, baking, cooking, metalwork, beading, sculpting, painting, doll making, henna tattoos, chain maille, and a few others that have been forgotten.

Her writing actively pursues the Happily Ever After that so rarely occurs in nature. A brilliant mind, with a twisted sense of humor.

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