

ELLORA'S CAVE PRESENTS



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Tantalizing Tilly

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TANTALIZING TILLY

Amarinda Jones

Dedication

Dedicated to authors Sandra Cox and Barbara Huffert—two women who epitomize strength, style and goodness. Genuine people like these are hard to find. How they wandered into my half-assed world I do not know, but I am grateful for the intrusion.

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Chapter One

Tilly Moor was pleased with her efforts so far. She was pretty sure the target had no idea she was trailing him. But then, he shouldn't. She had been doing this job for many years now and she believed she was damn good at what she did. Hiding in plain sight was an art. Tilly dipped her sunglasses down her nose and watched him as he turned down Eighth Avenue.

"Yep, that's where I thought he would go," she muttered to herself as she waited a moment before following. She did not want to follow him but she had no other choice. Tilly had a problem to sort out and she was not one to shy away from unpleasant things. As she put one of her Doc Marten boot-shod feet down onto the metal grate set in the pavement, she felt it tilt dangerously beneath her. She looked down in horror.

"Oh shit!" Tilly yelped in panic when it gave way completely beneath her. She plummeted helplessly downward, knowing the landing was going to be painful and yet there was no way she could stop it happening or prepare herself for the fall. She closed her eyes and hoped for the best.

The best was she landed in the outstretched arms of a man. The worst, she had no idea who he was or what he was doing standing in an underground sewer tunnel in the middle of Brisbane city. Even in her less than sane world, that was not normal.

"Hi," said the tall, blond man. He grinned at her widely.

"Hi?" Tilly struggled in his arms as she tried to free herself. "Who the fuck are you?" She turned her head and glared at him as she tried to break the hold he had on her. The arms that held her were like steel.

"I was just passing by," he murmured pleasantly as he held her against his chest.

And what a chest it was. Tilly could feel the rock-hard pecs against the side of her breast. She was disgusted to find herself getting all girly and giddy at the firm, warm flesh pressed against hers. *Get a grip, woman. He's a weirdo standing in a sewer.*

"And you just happened to be standing in an underground sewer?" She slapped at the arms that held her tight. "Let me go." It was weird being suspended in the air like this. Tilly had no control at all and she didn't like it one bit. Added to that she was amazed he was holding her not inconsequential weight without any effort at all. She had heard that crazy people did sometimes have supernatural strength. *I always attract the nutcases. Why me?*

"I saw you falling."

"So you immediately stretched out your arms to catch me?" She looked in the vivid blue eyes and saw amusement. How dare he be amused by this?

"Lucky huh?"

"Bullshit." She smacked his chest and wriggled to free herself. "Put me down."

"I like holding you."

The way he said it in a deep, husky voice made Tilly suddenly hot all over.

"Put me down before I poke you in the eyes." She held her fingers up threateningly.

The man shrugged and gently placed her feet on the ground.

"As you wish, *cariad*." He set her down carefully but kept his hands on her shoulders

Cariad? Tilly looked up at him. *Whoa*. He was much taller than the average man and he appeared to be solid muscle under the black knit t-shirt and well-faded jeans. His dark blond hair could be best described as shaggy but neat and the plain polished metal stud in his ear gave him a rakish look of battered elegance. He smiled at her as if amused by her perusal. It was an awfully nice smile and a delicious-looking mouth. It had the full bottom lip that she found sexy in a man—if she was interested and she wasn't. Tilly dragged her eyes from him and looked around for a way out. *Be proactive and find a solution and not reactive and panting at the hot guy*. The hot guy in question suddenly pulled Tilly to him.

"Hey, back off, mate," Tilly snapped in anger and shock. The shock was due to the fact that the heat from the body plastered tightly against hers was seeping into Tilly's senses and her sex-starved hormones were going crazy with delight. She pushed her hands against his chest in an effort to stop feeling stuff she did not want to feel.

"Shh," he dropped his head and whispered again her ear.

Oh boy. The hot breath skittered teasingly over her skin. Tilly felt an instant tightening response between her legs.

"Um, w-what?" She stammered, trying to gather herself. Tilly could not remember the last time she'd had such a reaction to anyone.

"He's coming back." The man looked into her eyes knowingly.

"He?" Who was this holding her and what did he know? She leaned back from him and looked at his mouth when she knew she should be looking at his eyes. Tilly could feel every solid inch of him and then some. She knew if it had been anyone else she would have kneed him in the groin or ground her heel down into his foot, but for the life of her she could do neither. "You don't have to hold me so close."

"But you feel so good, *cariad*."

So do you.

"Take your hands off my ass." They were gently kneading her flesh and melding her against what Tilly could feel was a tightly contained erection. She was appalled yet pleased that she was not the only one feeling the heat between them.

"Shh," he murmured as his mouth came down to rest an inch from hers.

Tilly licked her lips in response.

"Listen, mate—"

"Be quiet." His voice was soft yet authoritative.

Okay, I'm losing it here.

"Don't tell me what to d—" Tilly's words were silenced as his mouth came down on hers. She felt her body instantly slump against his in response. She gave in completely to the sensation of his firm, insistent lips expertly kissing hers as if he was savoring the moment. To do anything else but surrender would have been wrong. *Oh boy, a man who knew how to kiss.* It was full lips and tongues in a slow, perfectly wet kiss. It was amazing. When it ended Tilly gasped for breath as she clutched at his shirt. They looked at each other in surprise as if neither could believe what had just happened.

"I can't hear anything." That was because the sound of her pounding heart was blocking out everything else. She knew what she was going to do next was incredibly wrong but the urge overwhelmed her. Tilly's mouth met his and she kissed him hungrily as if one taste of this unknown man was not enough. She could feel his hands on her ass once more, pressing an obviously hard cock against her stomach. They could have been in grave danger and Tilly could not have cared less because all she wanted to do was taste and touch.

Despite the haze in her mind, she did finally register the sound of footsteps above her. They broke off the kiss and looked up.

"How did the grill get back in place?" she whispered in amazement as she saw the large, obviously male feet standing on it. Was that the man she had been following? Had he seen her? And what did this blond man know?

"Maybe it was magic?" the man who held her suggested in a hushed whimsical tone as his hands stroked up her back while they stood quietly until the man above walked away.

Was he referring to the kiss or the grate? Tilly pushed away from her gentle captor when he loosened his hold and slapped his face.

"What was that for?" he asked, rubbing his jaw. He looked more amused than offended.

"That was for kissing me without permission." Tilly groaned inwardly as she heard her own words. How silly and petulant they sounded. No wonder he smiled at her as if she was mad.

"You kissed me back."

"Well, I...um..." Yeah, Tilly knew she had but she did not plan to justify her actions as she had no justification other than lust. "Anyway, that's not the point." *What was the point?* "Who are you?" The whole collapsing grate, standing in the sewer thing needed to be explained and the kiss forgotten. *Good luck with that.* "Are you human?" Maybe other people would find that an odd question to ask but Tilly Moor led an odd life.

"I was once," he replied urbanely as if they were chatting about the weather.

Tilly lifted her eyebrow at him in query.

"So what are you? A shapeshifter? Vampire? Demon? Zombie?" Tilly, owner of the Matilda Moor Agency, dealt with them all when she conducted discreet investigations and disposals of supernatural creatures at the request of various individuals and companies who financed her to do so, yet disavowed all knowledge of her activities. *Whatever*. As long as her bills got paid, they could hide behind whatever they had to in order to cover their collective, corporate asses.

"Do I look or smell like a zombie?" The man looked at her in amusement.

"No." Zombies had a distinctive odor of burnt garlic and moldy leather. This man smelt of sandalwood and potent yummy male. Tilly cleared her throat as she tried to focus less on the yumminess and more on the being before her. "Well, what are you then?" When he smiled at her words, Tilly felt her knees wobble slightly.

"Is it important?" He seemed not to think so.

"Well, in my business yes. I like to know who I've —"

"Kissed?" he added before she could finish the sentence.

"You're a smart ass." She tried not to lick her lips at the thought of that kiss. Tilly didn't want him thinking it meant anything to her. "And because you have that arrogant sod air about you, my guess is you're either an angel or a spellbinder." She could see by the intrigued look in his eyes that she was on the right track. What she knew about angels was they were full of self-importance yet they would never have kissed without asking. As for spellbinders, they were rare. She heard talk of them but she never imagined she would see one let alone kiss—er—meet one. They were powerful beings who only did what they chose to do. They were not controlled by the universe. If the cause was right and it fitted in with their plans they would step in and help. Word was they had unimaginable power. "You're a spellbinder." He nodded. He did not fit her image of an all-powerful being. He looked like someone who belonged in a rock band. "So why are you following me?" Tilly's understanding was they only followed someone for a reason. She doubted that in the universal scheme of things she was that important.

"Let's go topside and discuss this."

The man, er, spellbinder looked like he had something on his mind and Tilly wanted to know what.

"Okay, beam us out of here." Tilly suspected this was someone who was capable of transportation at the blink of an eye and it had just registered how dank and smelly it was in the tunnel. The perfect place for a first kiss—not. But the thing was the minute he kissed her she had been totally oblivious to anything that was going on around her. Great kissers had the ability to do that.

"Don't you want to do it the normal human way free from any supernatural influence?" he asked in mock disappointment.

"Ah, no." She wasn't about to go wandering through the underground cavern looking for a way out when she had one right in front of her. "Get us out of here now."

"Yes, *cariad*." The spellbinder pulled her into his arms and transported them out and into an old 1920s trellised gazebo in the Brisbane Botanical Gardens.

"You can let go of me now." Tilly had enjoyed the whole head rush of being magically transported. It was like having pure energy zapped through her body, making her tingle. If only she could do that normally during rush hour traffic. It had been fun and deliciously scary being held so close to him but now it was time to step away. However, that was a little hard to do when he held her so tightly. Tilly pushed at his chest.

"Don't you like to be touched?" He released her from his hold but his eyes never left hers.

"Surprisingly, not by people I don't know."

"My name is Titch." He held his hand out to hers.

Tilly automatically clasped it as she would any normal handshake but then this was not a normal situation.

"Titch? No one names a child Titch unless they are under the influence." It was the last name she expected from such a powerful-looking man. "It's hardly a name that matches the whole spellbinder mystique, is it?"

Titch laughed at her words as if greatly amused by her honesty.

"My real name is Taliesin Trevelyan," His thumb massaged the back of her hand lightly. "Titch is but a nickname."

"Ah, now I understand." Taliesin Trevelyan was clearly a Welsh name as was the word *cariad* yet he did not have the lilting accent she would have expected to accompany such a name.

"I thought you would, Matilda." Titch saw the surprise in her eyes. "I'm a spellbinder, I know stuff. It's part of the job." He assessed her with interest. "Matilda Moor, you are thirty-two, single and you own an agency that you run from your garage. You have selective, anonymous clients who pay you to get rid of paranormal problems. You have a reputation of getting the job done so you have built a steady clientele by word-of-mouth and yet you are mortgaged to the hilt. You have an assistant called Rowdy and a pet goldfish called Shalimar."

He knew a lot, in fact more than she cared for him to know. Tilly pulled her hand from his. Why was she still holding it anyway? The answer was because it felt good and right and momentarily giving in to the need to feel something other than tiredness and worry was nice.

"So why are you following me, Taliesin?" The smile he gave her at the use of his real name made her feel weak in the knees. She backed away from him as he subtly moved in closer.

"Can't a man follow a beautiful woman, *cariad*?"

Smooth. If she fell for that sort of crap.

"A stalker does but a spellbinder never. My understanding is you lot always have another motive. See? I know stuff too." Tilly did not know much about spellbinders but she knew enough to hold her own with him. "Spellbinders never just turn up in someone's life without a reason. Now spill."

"I'm here because you're following a freak of nature."

There was no point asking how he knew for once a spellbinder took an interest in someone they knew everything. She was shocked, weirdly flattered and strangely relieved.

"So?" Tilly asked as her hands automatically went down to rest on her hips as they always did when she felt challenged.

"Do you know how deadly freaks are?"

Tilly rolled her eyes. Who did he think he was dealing with? An amateur?

"Of course I do." When the general public heard the words "freak of nature" they assumed it meant someone with some sort of deformity. But the true freaks of nature were anything but. They were paranormal beings who masqueraded as regular, everyday people who lived and worked in average jobs and suburbs. To all intents and purposes they were nondescript entities—but for the fact they liked to eat people's extremities off. Generally their victims died of a blood loss or a heart attack. The public knew nothing about them until they became a victim. Not even the media knew. The attacks were sporadic and the freaks left no discernible trace of their activities as they rarely left body parts. Only a careful few like Tilly and some in law enforcement were aware of the danger.

Tilly held up her right hand and showed him the damage. Two fingers were damaged—her pinkie was missing as was half her index finger.

"Been there, done that and survived." She had disposed of the last one two months ago after a bloody, painful battle and she would get rid of the one she followed now if he proved to be a freak of nature. As yet she had no definite evidence but gut instinct told her he was.

"I'm here to see you don't lose your other fingers." Titch's voice was adamant on the score.

"Why?" Like she was going to let him stop her conducting her business. She didn't need help and she didn't plan on losing any more fingers. Tilly was surprised Titch had held her hand as long as he had. Most people were uncomfortable when they looked at or touched her hand. But he hadn't been. But then Tilly did not doubt a spellbinder had seen some strange stuff.

"Because I'm a nice guy."

"Do I look gullible?" Tilly knew there was another reason to all this.

Titch took the opportunity to take a long, lingering look at her body.

"No—but you're definitely sexy." He smiled at what he saw.

"Okay, that sexy smile of yours may work on other women but—"

"You think I'm sexy?"

Titch moved in until Tilly's back hit the trellised wall of the old gazebo behind her. His hands came to rest on the wood on either side of her body.

"Sexy in that common, pretty boy way, Taliesin." *Crap*. He did not touch her, yet with his eyes locked on hers, she found it impossible to move. Yes, she could have dealt with him defensively like she would have done to any other man making unwelcome advances but the problem was, after kissing him, they weren't unwelcome.

"So I don't turn you on at all, *cariad*?" Titch's mouth was inches from hers.

Oh hell yes.

"Nope." His hot breath on her skin was intoxicating. Tilly wanted to close her eyes and give in to the sensation. When his hands moved down to rest on her hips, she pushed halfheartedly against his chest. Just the feel of the hard body under her palms made her feel instantly wet with need and she had not felt that for a long time. "I'm not like this. I don't—"

"Sleep around?" He provided the answer for her. "I know that."

"How? Spellbinder powers?" Tilly felt wildly unsophisticated and she prayed that the heat she felt in her face was not staining her cheeks red. It was hard to look tough when you were blushing.

"No, instinct and you just confirmed it when you blushed." Titch lifted one hand and ran his finger slowly down one pink cheek. "You're awfully cute when you're embarrassed."

"I'm not embarrassed." *I'm frigging mortified*. Freaks of nature did not faze her but one hot man did. His mouth hovered teasingly without touching hers.

"When did you last really cut loose and have wild, just-because-you-can sex?"

The answer was once and ten years ago. She had been twenty-two and newly engaged. First-time sex with her then fiancé Peter had been ghastly. It was hot, messy and painful. She could have run ten miles for the same sensation. Tilly had not seen what all the fuss was about. Her fiancé had taken her reaction badly. Sex was expected in marriage. Hence the reason she broke up with Peter. It was the first and last time she'd ever had sex.

"I don't need to cut loose." And if she did there was a carton of caramel swirl ice cream in her refrigerator with her name on it. You always knew where you stood with ice cream—it asked nothing and made no judgments. "And sex is over-rated."

"You badly need to lose some control." Titch's other hand pulled the band from her hair. "Your eyes are all bloodshot and that's a definite sign of a woman who needs sex."

"What?" It was more like the fact that she had sat up watching schlock 1950s horror films until three in the morning due to her never-ending insomnia. "Is that some scientific thing?"

Titch chuckled as his fingers ran through the waves of her hair.

"You have a problem with sex?"

"Other than I don't see the point of it?" Though, due to his body being so close to hers she could definitely feel the point of something.

"You haven't been doing it properly."

"Once was more than enough." Tilly stiffened. She hadn't meant to say that.

"Seriously?" Titch's head moved back from hers as he looked at her in amazement. "Oh *cariad*, that's a crime." His hands moved down to her jeans.

Tilly gulped and tried to swat them away but he already had the top button undone and was working on the zipper.

"I think you need to have an orgasm." The zipper came down.

"And I think you need to let go of me." She gasped as his hand slid down the front of her underwear. Her heart was racing wildly. It was not through fright but overwhelming need. It was something she had never felt before. With Peter she had felt a moment of need but it had died when the necessity to have him stop overwhelmed everything else. "This is a public place."

Titch waved his other hand once in the air.

"Not now it isn't. Now no one can see us."

Tilly jumped as his fingers sought entry to the curl-covered cleft between her legs. When he touched her clit she automatically surged forward for more.

"What are you talking about?" *What am I doing?* Tilly knew she should be pushing him away but she couldn't. It felt so right and so good.

"We're invisible." Titch stroked his fingers lazily back and forth against the hard nub.

The sensation that shot through her made her knees wobble. She clutched at him to stop herself from falling. A stranger was playing with her and there were a million reasons to tell him to stop and yet she was having great trouble articulating any of them.

"Someone will see." Not, oh no, I couldn't have sex with an all-powerful being.

"Nah, watch." Titch kept her body pinned to his and his hand in her panties as he turned and slapped hard on the back of a man passing by. The man did not flinch. Titch pinched a woman on the ass and got no reaction. He called a nearby skin-headed punk a crude name that should have provoked an extreme response and yet nothing. "See? Let's have sex."

"Here?" Okay, so maybe no one could see them and sure, maybe it was a fantasy of Tilly's to have crazy, hot sex with a stranger but fantasies were not necessarily meant to come true.

"Sure, you need passion in your life."

It was so hard to concentrate on rational objections when a man was slowly driving her onto what she knew would be one of the greatest feelings of her life.

"I have enough passion with my job." She shrieked when one long finger slid into the wetness of her vagina. She looked Titch in the eyes. Tilly saw need and passion and something else that was tender and heartfelt. Or was she just getting sucked in to the possibility that maybe the stories she had heard about sex were true? Whatever it was it felt damn good.

"I'm talking about a real, bone-shattering, toe-curling, screaming-out-loud orgasm."

It sounded excellent. The last orgasm she experienced had been induced by her own fingers and that did not compare to what she was feeling now.

"It doesn't sound very romantic."

"You want romance, *cariad*?"

Before Tilly could answer his mouth found hers and he literally kissed the stuffing out of her as his fingers continued their own game. She squirmed against him, wanting more but not sure why a complete stranger could have that effect on her.

"I'm really not interested in—oh." Tilly suddenly gripped his shoulders as she felt a spiral of excitement rip through her body.

Chapter Two

"Do you like this?" Titch circled his fingers faster on her clit and smiled as Tilly moaned and clutched at him for support. He did not need to hear the words as her reaction said it all. This woman fascinated him. She tried to be so tough and hard yet she was sweet and yielding in his arms. Her admission that she'd only had sex once astounded him as she was such a sexy woman. The body that shook against his called him to give an instant response. Titch removed his hand and started pulling her jeans down over her hips. He could not remember that last time he was so instantly turned on by a woman. Maybe it was the innocence that radiated from her or that she responded so sweetly, Titch wasn't sure. He just knew that if he did not have this woman he would surely die—and that was crazy. He was immortal. It was within his power to drive mortals mad with lust and not the other way around. "I need to be inside you." Her jeans fell to her ankles. The soft white flesh on display made his cock jerk in reaction.

"I'm not easy."

"*Cariad*, I have a feeling you are going to be the greatest challenge of my life." Titch had thought he had been sent to her to watch over her because of her crazy scheme to destroy the freaks but now he was beginning to believe there was some other reason he was there that he was unaware of. *Bloody Argon. What do you have in mind for me and why this woman?* Argon, the commander of all spellbinders, was a fickle bastard. Spellbinders were sent to help humans, not make love to them. Of course it happened but not as instantly as this. Titch kissed the pink, swollen mouth below his. Matilda Moor tasted like ambrosia and he wanted more. "You can say no and I will understand." It would kill him but he would understand. Titch never took an unwilling woman. The need and enjoyment had to be mutual.

Tilly licked her lips as if savoring the taste.

"I'm not very good at sex, Taliesin."

The first time Tilly had called him by his given name he had felt incredibly happy, as if someone had given him a gift he had long wanted. How could this pink-faced goddess think she was no good at sex? Mortal men were stupid if they did not have the patience to make love to her properly.

"If you've only had sex once, how do you know you're not good at it?" Titch was bemused by the look of wonder on her face as if that thought had not occurred to her.

"Are you sure no one will see us?"

The look of trust she gave him humbled Titch.

"You're safe with me, I promise." Even as he said the words he could see himself as an old man with this woman and that was crazy. Immortals did not age and yet the thought of being that close to someone for a lifetime made his heart pound with excitement.

"My boots," Tilly said as she stumbled in the tangle of jeans at her feet.

"Easily solved." That she wanted him as much as he wanted her made the blood surge wildly in his veins.

"By magic?"

"Only the old-fashioned kind." Titch dropped to his knees and quickly started unlacing her work boots. They were functional and clunky and yet when he looked up her legs to the flowered panties they were the sexiest things he had ever seen on a woman. Titch made short work of her boots and socks and started on her underwear. He felt her hands halt his. Tilly was looking around her with concern as the people passed them by, oblivious to what was going on. "Come on, it's a turn-on. You can see them, they can't see us."

"What are you doing?" Tilly's eyes were large and wide on his as if she was uncertain what to do or say next as her panties slid down her legs.

"I require you naked," Titch murmured with a grin as her underwear dropped to her feet. "Thank you, lord," he breathed in reverence as his eyes locked on her pussy. Tilly was plump and ripe and he wanted to devour her luscious sweetness. Titch buried his face in between her legs and licked the deep cleft.

Tilly screamed and grabbed his shoulders. She'd never imagined any man would ever do that to her. She felt her legs widening in response. When his mouth fastened on her clit she stopped breathing for a moment as the sensation was so exquisite. She choked in some air as she held on to him for balance.

"Taliesin." His name came out as a sigh. This stranger was making her feel things she'd only dreamed about. She squirmed against him, wanting and needing more. When he rose up to stand before her, she was momentarily disappointed until she saw the look of promised passion in his blue eyes. She could have pushed at the hands that pulled her red t-shirt over her head but the thought never entered her mind. All Tilly could think about was how his hands would feel on her suddenly aching breasts.

As if sensing her need and knowing it matched his own, Titch's hands went down to her lace-covered breasts.

"Do you want me, *cariad*?"

"Oh hell yes." It was the only response she could give as her fingers touched the buckle of his belt. She had never undressed a man before but Tilly needed to have him as naked as he had her. The bulge in his pants intrigued and excited her, yet she hesitated. How did one go about this?

"It's not going to bite." Titch's voice was warm with amusement as he corralled her up against a wooden table. "Unzip me." He unhooked her bra and his hands replaced the lace cups that contained her breasts.

Tilly's eyes closed as the warmth of his palms caressed the mounds of flesh. Her nipples tingled with pleasure. This was completely different from the five-second wham-bam-thank-you-ma'am thing she had been through with her ex-fiancé. She opened her eyes to find him gazing at her with tenderness. At that moment there was only one thought in her mind. Tilly reached down, unbuckled the belt and unzipped his jeans, freeing his cock from its confines. She no longer cared if anyone could see. This was all about what she needed.

"Oh my," she exclaimed in wonder as his penis jumped into her hand gratefully. She had never touched one like this before. Tilly stroked the firm flesh, feeling empowered by the satisfied growl from Titch.

"I had some vague idea of taking you slowly but I can see that's going to be impossible this first time, *cariad*."

Cariad. First time.

"I need you, Taliesin." It was madness but she did not care.

"I love the way you say my name," he leant down and captured her nipple in his mouth and sucked hard.

Tilly's hands gripped his cock hard in response. She heard him mutter at her breast—*I'm not going to last a moment longer*. Before she knew what was happening, Titch had her lying with her back against the table and her legs around his waist.

"I'll take it slowly," he assured her as his cock sought entrance to her vagina.

Tilly was so ready and wet that if he went slowly now she would faint she was so needy. She had never felt this way before and she liked it.

"No, not slowly. Make it fast and make it now."

"I don't want to hurt you."

Sweet and sexy and he needed permission. Tilly had the craziest feeling she could trust him.

"I need to be filled by you." Tilly pulled him toward her.

"I believe I love you." Titch's voice was husky with possession as one hand reached forward and caressed her face.

"Love me now then, Taliesin." That moment was all that mattered. Need had to be met and he was the man to do it. If he wanted to say he loved her that was fine but she had to have him inside her now.

"My pleasure, *cariad*."

"Wait!"

"Wait? Ah, that's going to be pretty damned impossible."

Tilly gave a small smile. She was pleased that she had him as crazy for her as she was for him.

"I know you're this all-powerful being but you need a condom if you want to be with me." Her hands rested on his chest as she looked at him. The need was overwhelming but Tilly was still sane enough to realize stranger sex, or even spellbinder sex, without a condom was asking for trouble.

"Spellbinders are immune to the diseases of mankind."

"Please."

"Of course, *cariad*." Titch waved his hand once and a bright pink condom appeared fitted over the taut muscle of his cock.

I love magic.

"That has to be handy."

"You have no idea how much until moments like this." He leaned into her and re-positioned himself at her entrance.

"Why shocking pink?" She licked her lips as her hands ran over the muscles in his back.

"I thought I'd make this memorable."

"Oh it is." Tilly knew she would carry this moment to the grave. How many people got fucked by a legend in the middle of the day while people walked past oblivious to what was going on?

"Now, *cariad*?"

That Titch asked touched her deeply. It was like he understood her need to be a part of this and not just used for the moment.

"Yes please."

As Titch sank slowly within her, Tilly felt the hot stretching of his shaft driving deep within as he made her his. This was how she'd always imagined it would feel. Okay, not necessarily with a splinter digging into her butt, but this fullness that joined their worlds together. There was a brief struggle as tight walls gave resistance but even those barriers gave in to the pleasurable onslaught of sensation. It was nothing like that ghastly moment with her ex-fiancé. This was such a full, intense feeling that made her want to give this man everything she had.

"You feel so good I may never leave you."

Tilly giggled at his earnest words. The spellbinder sure knew how to make a woman feel good.

"It's going to be hard to explain a man attached to me like this." Though as Titch moved so deeply inside her she did not care what anyone thought.

"You're smart. You'd think of something." Titch bent his head down to lick her nipples.

Tilly felt like she was dissolving under him. There was pressure and weight and yet this amazing sense of rightness. She had read about what good sex was. This was it.

"At the moment I can't think of anything at all but what you're doing to me."

"Perfect." Titch's mouth met hers and he kissed her.

Tilly threw her whole being into the kiss. She had been kissed before but she had never wanted to give back as much pleasure as she was receiving. This was something special and she wanted to remember it forever as she knew nothing this good ever lasted. Was it just because he was a spellbinder or some other reason? Was it power or desire?

"You have a great mouth," Titch murmured in between kisses.

"It's crooked." Tilly loved a man who could multi-task. He did not miss a stroke inside her as he kissed her.

"I adore crooked." He kissed her nose teasingly. "And I adore you, *cariad*."

"Oh...ah," Tilly moaned as he thrust deeper inside. She wrapped her legs tighter around his waist. "You spellbinders sure do have a way about you—oh my." She felt the most delicious feeling shoot through her body. Why she had ever thought masturbation was a release she did not know. It did not compare to this wild energy running through her body looking for an outlet. "I feel like I'm going to explode." *Okay, now I understand the whole toe curling deal.*

"So explode with me."

"Do you feel—"

"Like I want to die in your arms and never be free of you? Yes," Titch growled the words out in raw honesty.

"Wow." Tilly had not been thinking that, yet it felt true.

"Wow, as in I'm incredibly poetic or wow, I'm damn good at sex?"

"Wow, as you are so up yourself." She slugged his shoulder playfully. Who knew sex could be fun?

"Or in this case—you."

Yes he was and she liked it. A lot.

"Make me come, Taliesin." Tilly wanted him to take her to the point of no return and back again.

"Yes, *cariad*."

As the orgasm hit, Tilly's head thumped back against the table. If she gave herself brain damage at that moment it would be worth it for the sensation that was tearing through her body and lighting up her senses.

"Oh Taliesin, why have I never felt like this before?"

"Because you were waiting for me, *cariad*." He thrust one last time and exploded with her. They held each other tightly as they shook from the force of their coming together.

"Bloody hell," Tilly panted as she tried to catch her breath.

"We have to do this again." Titch gently pushed the hair back from her face.

"Supposing we see each other again."

Titch barked with laughter at her prim-sounding words.

"What do you think?"

She was sure that she wanted much more of the spellbinder but how rational was that with him being someone who could disappear in a heartbeat? Tilly wasn't looking for a husband but she would like a lover to stick around for a while—that was, if she was looking for a lover and she told herself she wasn't. This had to be a one-off deal.

"I'm not sure."

"Liar." He kissed her and pulled out of her body reluctantly.

Tilly lay spread out on the table too sated to move. She did however catch a brief glimpse of Titch's back as he twisted to remove the condom and do up his jeans. Was that a tattoo?

"Undo your trousers and turn around." She sat up, tilting her head back and forward as she looked at his waist.

"Why?" Titch grinned at her with delight.

"I want to see your ass." Nun-like Matilda Moor had sex and now wanted to perve on a man's butt. Her world had gone momentarily mad and she liked it.

"As you wish." He turned and dropped his trousers.

There was the most intricate Celtic tattoo etched onto the base of Titch's spine.

"Oh my." She reached out and ran one finger along the navy blue twists and turns of the pattern. Tilly liked the way he jumped at her touch.

"You like?"

"It's exquisite."

"The tatt or my ass?" Titch turned his head and their eyes met.

The answer was of course both. His ass was taut, trim and biteable. But neither tattoos nor biting was what she should be thinking about. She was supposed to be pursuing freaks of nature and not indulging in natural pursuits with a spellbinder.

"I'd better get going." Tilly sprang off the table, the splinter in her ass forgotten as she started to scramble into her clothes. *Where is my underwear?*

Titch handed Tilly her bra and pocketed her underwear. Neither commented on that. He just grinned at her charmingly.

"Do we have a problem?" He watched as she dressed herself swiftly.

The fact that he kept her panties made her hot all over. Why had he? What was the etiquette on this? Did she ask for them back or just shrug in urban sophistication and pretend it happened every day?

"No, of course there's not a problem." But for the panties thing and the fact she wasn't really sure how to handle the whole post-sex thing. "I just have to get back to business." She wrenched her jeans on and thrust her feet into her boots, forgetting her socks in her rush to cover flesh as quickly as possible. It was time to gird loins, not rub them. Tilly had work to do.

"Ah, so you are going to deny yourself further pleasure?" Titch said the words pleasantly as if he thought she was mad.

Her thighs sweated at the possibility of more pleasure.

"Yes. I mean no. I mean — I don't know you and yet I had sex with you. That's just not me." *Crap what do I mean? Who am I again?* "Look, it was great but it's over." Tilly stumbled on her laces in her rush to move away from him.

Titch caught her before she fell.

"Sit down." He all but pushed her back onto the table. He picked up one booted foot and began tying up her laces. "There is nothing wrong with mutually enjoying sex."

"I know that." Tilly obediently lifted her other boot to be tied. *He was awfully sweet.*

"Do you really?"

"Yes." He sounded like he thought she didn't have a clue. She hunted down weirdos for a living. Tilly had plenty of clues when it came to that sort of life. It was just how to handle the whole sex thing that was momentarily beyond her. "It's just not likely that we're going to have to sex again anyway." She was instantly disappointed by the thought. In some ways it would have been better not to have sex as then she would not have known what she had missed.

"Matilda Moor, I promise you can count on making love with me again."

Making love?

"Look, I'm not interested in —"

"What? Sex? Love? Romance?"

"Any of those." Tilly slipped off the table to stand on her own two feet.

Titch shook his head in bemusement.

"You know I thought you were smarter than this."

"I —"

"Is that you, Matilda?" a high-pitched female voice called. "Yoo hoo." A blonde woman dressed in a pink tracksuit and carrying a notebook and pen rushed toward her.

"Oh jeez Louise," Tilly muttered as the perky-faced individual approached. From the sublime to the ridiculous. Clearly they were now visible to everyone.

Titch stiffened momentarily as he looked at the woman. Whatever he was thinking he quickly masked.

"A friend of yours?" He stood casually yet watchfully at Tilly's side.

"That's Jeri. She's an annoying twat of a romance novelist following me around to get background for some story she's going to write. She wants to see the real emotion of my job." If she had only been there moments earlier, without the magical force field of invisibility, she would have seen a great deal of emotion.

"I always thought romance writers were odd." He tilted his head as he assessed the other woman keenly.

Great sex and they thought alike. He was like the perfect man—that was if she was looking for one. *And I'm not, times fifteen.*

"This one is odd to the point of paranormal. She's so perky I want to puke." Tilly shook her head. "It's not natural." She knew that only too well. It was all staged. She and Rowdy had already checked Jeri out. They knew exactly who they were dealing with. Would Titch suspect who she was? Just how all-knowing was he?

"Hi, Matilda." Jeri's voice was infused with perkiness.

"Jeri, how are you?" Tilly was overly sweet back. Out of the corner of her eyes, she could see Titch smile at her tone.

"I lost sight of you." The writer made a *tsk tsk* disappointed sound.

"Fancy." Tilly had made sure that had happened. She had her reasons for hiding from the woman and she was not happy that Jeri had found her so quickly. *I must be losing my touch.*

Jeri looked Titch up and down in wide-eyed appreciation.

"Who's your friend?"

"I'm Titch."

Jeri giggled and accepted his hand.

"Well aren't you the handsome one." She smiled almost too brightly at him. "I didn't know Matilda had a boyfriend."

"I'm actually her fiancé."

Tilly's mouth dropped open in shock. What was he playing at? Before she had time to even shoot him a furious gaze, Titch pulled her to him and kissed her hard. It was all about passion and possession. When the kiss broke off, Tilly staggered against him. *Oh this was bad.* She knew she needed to have her wits about her with this man, er, spellbinder.

"He's actually my ex-fiancé." Tilly decided she would go along with this for the moment. He just may prove to be useful when dealing with Jeri. Had he worked out who Jeri was yet? Was Titch as surprised as her that there was a rare female freak of nature standing before them? Was he aware the female gender even existed anymore? She and Rowdy had been surprised as their research had indicated otherwise. Tilly hoped he said nothing to alert Jeri as she wanted to wipe out the whole nest of them before they could do to others what they had done to her. It was a crazy and ambitious plan but it was hers. Keeping Jeri friendly was the key to finding the rest of them before they found her first.

For the last two months, Tilly had pretended the freaks did not exist. Although she had a mangled hand that indicated otherwise, forced ignorance was better than living in fear. Tilly was not brave enough to pretend that freaks had not shaken her badly by what had happened. When she had heard through the underworld grapevine that they were back and after her because of what she done to one of their own, Tilly knew she had to face her fear and try to rid the area of them once and for all. Of course that was easier said than done. She looked at Titch. Was he there to help her?

"We broke up after a terrible fight."

"Now, *cariad*, that's all in the past."

Tilly smiled tartly at him as she rolled her eyes.

"How long have you known my beautiful Tilly?" Titch stroked the ravaged flesh on her hand as if he knew where her thoughts lay.

Oh yeah, he was laying it on thick but why?

"I met Tilly yesterday and begged her to allow me to follow her."

"I see," Titch responded noncommittally as his arm moved to tighten around her waist.

What did he see with those astute blue eyes of his?

"Okay, Jeri, I'm done for the day." Tilly saw the disappointment in the freak's eyes. What game was she playing with her? She had a feeling Jeri was as aware as she that they were an ill-matched pair to be hanging out together. Tilly wasn't exactly the poster child for freaks of nature after she destroyed their leader. That Jeri had not struck out at her as yet was as frightening as it was intriguing. "I need to spend some time chatting to my fiancé."

"So you won't be doing any more investigating this afternoon?" The blonde sounded disappointed though her eyes remained cool on her intended victim.

"No, Jeri." As much as she wanted to neutralize the problem of the freaks she had to deal with the spellbinder. Besides to kill a freak of nature she needed quick lime mixed with rock salt. This had only ever been a reconnaissance trip anyway. She knew she wasn't the only one hunting them. There were another five paranormal hunters in Brisbane who knew about these flesh eaters but unlike her they hunted for sport and profit and not sheer survival. And as far as she knew, none of them had attracted their own freak tag-along. *Lucky*. If Jeri had a plan in mind Tilly suspected she would wait another day to enact it. She watched as the creature left them, all deadly smiles.

"Why did you say we were engaged?" Tilly pushed Titch from her. Everyone was playing their own games at the moment. What was his?

"Never heard of love at first sight?"

"Only when people are drunk and desperate. Which are you?"

"I'm stone cold sober." Titch looked at her thoughtfully. "You know we have to talk, *cariad*."

"About what?" As if she didn't know. She ached pleasantly from the feel of him inside her.

"Sex."

Such a small word that had so many ramifications.

"It happened. It was great." When Titch smiled at her like that Tilly wanted to respond in kind. "But that's it, over, finished, bust." She was pleased with how cool and in control she sounded.

"You don't believe that." Titch sounded like he certainly didn't.

Oh crap. You had to go and have sex with the spellbinder. They both knew she was screwed. You could not break a drought in such an amazing way and then expect to walk away like nothing happened. But you could certainly try.

"You know, I don't know what game you're playing, spellbinder, but I'm not about to play along." Tilly turned and walked away, trying to maintain some semblance of control.

"Not going to say goodbye, *cariad*?"

"No, because I have a feeling you're going to turn up again." *Damn you.*

Chapter Three

Titch smiled as he watched Matilda Moor swing her shapely ass as she walked away from him.

“What a woman.” Of course Titch knew all about Tilly. Spellbinders knew or found out everything. When Argon, the being who directed all spellbinders, had directed him to meet up with her, Titch had been wary as to why. For all intents and purposes Matilda Moor was a woman who was in way over her head dealing with creatures that were best left to the professionals to handle. The Universe had its own way of cleaning up the scum that existed. Yet people like Tilly still had to put their own two cents in.

The loss of Tilly’s fingers was no surprise to Titch. He had heard a female human had tangled with a freak of nature and destroyed it. It was inevitable that some damage had been sustained. He wondered what scars she carried that she concealed. Was that why she was so giving one minute and terrified the next? Titch had initially been amazed that Tilly seemed unaware as to what Jeri was. This was no would-be romance novelist. This was a female freak of nature and it was extremely rare to see one roaming around freely and without a mate. Despite her initial pretense, Titch knew as soon as he touched Tilly and felt her tense up that she knew exactly who Jeri was. She just chose to hide her fear and caution. So why the hell was she tracking freaks down? That confused him. He felt her fear but knew she planned to go ahead with her crazy scheme. Titch suspected it was a matter of survival to her. Strike first or suffer.

Titch knew two things for sure. Tilly wanted him as much as he wanted her and she had been targeted by a female freak of nature – but why? He suspected the female knew she was hunting her kind and they were very possessive if their clan was at risk. There was also the fact that Tilly had killed one in order to save herself and freaks were known to be big on vengeance. He debated for a moment bringing the matter out into the open but he had decided against it as these flesh eaters were very tricky and it was better to fight them on winning terms rather than being pushed into it. He did not want Jeri turning on Tilly. So Titch had played dumb so he could find out what was going on. There was clearly much more to this assignment than he had been led to believe. The fantastic sex alone made him realize that. So why had Argon sent him to Matilda Moor when they both knew there were another two spellbinders in the locality?

Titch had known he was in trouble the minute he saw Tilly. He had been having a strange feeling for a while that his next assignment would be trouble and he had been extremely wary when he had been told by Argon that it was a woman. Titch loved all women but he wanted no complications. Thankfully as an immortal being he rarely had to deal with the complications that mortal men did when it came to women. He could

love them and leave them and no one got hurt as he made no promises and the women knew this.

Titch had no say in where he went, who he helped or how long he stayed in their lives. While it was true he was an almighty spellbinder, even spellbinders answered to a higher power in all that they did. That power was Argon and Argon only explained himself when he chose to do so and that was infrequently at best. Titch knew after one look at the flame-haired Matilda that she was going to complicate his life and yet that kind of complication appealed to him.

Taliesin Trevelyan was the epitome of careless and casual. Even when he had been human he had been relaxed when it came to following conventions and rules. When he approached humans today, in his role as a spellbinder, many were quite surprised at his laid-back appearance. He did not go in for shock and awe. Titch favored faded jeans, board shorts and t-shirts and inevitably had sunglasses on his person. He liked the modern way of life. It differed greatly from the time he came from. Wales in 1832 had too many rules and too many had suffered under them, including himself.

In 1832, when Taliesin, the village carpenter and staunch advocate of Welsh independence, had soundly beaten the local English landowner in a horse race many locals were pleased. The English were despised. The villagers had also found great mirth in the fact the same carpenter was making love to the squire's daughter. It was not the smartest thing to do especially when that squire hated Titch for his good looks, his heritage and what he perceived as insolence and disrespect. But Titch had always been, then and now, his own man and the beating of the gentrified English dandy had meant little to him. He lived his life on his own terms. When charges of theft were easily trumped up against him, Titch had been angry and astounded at the lengths that a petulant man would go to. At that time transportation to the colony of Australia was a good way to rid oneself of a problem. Naturally Titch had fought the sentence but the times as they were did not favor a carpenter and Taliesin was sentenced by the local magistrate, the squire's best friend, to suffer the long trip to Australia.

Titch had left no family behind. It had just been him so there was no one to mourn him. He did not doubt that Marianne, the squire's daughter, would have dutifully done whatever was required of her. He smiled as he thought of Matilda docilely going along with what another had decreed for her. Titch liked Tilly a lot. It was strange to think if he had never been killed on that ship journey to Australia and resurrected as a spellbinder then their worlds would never have touched.

When the crude homemade knife had first penetrated between his ribs, he had not fully understood what had happened. Until the second blow made him gasp in pain and alarm he knew in a heartbeat he was dying. Titch had turned to his evil-smelling assailant questioningly.

"A little gift from the squire, mate," the man said as he had turned the knife.

Titch had fallen to the deck in agony, his last thoughts about how pointless his life had been. He had done nothing he considered of any use for himself or anyone else. As his life ebbed away, Titch heard a soft, male voice whisper in his ear.

But you will, Taliesin Trevelyan.

"What?" Titch had choked out on his last breath.

Close your eyes and let me take over.

Titch had been beyond doing anything else anyway. As life left his body, his mind suddenly became sharper and more focused than ever. He was able to rise above the chaotic scene happening on the deck below and look down on it without any feeling of sadness or regret at all.

"Where am I now?" Titch had asked as he tried to focus on what was happening to him. He had heard the local village witch tell people that their bodies were but shells and that their souls could escape in order to start again. At the time Titch, like the others, had thought she was mad. But now he knew she was right.

You are where you need to be.

Titch tried to focus on the voice to see who he was talking to. Gradually the shape of a large, muscular man appeared before him. Everything about him bespoke power. Titch was certainly no weakling but he knew instantly this man was a force to be reckoned with. The deep, dark, fathomless eyes that held his were full of great wisdom and a touch of humor.

"Who are you?"

I am Argon and I will guide you from now on, Taliesin Trevelyan.

At the time, Titch had immediately arced up at his words. No man ordered or guided him. He was in charge of his own life, or in this case whatever state he was in now. Titch had told this Argon that in no uncertain terms. Argon had merely laughed at his heated words.

You have much to learn.

Those words were to plague him for his first couple of months as a spellbinder. When Titch had been informed of his new "life" he had railed against it as it had not seemed natural to him. Titch wasn't a religious man but the thought of beings who traveled mysteriously through time and space naturally made him suspicious. Although he liked the idea of helping people, the spellbinder life was hard to get used to. He belonged nowhere, to no one and he left as soon as the job was done. The loneliness of those first few months was not compensated by the enormous power he had been given. Spellbinders could do just about anything if it was justifiable and in the interests of humanity. He could heal the sick, raise the dead, change the course of lives and history all with the wave of his hand. It was an amazing authority he had been given and Titch recognized it. He was not sure why it had been bestowed on him.

Spellbinders were made and not born. Legend had it that a spellbinder was either someone good who died before their time and was given a chance at mortality or an evil person who was condemned to walk through eternal life doing good deeds. There were days when Titch wondered which category he fell into. He hadn't always been good in his life but then he had not been evil either.

"And now I have to sort Matilda Moor out." He closed his eyes momentarily as he remembered the feeling of being with her. That she had only had sex once before amazed him. The woman was built to be loved and often. "By me." He opened his eyes as he said the words. He knew right then that he wanted that woman in his life. Was that why Argon had sent him to her? Had he felt the incredible aching emptiness within Titch? Even if Argon had, it was not like Titch could do anything about being with Tilly. Technically he did not exist. He died in 1832. He could not offer her anything for he was not human and it was unlikely he would be staying around as another assignment would call him away. Besides, was he latching onto her in desperation? Was it a case that any woman would do?

You know that's not the truth, Taliesin Trevelyan.

Argon. The ever-present voice in his ear who listened in on all thoughts. The being rarely turned up in person and when he did it was for something so important that Titch was wary of being a part of whatever his plan was. Spellbinders were never forced to do anything. Assignments were given on the basis of ability and temperament. Titch could always give a good reason why he could be excused from being involved. He could not think of a single one when it came to Tilly.

Do you remember your last assignment?

Sure, Titch did. It was only last week. He had helped a demon gain mortality to be with the woman he loved. A sudden flare of hope grabbed at Titch.

"What are you saying, Argon?" Was he going to be granted the same thing? To lose the curse of immortality and be given another chance at life? That he could have true love? Was Tilly the woman for him? No one, not even Argon could stop or fight the power of romantic destiny.

You know how dangerous true love can be to a spellbinder.

Yes, Titch knew. It was the one weakness a spellbinder had. If they fell in love "on duty" then such love would threaten both them and their subject. But how did you turn true love away when it was meant to be?

"What is it you want me to do?" Titch knew very well that spellbinders did nothing without a reason and that favors were only granted and lives changed if the people who needed help first tried to help themselves. Nothing was ever given freely.

All in good time, Taliesin.

"Bastard," Titch responded pleasantly as he slipped his sunglasses back over his eyes. He was rewarded with a hearty chuckle from his employer. Argon was a manipulative sod when he chose to be. Titch thought about Tilly and smiled. He felt hopeful for the first time in a century.

Jeri also watched Matilda walk away. She was fairly certain Tilly had worked out who she was. It was strange that she had not tried to destroy her. It was unusual for a human to act so calmly. The only thing Jeri could think of was that Tilly was either scared to make a move against her or she was incredibly ambitious and stupid to think

she could maneuver her into taking a hunter back to her compatriots. It appeared she had learnt nothing from losing her fingers in her last encounter with a freak.

Jeri swore angrily. It still made her wild to think that the human female had killed her mate. How had that even been possible? Humans were ridiculously weak and yet this woman had killed one of them. Jeri would have liked to have struck her down when she first came eye to eye with her but that was not the plan. Oberon, their new leader, wanted the Moor woman to suffer.

"It's just not happening quickly enough," Jeri spat out angrily. She wanted to see Matilda in desperate agony as she watched her slowly die.

The blond man was intriguing. There was something about him that alerted Jeri to danger and yet turned her on at the same time. She licked her lips greedily. He smelled divine. Sandalwood and musk. The perfect seasoning to hot, human flesh. The only thing that puzzled her was that he seemed human but not quite. Who was he? They hadn't planned on him showing up in the Moor woman's life. Maybe Oberon would know.

Chapter Four

"He calls himself Titch but his real name is Taliesin Trevelyan," Tilly explained to Augusta "Rowdy" Lawrence, her best friend and sole employee in the Matilda Moor Agency. They were in the messy garage attached to the side of Tilly's home. It was a double garage that had her car parked on one side and the "agency" was on the other. The office was overcrowded with four computers of various ages, two desks partitioned off—as Rowdy liked to work in peace and Tilly was inclined to sing along to the radio—stacked boxes of gadgets they used on the job of dealing with the weird and the unknown, banks of filing cabinets, and walls covered with old 1950s horror posters. "He's a spellbinder." *And I had amazing sex with him and I still cannot believe I did that.* Tilly was still agog that she'd had sex with a stranger—and he was stranger than most.

"A spellbinder, really?" Rowdy pushed her glasses up her nose as she looked at her friend with interest.

Tilly smiled fondly at the woman. Rowdy's glasses were taped up at the front with white tape from where she broke them last week, her black hair was scraped back, she wore no makeup and yet for all the lack of sophistication her friend and assistant was stunning in a natural way that few women could hope to be. Augusta Lawrence had been called Rowdy for as long as Tilly had known her. They had met as five-year-olds in Miss Woodburn's class. Tilly had been the new girl with the strange auntie who everyone thought was a witch and Rowdy had been the quiet, observant one—hence the nickname Rowdy.

Tilly knew behind the quiet facade Rowdy presented to the world there was a brilliant mind and a deep, thoughtful nature. She was well aware that the quietest people were the most interesting and at times the deadliest.

"Yes, and I want to know whatever you can find out about him." Tilly could still feel the heat of him inside her body. She closed her legs tightly as if to hold the sensation in. If she never had sex again, she could live on that memory forever.

"Are you okay? You look uncomfortable and your face is pink."

"I'm fine." As much as she loved Rowdy, there was no way she would be spilling that she had sex with a complete stranger and enjoyed every delicious second of it. Tilly did not want to come across as a total slut. "I reckon start with the British databases first. Get in touch with Newton in Wales." There was a whole geek network of amateur sleuths of the paranormal across the globe. They were extremely useful to them.

"Why the interest?" Rowdy leaned back in her chair and surveyed her thoughtfully.

Tilly knew that look. Rowdy's astute mind was already working out what was going on.

"It's my understanding that a spellbinder does not turn up for no reason." Rowdy assessed her as if trying to find out what Tilly was hiding. "Do you think he knows about Jeri?"

"Yes." Titch wasn't stupid. The minute her called her his fiancé, Tilly knew he was aware of exactly what Jeri was. It had been kind of sweet the way he had leapt in to lend his sword arm to her cause.

"Do you think that's why he's here?"

Tilly knew there had to be more to Titch's appearance as well. Like Rowdy she had read somewhere that spellbinders were motivated by some cause. They were not ones to do anything unless they chose to.

"Yes, to Jeri but I suspect he has another motive for being here." It would be nice to think it was because of her but Tilly was not naïve enough to believe that the Universe went out of its way to cater to the needs of sex-starved women. The Universe was into helping humanity and not necessarily aiding in orgasms.

"I heard some recent talk about a demon who became mortal after closing a gate in Hell. Do you think it was this Titch who did that?" Rowdy's fingers were poised on the keyboard ready to search.

"They do tend to stick their noses into other people's business." *And other things...* Tilly shook herself. *I have to get back on track. It was just great, fantastic sex – get over it.*

"What does he look like?"

"Blond, handsome in that raw masculine way, sparkling blue eyes, he has an ear stud and a tattoo at the base of his spine." Tilly stopped suddenly as she realized what she had said. *Oh crap, too much information.*

Rowdy's eyes went wide in surprise.

"You saw him naked?"

"I, um...er..." How did she answer that without getting caught up in an explanation she wasn't even sure of herself? "Just get in contact with Newton and see what you can find."

"With a name like Taliesin Trevelyan I take it he's Welsh?" Rowdy murmured, changing the subject as if knowing she had pushed Tilly into a tough spot.

"Yes, I would assume so though he does not have an accent." Though, if he was like most spellbinders and had been around for centuries, then maybe the accent had been diluted over time.

"How old do you think he is?" Rowdy tapped on the keys as she brought up a search engine.

"He looks about thirty-seven or thirty-eight, very hot in faded denim and—" Tilly shut up instantly. What was wrong with her? She had never taken too much notice of men before other than when they were some weird alien she was trying to track.

"I'm not sure 'hot' fits the search engine." Rowdy looked at Tilly in bemusement. "What I meant was what period of time would he have come from? As you know Titch would have once been a mortal."

Rowdy was right. Spellbinders could be from any time period. He seemed of this age but he could be from any time going back for centuries. *I had sex with an immortal.* Was that something you could tell the reunion committee of your old high school? It beat out being remembered as the strange girl with the weird aunt.

"He just seemed to fit in so it's hard to say." He was so casually dressed that she would have assumed he came from their own time.

"That's what they do. From what little I know, records indicate spellbinders started to appear around the fifteenth century. Was there anything that stuck out about him in your mind other than he was hot and you obviously saw his ass?"

Sometimes Rowdy surprised her with her quiet, pithy observations. Tilly chose not to respond to her teasing. What stood out about Titch? Everything. His smile, his eyes and the way he felt inside her.

"His kiss," she mused in remembrance.

"You kissed him as well?" Rowdy asked in renewed amazement.

Well, I did see his butt along with other things.

"He called me 'cariad'."

"That means 'love' or 'sweetheart' and it's common in Wales." She eyed her boss with interest. "That's a very nice and unusual thing to call a stranger."

"I'm sure it's just some quirky thing of his." It was not like Titch actually meant it. How could he?

"Uh-huh," Rowdy responded, not believing a word of what Tilly said. "What do you think he did to become a spellbinder?"

"That's right, a spellbinder is chosen for a specific reason, supposedly because they were either very good or very bad in their past life. He didn't seem like a criminal." Surely she would have noticed that.

"They never do. I'll start with his name and Wales and continue from there."

"Thanks, Rowdy." The agency would fall apart without her. Tilly was smart enough to know that. Rowdy was the brains and she was the clumsy brawn. That wasn't to say Tilly was stupid but she appreciated the computer smarts of her friend.

"There's a bunch of bills on your desk," Rowdy called as Tilly walked away.

Tilly felt her whole body stiffen at the "b" word. *Crap.* What money came in went to pay off things that inevitably got busted up in the operations side of the business or on overhead. Then there was stuff like rock salt, lime, vinegar, borax and mugwort to buy. None of that was cheap. Paying bills came after all that and the mortgage. When she got to her desk at the other end of the building, she looked at the envelopes stacked there. Only one had the red final demand stamp on the outside. If all of them had the dreaded

red stamp she would have been screwed as her bank account barely had enough in it to keep it open.

"Some days are diamonds, hey Shalimar?" Tilly tapped lightly on the round glass bowl that housed her pet goldfish. Shalimar, being Shalimar, ignored her and continued swimming around in the never-ending circle that was her life. Tilly smiled at this one consistent thing in her life. For the last seven years Shalimar had done her own thing and yet lived peacefully with Tilly. You could not say that about a lot of people or pets. Tilly sat down at her desk and flicked the other bills into a to-be-looked-at-later-if-I-have-money-ha-ha pile.

Tilly's Aunt Sage had started the agency. She had begun as a clairvoyant using her natural ability to predict the future for those who asked. People came to see her in droves such was their belief in her skill. After a while some people started to ask Sage about paranormal beings visiting them and what was the best way to get rid of them. Sage, being the generous soul she was, started to help out in ridding people of the strange beings that turned up in their lives. As an impressionable fourteen-year-old Tilly had been quite amazed at the number of people who visited her aunt looking to be freed from some demon or other. Demand was great and so began the business that she now ran out of the garage.

As a child, Tilly had come to live with her Aunt Sage after her mother died. Her father was unknown and that was fine by Tilly. Whatever references Sage made to him were not flattering as it appeared he had run out on her mother when he discovered she was pregnant. So Tilly was not about to go looking for such a creep. She had everything she needed with Sage. While it was true her aunt was quirky and odd and the kids at school teased her, Aunt Sage was a good-hearted woman who felt a genuine need to help people and Tilly loved her.

After Sage died, Tilly had been directionless for a while. It was no surprise to Tilly that people naturally assumed that Sage's death was something supernatural. A rumor shot around that it had been voodoo. It hadn't been. It was cancer. Eventually, despite the rumors and remarks about the Moors, people started to come see Tilly with their problems. Tilly had no psychic ability and let people know that. Her gift was more the application of common sense. She had been average at school and nothing beyond waiting for the final bell in the afternoon interested her when it came to education. While everyone was talking five-year plans, Tilly's mind was thinking five-minute plans. It seemed strangely logical that she would carry on with what her aunt had already started. Besides Tilly found out that she was a natural snoop and she had learnt a lot from just talking to and watching Sage. She hired her friend Rowdy as she knew that the quiet woman would be an asset as she saw and remembered things that others didn't. There was no real money in the business but it felt good to help people.

"That's right," Tilly murmured to her goldfish as she picked up the most overdue bill. "Goodness is apparently its own frigging reward, Shalimar." She sighed as she looked at the amount. Seriously? That much on electricity? "I probably should find a proper job." Even as she said the words, Tilly could not picture herself at a sales counter

or slinging hash in a restaurant. She was used to being her own boss and working whatever hours she had to.

Her mind went back to Titch. A sudden warm shiver ran up her spine. Oh how he had made her feel. It was like he knew exactly how she needed to be touched and kissed and what she desired. She now understood the whole thing about hunger and lust and how it could drive you on to do the best things. Was it just because he was a spellbinder and had the power to know things instinctively? Was he just a sensational lover? Or did he have the ability to read minds?

"I must get Rowdy to check the mind reading thing out." Tilly liked to keep her dumb, embarrassing thoughts to herself. That he knew about Jeri was interesting and she knew he was there for a reason. Was Jeri it? But then freaks of nature were everywhere so why was he in Brisbane now? The city did not corner the market on weirdos. Besides Tilly had handled freaks before, without a spellbinder, and gotten rid of them. Something else had to be happening that she was unaware of but what? Like most in their business she had heard about the demon turning mortal because of true love and the portal gate of Hell being closed. Who hadn't? It was big stuff that had a huge impact on their businesses. The fewer demons they had to deal with the better. They were such tricky bastards.

As for Jeri, Tilly had known who she was instantly when they had met. The first clammy, hello handshake between them had set her on instant alert. After her run-in with the first lot of freaks and the loss of her fingers, Tilly was only too aware of how to spot one of their kind though she had never expected to be faced with a female of the species. From what research Rowdy had done, they knew the females did not eat female human flesh to survive as the men did. They killed outright. So why was Jeri toying with her? Why use the ridiculous story of being a romance novelist? Hell, Tilly would not have allowed a romance novelist to get in her way asking dumb questions anyway.

Tilly thought back two months ago to the last freak she destroyed, the male freak who had taken her fingers. The agency had been employed by a large retirement village. Freaks had moved in close by to the community and one by one residents started to disappear. The police could not work out why. Rumors of strange, glowing beings having been seen at the village had alerted one of Sage's old customers to suggest that the management of the Blue Gums Retirement Village seek out Tilly. Rowdy had made short work of ascertaining who they were, where they lived and how to stop them. Only freaks of nature glowed at night and they could only be killed with quick lime and rock salt.

With the research done, the rest had been up to Tilly. This was very different from chanting passages of the bible in Latin to dismiss demons or persuading ghosts to go toward the light. These were beings who ate body parts to live. The freak she killed had put up a hell of a fight. Initially he had been all pleasant and charming when she knocked on his door. When he had seen the container of lime and rock salt, he had dragged her inside his home and latched onto her fingers. Tilly still remembered the crunching sound of bone and the agonizing pain. She had almost passed out, however

her need to kill the freak and get her hand back made her keep her head. With one hand stuck in the vise-like jaws, Tilly had used her free hand to swing the bag containing the bag of lime mixture down on them both. While the lime had stung her skin, it had set the freak off into a frenzy of screaming. He let go of her hand as he tried to wipe the lime and salt from his skin.

Tilly had clutched her bleeding hand to staunch the flow, knowing her digits were gone for good, as she watched the skin peel off the tortured freak. If it was anyone else she would have been horrified. But things that chomped on flesh, hers especially, did not deserve pity. Once Tilly knew that the freak was all but dead, she did not stay around any longer than she had to. She was not foolish enough to believe there was only one freak. However she hoped the others would take this as a warning and move on. It wasn't a great plan as Tilly knew they would start up somewhere else but she could only solve so many problems at a time. After the death of that one freak, the retirement village reported no more disappearances and neither they nor Tilly explained to the police what had happened.

So who was Jeri? Could she be a family member of the freak she destroyed? Research indicated freaks were intensely loyal to one another. Was that why a spellbinder had appeared in her life? Was Tilly in some sort of further trouble that she wasn't aware of? Titch had told her he was there to protect her and sure, it was a nice offer. No one had ever made a similar one before. However Tilly had been looking after herself for a long time and did not need his protection or anything else he had to offer.

"Honest to God, Shalimar, the man kissed me and I went all stupid over him." Shalimar made no comment. Tilly watched as the fish scooted past the plastic deep sea diver for the millionth time. "That's what I like about you, Shalimar—you're quietly stoic." Tilly sighed. Of course, kissing Titch was only part of her problem. The whole package that was Titch was dangerous. "Sex with a spellbinder? What were you thinking?" she muttered softly to herself.

"Do you think Shalimar will ever answer?" Rowdy asked as she stuck her head around the partition.

"It would surprise the hell out of me if she does. What's up?" This was good. Tilly needed to get back to business and not moon over a spellbinder.

"There is a record of a Taliesin Trevelyan leaving a dock in England on a convict ship called *The Good Christopher* in 1832."

"He was a convict?" That surprised Tilly though why she wasn't sure. She was aware that a lot of convicts were transported for all sorts of petty crimes in an effort to clean up a rotting England. Somehow she could not see him as a criminal.

"However there is no account of Taliesin Trevelyan disembarking at Sydney Cove with the other convicts at that time."

"That's weird."

"Not really, Taliesin Trevelyan was killed on *The Good Christopher* in what was recorded as a fight with another prisoner."

Tilly felt suddenly saddened. He was murdered? How horrible. Of course she knew Titch was dead because he was a spellbinder yet it was hard to hear how he died so violently. She pulled herself together and cleared her throat.

"Good work."

Rowdy left Tilly to her thoughts. And as if by magic, the man that those thoughts were focused on appeared before her. She gripped the table in sudden shock. It was hard to act cool when people or beings dropped in suddenly.

"Nice place you have here, *cariad*." Titch stroked his finger along the side of the fishbowl. "Hello, Shalimar." The goldfish stopped and instantly turned to press its mouth against the bowl.

Floozy fish.

"It's a hot, stuffy garage." Tilly really hoped her tongue was not hanging out in need, like her goldfish's eye was bulging with interest, as she looked him up and down hungrily. When she remembered what they had done together her inner thighs sweated with need.

"But you're here, *cariad*, and that's what makes it nice." Titch smiled charmingly at her.

Damn, he was good.

"What do you want?" It came out harsher than she intended but she hadn't counted on having to deal with him again so soon. She had no armor in place to combat the masculine beauty of his smile. "Are you a mind reader?"

"If someone deliberately projects a thought to me I can pick it up but on the whole no. Why?" The idea seemed to amuse Titch.

"No reason." That was at least one less thing she had to think about. Now all she had to worry over was making a fool out of herself over him. "I'm busy." Tilly picked up the pile of bills and shuffled them about.

"Are you going pay those?"

"Yes, I just have to go out and find a money tree." *Crap*. Did he know about her money problems too?

"Things are tough." It was more a statement than a question.

"I'll get by. So you're here because?"

"I wanted to be with you." Titch sat down on the edge of the desk, giving her no other option but to look at him.

Uh-oh.

"Look, I'm not a clingy person. The sex was great but I'm not looking for a relationship." That sounded good to her ears. Like she was in control.

"What are you looking for, *cariad*?"

I have no idea was the answer. When Tilly looked into his eyes she felt her heart pound and she was glad she was sitting for she would have fallen due to the sudden attack of knee wobbling.

"Hey, Tilly, I just found this on your mystery man." Rowdy rounded the partition and stopped dead in her tracks when she saw the spellbinder. "Oh, hello."

"You checking me out, *cariad*?" Titch seemed more pleased than annoyed.

"Oh yeah, there's definitely a Welsh background there. I believe Newton's further research is correct," Rowdy told her, although her eyes were locked on Titch.

Tilly wanted to ask about what the further information was but she just did not want to appear too interested in case Titch took it as meaning something else.

"Rowdy, this is Titch and vice versa." It was a crap introduction but Tilly was having trouble thinking logically at that moment with Titch so close to her, and Shalimar glued love-struck to her bowl was throwing her off as well.

"Hello, Augusta," Titch said as he held his hand out to hers.

Rowdy looked at him and smiled with pleasure.

Tilly had a feeling some weird psychic thing was going on with Rowdy and Titch at that moment that she was not privy to. She had always believed there was more to Rowdy and knew her aunt had felt so too.

"Taliesin," Rowdy acknowledged as she shook his hand. She looked at Tilly. "I completely understand now."

What did she understand? Was Rowdy feeling the same intense reaction to Titch as she was? Tilly felt suddenly jealous of her best friend.

"Thank you, Augusta." Tilly only used her full name when she was not happy.

"I'm in trouble," Rowdy told the spellbinder as their hands disengaged.

"So is Tilly, she just hasn't worked out how much yet." He winked at Rowdy.

"Tilly and Titch—it sounds like a magic act." Rowdy left before Tilly could say anything further.

"We are magic together," Titch said as he slid off the table and moved toward her.

Tilly's chair rolled back into the wall in her effort to escape the inevitable.

"Okay. Step back." *Before I do something stupid.*

"Why?" Titch leaned down and placed his hands on the arm rests, imprisoning Tilly in her chair.

"Because." *What? Because I know this can go nowhere yet I want you?* Could she say that without coming across weak and needy after one time of incredible sex?

"Yes, *cariad*?" Titch smiled down patiently at her.

"I'm thinking." But the wheels in her head spun erratically when he stood so close.

"You know what I think?" Titch reached for one of her hands and pulled her to her feet. "You're scared and jealous."

"Who would I be jealous of?" Scared she wasn't going to comment on as they both knew that was a fact.

"You're jealous of Augusta liking me." He caressed her hand in his.

Tilly snorted in derision. She knew she had the power to push him away but where exactly had she put that power?

"Don't be insane, Rowdy is my friend."

"I want to be your friend." He brought her damaged hand to his lips and kissed the scarred flesh.

He is so nice. Why am I fighting this again?

She shook her head as if to clear her thoughts as she tried halfheartedly to pull her hand from his.

"That's not going to happen."

"Because we're lovers, *cariad*?"

Oh crap, I'm so screwed.

"We were lovers once." If the heat from his linked hands made her heart race so wildly what would other hot parts of him linked to her do?

"Lovers forever."

"You're mighty sure of yourself." Realistically Tilly knew there was no future in this. Forever was not something he could give her and she knew in her heart if she got any more involved with the spellbinder she would want forever.

"I'm sure of you." Titch's voice sounded most definite on that account.

"It kills you that you need me as much as want me. Giving in to need is not a bad thing." Both his hands moved to her waist and he pulled her into his arms.

"What are you doing?" Like she did not know. Her body cried out to touch his. Who knew she could feel so much?

"I need to touch you, *cariad*."

"I don't need—" Whatever Tilly had been about to say was silenced by his mouth on hers.

Chapter Five

Titch had kissed a lot of women in his time but no one tasted like Matilda. There was a sweet innocence combined with a passionate nature that set off a response in him that made him want to do anything she asked him. Never had anyone consumed his thoughts and feelings as this woman had.

"Oh boy," Tilly panted as she tried to catch her breath in between kisses.

"Admit it, *cariad*, you want me." Before she could give a response Titch kissed Tilly again. He knew what he was doing to her was rattling her senses. It was doing the same to him. He had not felt this alive in over a century and he wanted to savor every moment of it. Titch put his hands under her ass and picked her up in his arms. He loved the way her legs instantly wrapped around his waist. He needed to get her naked. He wanted to kiss every inch of her body. A garage was not the most ideal place to make love but his need to please her was so great that it overrode any other thought. "Where?"

"Inside the house," Tilly murmured as she pointed the way.

"Excellent." However Titch was so consumed with kissing the woman in his arms that he did not pay attention to the direction he was headed in and walked them into the partition. It landed with a loud bang.

"Everything okay?" Rowdy called out. She stopped dead in her tracks when she saw them. "Oh, I think I'll go out for coffee." She left quickly.

"Smart woman." As much as Titch wanted to go slowly he knew once again it would be impossible. He had never lost control of himself before and yet with Tilly he knew he was close to losing it completely and he liked the feeling of being overwhelmed. It made him feel like a real man again.

"How embarrassing."

Titch smiled at the sudden blush that came to her face. She was beautiful.

"*Cariad*, never be embarrassed with me." He carried her over to the hood of her car, laying her down gently. His hands moved down to her jeans and he started to unfasten them quickly. His cock ached to plunge into the tight wetness he knew awaited him.

"What if Rowdy..."

"She won't." He pulled her jeans down to her knees and swore when he remembered she still had her boots on. He thanked Argon at that moment for making him a spellbinder. Although technically he was not supposed to use his powers for self gain, Titch had a feeling that Argon would overlook it this once. With a wave of his hand the boots disappeared.

"I'd better get my boots back."

He laughed as he pulled her jeans off in two quick tugs and tossed them over his shoulder.

"You are lovely." Titch stood and admired the half-naked woman before him. White, plump thighs and hips that a man could hold onto as he lost himself within his woman. The glistening red curls at her pussy made his cock twitch with excitement knowing she wanted him as much as he wanted her. "*Cariad*, may I?"

Titch asking her in such a sweet way, it made her shiver in anticipation. He wanted her and yet he was still leaving the final decision up to her. That meant a lot to Tilly. She knew she had the power to stop this. She also knew that was damn near impossible given the way she felt at that moment.

"Please, Taliesin." Tilly parted her legs and held out her arms toward him. "I need to feel you inside me once more." The relief on his face was almost comical. Tilly laughed.

"What?" he asked as he moved in closer between her legs.

"What if I said no?" Not that she would have as she was on fire for the taste of him.

"I would have had to take matters into my own hands so to speak." Titch unzipped his fly and his penis jumped out eagerly, looking for action.

Tilly licked her lips hungrily. All that was hers. *Yippee*.

"I would hate you to waste that. Come closer." The heat of his body seeped into hers.

"You want me?" Titch asked as he fisted his cock and ran it leisurely up and down the wet cleft between her legs.

"Oh yes." *That felt so good.*

"What would you do to have me, *cariad*?"

Tilly almost said "anything" but she stopped herself. She did not want to be the only one losing control here.

"You want to play games?" Games were good.

Titch leaned in and licked the skin of her throat as he continued stroking her with his cock.

"Don't you?"

"No." The word was as choked to say as it was to hear. How could she concentrate when he was doing that?

"Liar." His eyes locked with hers. "Games turn you on."

Although she was impressed by the magic and the sex, he did not know everything about her after a couple of hours and it annoyed her that he thought he did. Added to that, the man had taken her favorite boots and was now toying with her, using a loaded cock instead of giving her what she craved. Was this about sex or point scoring? Tilly struggled to sit up.

"You don't know me."

Titch let her push him away.

"I do know you."

"Men. You're all the same." Tilly pushed her hands against his chest. She was tempted to fan her hands out and explore but that would indicate interest. Yes, she wanted Titch, but on her terms.

He laughed at her words.

"What do you know of men, *cariad*?" Titch's voice was gentle with amusement. They both knew Tilly's experience was extremely limited.

"Enough." She slid off the hood of the car and looked at the cock before her. As much as she wanted that inside her Tilly did not need the master of the universe act going on.

"Where you going?"

"Wherever I want." Tilly smacked lightly at him to let her pass. Titch's penis was pressing against her bare stomach, making it almost impossible to think of anything else.

"You don't want to leave me like this." Titch reached out to pull her in tightly against him.

"Oh, but I do. You're an arrogant prick." Tilly fought his hands as she fought her own needs.

"Yes, but I turn you on, *cariad*." Titch managed to secure his hands to her waist.

"Yes, but then so does chocolate, Taliesin." Both were filling and stimulating. Before she had time to react, he had spun her around and pressed her against the hood of the car with his body tight against hers.

"You need me." Titch bent her forward as his knee nudged her legs apart.

"I do not." Oh, but she did. This was incredibly exciting and any possible thoughts she had of fighting him off were rapidly diminishing.

Titch waved a condom over his straining shaft and prodded it against her butt.

"Yeah you do." His hands moved round to her pussy.

When his fingers touched her clit she gasped. It was not the reaction of a horrified woman. It was a gasp of give-me-more.

"What are you doing?" Tilly ground her ass back against him. To do anything else would have been wasteful.

"Making love to you," he murmured as his fingers slid into her slippery vagina.

"Oh my..." That felt awfully good. "It's not love." It was lust and praise be to whatever deity was shining down on her at that moment for bringing him into her life.

"Of course it's love, *cariad*. You just haven't allowed yourself to believe it yet." His fingers moved slowly in and out of her body.

Tilly bore down on his hand, wanting more.

"Is this your approach to all women?" If so she would have to lock him up as no one else could be allowed this pleasure from Titch.

"There is no other woman for me but you."

Excellent answer.

Tilly twisted her head to look at him. She was sure the hunger she could see in his eyes mirrored her own.

"Are you going to fuck me or what?"

Titch kissed her lips greedily.

"Do you want me to, *cariad*?"

"Don't play with me, spellbinder." Tilly knew something more than just lust was going on here but what it was she could not or would not name.

"I thought you liked to play." His lips nuzzled at her neck.

"I do but I need more." More than she ever believed she could possibly want.

"What?" His eyes were locked on hers as if he needed answers.

"If you do not shove your big, fat cock inside me right now I will scream." Tilly was so taut with need that only sex or screaming would relieve her. Titch smiled the most beautiful smile she had ever seen and she felt her heart skip a beat. *Oh no, I can't possibly be...am I? Am I falling for the spellbinder?*

"We can't have you screaming in frustration." Titch quickly removed his fingers and replaced them with his plunging cock. He held her hips tightly against him.

Tilly yelped in pleasure. This was exactly what she needed.

"Do you like that, *cariad*?" he asked as he rammed in and out of her, ensuring they were both satisfied.

"Do you?" she panted as she tried to keep up with the rhythm of his stroke.

Titch threw back his head and laughed.

"See how good we are together?" Titch adored this woman and he knew in his heart that she was his for life. She was exactly the woman he needed. Maybe Fate had some crazy plan killing him off in his old life just so he could eventually meet up with Matilda Moor. While Titch believed in true love, he had never until this moment believed in it for himself.

"Oh Taliesin," she gasped in enjoyment as she tried to keep up the pace.

Titch smiled. He could gladly spend the rest of his days hearing "Oh Taliesin" said just like that by this woman. He held Tilly against him, trying to get as close to her as possible as if to blend their lives together, making it a reality. He pounded hard within her, needing to give them both the release they craved. When she shrieked out loudly and clutched the hood as she came Titch smiled, feeling the wild tremors rack her body. Climaxing hard within her, he knew Matilda Moor was his. She just had to accept it. He would have fun helping her realize it.

"Holy hell," Tilly choked out as she tried to catch her breath.

Titch pulled out from behind her, swept the condom away with a hand wave and turned her around to face him. He loved the dazed, yet spent look on her face. It had a slumberous, relaxed quality. He pulled her into his arms and kissed her lingeringly. The womanly smell of her made his cock twitch again with interest.

"You're not serious?" Tilly felt the movement at her stomach. "I don't think I'll walk again after that."

Just the thing every man wanted to hear. Titch lifted her back into his arms once more and walked over to her desk, seating himself, with her straddling his lap, on the chair. The wet curls between her legs teased his cock and he knew it would take virtually no effort to become fully erect once more. For the moment, he would allow her to calm down before he overwhelmed her with what he both knew they craved from the other. Titch wanted to keep her in a constant state of confusion mixed with anticipation as he suspected that was the best way to woo Matilda. He loved the way she flopped against him in exhaustion. His arms enfolded her still trembling body.

Take it steady, Taliesin. She is yours but she will take some effort.

Argon—now? Titch answered in his mind as he held her.

Bugger off, Argon. This is my woman and my time. His words were rewarded with a chuckle of acquiescence.

As you wish.

Titch pushed Tilly back from him slightly so he could see her eyes. She tried to hide so much and failed miserably with him. He could see she wanted him.

"We have to talk." He eased the hair back from her face. "I know about Jeri."

Tilly sighed as she rested her hands on his shoulders.

"I figured that's why you were here."

"It's not the only reason."

Tilly knew that was true. There was too much going on right now for her not to realize it. However that did not mean she was ready to acknowledge it openly.

"The Jeri thing is under control." Sort of. Or it would be when she went back to focusing on it and not having sex with a spellbinder.

"Is it?" Titch's voice indicated his doubt.

"Yes." She hated it when people could see through her so easily. Until him, Tilly had the whole inscrutable look down pat.

"Are you planning to lose more fingers?" Titch picked up her damaged hand and kissed the stubs of her fingers lovingly.

That was so sweet.

"I know what I am doing." Though that did not include the whole having-sex-with-a-spellbinder thing. That was still in the what-the-hell-am-I-doing? stage. Tilly had

always believed that sex equated to love. Was this love or just a really good case of lust? She looked into his eyes and saw so many things that she could believe quite easily – love, desire and need. Tilly heard a similar echo in her own soul.

“What?” Titch looked at her with interest.

“Nothing.” Though something was certainly stirring between her legs. She peeked down and saw the head of his cock snaking up toward her. “I have to get back to work.” Though the overriding urge to slide on down over him was compelling. Besides, it was only bills to deal with and they had waited this long.

“I have to help you.”

“I don’t need a guardian spellbinder.”

“You don’t know what you need, *cariad*.”

“Oh I do but you’re going to need another condom.” Tilly was amazed to hear the words come out of her mouth. She never imagined she would ever initiate sex with a man. His cock thrust forward at the invitation.

“Your wish is my command.” He waved his hand and a condom magically encased his hard flesh. “You like it when I do that, don’t you?” He chuckled at her pleased look. His hands swept over her shirt, making it and her bra disappear.

“That’s a handy trick.” Tilly sighed as his palms cupped her breasts. “You have to be naked too.”

“But of course.” Titch waved his clothes away.

Tilly caught her breath at the masculine perfection of him. Titch was like someone out of a dream – almost too good to be true – and he wanted her. It amazed her.

“Why me, Taliesin?” She asked the words out loud without realizing she had.

“It’s only ever been you, *cariad*.”

The way Titch said it was so full of longing that she wanted to believe him. She lifted herself up and centered his cock at her entrance.

“This will be the last time we do this.” Saying it and meaning it were two different things of course.

“How delightful, you’re a comedian.” Titch smiled at her in enjoyment, not believing a word she said.

“I mean it,” Tilly responded defiantly as she pushed down over him feeling the hot length slide inside her. She closed her eyes as she gave in to the sensation.

“I’m sure you do.” Titch’s mouth sucked down hard on one of her nipples.

“I do.” Which could have meant anything but at that moment she wasn’t going to analyze it further. Tilly rocked back and forward, riding him hard and loving the feeling of his shaft stretching and filling her once more.

“I’m back, Tilly,” Rowdy called out loudly.

“Oh crap!” Her eyes snapped open and stared at Titch in alarm. He, however, did not look as alarmed as he should. “Just a moment – stay where you are, Rowdy.” Tilly

guessed Rowdy was at the entrance to the garage. The only thing that separated her and them was one corner. "The woman is supposed to have some sort of psychic powers. They obviously don't apply to timing." Tilly started moving faster on top of Titch's lap. The idea of stopping and removing herself did not occur to her. "I wanted this to go slowly."

"Next time – and yes there will be one," Titch assured her as he grabbed her hips and helped them along. "Do you want me to do something magical to speed this up?"

"No." Tilly wanted Titch, not his spellbinder powers.

"Excellent answer, *cariad*."

Tilly gripped his shoulders and bit her lips as she felt the orgasm hit. Titch plastered his mouth to hers and they came together quickly, each holding onto the other. As soon as she could Tilly all but fell off him her legs were so wobbly.

"Bloody hell, where are my clothes?" She watched as Titch waved his hand and they appeared before her. "Just hang on, Rowdy." Tilly looked at Titch when she heard Rowdy's response. "Is she laughing?" She shrugged her bra on quickly.

"Yes, because it's funny." Titch waved his own clothes back on.

"Do mine." Tilly stopped struggling into her jeans and waited for the magic to take over.

"Nah, its more fun watching you dress in a panic."

"Bastard." She yanked up her jeans and grabbed her shirt.

"You love me." Titch chuckled as she slapped his hands away as he tried to help her dress.

"As if."

"Wow, snappy response, *cariad*."

"Oh shut up." Okay, zippers were zipped and buttons buttoned. She could face her friend once more. While it was true she did not have her boots on, standing behind the desk solved that problem. "Yes, Rowdy." The woman in question came around the corner and looked at them.

"What happened to the partition?"

Titch pulled it back up.

"The earth moved."

Tilly refrained from doing the eye roll she dearly wanted to do.

"Titch is leaving now."

"Am I?" He looked at her in amusement.

"Yes." She did not want him lurking around and confirming what suspicions she was sure Rowdy already had.

"I'll come to you later, *cariad*." Titch pulled her to him and kissed her hard.

"Smart ass," she panted as she collected her scattered wits after he disappeared.

"Hmm," Rowdy murmured thoughtfully.

"Hmm what?" Tilly did not want to try to explain what she felt at that moment as she wasn't sure.

"Nothing." Rowdy's tone was noncommittal.

"Good." Noncommittal from Augusta Lawrence had a wealth of meaning.

"He's cute."

Beyond cute. Taliesin Trevelyan was delicious and an addiction.

"I need to know more about him."

"I'll get on it." Rowdy smiled softly at her employer. "You may want to re-check your buttons." She turned to Shalimar. "Whatever has your owner been doing?" she teased as she left Tilly to redress herself.

Chapter Six

"You look terrible," Titch observed as he appeared beside Tilly.

Tilly jumped in alarm at the abrupt contact. In her heart she had been hoping and expecting to see him yet it was still a shock to see him suddenly standing beside her in the alleyway. But maybe that had more to do with the fact she was intently watching a house she believed the freaks of nature were hiding out in, rather than Titch. She had to admit the freaks did scare her more than she let on.

"Gosh, I'm all giddy at your compliment." She looked him up and down. He was dressed in long blue Hawaiian print board shorts, a navy Billabong t-shirt and running shoes and the sun glinted off the stud in his ear. *Damn, he was sexy.* "What are you supposed to be? A surfer dude?"

Titch lifted his sunglasses off his eyes and smiled.

"And are you trying out for a junior miss SWAT member?"

"I have to be prepared." She was dressed in black, had two thermos-sized canisters of quick lime and rock salt mixed together as well as a flashlight and a pocket knife attached to a chunky belt around her waist. Tilly was not licensed to carry weapons as she preferred not to talk to the police about what she did. Some knew but the majority didn't. Tilly did not need people thinking her any odder than they already did. Being Crazy Sage's niece was enough. Besides, Tilly preferred not to use weapons at all. She had only ever killed one thing and that had been the freak of nature who had been attacking her. She still felt bad about it. "I need to be able to act." She liked that she sounded more decisive than she felt.

"Or you could leave the whole freak thing alone." Titch pointed out the obvious as his hand reached out for hers.

"Or you could leave me alone." Though his flesh did feel awfully nice up against hers. It refreshed the memories of even more personal contact. If she closed her eyes Tilly could still feel him up inside her.

"I go where my heart is."

"You are full of crap." Sweet but still full of it.

"I love you too, *cariad*."

Tilly gulped. He said the "L" word so easily. He sounded like he meant it but did he? And even if he did, what future could she have with a spellbinder who could never really belong to her? They belonged to the Universe. That was a hell of a thing to compete against.

"I'm busy." She yanked her hand from his. This was no time to be hand holding with him. Anyone could slip under her guard if her focus was on Titch.

"I'm here to help you."

"And I told you I don't need help. Go help some old lady cross the street."

"*Cariad*, I just love being with you." He reached over and brushed some hair from her face. "You look tired. Were you thinking of me last night? I wanted to come to you."

Tilly normally had problems sleeping but thinking of Titch compounded her insomnia.

"I slept like a log." She had actually wandered aimlessly around the house until she ended up in the garage staring at Shalimar.

"Liar," he murmured in her ear, amused that she shivered in reaction. "Is this the freak house?"

"You already know it is."

"Okay, you're right I do but you want to be the one in control."

Tilly turned and looked at him in annoyance.

"You make me sound anal."

"Nah, you're sugary sweet." Titch smiled charmingly at her.

Tilly snorted in soft cynicism.

"You're irritating."

"That's because I'm getting to you."

You already have me.

"What do you think she's doing with a spellbinder?"

"Other than arguing? I'm not sure." Oberon watched the woman he loathed. "All I do know I just want her dead for killing our kinsman." He dropped the curtain and paced the room. It still angered him that such a puny human being, and a woman at that, had bested one of their kind. Why she could not have left them alone in peace to do what they had been doing for centuries was beyond Oberon. "I hate do-gooders." He pushed the wire-rimmed glasses back farther up his nose then ran his hand over his tie to make sure it was neatly in place. Freaks of nature were always perfect in their attire. They practiced fitting in to their surroundings and maintained the façade as long as their food source, the general populace, remained plentiful.

"Is Jeri following her?" Quayle, his assistant, asked. He was as impossibly neat as his boss. Freaks often took on jobs as accountants as that neat, orderly persona matched their own personalities.

"Yes." It was not an ideal situation to have Jeri involved in this as she could not easily separate her anger from the need to punish the woman who had killed her mate. It had taken some hefty warning of eviction to the oblivion of their own underground world for Jeri to curb her impatience and do it his way. The Moor woman would die but when and how it suited Oberon. For the moment he would make the human think she was tracking them down whereas they had been making it easy for her.

"Why not just kill her and get it over and done with?"

"Because I want to toy with her awhile. I want to get my pound of flesh so to speak." Why Matilda Moor had to get involved in their lives two months ago he wasn't sure. He had seen where she lived. Surely it couldn't have been for money for she lived poorly by his standards. Whatever she had been paid to kill their kinsman had been paltry and certainly not worth his life. Why was she again putting herself through what she had to know was dangerous? Was it bravado? Fear? A sense of kill or be killed? It was common knowledge with the lowlife paranormal scum that the freaks planned to take Matilda out. Was that why a spellbinder was suddenly at her side? Oberon knew spellbinders only went to where they were needed. He smiled suddenly. The woman would be beyond even a spellbinder's help when he finished with her.

"But we will kill her for what she did to Talbot?"

The note of insistence in the other freak's voice annoyed him. Of course they would kill her. He had not gone soft just because he had been living among humans.

"Never question me, Quayle."

"Then you still plan to mate with the human?"

Oberon smiled thinly.

"Humans call it sex." He watched the other freak shudder in disgust. "They are actually quite interesting to fuck, Quayle, as it's all about feeling good and not reproduction of the species." It was also about conquering and horrifying the Moor woman by making sure the needs of her body betrayed her. Human females were easy to arouse. It only required three simple moves.

"They're disgusting."

"But delicious to eat. I plan to keep the woman alive for a very long time. Humiliation flavors them so nicely." Oberon would teach her a lesson for killing his kin. She would serve as an agonizing lesson to others.

"What about the spellbinder?"

"He makes it harder to deal with her but what a coup for us if we captured him too." There was only one way to trap a spellbinder. They had to be weakened by true love. Did this one love the Moor woman? Could they make him do something he did not want to do to save her life?

"Spellbinders are tricky by nature, Oberon."

That was true. No one yet—demon, zombie, vampire or freak—could boast of taking one.

"They have that one fatal flaw. They mate for life." Oberon stalked over to the window again and peered out. Yes, he could see the closeness between them. It was in the way the man looked at the woman.

"Do you think that's why he's following her?"

"I believe so."

Quayle looked out and sneered.

"By God, she's ugly."

"Really? I find her quite delicious." Oberon planned to enjoy every second with Matilda Moor until she was a bloody, screaming wreck.

"So how long do we stand here?" Titch leaned back against the wall beside her.

"As long as it takes." Tilly was screwing up her courage to go and face the freaks. She was not one to back down from a fight and she knew attack could be the best form of defense. She looked at Titch. She felt amazingly safe just standing beside him. If he wanted to leave now, she knew she would go with him. Tilly did not want to pick a fight with the freaks but she knew a fight was inevitable. *Why couldn't I have had a normal aunt who baked cookies and knitted?* "You can leave at anytime you know." It would give her an excuse to go as well.

"You know you have to look them in the eyes to kill them," Titch said as if he knew where her thoughts were.

"I know that." It was not something she could forget or she was looking forward to. Kill or be killed. Keep remaining fingers or be a snack for a bunch of ravenous freaks. *Yep, the knitting aunt would have been a good thing.* "It's got to be done." It worried her that other than Jeri no other freak had approached her. She expected retaliation. This quiet stalking by Jeri was nerve wracking but maybe that's what they wanted. To get her on edge so she slipped up.

"By you?" Titch eyed her assessingly.

It felt like he was looking right into her. Tilly glanced away from him, trying to act cool and casual.

"I did it before." Though before she had been running on pure adrenaline and the will to survive. Only fear ran through her veins now. She wasn't getting rid of freaks for altruistic reasons. She wanted to save her ass. If she got rid of this particular nest of freaks, she broke the family line and no other nest would be likely to come after her because as a species freaks only cared for their own particular kin and not other freaks' strains.

"And how did you feel about destroying one of them before?"

Horrible, scared, terrified.

"Fine."

"Really?" Titch looked at her as if he did not believe her.

"I'm not scared of them, it's just..."

"You're a softie." Titch pulled her to him and hugged her tightly.

Tilly tried very hard to push away and not slump into his arms like she really wanted to.

"I am not." She was and she knew it. She had trouble killing mice and spiders roamed free in her house. It was just this crazy business she found herself in. *I have to*

get out of this soon. Maybe I'll go and work in a call center. You were still dealing with the paranormal there but as long as no one knew your location, no one could kill you.

"You've only killed once, haven't you?"

"I had to in order to survive." Even though she knew the freak had to die, she still felt bad about being the one to do it. "I'm not a wimp." She just had no choice. The grapevine said she was marked for freak revenge. Tilly vividly remembered the pain from losing her fingers. What would an arm or leg feel like being crunched on by those ravenous monsters? She had no choice. She had to act.

Titch tipped her face up to his.

"I know that you think you have to do this."

There was no think about it.

"I have to face up to—"

"Your fears?" Titch interrupted her words. Tilly was brave and beautiful but he wanted to shake her. What she planned to do was crazy. She could get killed.

"Yes."

"You have fears other than these flesh eaters."

Suddenly Tilly burst out laughing. Titch was mesmerized by the change to her face. He thought her beautiful before but her smile was dazzling.

"What's so funny?" *And how can I make you smile more?*

"You know if you said that to a normal person they would consider flesh eaters the major fear."

"You have other fears that you don't own up to." He saw a veil draw over eyes as if he had seen more than he was supposed to.

"Everyone does, though I guess spellbinders don't."

"Oh we do." Titch's greatest fear was that he would be made to leave. Had he understood Argon correctly? Did he have a chance to be with this woman as his heart desired? If only Argon did not talk in riddles.

"Really?" Tilly looked interested and wanted to know more.

Titch was prepared to tell her anything and everything about his past and current life if it meant she would become a fixture in it. But standing in an alley outside a freak of nature's house was not his idea of romance and he wanted to romance this woman until she could think of nothing but him.

"Let's leave here." He wrapped his arm around her shoulders, smiling softly at the shiver that he felt shoot through her body. Titch liked the way her body spoke its feelings clearly even if her lips didn't. He could see Tilly wanted to leave but some misguided sense of getting the job over and done with was upon her. "They'll be here tomorrow chomping at the bit—so to speak."

"I guess."

"You'll be safe with me, *cariad*." The simple nod of acceptance she gave him was worth more than diamonds. Tilly trusted him and it meant everything to him.

"I should go home and do paperwork anyway." She frowned just thinking of it.

"Or come to bed with me." Titch felt her jump at the suggestion. It made things of his own jump about.

"Is sex the only thing you have on your mind?"

He turned her to face him, his hands on her shoulders.

"*Cariad*, I have other thoughts that concern you but I believe they would scare you as much as the freaks do." He looked at the dark circles under his eyes. "You look tired."

"I'm knackered."

"Come with me?"

"Okay." She sounded too tired to argue.

Titch waved his hand and seconds later they were standing in the bedroom of her home. It was exactly how he imagined Tilly's bedroom to look—chaotic. Clothes, shoes and an astounding array of perfume bottles everywhere. *No wonder she always smelled so nice.*

"Boy, you must save a lot on gas," Tilly said as she regained her balance.

"When was the last time you relaxed?" Her bedroom was an indicator of how rushed her life was.

"What year is this again?"

The woman needed him and Titch was going to make her see that if it was the last thing he did. By the time he was finished Matilda Moor would not be able to contemplate living without him. It was arrogant and domineering of him but he had to make sure she did not walk out on the best thing to happen to either of them.

"Take off your clothes."

"What?"

"I want to give you a massage." Titch wanted her to relax and selfishly the idea of touching her again excited him. He spent all last night thinking her. Spellbinders did not sleep. But that did not bother him. He liked his thoughts on Tilly.

The woman in question backed away from him.

"No thanks."

"Scared?" Titch could see she was. She was a funny thing. Brave and smart-mouthed one moment then shy and unsure the next.

"No, it's just I don't like people touching me."

"Am I 'people'?" Titch knew the answer but he needed to hear it from her. He wanted to always be the first person she thought of.

"You're different but you know that."

Please, Argon, set me free.

"Can I touch you?" The need to have her skin against his was overwhelming.

"Yes but..." Tilly pushed against his chest as he advanced upon her.

"I just want to make you feel better."

"And that will lead to sex." Tilly licked her lips as if contemplating her options.

"Is that a bad thing?" He would never push Tilly into anything but he longed to slide back inside her and he knew by the look in her eyes that she was not against being with him again.

"Yes. No. I don't know. I just don't want to get involved with you if you're not sticking around."

So the lady was thinking commitment. Excellent.

"What if I am?"

"Are you?"

"I want to." *Are you frigging listening, Argon?*

You want me to listen in now, Taliesin?

I need her.

I know you do.

"Wanting and doing are two different things."

"I need you and believe you need me."

Patience, spellbinder.

"Oh Taliesin," Tilly sighed out in frustration.

"No one has ever made me feel like you do, *cariad*." Titch captured her hands his. How could such small hands have such a hold on him? "It's just a massage. I'll marry you afterwards if you think you've been compromised." In fact if he could he would marry her now if it meant binding her to him forever. He heard Argon's voice.

Steady, man, she needs time and so do you.

Go away, Argon.

Titch heard his mentor chuckle at his words. He looked at the woman before him.

"Be a good girl and take your clothes off."

"What happens if I'm bad?"

The mischievous glint in her eyes made his heart leap with pleasure. *My love wants me and I am content.*

"We'll have an even better time."

Tilly dropped his hands from his and held out her arms to him.

"Undress me, Taliesin."

Lucky man.

Piss off, Argon.

"Yes ma'am." Titch's hands went straight to the task.

"What? No magic?" Tilly giggled as he worked feverishly to strip her.

"Oh there'll be magic, *cariad*."

Chapter Seven

"Ahh...ohh...mmm," Tilly moaned blissfully as Titch's hands gently massaged the knotted planes of her back.

"Good, huh?"

"Better than sex." She jumped as Titch slapped her ass lightly in reproach. She had elected to keep her panties on. Why? There were so many reasons. Yes, he had seen her naked. But that thin cotton barrier reminded her to think before she acted. "Okay, no it's not better than sex." But it was close. It was all the rubbing and soothing that made her want to turn over and swallow Titch whole and that was so unlike her. She was not a tactile person yet she wanted to touch him. "I always thought massages—" Tilly stopped as she realized what she had been about to say would make her sound like a repressed spinster.

"What, *cariad*?" Titch smoothed his palms over her shoulders.

"Well, I just didn't want strangers touching me to do this. I know I sound frigid." She had until this point believed she was incapable of feeling any human connection with anyone. Touching had never interested her until Titch.

"No, you sound like a woman who wants more than a casual touch."

"I want— Oh that. Do that again." His fingers were deeply massaging the knotted muscles in her shoulders. If Titch asked her to be his slave for life at that moment she would agree just so he did not stop what he was doing.

"I could break my fingers on your shoulders you are so tense, *cariad*." Titch did not sound pleased that he found her so. "Do I stress you out?"

"Yes." Why lie? The man put her on an edge but in a spine-tingling way. She wanted him and she didn't. If he walked away she'd be upset and yet she wasn't sure what she would do if he stayed.

"Honesty is good."

"I'm also worried about being luncheon meat for the freaks." Tilly felt a strange kind of relief wash over her as she admitted that. It was nice to be able to tell someone what she was thinking. Of course she had Rowdy but it was different. Rowdy listened quietly but made no judgments as a good friend did. Tilly wanted someone to bounce stuff off and maybe to challenge her thoughts. "Is that why you're here?" Although she was a strong competent woman, she understood that standing alone did not always make life easier.

"I believe I'm here because of the freaks and other stuff." He leaned over and kissed her shoulder lightly.

Tilly shivered in delight. She could get used to having him around.

"You know I had this idea that spellbinders were all-powerful and all-knowing."

"We have our moments but we are not in control of our destinies."

His words were so sad that Tilly immediately rolled over and looked at the bare-chested man before her. *I love him. Go figure.* Part of her wanted to panic at the suddenness of it all and the other part knew there was no point.

Some things are meant to be, Matilda.

Tilly sat up and looked at Titch in surprise.

"Did you hear that voice?" It was deep and masculine and almost like it did not belong to her world.

"I see and hear only you." He touched the nipple that bounced toward his finger. "You're awfully pretty."

"Really?" This totally astounded her. Here she was totally exposed before a gorgeous man and she had every reason to feel self-conscious but she didn't. And it was because of this man. Oh yes, he may be called a spellbinder but to her he was Taliesin. He was hers and that she was even thinking that way both scared and thrilled her. Tilly caught at his hand. "Tell me about what happened to you." She needed to know everything about him.

Titch sighed and lay down beside her on the bed, his hand linked with hers and their sides touching.

"I pissed off the wrong people and I paid for it." He explained to her about the squire's daughter and how he had been convicted falsely of theft. "Unfortunately, in those days it happened all the time. Transportation to the colonies solved a lot of problems."

"Did you love her?" The squire's daughter must have been in love with him for her father to have reacted so badly. Had Titch loved her and why did it matter now after all these years? Was she being jealous of a dead woman?

"I have loved no one until now."

Tilly knew he meant her and she wanted to believe him but did love just happen like this? So fast and so sweetly?

"That's a big call." She reached up and touched the stud in his ear gently then ran her finger down to his jawline. *I could easily wake up to this face every morning.*

"It's the truth." His eyes were solemn on hers.

She could see he believed it but did she? Tilly wanted to but she also wasn't sure she should throw herself into love not knowing what the consequences were. Basically she was a chicken. She could direct ghosts to the light and ask vampires to move on but love was tricky. A change of subject was needed.

"So, transportation would have been horrible." Tilly had learned about it at school as all Australian children did. It was a ghastly time with people crowded into ships, forced to leave their homes and families, many never to see them again.

Titch was not surprised Tilly changed the subject. That she was aware and concerned about the feelings between them pleased him. He wanted her thinking about him. Selfishly he needed to be the most important thing in her life.

"It wasn't pleasant, no." Even after all this time, Titch could still smell the unwashed bodies and hear the cries of people who had been dragged from all they knew regardless whether they were felons or just in the wrong place at the wrong time like him.

"What happened?"

Titch loved the feel of Tilly curled up beside him. It made him feel loved and protective. He placed his arm around her shoulders and pulled her close. The gentle thump of her heartbeat against his made him feel alive.

"When I died you mean?" It was not something he really ever thought about. It happened. All humans died. He just came back in another form.

"Yes."

"I was stabbed." Titch felt Tilly stiffen beside him and her eyes widened in horror.

"Why?"

"Payback for not backing away from the squire's daughter and to make sure I never went back to her." Titch was surprised at the glassy tear he saw drop from the corner of her eye. No one had ever cried for him but then no one had ever cared for him. "Hey, are you crying for me?"

"It's just so horribly unfair." Tilly swiped at the tears as if annoyed to find them there.

"But I'm here now, with you." *And I plan to stay and that makes up for everything.*

"Because someone changed you into a spellbinder."

"Argon." There were many times he had been annoyed with Argon but that he had brought him to Tilly made up for a lot of it.

"Is he like an angel?"

Titch threw back his head and laughed at her words.

"He's anything but. He actually a manipulative bastard who makes me do things but I like him."

Tilly looked at him thoughtfully.

"Was he the voice I heard before?"

It was totally like Argon to try to influence Tilly in some way and it did not surprise Titch. Argon was like that – pushy.

"Most likely. He likes to get involved in everyone else's business."

Tilly sat up suddenly and grabbed a nearby pillow, clutching it to her breasts, and looked around her.

"Is he watching us now?"

Titch smiled indulgently at the woman beside him. She would share herself with him, to a degree, but no other man. It made him feel powerful.

"He'd better not be," Titch murmured warningly to Argon. He ran his fingers lightly along Tilly's thigh. He loved the plump curves of her body. He was tired of stick-thin models who offered no sexual comfort.

"What's it like being a spellbinder?"

"Lonely." There was no other word for it.

"Really?" Tilly's eyes on his were soft with concern.

She loves me. Titch was content knowing that.

"Yeah, but you help people." That was something special. He had never been able to do that when he had been alive. Then he had been too focused on his own survival to think about anyone else. If being a spellbinder had taught Titch anything it was to see what was happening around him and help if he could.

"But there's no one for you."

He was not surprised that Tilly understood that. She worked in a crazy business where she tried to help people. She could have walked away from it when her aunt died but she didn't. It said a lot about her as a person.

"Are you latching on to me because you're lonely and I'm – well – easy?"

Titch laughed heartily at her words and snatched the pillow from her body.

"You are anything but easy, *cariad*." He pulled her down on top of him, her breasts squashed against his chest as she straddled him. His hand strayed into the back of her panties, caressing the soft flesh of her ass. Titch felt her squirm against his cock, which was encased in fabric but looking for other accommodation. "Do you like that?"

"I like you, Taliesin."

"Like can turn to love, Matilda."

"We barely know each other," she responded as she looked down at him.

"You think?"

"I know."

"I want to make love to you, *cariad*."

Tilly wanted that more than she had ever wanted anything. If someone had told her last week that she would be straddling a sexy man and getting lost in the depths of his soulful blue eyes while she contemplated the excellence of sliding down over his cock she would have said they were mad. She did not fall in love. That happened to other people. *When did I become one of them?* She leaned back and started working on the zipper of his board shorts.

"The minute I saw you," she murmured softly.

"What?"

"Nothing." He did not need to know all her crazy thoughts just yet. *Yet?*

"I thought you said you'd never have sex with me again."

"I lied." Tilly lifted up so she was on her knees and started to work at stripping off his shorts. His penis jumped out with excitement at her frenzied activity. "I see you go commando."

"A man's got to be ready when an opportunity presents itself." Titch grinned at her as she worked the fabric down his legs. "I could speed this along with magic."

"Nope, this is the first time I get to undress a man and I plan to do it the old-fashioned way." She bit her lip in concentration as she focused on getting his pants down and not on the cock that was dancing into her view.

"We'll have lots of firsts, *cariad*."

"I'm thinking of one right now." Tilly wrenched his shorts off and threw them on top of a pile of her own clothes. She had never sucked a man's cock before, mainly because no man deserved that of her. Tilly contemplated the man before her. He was beautiful, though she doubted most men wanted to be called that. But that was the word that came to mind. His long, hair-roughened limbs, his hard, flat chest and stomach, and those eyes that looked at her with such love made him beautiful. She reached out for his cock. She heard his growl of approval. It emboldened her to run her hand along the length. "Do you like that, Taliesin?"

"I love that." His eyes were locked on her. "What do you plan to do, *cariad*?"

"I plan to suck you." Just saying the words made her hot and she could feel the heat staining her cheeks and making her blush. It was hard to act sophisticated when holding a cock in one hand and blushing furiously.

"You want to do that?" Titch's voice was strained with excitement.

"Yes." *Excellent*. She did not want to be the only one losing control here.

"Be my guest, *cariad*. What's wrong?"

Tilly assessed the bobbing shaft.

"I'm just wondering how to start." It was not like it was something she'd learned at school and it certainly wasn't something she had discussed with Rowdy.

"Come here," Titch said, motioning her toward him. He pulled her down and kissed her hungrily. "Anything you do to me I will love."

That gave Tilly the confidence to do what she felt. With her ex-fiancé she would never have contemplated this nor with any other man for that matter. She would have felt silly wondering where to begin but with Titch all things seemed possible. She hunkered down over his thighs, her butt pushed up in the air, one hand on his cock and the other on the bed. She licked the tip.

"Hmm, salty." Tilly licked again. "And musky." It was a definite masculine flavor that she savored on her lips. She looked up into his half-closed eyes. "How do I taste?"

"Like ambrosia," Titch told her as he put his hands behind his head and waited for more.

Ah, power.

"If I stopped now what would you do?" She ran her hand lightly back and forth over his shaft.

"I would die," Titch answered.

Tilly giggled at his dramatic-sounding words.

"You're a spellbinder, you can't die."

"Okay, I'll cry."

"Really?"

"Don't make me cry, *cariad*."

"Never, Taliesin." Tilly sucked the dark pink head of his cock into her mouth. The man beneath her groaned. That was the reaction she was going for. She moved her mouth farther down, sucking the hard flesh inside. It was like sucking on a very long lollipop and she found she enjoyed the sensation of making Taliesin squirm. She slid his cock in and out of her mouth, mimicking how it felt when he was inside her.

"Stop," Titch choked the words out.

Tilly removed her mouth until they were connected only by a long trail of silvery saliva.

"Problem?" she asked as she caressed his balls.

"Oh yeah." He sat up and reached for her. "I need you flat on your back now."

"That seems a little bossy to me." *But I like it.*

"So I'm bossy." Titch pulled her to him and rolled her over and started working on removing her panties.

"You seem a little anxious there, big fella." There was something about a man wanting a woman so badly that made a woman feel glad to be alive.

"Oh yeah," he agreed as he flung her panties off and onto the ceiling fan above them. Titch's hands parted her legs and caressed her pussy. "But then so are you. You're so wet with need."

"You make me that way." Tilly let him grab her legs and pull them over his shoulders. She was his, why fight it? She looked at the condom he waved on over his cock. "Purple?"

"It's the color of royalty." He positioned himself at the entrance of her vagina.

"Feeling like a king?" She licked her lips in anticipation of that first thrust inside. *Why did I ever think I hated sex?*

"With you – always."

"You say the sweetest things." But why wasn't he thrusting as she so dearly wanted him to? "What?"

"Do you want me?" He ran his hands between her thighs lovingly.

Tilly rolled her eyes at him.

"No, I'm waiting for a bus. Take me now, Taliesin."

Titch smiled in satisfaction.

"Yes, *cariad*." He thrust inside her, not stopping for second.

"Oh my..." Her head dropped back as the heat of his penis forced up and inside her body. It was the best feeling ever.

"You feel so good." Titch growled as he leaned forward and kissed her passionately.

"I aim to please," Tilly panted out when the kiss ended. She was on the verge of coming just with him inside her.

"And I'm pleased to aim." Titch pulled out and rammed in again. He started grinding quickly in and out of her body as if he was only intent on making her come.

Tilly clutched at his hips and rode the sudden, wild wave of pleasure that shot through her body.

"Bloody hell." The man could make her come with no effort at all. What did that make her? Other than very lucky?

"We're good together, *cariad*."

If they were so good why was he still so hard inside her?

"Another problem?"

"No, I just want you to calm down enough so I can give you another thrill."

From any other man that would have sounded arrogant. But this was Titch. Her man. That he was delaying his own pleasure was so sexy and sweet that she had instant visions of growing old and doing all manner of delicious things with him. A thought crossed her mind. Could she ask for that?

"I want..." Tilly hesitated. How did you ask to be taken in the ass? Was there an etiquette to that?

"What?" Titch had not moved from where he was tightly ensconced inside her.

Please fuck me in the ass?

"Nothing." It was not like she needed him to do that. *But it would be nice...*

"Tell me," he coaxed, pushing his hips forward into hers and making her body bounce slightly.

The bouncing thing was good too.

"I have wondered what it felt like in— Well, um— To be taken in the, er— ass." She knew her face had to be bright red as it felt like her cheeks were on fire.

Titch pulled out of her instantly and flipped her over.

"Wonder no more. On your knees and ass out ready to receive, *cariad*." Titch helped position her. "Yep that's it— beautiful."

"Ass up is hardly my best side."

Titch leaned in and lightly bit her buttock.

"You're delicious."

The man was clearly mad but she liked it.

"Will it hurt?" Tilly turned to look at him and watched as the bottle of lube appeared in his hand.

"Maybe a little bit at the start. Do you want to stop?" Titch looked at her with concern.

"Oh hell no."

Titch threw back his head and laughed in delight at her words.

"That's my girl." He parted her cheeks and squirted the lube inside the tight hole. She jumped in surprise. "That's only the start." Titch pushed one finger then another finger inside her and began thrusting gently, preparing her for bigger things.

"Oh," she moaned softly. That felt good. His other hand moved around her body and those fingers sank into her vagina. "So tight, so hot." She closed her eyes and gave into the feeling.

"Yes, *cariad*, and it will be tighter and hotter soon," Titch crooned against her ear, moving in time with the gentle sway of her body as she followed the movement of his fingers.

When his fingers came out from where they were buried she was disappointed but not for long as she felt him move up behind her. The head of his slippery cock pushed at the tight ring of muscle.

"Uh-oh." Was this possible? He was so big. "Taliesin?"

"Relax," he murmured as he began working his way inside her slowly.

A burning, stretching feeling started to overcome her. Tilly pushed her ass back for more. The more cock he slipped inside her, the more she relaxed. It was such a full, pressured feeling of connection that Tilly wasn't sure where he stopped and she started. When he was all the way inside she sighed happily.

"Okay?" Titch asked as he kissed her neck and shoulders.

"Mmm yes, Taliesin." This was the most okay she had been in a long time. "Please move." She needed to feel every inch of him grinding within her.

"Yes, *cariad*." His balls slapped smoothly against her ass as he began moving inside her body.

"Why did I never do this before?" It was fantastic. What did that say about her? She had slut-like tendencies? Did she care? No, because only Titch made her feel this way.

"Again, because you did not have me in your life before." He ramped his movements up so they were harder, creating more friction.

"Can we do this again?" *Oh please say yes.*

"Most definitely," Titch agreed as his fingers found her clit.

"Oh Taliesin." This was heavenly. Tilly would be re-thinking chocolate as her favorite pastime if this was permanently on offer.

"I love it when you sigh my name like that." He nuzzled her neck.

The feeling of coming was starting to overwhelm her.

"Harder." Titch obeyed and she grasped the bed sheets, the bed shaking with every thrust. "This is so good."

The phone rang and went instantly to the answering machine as Tilly had trained it to do. Phone calls annoyed her when she was busy. It was Rowdy.

"Um, I hate to interrupt as I am sure you are doing—er, something with Taliesin but Jeri is looking for you so call me when you're—er, free."

"You think she knows what we're doing?" Tilly almost heard the embarrassment in her friend's voice before she hung up. It was bizarre to think Rowdy was several rooms away in the agency-cum-garage.

"That I'm in your ass at this moment?" Titch rammed merrily away within her.

"How crude you are," Tilly giggled in mock reproach. She liked being crude or anything else with Taliesin.

"You love it."

"Oh God." Tilly gasped and slammed face first into the bedding to muffle the scream that tore from her lips. It would not do to have Rowdy thinking she was being murdered.

"Praying, *cariad*?"

Tilly could barely form words she was so racked with sensation. She dragged herself up and she panted to keep pace and catch her breath as Titch pounded her into one of the best orgasms she had ever had in her life.

"Oh Taliesin." She shuddered and shook as she came back to Earth.

"That's my girl." Titch held her to him firmly as he came inside her. "Bloody hell." He slumped over Tilly as he fought to regain what was left of his control.

"Don't leave." Tilly did not want to sound whiny but if he left now she would be devastated.

"Ever?" he asked against her ear. "It's going to be hard to explain to people why I am attached to you like this."

Tilly giggled. Crazy, wonderful man.

"No, I mean don't leave me now." She knew what she was saying was betraying more than she planned to but Tilly needed Titch. "I know you'll have to one day soon but just stay for the moment."

"I plan to stay forever."

That sounded nice but Tilly was aware of the reality of their situation.

"You may not have that option." *And I don't know how I will cope if you leave me now.*

Chapter Eight

It was the banging on the front door that woke Tilly up. She looked around her in a daze. She was in her own bed with a man. This was strange for two reasons. One, she'd never had a man visit her bed before but then she had never had Titch in her life. And two, she rarely ever managed to sleep in her bed as she tended to fall asleep on her sofa at night watching old black and white movies. Insomnia sucked. If Tilly got more than a couple of hours sleep she was surprised.

"Bizarro world."

"You slept well," Titch said, as if sensing her thoughts.

"You watched me?" That was sweet yet odd.

Titch pulled her closer toward him.

"I don't sleep. I'm a spellbinder. We don't have to."

Tilly looked into his sparkling blue eyes and fell a little further in love with him. He was charming, sexy and a sleeping aid. What more could she want in a man?

"I hope I didn't drool." That would have been embarrassing.

"No, you only snored."

Tilly swatted his chest lightly.

"I do not." She looked at him in concern. "Do I?" The sound of banging on the front door turned her thoughts from possible snoring to annoying people. "Who is that?" Almost everyone knew to go around to the garage if they needed anything. Clearly Rowdy wasn't around if the front door was under attack.

"That would be Jeri." Titch's voice was certain of the fact.

"How do you know that? X-ray vision?" She quirked her eyebrow at him. What a fascinating man he was.

"Nah, she yelled your name several times."

"Oh crap, what does she want?" Tilly pulled out of his arms and sat up. She was naked. *Oh that's right.* She'd had a very nice time.

Titch followed her up and flung the sheet from his body. He smiled when her eyes traveled to his semi-erect cock.

"I expect Jeri has plans to eat you but then so do I, but in a different way." His hand moved up her thigh.

Tilly shivered at the husky tone of promise in his voice. She had quite a few hungry thoughts of her own when it came to Titch. Did that make her oversexed? Did she care? *Not really.* More banging sounded on the door. Tilly looked at the clock beside the bed. It was just past noon.

"You think she would at least let me shower and freshen up."

Titch threw his hands up in mock disgust.

"People, or in this case freaks, are so thoughtless." He watched as Tilly scrambled out of bed. "What do you plan to do with her?"

Tilly blew out a long sigh as she pushed her tangled hair back from her face.

"I'm not sure. She obviously has been sent to toy with me." Which meant the freaks had a painful agenda in mind for Tilly. *Not looking forward to that.*

"So play her at her own game." Titch lazed back on the bed, relaxed.

"How?" Titch looked so good. What would it hurt to ignore the gastronomes who wanted to chomp on her and indulge in a little sucking and biting of her own?

"What do freaks hate?" Titch asked her as he watched her picking up random articles of clothing to wear.

"Other than me? Rock salt and quick lime." She pulled up a pair of shorts and tried to ignore the banging on the door. Boy oh boy, hungry people were pissed-off people.

"And?" Titch prompted.

"What?" She wasn't in the mood to play twenty questions. She reached for a discarded bra.

"I like you without a bra."

"I'm not answering the door with any more extremities hanging out than necessary." She lifted her breasts into the lace cups. "You may want to consider that yourself." He had a mighty prominent extremity pointed at her at that moment.

"I need to put it somewhere." Titch raised his eyebrow suggestively.

"Find a pocket," Tilly responded sweetly as she slid a crumpled t-shirt on. "What else do freaks hate?"

"Haven't you done your research?"

"That's Rowdy's job." It was bad to blame someone for her own incompetence but she would consider that later after she worked through the whole how-not-to-be-eaten-by-a-freak thing.

"Rowdy's an interesting woman."

"Fascinating. Now what other things don't they like?"

Titch grinned at her annoyance.

"Smoking."

"I don't smoke." Damn lousy time not to have that vice.

"Never tried it when you were a kid?"

"Oh sure, I got thrown out of Girl Guides for smoking." She had joined the girls' group when trying to fit in with the other kids but some people were destined to remain square pegs.

Titch burst out laughing.

"Your aunt must have been proud."

He had such a nice laugh. It was a sound you could live with for a very long time. Tilly mentally slapped herself. *Lord, I'll want to marry him next.*

"You know about Sage?" Of course he did. He was a spellbinder.

"She sounds like she was a great woman."

"The best." *Bang, bang.* Jeri would be annoying even if she didn't chew flesh as a hobby. "Smoking, huh? Can you conjure me up a packet?" Tilly did not like smoking but if it got rid of the freak at her door she would take a couple of puffs.

Titch did as requested and tossed it and a lighter to her.

"Don't inhale and you'll be fine."

Tilly rolled her eyes at his words as she opened the packet.

"Oh please, I've watched enough late night Lauren Bacall movies to know how to smoke." She lit one, took a drag and choked.

"Smooth."

"Oh shut up." Tilly went to the door, cigarette in hand, coughing.

"Jeri, how are you?" Tilly noticed her reaction as she opened the door. The smell instantly repelled the freak. *Excellent.* She and Rowdy had to check the facts more carefully.

"You smoke?" Jeri appeared horrified.

"All the time." Tilly waved her hand casually and coughed hard to clear her lungs. *Smoking sucked. Why would you do this to yourself?*

"I wondered what you were doing today."

I bet you were.

"Why? You got plans for me?" *A little chompin'? A little chewing?*

Jeri looked at her in irritation.

"What an odd thing to say, Matilda." Her eyes grew round as she saw Titch come to stand beside Tilly. "Oh hello."

Tilly looked at Titch. He was naked. No wonder the woman's eyes were like saucers. How game was he to stand there all naked with his most prominent extremity exposed? Tilly would be awfully upset to see anything happen to that. She pushed her hip into him so he stood behind her, cock prodding her butt but at least it was safe.

"I see you're back together." The freak was not happy.

"Yes and I protect what's mine." Titch's hands came down to rest on Tilly's shoulders.

"Isn't that sweet." Jeri's tone indicated it was anything but.

"I think so." Tilly was tired of playing whatever this game was with Jeri. "Let's cut the crap shall we, Jeri? I know who you are and I am not planning to be eaten by you or

your mates so take your knife and fork and go elsewhere." Tough words from the woman who felt anything but. Though it helped to have Titch literally at her back.

"You know you won't win."

When Jeri snarled, Tilly could clearly see her sharp, pointed teeth.

"Maybe I will, maybe I won't, but this following me around crap is boring and it will stop. Go and find someone else to play tag with."

"You must pay for what you did." There was a fanatical light in Jeri's eyes.

Whoa scary.

"We all do eventually pay somehow but you aren't going to be my paymaster." On the inside she was shaking but on the outside she was going to stare the bitch down.

"Oh no, not me." Her laughter crackled eerily. "Someone else has plans for you."

Oh crap, there was no way that sounded good. Who else had she pissed off? It had been a busy couple of months. On the whole most cranky supernatural types either did the whole curse thing or threw her furniture around before they left in the proverbial puff of smoke. Curses and property destruction, while tedious, Tilly could handle.

"So who are we talking about here? Another fat muncher?" She felt Titch's hands grip her shoulders reassuringly.

"Wouldn't you like to know?" The freak smiled at her smugly.

"Well, yes, that's why I asked." *Frigging smart-ass freak.*

"Oberon has plans for you." Her words were harsh and taunting. "He likes to fuck humans before he eats them very, very slowly."

Tilly tried hard to hide the gulp of fear that slid down her throat. Oberon? Rape? Who the hell was he? *I must get Rowdy to check him out. Why are we so crap on our research at the moment? Is it the sex?* It certainly had a way of changing one's priorities. What was Rowdy's excuse? Tilly did not think Rowdy was having sex with anyone but she was preoccupied with something. *Stop blaming Rowdy, this is your problem.*

"Is that it, Jeri? You come and goad me then leave?" Tilly shook her head dismissively. "Surely you can do better than that."

"I loathe you," she spat the words out venomously.

"The feeling is mutual. Now fuck off." Tilly slammed the door in Jeri's face. She knew she had all but signed her death warrant but she did not plan to go easily or in obvious fear. Matilda Moor was a woman who believed in nailing her colors to the mast. It was not always the best of plans but people always knew where she stood.

"Gutsy move." Titch looked at her proudly as he pulled her into his arms.

"It was a dumb-assed, death wish move." She looked up at the man who held her so tightly. He was proud of her? It made her feel warm all over. "I sounded tough, didn't I?" Not that it would matter. Tough-sounding people died as easily as the mealy-mouthed.

Titch took the burning cigarette from her shaking fingers and made it disappear into thin air.

"You scared me," he responded with a wry smile. The smile hid the worry he felt. Normally as a spellbinder he would have treated this whole situation differently. He only ever got involved to a certain point and he always had a plan of action. But this time Titch was too involved and while his plan of action was to save the woman he loved, he knew that being in love with her was a weakness the freaks could chose to exploit if they knew, which more than likely they did now. Tilly slapped his naked chest teasingly. Titch caught and held her hand to his skin. He loved the feel of her anywhere on his body.

"I don't know who's the more insane — you or me."

"It's a dead heat, that's why we're so good together." He leaned down and kissed her lips softly. Titch would do whatever he had to in order to make Tilly safe. He suspected Argon had led him to her to save her and to love her but there was something more going on that he needed to find out. Argon's vague words of true love and forever were what Titch wanted to hear but nothing was ever that simple with Argon.

"Who is Oberon?" Tilly's eyes searched his. "You know, don't you?" She pushed away from him and paced worriedly.

Titch sighed tensely. He had heard of Oberon but he had never considered him anything more than an annoying tick on the skin of human society until this moment. Now he had the potential to ruin Titch's happiness.

"He's their leader."

"Bad?" Tilly looked like she already knew the answer.

"Oberon does not play nice."

"Well he can fuck off too."

Titch smiled at the tough woman with her hands on her hips. At that moment, on piss and vinegar attitude alone, he would bet everything on Matilda Moor beating the freaks.

"Tough women turn me on." Standing at the front door as they had with his cock pushed up against her backside had made it flare to life once more.

"You're aroused after that?" She smiled at his words as if he were mad.

"Oh yeah." He wanted nothing more than to be hot and tight with Tilly. Any time he spent with or in her was a blessing.

"So was it me or Jeri who got you all hot and bothered?"

"It will only ever be you." Titch liked the possessive look on her face.

"So if I told you to fuck me now that would make you even hotter, Taliesin?"

Tilly was so cute playing the bad girl.

"You always make me hot, *cariad*."

She looked at his erect cock and licked her lips.

"I can see that." She pointed to the sofa. "Sit down."

Titch immediately sat and then watched as she stripped off her shorts. He could see she was enjoying this.

"Do you want me?" Tilly ripped her t-shirt over her head with the bra quickly following it to lie in a heap on the floor.

He loved the way her full breasts bounced so enticingly, their tips begging to be sucked.

"Oh yes, I long for you."

"How much, Taliesin?" She walked toward him, her eyes locked with his.

"Can't you tell?" His cock was so hard it was almost painful. When Tilly straddled his lap and sat down, he reached for her.

"Suck me." She pulled his head to her breasts.

If he had not been hard then, Titch knew his cock would have sprung to attention at those two, husky-sounding words.

"Yes, *cariad*." His mouth descended on one nipple, his tongue circling the rosy peak as his hands pulled her hard against his cock. He liked assertiveness in a woman—his woman. It was sexy.

Tilly stoked his penis and closed her eyes as his mouth sucked firmly on her breasts.

"Condom," she choked out.

Titch looked up at the woman he held in his arms. Her eyes were closed, her face was flushed and she was glorious. *How did I get this lucky?*

"I always have one ready for you." He caressed her breast and enjoyed the rocking motion of her pussy against his shaft.

"Good man. Put it on now."

"And if I don't?" *Like I'm going to refuse.* Titch was aching to slide inside the hot, wet depth of her once more.

Tilly's eyes snapped open at his words.

"Then you'll miss out on the ride of your life," she purred, her eyes knowledgeable on his as she flicked the head of his penis gently.

Titch waved a condom on instantly.

"Blue?" Tilly looked down at the blue torpedo poised between her legs. "That's not very imaginative." She laughed when the color was instantly changed to bright neon green. "Much better," she murmured approvingly as she stroked the neon length.

"Well, *cariad*?"

"Well what, Taliesin?" She arched her eyebrow at him teasingly.

This kind of cock teasing he enjoyed because the inevitable conclusion was one they would both enjoy.

"Do I have to beg?" He was not that proud. To have her he would do whatever she decreed.

Tilly bounced lightly against him. She smiled when he groaned.

"That would be nice."

"You'll pay for this later, you know that." And Titch would enjoy that just as much.

"Maybe that's I want." Tilly bounced again, his cock wildly pushing at the apex of her thighs.

A man could only stand so much.

"Please, *cariad*, I need you, I beg you, I beseech you, to let me inside so I can make you come screaming.

"Beseeching and screaming?" Tilly lifted herself up so she hovered over the tip. "I like the sound of that."

"Please, *cariad*, I adore you." Titch saw the surprise in her eyes. It was almost as if she could not believe her luck. He planned on making her believe it every day of her life from now on.

"You are such a good boy." Tilly slid down on top of him, not stopping until he was totally ensconced within her.

Titch lifted her hand and kissed it, his eyes on hers.

"I live to serve you."

"Oh Taliesin," Tilly sighed as she leaned forward and kissed him. She loved the hot, tight feel of him inside her as he clutched her ass and dragged her in close to him. She rocked swiftly against him, looking for the release she knew was only moments away. *Will it always be like this for us? So desperate and intense?* Tilly looked at Titch in wonder. *I really love him.*

"You know you can't go back from this moment," Titch said, as if sensing her thoughts.

Tilly knew. She was his as he was hers. Some things were meant to be. She felt a spiral of pleasure shoot through her body and she moved faster.

While this is all very cute, I need to talk to you both.

"What the hell?" Tilly would have fallen backward in shock if Titch had not grabbed hold of her in time. Since she was impaled on his cock, falling backward would have been an acrobatic feat worthy of a circus performer. She looked around her wildly. *They had company? Now? Like this?* She clutched at Titch in alarm and pushed herself against him to cover what could be covered—though it would have been obvious to even the most naïve what was going on. *How frigging embarrassing.*

Titch sighed angrily and bellowed.

"Now is neither the time or place, Argon. Leave us."

Too bad, we need to do this now. I need you to pay attention.

Argon certainly had Tilly's attention. She felt like she had been caught by the headmaster. That left the embarrassing question of how did she dismount in a ladylike fashion from a rigid neon cock? It was not stuff you learned at your mother's knee.

"Holy crap," she mumbled. Tilly knew she had to be twelve different shades of scarlet as she lifted off Titch. The squelching sound of reluctant muscles letting go of hard cock broke the tense silence. *How embarrassing.*

"Cariad," Titch said as he reached for her.

"No, I'm fine...just looking for a hole to crawl into now." Tilly quickly scrambled around for her clothes. Neither of them had come but that seemed like the least of their problems at the moment. Covering herself was more important than an orgasm.

"If only I could kill you, Argon," Titch murmured in deadly tones.

Taliesin, I have seen naked people before and I don't have time for your trivial embarrassment.

"Whoever raised you did a lousy job," Tilly snapped at the disembodied voice. "You could have at least had the manners to wait until after we finished." Tilly dragged on her shorts, the cotton irritating the sensitive, wet flesh between her legs. She really wanted something else between her legs at that moment but that was not going to happen with the invisible voyeur looking on. She looked over at Titch. He wasn't happy as he stood up, his penis doing a mighty fine job all by itself in expandable neon.

No one raised me, I just am and you two are rutting like rabbits at the moment. It's hard to know when is a good time.

"You are a pig and I'm not talking to someone I can't see." She dropped the shirt over her head and stood with her hands on her hips, trying to work out where the voice was coming from. It was one of those everywhere and nowhere voices.

We play by my rules now, Matilda.

"Blow it out your ear." It was childish but she was frustrated.

You have no choice, Matilda.

"Look, you may think you are some all-powerful being but I'm not one of your spellbinder puppets. I can do what I like." She turned to Titch whose fists were clenched as if he was trying to contain himself in a situation he knew he had no control over. "Sorry, don't take it personally." What would it be like to be at the whim of a prick like this?

"No, not at all, *cariad*—call him out."

We're wasting time.

"So appear, Argon, or are you like your name—just gas and of no substance what so ever?"

A loud sigh penetrated the room. *You're cute. I can see what Taliesin sees in you.*

"Don't try to flatter me, I—" She stopped mid-sentence when Argon appeared before her. *Holy crap*. This man was gorgeous. Certainly not on a par with Titch for they were like night and day. Titch was blond, lean and casual while Argon was dark and intense with his brooding stare and exasperated look of amusement.

"Going to cover yourself, Taliesin?" Argon looked at the spellbinder.

"I like him the way he is." It was a crazy thing to say but she wanted to maintain some measure of control over the man who'd caught her in the act.

Titch grinned but waved on some jeans to cover his lower body. They did nothing to hide his erection. No spellbinder could countermand that.

"Spoilsport," Tilly snapped out at the dark man. She looked him up and down with her best disdainful look. Argon seemed only bemused.

"She is almost as annoying as you, Taliesin."

"Hey." This man may have been bigger and more powerful but Tilly took crap from no one. She stepped toward him, knowing anything she did to him he would deflect easily, but she wanted to smack him for his rudeness. Thankfully Titch grabbed her arm before she embarrassed herself.

"Argon actually means that as a compliment, *cariad*."

Tilly eyed the man suspiciously.

"So what is so bloody important you have to stop me from...er, why couldn't you wait?" They were all grown-ups. Everyone knew what had been going on yet she felt incredibly guilty for some reason.

"You can have an orgasm any time."

Titch put his hand over Tilly's mouth before she could say the politically incorrect words she dearly wanted to say.

"Just tell us, Argon. What do you want?"

"I need Matilda to be captured by the freaks of nature."

"No." That one word from Titch had more power than any others.

"Oh wow, that's so sad," Tilly looked at Argon.

"What is?" he responded.

"That you are fucking insane." There was no way in hell she was going to go along with that half-assed plan.

"I cannot allow this, Argon."

The man in question shook his head as if their words were meaningless.

"It's not a matter of allowing it or not, Taliesin. If we are to succeed in getting rid of the freaks we have to attack the main nest."

"Why can't you do it? Why does it have to be me?" Surely there was someone other than Tilly who could deal with the freaks? It was not like she was Wonder Woman or something.

"They hate you," Argon answered simply.

"Okay well sure, there's that but can't you do some whiz-bang all-powerful thing to get rid of them?" What was the point of massive power if you shoved your workload onto another?

Argon sighed tiredly as if he was not in the mood to fight with her.

"Neither Taliesin or myself are totally immune to the danger the freaks present."

Tilly looked at Titch uncertainly. He nodded in agreement with Argon.

"He's right. We have a flaw when it comes to our enemies."

Everyone had weaknesses but they overcame them.

"And that is?" Kryptonite? Inability to pass by chocolate?

"True love is our weakness." Argon's voice indicated he was not happy about this at all.

"Seriously?" They were these all-powerful, kick-ass men who had a problem when it came to dealing with emotions? "What?" She looked at Titch for clarification.

"If our enemies, in this case the freaks, know whom we love then they have the ability to destroy them and us."

Tilly held up her hands as if to stop the flow of words and digest what he was saying.

"So you're saying I'm on my own?" She wasn't sure if she was more angry, surprised or sad.

Titch pulled her to him.

"No, *cariad*, I'm not saying that." He sighed deeply. "I am in love with you. The problem is that true love weakens a spellbinder and because of this I cannot protect the one I love. I can try to destroy the freaks on my own but I'm worried the danger will turn back on you. If it was just me to worry about I would not care what happened." He ran an agitated hand through his hair. "I hate being so helpless."

"So I *am* on my own." Well, that just sucked.

"No, not at all. But it does mean we need to hear Argon out." He kissed her softly, ignoring the other man. "I am not the slightest bit happy about this."

Tilly was silent for a moment as she tried to gather up all the words that had been said, trying to make sense of them in her mind. Okay, so she wasn't alone but she was. *Huh?*

"Okay so let me get this right. Taliesin, I understand, has this crush on me."

Titch slapped her butt in exasperation.

"I love you and you love me but you're too pig-headed to believe it."

"A couple of days of excellent sex does not make true love." She watched as he shook his head in indulgent amusement. Tilly turned to look at Argon. "So what's to stop you getting rid of the freaks? Why do you need me? You don't have a true love, do you?"

At that moment Rowdy appeared.

"Oh, am I interrupting something?" Her head turned and her eyes latched onto Argon. "Oh crap." The disbelief in her voice made everyone look at her in wonder.

Argon's eyes were riveted on her as if he could not believe who he saw.

Tilly looked at the two of them and the wildest idea shot into her head. *Nah, how could these two possibly know each other?*

"Rowdy, this is Argon, he is the Grand Poobah of spellbinders." Tilly was quite pleased when he scowled at her words. Strike one for the human.

"Yes I know." Rowdy's voice was tight and she looked like she wanted to flee but she was trying to remain calm.

"You do?" What the hell was going on? Why did Rowdy look paler than normal? It was not like they hadn't dealt with stranger things than this guy before.

"Yes."

That one word spoke volumes. Tilly wanted to know more but she sensed now was not the time.

"Okay then – well it seems he thinks I should just let the freaks take me."

Rowdy's eyes never left Argon's.

"That seems like an unacceptable risk and I would assume Argon would know that forcing people into situations does not work."

What the? Tilly had never heard Rowdy speak like that. It was like she wanted to explode but she was trying to contain herself. She had to ask.

"Do you two know each other?"

"No." Rowdy was most insistent on that fact.

"No," agreed Argon with a slight tinge of amusement to his voice.

"All righty then." They were just two people who did not know each other having a standoff. Tilly's life was not normal so why expect it of others? "Well this has been pleasant but no, I'm not going to walk into a trap for anyone."

Argon turned and looked at her.

"You have no choice."

"Everyone has free will," Rowdy snapped at him.

"Some don't." Argon's eyes were meaningful on hers. "I don't have time for games."

Rowdy looked at him coolly.

"Then don't play them."

Tilly waved at the two people, supposedly strangers, squared off before each other.

"Is this actually about me anymore?" She would have been happy to forget the whole freak thing. She looked at Titch. He shrugged his shoulders.

Argon dragged his eyes from Rowdy and assessed Tilly.

"Are you aware this is the last known enclave of freaks left on the planet?"

Tilly looked unsure. No, she hadn't been as she relied on Rowdy to do all the research because she knew she was too slack to.

"He's right," Rowdy said as she turned her back on him dismissively. "That was what I was coming to tell you. Newton says no more left."

"You have destroyed the rest?" Titch asked as if he wasn't sure where this conversation was headed.

"Yes." Argon exchanged a look with the spellbinder. A look of understanding dawned on Titch.

"But you can't destroy these freaks because of," Titch looked at Rowdy, "circumstances beyond your control."

"Correct," Argon murmured.

Tilly was not one hundred percent sure what was going on here. Her friend was acting completely out of character, some being wanted her to be bait for carnivores and significant looks she was not privy to were being shot between the other three.

"So how does my getting captured help?" *And it ain't going to happen by the way.*

"There is a virus that only they are susceptible to. It kills them within a minute after it makes contact with their skin," Argon explained, his eyes on Tilly now, almost as if it was easier to deal with her than the other woman. "They spread it to each other by their breath. We need you to apply the virus. Neither Taliesin nor I can do it due to circumstances."

The circumstances just sucked.

"A virus?" Was he for real? Tilly swung her eyes to Titch. He nodded his head in confirmation. Him she trusted. She wasn't sure she understood the whole true love bit but she didn't want to put Titch or any innocent people in any danger. She ran her hands through her hair in frustration. Despite everything she had just heard, Tilly kept thinking there had to be a better way than walking in and announcing herself as dinner to the freaks.

"So if you two go—"

"We endanger you and others."

"Right." *Why is nothing in my life uncomplicated?*

"It effectively means that we are no use to you or anyone else who needs us." Titch did not look happy at all with this turn of events.

Great, her own personal *High Noon*.

"How do I give this virus to them?" If it was like shooting a dart into an ass, that she could do. In fact she would enjoy doing that.

"You would have to get up close enough to touch them."

"Oh puke! No way." Touching one of them once was more than enough. She looked at Titch. He was awfully quiet about this. What was he thinking? As for Rowdy, the

chill factor around her was frightening. Why did Argon piss her off so much if she didn't know him?

"They hate you. It's our best way in to destroy them."

Gee, who knew hatred would be considered a bonus.

"You just need to touch one with the virus."

Jeez Louise. Why me? Why do I get the good jobs? Why couldn't I have had enough sense to be working in the local fast food emporium?

"And if I don't?" So what if half a dozen flesh eaters roamed around Brisbane. They were no worse than any of the other inhabitants.

"They're going to try to kill you anyway." Argon pointed out the reality of her situation.

"So it's a lose-lose situation." *Yay me.*

"You can help many."

"But not myself." If she was brave, Tilly knew she would just do it and not count the cost. But she wasn't that brave.

Titch took Tilly's hand in his.

"You've said enough, Argon." He pulled Tilly away from them.

Chapter Nine

"I'm not doing it and you can't make me." Tilly stood with her hands on her hips, her eyes defiant on Titch's. This was her life and she would make the decisions.

"*Cariad*," Titch began as he tried to pull her toward him.

Tilly pushed him away. To touch him now would be deadly because she was still so hyped after not having sex that she was liable to agree to anything to have him fill her once more. She closed her legs together tightly and tried to focus on her point.

"No, Taliesin, you may be controlled by that jerk out there but I do what I want." Not always successfully, but the thing was she was mistress of her own destiny.

"Please just listen to me."

She threw her hands up in the air in frustration.

"You know I don't think this is going to work between us." Even as she said the words Tilly felt sick at heart. She'd never realized until that moment how much she wanted to be with Titch, but she could not be with a man who did not respect her. By insisting on his course of action, without understanding her fears, he was just playing with her feelings. It was a huge shock to think she had got Titch so wrong. *I've only known him for a couple of days. What did I expect?*

"What?" Titch barked out the word as if he could not believe what she was saying.

"I need someone who supports me." If it wasn't him then it would be no one. Whatever this thing was between them, it was powerful and she recognized if they split she would not want anyone else. At that moment, Tilly was reluctant to call the feeling what it was.

"Tilly –"

"No."

"Matilda –"

She did not want him to speak for fear that she would be so easily swayed into believing what he wanted. *Damn it, I have a mind of my own.* The sex was fantastic but it could not be allowed to rule her.

"I think you should go." She needed time to think about what to do and she couldn't do that with him there. She pushed past him and stormed to the door. Yes, it was her bedroom and her home but she needed a dramatic, door-slamming exit to make her feel better.

There was no way Titch was going to let her leave angry and confused like this. He needed to explain what he was thinking and feeling. While he could have used magic to

bind her, he preferred the old-fashioned methods. He reached forward and tackled her to the ground. Pinning her soft body under his. His cock instantly jerked hard against his jeans in excitement. In his rush to dress, he had not even taken the condom off. Neon green latex was literally holding him together at that stage. Titch used to think he had a lot of control when it came to women but Matilda Moor could bring him to his knees like no other.

The woman in question struggled beneath him.

"What are you going to do? Some sort of Vulcan mild meld to get me to follow your insane plans?" She pushed at his shoulders to free herself.

Titch slipped in between the cradle of her thighs and pressed his still-hard cock against her covered pussy. He saw the need in her eyes. It answered his own. That they had been stopped from making love maddened him. He wanted to beat the crap out of Argon but he knew it was pointless as immortals did not bruise or understand lessons like that.

"Listen to me." He linked their hands together and pushed them above her head. Despite her anger, he could tell by the softening of her body that she wanted him as much as he wanted her. "I need to explain."

"No." Tilly was adamant on that score.

"Fine." Before she had time to react, Titch levered back onto his haunches and pulled Tilly around so she was stomach down over the top of his thighs.

"Hey!" Her palms smacked down on the carpet as she tried to balance herself.

Titch dragged her shorts down, exposing the plump, white flesh of her ass. He needed to get her attention. His hand came down firmly on it in two stinging slaps.

"Oww," Tilly howled as his hand came down again.

"Are you going to be quiet and let me give you an explanation?" His cock was in an agony of ecstasy at the flesh on display. He knew how hot and tight it was within the creamy confines of her body. Titch longed to sink himself inside once more.

"Bugger off," Tilly snapped, earning herself another slap.

"You are the most annoying woman sometimes."

"Ha! You're lucky I'm not premenstrual 'cause then you would see freaking annoying."

As Titch spanked her again, it occurred to him that Tilly was no longer struggling to free herself, instead she was accepting the spanking rather calmly.

"You're enjoying this, aren't you?" He chuckled as his hand changed to stroking the curves of her now pink butt. Titch felt her tremble beneath him.

"I am not," she murmured halfheartedly as she relaxed to allow him to explore between the curves of her ass.

Titch knew as important as this explanation was, he had to make it fast as he had plans for the ass on display.

"Will you listen to me now, *cariad*?" He ran his fingers along the deep cleft, lightly probing the places he planned to visit very soon.

"No more spanking?" she asked in a small, yet hopeful voice.

Titch grinned at her words.

"I will later if you like."

Tilly had never before understood how people got turned on by something as silly as spanking but now she understood. It wasn't punishment, it was pleasure. There was something hot in being on the receiving end of tingling blows that ground your pussy into hard, contained male flesh. When Titch pulled her up into his arms to perch on his thighs, she could see by the look in his eyes he knew how much she had been turned on by what had happened. How was it he knew her so well after so short a time? There were things about herself she still did not understand and she had known herself forever.

"Okay tell me." It was only fair he was given the chance to explain himself. While she could be a total shrew, she recognized everyone had a right to defend themselves.

"Argon can say what he likes but that doesn't mean I go along with it." Titch held her close against him as he spoke. "To some degree, I am under his control. I don't like it but at this stage there is not a great deal I can do about it."

"It just sucks." How hard would it be to be under that pressure? Having to fall in line with someone else's plans? Tilly could not do it. She was much too militant. It was then that it dawned on her how much strength it took to endure in a situation that wasn't of your own choosing. Titch was a man whose fate had been changed by a knife wound. It had been a violent end and an unasked-for start in another life. None of it was his choice. He was just doing what he had to in order to survive. That took strength and courage and she doubted she would be as noble as that. "It's wrong what you have to put up with and I'm sorry for being a bitch." Her hand reached out and caressed his face.

"Yeah, it sucks." Titch sighed as if relieved at her words. His mouth kissed the fingers that touched his lips. "And you're too sweet to be a bitch."

"I will most definitely be making love with you later, Taliesin." That was a given. He was yummy in every way it was possible for a man to be.

Titch arched his eyebrow at her.

"Making love? Is that an admission?" he teased.

"You know what I mean." With all the feelings that were pounding down on top of her, one thing remained constant. Titch and what she felt for him. *I love him*. It sounded good in her head but hard to translate it to her lips.

"Yeah, I know, *cariad*."

"So what is this Argon person's problem other than he is an arrogant asshole?" She smiled when Titch laughed out loud at her words. He had the nicest laugh and he

smiled with his eyes. It was genuine and real and it made her feel good inside. Until meeting him, Tilly had been only vaguely aware that she even had an inside that needed to feel stuff instead of just deflecting the bad stuff on the outside.

"Argon is a very old being. He has been around longer than dirt," Titch explained. "He has had his own way for hundreds of years. He has never had to consider anyone but himself." He grinned mischievously as if a whimsical thought came to mind. "I have a feeling that's going to change though."

"He needs a swift kick in the pants." *Stuck-up know-it-all.*

"Yes, he's very dramatic and moody and unable to bend unless it suits him."

"And you're the complete opposite." Titch was casual, laid-back yet watchful. Tilly could see he drew people to him by his natural charm. He did not need to compel or order people to do his bidding. She had no doubt that people wanted to help Titch just because of who he was.

"I have no intention of going along with whatever plan he has in mind for you."

"Really?" She felt like a weight had been lifted off her. Fear could be crippling sometimes.

Titch picked up her hand and kissed the palm.

"We're in this together, *cariad*. I could not let you walk into danger alone. If one falls we both fall."

He was so sweet she just wanted to eat him up with a spoon. She leaned forward and flicked his ear stud with her tongue. Tilly loved the way he jumped forward eagerly at her touch.

"But you're immortal. Nothing can touch you." Which was good because she would hate to think anything would happen to him. Death by freak would be easier than losing Titch.

"If anything happened to you I would not be able to go on."

Oh yes, I love him.

"I really need you now, Taliesin." What was the point of pretense? She wanted to be with him every way possible. She ran her hands down to the opening of his jeans.

"Thank God, I didn't know how much longer I could hold on." Titch watched as she unsnapped the fastening.

Tilly needed much more than what was on show at present. Although it was quality stuff she needed every inch of his body exposed to her. She got up from where she sat.

"Lie back." She watched as he waved and the jeans disappeared from his body. She burst out laughing when she saw the condom still on his erect cock. "Poor baby. Does it hurt?" She leaned forward and touched it gently. It jumped in excitement in response.

"Climb onboard," Titch growled low in his throat as if he was trying hard to maintain control. "Please, *cariad*."

"Desperate?" Tilly teased as she stroked the hard flesh. She had never cared for neon colors before but now she saw the attraction when applied on the right body part.

"Aren't you?" His voice was certain of that fact.

"I'm a woman, Taliesin, we have more control." She was dripping with need and her control had been shot long ago – maybe when she first looked in his eyes.

"Come here." Titch patted his thighs invitingly.

"Is that an order?"

He smiled into her eyes and held out his hands.

"It's a hope, a desire."

Tilly felt her heart melt a little further as she looked into Titch's eyes. *What a beautiful man.* That's what they had between them—hope and desire. She knew at that moment she could have so much more if she took a chance. Tilly took his hands and crawled over him.

Titch's eyes went to the folds of her glistening pussy.

"So beautifully wet."

"And all for you, Taliesin." She poised over the top of his shaft. "Sorry, no time for seduction." She impaled herself on the hard flesh. "Oh yes." This was what she needed.

"Fine with me." Titch held fast to her hips. "This is perfection."

"Mmm," Tilly moaned in agreement as she closed her eyes and gave in to the feeling of being joined to him once more. Her eyes snapped open in annoyance and she looked around her warily. Who was watching them?

"What a jerk-face Argon is."

Titch barked with laughter.

"You know I don't think anyone has ever called him that before."

She stopped moving and looked down at Titch.

"What if he intrudes again?" Even though he was immortal, Tilly would take a crack at killing him if he did.

"He won't." Titch's hands pushed and pulled at her hips to restart her movement. "Argon likes the dramatic moments like the one we just went through. But then he backs off to give people time to think. Then he has another go at trying to bend them to his will."

Tilly snorted at the thought and continued the rocking motion she was enjoying. There was something so nice about riding a stiff cock. It had never occurred to her to do it before Titch.

"Well I'm not about bend for him."

"Agreed."

"You have a cunning plan?"

"I'm working on it but just at the moment I have other things on my mind." Titch pulled her down and sucked one of her nipples into his mouth.

Tilly gasped in pleasure.

"I love how you think."

Titch flicked his tongue on her nipple.

"I love you. What's your take on the whole love issue between us, *cariad*?"

When he licked and sucked on her like that it was very hard to have any other thoughts than what Titch was doing to her.

"I'm still thinking about it."

Titch slapped her ass lightly.

"You're so stubborn."

The reverberation of his hand made a thrill shoot through her body.

"Do that again."

Titch obliged.

"You like being spanked." It was a statement not a question as they both knew the answer. He smacked her butt again.

As the orgasm hit, Tilly increased her speed, rocking harder as she ground her body down against his bucking hips. The scream that tore from her throat could not be stopped. But then she did not care about anyone but the two of them. Tilly collapsed on top of him and felt him pump wildly inside her as he came.

"Hell of a ride." She snuggled against his chest, his cock still within her. "I'd like to do that again."

Titch held her close and stroked her damp back.

"Give me a moment and I'll be happy to oblige."

They lay like that for a short time until the thoughts they were both thinking intruded.

"So what do we do about Argon and the freaks?" Tilly was the first to say it. "Argon is a bastard to put us in this situation."

"Agreed." Although Titch was thrilled that Argon had brought Tilly into his lonely existence there was still the fact that they had a problem to resolve before they could just be together. He cuddled Tilly to his chest. Titch liked the way she said "put us in this situation". "Us" implied she was thinking long-term. "I know Argon will not say it outright, because that would be so unlike him, but I believe he has a plan to release me from that which binds me as a spellbinder if the freaks are dispensed with first."

"And that's where I come in." Tilly lifted her head and looked at him in concern.

"Yes and while Argon can be an arrogant sod, I believe he knew of the connection between us even before we did." He pushed the tangled hair from her face. Titch was incredibly thankful he'd found Tilly. Some people searched their whole lives trying to

find the one they were meant to be with. There were no guarantees that it would ever happen. He had been lucky. As much as being a spellbinder could be a burden, if Titch had never become one he may never have met this woman. "Some people are fated to be, *cariad*."

"I believe that, Taliesin." Her voice sounded certain of this fact.

"Good." Titch kissed her lips lovingly. Tilly believing in them was a sign to him that eventually she would overcome her fears and admit she loved him. In his heart, he knew. The words would be an extra bonus. "My loving you is a weakness Argon intends to utilize. He is already trying to use my need for you to push you into destroying the freaks."

"Manipulative swine," Tilly spat out angrily. "Oh, he may be good-looking – not as much as you of course – but he has a strange way of dealing with things."

"It's the life he has been living forever. He has never had to consider anyone else's wishes but his own." Titch wondered if Argon would ever be able to change that. It had to be a lonely, hard existence he led. His thoughts strayed momentarily to the grim-faced Rowdy who looked like she had seen her worst nightmare come true. Who was she to Argon? Titch shook his head. That was not his problem.

"So if I do what Argon wants I will most likely die as I cannot see the freaks letting me touch them then flee. And if I don't help, you remain a spellbinder and the freaks probably kill me anyway. Great choices." Tilly sighed in frustration.

He knew her options were not great and Titch did not want to push her into danger regardless of any possible outcome.

"Even if I can never be mortal I don't ever plan to leave you, *cariad*." He wanted to stay by her side for as long as he could and love Tilly the way she deserved to be loved.

Tilly sat up and looked at him with a mixture of hope and reality in her eyes as if she wanted to believe but she knew her options were limited as to what she could have.

"Can you really do that?"

"I am trapped but not helpless." Titch did not always follow Argon's every plan, which Argon was only too aware of. It was just a matter of working out how to bluff a being who had seen and heard every bluff and excuse known to humankind.

"It's just wrong using you like this. You are such a good man, Taliesin."

Her words made him feel invincible. She was more interested in his situation than her own and it made his heart swell with love.

"I don't write the rules, *cariad*." If he did he would have changed them the minute Tilly had fallen into his arms.

"Well, the rules stink."

Titch smiled at the venom in her voice. He knew she was not a woman who liked to either follow the rules or be made to enforce them. Tilly would not have been able to do the job she had if rules had to be applied.

"So," he murmured as he felt his cock harden with anticipation inside her.

Her eyes widened as she felt the movement.

"So what?"

"Forget about everything but you and me for the moment and tell me, do you love me, Matilda Moor?"

She rubbed her hands up and down the planes of his chest.

"I just..." she hesitated as if trying to find the right words. "I don't know what I feel. This thing between us is all so new and scary. I don't want to mistake this sudden enjoyment of sex for love. I don't want to hurt you."

If Titch did not already love her, he would have fallen in love with Tilly at that moment.

"You will never hurt me." He knew that was a fact.

"I might inadvertently through..." Tilly stopped as if she knew what she was about to say would give too much away.

"Through fear?" Titch already knew that. "I believe you're already in love with me but you're scared."

"Of what?" Tilly tried to bluff it away as if the notion was crazy.

"Of giving every part of you to someone else."

"Well it's a huge thing to ask."

"Is it?" Titch pulled her down and kissed her hungrily.

Tilly licked her lips as the kiss ended.

"Speaking of huge things, I think we need another condom and I'm thinking black would be a good color." Tilly swung off his body and stayed on her knees.

Titch arched his eyebrow at her in amusement.

"Any particular reason?" Though he would do or give her anything she wanted.

"I just like a man in black." She dropped down on her hands and presented her butt to him. "Any objections?"

"Oh hell no." Titch quickly changed condoms, grateful that he had the power to do it in the blink of an eye for wasting time on packets and rolling meant less time spent with his woman.

"Take me, Taliesin." She spread her legs in invitation.

"Yes, *cariad*." Titch moved in tight and close behind her and plunged inside her wet core in one stroke. He loved the soft sigh of relief she gave. His balls slapped against her ass as he ground into her.

"Oh Taliesin," Tilly panted as she allowed him to have his way with her. She was as independent as the next woman but there was something about being taken blind by a man that was so hot that independence be damned. "I love you." She stopped still. *Uh-oh, did I just say what I think I did?* She opened her eyes wide in shock. She had gone and

told Titch she loved him. Surprisingly it wasn't as hard as she thought it would be to say those three words.

Titch stopped as well as if he could not believe what he had heard.

"What?" His voice was tinged with hope.

"You heard me." It was as stunning to him as it was to her but stopping what he was doing was not part of her plan. She butted her ass back against him.

"Did you say them because I'm inside you right now and you're hoping for an orgasm?"

Tilly snorted at his words.

"Hope nothing. I demand one." If he left her now on the brink of what promised to be another toe-curling experience she would be wild.

"*Cariad*?" Titch needed to hear more.

"Taliesin, I would love you if you were across the room from me peeling potatoes, changing a light bulb or washing the dishes. I love you, pure and simple." Tilly was surprised how easy the truth was to say.

Titch kissed her shoulders lovingly.

"Thank you, *cariad*. I needed to hear that."

"Why? It's not as if it was a romantic thing to say." But it was true. Love was all about the great emotions but also the boring day-to-day things like light bulbs and dishwashing.

"It is to me," he whispered in her ear.

"I'm pleased." Making him happy made her happy. "Now please me further by fucking the stuffing out of me."

Titch threw back his head and laughed and slammed into her with the passion of a man with his life renewed.

The man watching in the window was fascinated. Not by the sexual act itself but more that the woman was totally enjoying herself. Female freaks did not enjoy sex. It was a duty, a commitment to their race to procreate. Oberon knew human women were different. He had fucked quite a few before he had used their bodies to feed his hunger for human flesh. None of them had enjoyed what he had done to them but then they had been hookers – woman who fucked for a living. It was different to see a woman like Matilda Moor on all fours having sex.

Oberon had initially been disappointed when the other man, who he believed to be the legendary Argon, had appeared and ruined the show. Though he was glad he had been fortunate enough to be lurking outside the Moor property when he was. He had initially gone there to check out the security. He could not believe it was as lax he found it. That was surprising considering the woman's business. Oberon knew he could take Matilda Moor any time he wanted as no barrier, other than the spellbinder, stopped him. Oberon smiled. Clearly the spellbinder loved her so he was no threat whatsoever

to him. She was his weakness and he would do more harm to himself trying to save her than he would to Oberon.

He smiled as the woman screamed again in release.

“My, you are the passionate slut, Matilda.” He would enjoy taking her slowly over days, maybe weeks, depending on how long she lasted. His hatred for her never changed but sex did not require love. The look on the spellbinder’s face as he came made him almost jealous. But then, that would be him soon so he could afford to allow the man his last fuck.

Oberon walked away from the house. No one saw him and if anyone questioned him he would make short work of dealing with them for he was not one to suffer the inquisitive or the righteous lightly. It both angered and fascinated him that Argon thought he could so easily send the woman to him with the virus. The virus was the reason they were the last of their breed left standing. Argon and his ilk were responsible for that.

“I only wish I could kill you, dark man.” But never mind. It would kill the mighty Argon and his spellbinders to lose an innocent life through their own foolish plotting. Matilda would die. Nothing would stop that. Payback could not be halted. Oberon knew he would enjoy it on so many levels.

Chapter Ten

"So we pretend we go along with him?" Tilly pulled the shirt over her head so it rested on the waistband of her jeans.

"You look skeptical." Titch hung the towels they had used over the railing in the bathroom.

"Is it possible to really dupe an all-powerful being?" Tilly felt relaxed and fresh after the shower. There was something to be said about showering with a friend. Although they had not indulged in further sex, the sliding of wet, soapy flesh against flesh had been more exciting in a silly, playful way. It was good to laugh at crazy stuff.

"We're going to find out." He led her out of the bathroom.

"Can't he hear and see everything we do?"

"Normally yes but I have a feeling that coming face-to-face with your friend Augusta has screwed with his radar somewhat."

Tilly remembered the pissed-off look on Rowdy's face. She had known her most of her life and she had never seen her look like that at anyone. If anything, Rowdy tended to hide what she felt. She made no attempt to do so with Argon. If Tilly had to bet on Argon against Rowdy she would put the money on Rowdy as there was a hidden depth to that woman that Tilly suspected would floor the strongest man.

"What is that about with those two?"

Titch shook his head in confusion.

"I'm not sure but if it works in our favor I'm happy for it to continue."

Tilly looked up at the tall man at her side. At that moment she felt safe and loved. She hoped that feeling would continue.

"Come up with a plan yet?" Tilly had total faith Titch would think up something to save her ass.

"Sort of." He walked with her into the living room.

What sort of an answer was that?

"Is it better than me walking into a house full of freaks?"

"Sort of," Titch repeated with a wry smile.

"Great, I feel so confident – not."

Titch hugged her to him.

"I will let nothing happen to you. Are you ready to lie?"

"I was born lying." Hell, her occupation alone required covering up the truth on a daily basis. She lied to everyone – the neighbors, the City Council, the police – to cover

up the weirdness of her life because sometimes it was just too hard explaining why she had huge barrels of rock salt dropped at her doorstep or the strange vapors that would swirl around her home when she was in the midst of a full-blown haunting. Tilly raised her voice. "You can't make me do anything I don't want to do by trying to seduce me with sex."

"I'm not trying to, *cariad*. I just want to be with you."

"So if I said no to sex and the making the freaks sick thing you'd be okay with that?" She knew if she was a normal person this whole conversation would be insane. But then she hadn't been normal for the longest time, if ever.

Titch pulled her into his arms.

"You won't say no."

He sounded so smug she was happy to play along and pull away from him.

"Won't I? How do you know?"

"Because you need me and you love me and you want us to be together."

"That sounds like blackmail."

"It sounds like true love." Titch looked at her pointedly. "What would you do for true love?"

For you – everything.

"What has loving you got to do with anything?"

"If you love me enough you will do what I ask."

Tilly stamped her foot for added emphasis.

"Oh how frigging archaic." She hoped Argon was buying this. "Sex is one thing, running my life is another."

"You have to do this." Titch made it sound like an ultimatum.

"No, I don't. I am tired of helping everyone with their freaky-assed problems." That was true enough. Just once Tilly wished she could deal with something boring like needing to mow the lawn, instead of trying to decide how to handle the supernatural problem.

"If you don't do this we cannot be together." Titch sighed in exasperation as he ran a hand through his hair in frustration.

Nice touch.

"How do you figure that?" She almost smiled at the spiky blond strands that stood on end on his head.

"Because Argon will only release me if you love me enough to do this." Titch's eyes locked on hers. "And I cannot be with a woman who does not respect me enough to do as I bid."

Just as well she loved him and they were playacting or she would have punched him in the stomach for such a statement.

"You leave me no choice, spellbinder."

Titch smiled at the cool tone of her voice.

"I knew you'd see it my way, *cariad*."

Argon had almost missed this conversation with Titch and his woman. He had been so preoccupied observing Augusta Lawrence. He always knew she existed but he had chosen not to give in to curiosity and find her. Now here he was and there she was and they both were aware of the situation between them, which was crazy for complete strangers.

"Or are we strangers?" Argon mused to himself as he stood and watched the woman with the nickname of Rowdy. She was nothing like he expected. She was quietly beautiful with her thick jet black hair scraped haphazardly on top of her head. The broken glasses did not hide the intelligence of her eyes nor diminish the loveliness of her face.

"I know you're there," Rowdy spoke out loud in the empty garage.

She was smart. Argon liked that. Smart and sexy was an unbeatable combination. Argon blew out a breath and tried to focus. He was there for a reason and that reason was to get rid of the freaks. To do that he had to utilize Matilda Moor. He needed to get back on track. Watching Augusta Lawrence was not going to help him with his plans.

"Don't hover," her voice snapped out in irritation.

Argon smiled at her waspish tone. He liked cool, composed women who sounded like they were in control yet underneath they rarely were. However, this woman was not like any other and he knew whatever move he made with her would change his fate forever and he wasn't about to do that. He liked his world as it was. It was functional and he controlled it.

"Goodbye, Augusta," he murmured lightly. Argon saw her stiffen.

"Forever?" There were a hint of relief and sadness in her voice.

"Who can say?"

Argon forced himself to pay attention to his other problem. He listened as Titch explained what he wanted Matilda to do. It was exactly what Argon wanted him to do. The woman answered back as he expected. Argon laughed softly. He had to give them an A for effort but he did not believe a word of it. But then Titch often went out of his way to do the opposite of what Argon wanted. If he did not like the blond man so much he would have gotten rid of him long ago. Militant spellbinders were one thing he did not need. It was true that Argon did have plans to release Titch but on his terms and when he was ready. It had nothing to do with the Matilda. She was just a side issue.

Argon watched in his mind's eye as Oberon scuttled away. No doubt the freak had heard all the plans that were discussed here. Excellent. It was better than he had hoped. Now neither Oberon nor Titch and his woman knew the real plan.

"Bloody hard to be in charge sometimes."

"So what's the story with you and Argon?" Tilly asked as she came to stand beside Rowdy's desk. Unlike her own rat's nest of a desk with Shalimar and her bowl plonked in the middle, everything was neat and in place in Rowdy's part of the office. In some ways almost too neat. Tilly often wondered about people that controlled. But then Rowdy had been that way as a kid. When Tilly had turned up at school in her scuffed shoes, un-ironed uniform with mismatched socks falling around her ankles and books in a mess, Rowdy had always been pristine and composed with not a hair out of place. That was just the way of it but that did not mean Rowdy was any more in control than Tilly. She just hid it better. In fact, Rowdy rarely got angry, preferring instead to walk off and not get involved.

"No story at all." Rowdy blindly tapped away at the keyboard before her.

"Really?" What a lie. Even Tilly who was the world's worst typist could see the amount of typos littering the screen under Rowdy's touch. "It looked like something was going on to me." She saw Rowdy swallow several times and she knew her friend was trying hard to contain the nervous hiccups she always got when she was scared or worried.

"I have been talking to Newton," Rowdy murmured as she tried to change the subject.

"So when did you two meet?" Although it was absolutely none of her business she was not about to give up on trying to find out more.

Rowdy looked up at her coolly.

"I've never met Newton."

Tilly smiled. Rowdy could be more mysterious than the sphinx if she wanted to be.

"I'm talking about Argon and you know it." Though it would also be interesting to meet Newton. The only thing they knew about him was he was a helpful geek and he lived in Wales. "When did you meet the tall, dark pain in the ass?" She hoped he was listening.

Rowdy sighed as if she knew she had no choice but to answer.

"I met him today."

"Oh yeah?" That was surprising. They had the look of a couple who had history. "There was a lot of electricity in the air for someone you just met."

"It's complicated." Rowdy banged at the keys.

"And you two never met until today?" But then why question that? She and Titch were on fire from the first moment they met.

"Correct."

"But you know about each other." Tilly looked at Rowdy's knuckles. They were white with tension.

"Yes."

There was something pretty intense going on and Tilly knew she had pushed far enough.

"Okay, if you need to talk you know you can talk to me."

"I know and thank you but I'd prefer to work." Rowdy swiveled in her chair and pushed her fractured glasses up onto her nose. "We have lots of jobs backing up. Mrs. Abernathy believes her cat, Dudley, is possessed with the spirit of the milkman who used to do the rounds in this neighborhood in 1954."

"Of course she does." Fat, fluffy Dudley was an obvious candidate for possession—you could see it in his sleepy, squinty eyes.

"And Mr. Wayne at number twenty-seven believes he can hear voices coming through the television set."

"Ah, easy fix. I'll wander over there later and get him to turn his volume down." Tilly saw Rowdy's frown. She took the job a lot more seriously than Tilly did but then she took life that way. "I promise I'll talk to him. Anyone else?" She watched as her friend picked up a sheaf of papers.

"Seven hexes, two ghosts looking for the light, a homeless vampire with an alcohol addiction, an issue with a voodoo doll making people quote 'swear uncontrollably' and a headless duck is apparently roaming the next suburb and terrorizing the locals."

This is your life, Matilda Moor.

"Excellent," Tilly murmured, rolling her eyes.

"Oh, I almost forgot. Madam Zarina has put yet another curse on you."

Tilly snorted in amusement at her words.

"How many is that now?"

"Forty-two."

Madam Zarina was the local gypsy-come-clairvoyant who felt Tilly was taking her business away. No matter how many times Tilly had a friendly chat with the purple-haired grandmother, explaining she wasn't at all clairvoyant, the crazy old bitch continued to curse her.

"What am I supposed to turn into now?" She kind of felt sorry for the woman that none of her curses ever panned out. It screwed with Madam Zarina's reputation especially when she always made sure everyone knew what her latest curse was. That's why she didn't get as much business. Her curses lacked credibility.

Rowdy handed her the note from Madam Zarina.

"I will become 'a woman of no home, no virtue and no hope'." Strangely enough that almost matched her current situation. She was up to her neck in bills and was worried about the mortgage, she was having wild sex with a supernatural being who was hardly virtuous and the whole freak thing did not sound like it would have a really hopeful outcome.

"What are you going to do about the freaks?" Rowdy asked as if reading her mind.

There were times she truly wondered just how psychic Rowdy was. Unlike Madame Zarina, she did not run around promoting her abilities. Tilly's Aunt Sage had always watched Rowdy with interest for she believed she was gifted.

"Titch is handling the freak thing." Tilly wasn't exactly sure what the plan was but she had faith in him.

"You know it's not going to be as easy."

"I can't remember the last time anything was." Like everyone on the planet she wondered sometimes "why me" but dropping her bundle and having a tantrum now was not an option.

"They want blood."

"And various body parts as well," Tilly quipped.

Rowdy shot her an angry look.

"Be serious. I'm worried about you."

"I know, I'll be fine." They both knew that was a lie.

"Thanks for meeting me." Titch stood and assessed the man before him. He was bland to the point of boring in his pristine white shirt, blue striped tie and neat average brown hair. Only the dark burning eyes behind the glasses gave him away as a freak of nature.

"I was intrigued," Oberon admitted as he placed his briefcase on the ground. "It's not often a spellbinder deigns to meet with one of our kind."

Titch smiled at him thinly. As far as he was concerned his kind were the scum of the Earth and the sooner they were all gone the happier he would be.

"Let's cut to the chase, shall we?"

"By all means." Oberon nodded his assent. "This would be about Matilda Moor and the fact that we want her dead and you don't."

"She killed in self-defense." Titch kept his voice calm and low. He did not want the freak thinking that he was desperate.

"She killed one of our own and that's all that matters."

Titch knew by the look in Oberon's eyes that he believed he was in a position of power.

"Was she supposed to allow herself to be taken?"

"Why yes." Oberon looked at him as if that was the obvious answer. "Most humans don't struggle as they're too scared. I'll admit your woman has spirit and that has its appeal but she still has to die."

"You know we have the power to destroy you at any time." Technically this was true but he knew that his connection to Tilly had weakened his normally reliable powers. Spellbinders were supposed to be rational and pragmatic. Titch felt anything but dealing with this situation.

"Do it then," the freak dared.

"You will not save yourself?" They both knew the freaks held a powerful hand of cards.

"We will do whatever we have to in order to survive." He looked at him pointedly. "We expect no less of you or Matilda. Did you expect us to negotiate and walk away promising not to hurt your woman?" Oberon looked at him knowingly. "Yes, we know your attachment to her and it weakens you. One of our kind would never let a woman have such influence over them."

A freak would never understand the concept of love so it was pointless even trying to explain it to Oberon.

"I offer myself in place of Matilda Moor." Titch was not surprised the freak laughed.

"How foolishly noble of you."

"I know a spellbinder would be considered a prize to you." Freaks were arrogant enough to believe that they could utilize any power source for their own means.

"Yes, in so many ways you would be a trophy."

"So?"

"Let me think about it."

"You have two hours."

Chapter Eleven

When the steak knife flew past her head and embedded in the door frame Tilly ducked and dived. She dropped to the linoleum and crawled on her hands and knees. It was not a usual occurrence for a blade to fly at her head in her own kitchen. Sure, some freaky-assed spirits had invaded her house in the past but they had not used her own cutlery against her. She peered around the corner of her kitchen bench to see who her assailant was. *Fucking Jeri*. The freak aimed another knife at her head. Tilly scuttled back for cover and did a mental count of how many steak knives she had – four – so unless Jeri started flinging forks there were only two more to go.

“What do you want, Jeri?” Another knife skittered off course, hitting the fridge and taking fridge magnets with it.

“I want you dead.”

Ask a stupid question.

Tilly stood up quickly and shot back down equally as fast as the last knife flew toward her.

“Damn,” Jeri cursed angrily as she missed her mark.

Tilly stood and reached for the condiments basket on the bench. There was salt in one of them. It would not kill her but it would be enough to slow her down until she got the rock salt and lime mixture from the garage to do the job properly. Tilly threw a shaker at the wall above Jeri’s head. Pepper rained down, making the freak sneeze violently.

“Oh bugger.” Tilly always got the salt and pepper shakers mixed up.

Jeri swore and advanced toward her. There was blood lust in her eyes and pepper up her nose.

“I am going to kill you.” She sneezed rapidly in succession as the pepper continued to irritate her.

Where the fuck was the salt? Tilly lobbed the oregano at her. What the hell was oregano doing mixed up in there? You are such a lousy housekeeper.

“What? Not going to try to eat me first? You seem to be lacking in ambition, Jeri.”

“Bitch!” Jeri shrieked furiously as she dodged the oregano and ran at her enemy.

Tilly scooped up the last handful of condiment containers into her shirt and ran around the counter to get away from her. She was no coward but she was not about to take on an enraged flesh eater without some defense. Tilly pinged a loaded container of cinnamon, which bounced off Jeri’s head.

“Stand and fight!” Jeri roared as she raced after her.

"Oh fuck off, you'll kill me." Tilly wasn't that silly. She chucked the half-empty bottle of Tabasco sauce at her.

Jeri caught it and threw it back at her. It smashed and splattered against the wall.

"Coward!"

"Whatever," Tilly replied as onion flakes hurtled from her hand and smacked Jeri in the mouth. *Score!* At the time of purchase she had wondered when she would use such a big bottle of onion flakes but now she was pleased she made the right choice. Tilly made a mental note to keep quick lime in the house in future. *And label the frigging salt.*

Jeri launched forward and tackled Tilly onto the floor.

"Oh shit!" Tilly slammed into the linoleum with the freak on top of her. When Jeri sunk her teeth into her shoulder, Tilly screamed in agony. The pain was devastating. Freaks kept their teeth razor sharp. She felt the blood pour from the wound and she told herself not to faint as that would be fatal. *Where the fuck was everyone?* The one time Tilly actively wanted help no one was around. There was a lesson to be learned in being Miss Independent all the time. Tilly pounded one fist against Jeri as she looked desperately at the last two containers in her hand. She shook out some grains from one of them. *Yes – salt!* Tilly frantically sprinkled it over Jeri's face.

The freak lifted her mouth and howled in pain as her skin started to burn and peel away. Jeri tried wildly to brush the salt from her skin as Tilly flung more at her.

"I'm going to make you suffer," Jeri bellowed in rage as her mouth started its descent back to her shoulder.

Just when Tilly thought all hope was gone, Titch appeared with Rowdy following close behind. He picked Jeri off Tilly and slammed the freak brutally against the wall, knocking her out. Titch waved his hand and quickly tied her up with rope.

"My hero," Tilly murmured as she slumped on the ground.

Titch dropped to his knees. He was horrified at the blood that coursed down from the wound to her shoulder. He was furious at himself that he had not been with Tilly to protect her from the attack. Titch summoned a thick gauze pad and held it firmly to the gash.

"Thank God you turned up. I was running out of condiments. I was down to rainbow sprinkles." She weakly dropped the last container from her hand and slumped against the strength of the man she loved.

"We need to get you an ambulance." Rowdy picked up the phone and began to dial.

"Oh yeah and how do we explain this?" Tilly watched as she hung up the phone in realization.

"You've lost a lot of blood, *cariad*, we can think of some story to tell the paramedics." Titch told her as he continued to staunch the flow of blood. He did not care what he had to do to help her.

"You can heal me." Tilly remembered that spellbinders had that power.

Titch shook his head in agonized regret.

"No I can't. I can't heal those I love as it's considered self-gain." It was damnable to Titch that he had these fantastic powers but he could not do anything to help Tilly because it helped him as well. *What was the fucking point of having them?* It made his blood boil at the futility of it all.

"I'll be fine, Taliesin. I heal quickly. This is just like a really big paper cut," she joked weakly.

"I'll get the first aid kit." Rowdy ran off to get it.

"Jeri could have killed you." Titch looked at the unconscious freak. Tilly's blood dripped down her raw, scarred face. Titch wanted to kill Jeri with his bare hands. He had never felt that sort of rage before. Now he wanted to give in to it and make that creature suffer. But Rowdy returned and solved that problem. Not only did she have her first aid kit with her but she brought a large container of the rock salt and quick lime mixture he had earlier seen strapped to Tilly's waist. Rowdy threw it dispassionately over Jeri who screamed in agony.

"Don't fuck with us, freak," Rowdy said as she watched the woman's body melt into a lump of ugly fat.

"Way to go, Rowdy." Tilly was impressed.

"Thank you, Augusta." Titch was grateful.

"I don't believe in killing but that bitch deserved it." Rowdy dropped to her knees beside Tilly and started pulling stuff out of the first aid kit.

Titch held Tilly gently in his arms as he watched Rowdy efficiently swab the gash with antiseptic and firmly dress it and then bind Tilly's arm in a sling.

"How do you know all this?" Even as he said the words, Titch suspected there was an amazing amount of knowledge hidden within the dark-haired woman.

"We've had a few moments," Tilly explained as she traded conspiratorial glances at Rowdy.

"Too bloody many," agreed Rowdy.

Titch looked at Tilly and shook his head in wonder.

"Why the hell do you put yourself through this?" What gain could she possibly get from it? It certainly wasn't monetary. "You have to quit this life, *cariad*." Titch could not have her in this constant danger.

"That's the plan after I deal with the freaks." Tilly sounded certain of that.

There was no way after this that Titch was going to allow her to go after the freaks. No doubt it would piss her off but Titch was going to handle this his way and keep her safe.

"Don't worry about the freaks. I have that sorted out." At least he hoped he had. Titch was fairly certain Oberon's need for power would overcome his blood lust for Tilly. He got that power having a spellbinder under his control.

"How do you have this 'sorted'?" Tilly looked at him in concern. "And don't do the quiet stoic thing. Tell me."

Titch knew she had to know sooner or later.

"I have offered myself in your place, *cariad*."

Tilly sat up in shock and slapped his chest angrily. The pain in her shoulder made her flinch but damn it she was furious.

"You offered yourself as a sacrifice? Are you mad?" She was wild that Titch had endangered himself like that. Didn't he know it would kill her if anything happened to him?

"I can't have you getting hurt." Titch's hand linked with hers.

He was the sweetest man on the planet.

"But you can be hurt? I know you're immortal but you still feel pain and everlasting pain at the hands of those pricks is not what I want for you." She glanced at what had once been Jeri. There was nothing worse than cleaning up supernatural carcasses. It was dead of night stuff.

"I want you safe, *cariad*."

"Taliesin, I will not allow this." Sure, she was wounded but she was a woman and she would have her say.

"Oberon has not accepted the trade-off yet."

Tilly sighed gratefully.

"Thank God." She had time to talk Titch out of doing something dumb, sweet and heroic.

"You two are so bloody complicated." Rowdy shook her head in amazement.

Tilly snorted at her friend's words. Rowdy was the queen of complicated.

"And you're not, Augusta? What do you suggest we do?"

Rowdy looked from Titch to Tilly in disbelief.

"Haven't you worked out what Argon wants?"

"Well clearly not." Tilly was too worried trying to save both hers and her lover's ass to think about Argon.

"That's because you're too caught up in each other." That much was obvious to Rowdy. "That's sweet but it will kill you. You have to focus and do the lovey dovey stuff later."

Tilly was impressed with the pushy woman before her. She knew that quiet façade hid a kick-ass woman.

"What does Argon want?" Rowdy had Titch's complete attention.

"He wants the relic from Eden that the freaks have." Rowdy exchanged significant glances with them both.

"What?" She could look as significant as she liked but Tilly had no idea what she was talking about. A relic? Eden? The suburb Eden or the actual biblical Eden? Did that even exist? Was she hearing things due to blood loss?

"You're joking." Titch was amazed as if the thought was so daring it had not occurred to him. "How do you know?"

"I know how Argon thinks." Rowdy turned to look at Tilly. "And no, I'm not going to explain how."

Bugger, I'll get it out of her later.

"What relic?" Tilly switched tack.

"It's a piece of Adam's bone."

Tilly looked at her as if she could not believe what she was hearing.

"Adam? As in Adam and Eve and the snake thing?"

"Yes." Titch was grim-faced. He was not happy with this turn of events.

Were they serious? The tense looks on their faces indicated they were.

"That's just legend."

"No, it's not." Rowdy's tone was adamant.

Titch nodded in agreement.

"The freaks have a massive power base if they have the relic. They know they control the fate of religion and mankind in their hands. Their numbers may be depleted but the relic gives them bargaining power on a massive scale."

Okay, so the man she loved and her best friend believed in this relic. Who was she to doubt them? Tilly could see that if everything they said was true then the freaks did indeed have a massive advantage as people were always fighting over religion. The thing that really made her blood boil was that Argon had known this all the time. "So that bastard Argon wanted to use me as bait to get the relic?"

"Yes." Titch's hands curled into fists of anger as he said the word.

"What about the virus to kill them?" Was that real or did Argon want her to walk into their lair with some bogus plague?

"It exists and has been killing off freaks in large numbers all over the world," Rowdy confirmed. "Argon wanted you to go in and divert their attention while he took the relic."

Argon appeared before them.

"Asshole!" Tilly struggled to get to her feet. Titch kept her from going for Argon's throat.

"I wish you hadn't said anything, Augusta." Argon looked at the dark-haired woman in annoyance.

Rowdy arched her eyebrows at him dismissively as if his opinion meant nothing to her.

Titch stood up and faced Argon.

"I will not risk Tilly." His anger was barely contained.

"I would not have let her die," Argon told him calmly.

Fucking omnipotent beings.

"But the odd missing body part would have been okay?" Tilly asked, knowing already what the answer was.

"To help humanity, yes."

"Tilly is not going to be a part of your game, Argon." The two men looked at each other, knowing they could inflict great damage on each other if they chose to.

"And I will not let you be a sacrifice, Taliesin." There was no argument in Argon's voice.

As much as it pissed Tilly off, Argon was right. Humanity was at stake, as was the man she loved. It was up to her to act.

"Can you heal me, Argon?" She staggered to her feet with Titch's help.

"Yes, because I don't love you." Argon's words were not callous. They were just direct and to the point.

Tilly snorted at his words. She was not upset. Instead his ambivalence amused her.

"The feeling is extremely mutual."

Titch pulled Tilly into his arms.

"Whatever you plan, *cariad*, I will not allow it."

That Titch loved her she did not doubt. *How lucky was I to drop into this man's arms?*

"We have no choice, Taliesin."

"Smart woman." Argon nodded her head in approval.

"Oh piss off." Tilly did not need his endorsement.

Argon laughed at her words in genuine amusement.

"I'll go instead of Tilly," Rowdy announced.

"No," Argon snapped angrily.

Tilly looked at him in amazement. He loved Rowdy. Go figure. There was truly someone for everyone.

"Don't worry, Argon, I would not let anyone take my place." Tilly turned to Titch. "I have to do this."

"There has to be another way, *cariad*."

"I don't think so." Other than running and hiding, which Tilly would not do no matter how tempted, there was no other choice and they all knew it.

"Where do they keep the relic?" Titch asked as if he knew their choices were limited so they had to have a plan to ensure a safe outcome.

"They keep it in a locked chest they guard," Argon explained.

Titch threw his hands in the air as if the solution was obvious to him.

"So we beam in right now and get it."

Argon eyed him thoughtfully.

"Due to circumstances, neither you nor I would be effective at doing this at the moment." He looked at the two women. "We have issues that conflict that's why we need a diversion."

Tilly had been called many things in her life but not a diversion.

"And that's me." She looked at Rowdy. "Is he telling us the truth?" She trusted Rowdy's word implicitly. When Rowdy affirmed he was, Tilly walked up to Argon. "I expect you to save my unlovable ass."

Argon nodded his assent.

"Consider it done, if only for Taliesin's sake."

That was fine. Tilly did not want Christmas cards from Argon anyway.

"I also want you to grant Taliesin mortality." Tilly wanted him to have a normal life.

"Okay."

That was sorted. She felt a little more confident.

"Fine, let's do this. The sooner the better.

"Tonight at sunset," Argon told her.

"Why?" Wasn't it like pulling off a particularly big Band-Aid? The faster it was done the easier it was?

"The freaks are more susceptible to attack in the evening as they generally are slowed by a full stomach." Everyone knew what that meant. Some poor person would meet a nasty fate. "We get them when their defenses are down."

"He's right, Tilly," confirmed Rowdy. "Newton told me this."

Argon looked angry at the mention of Newton's name.

Rowdy noticed the look and faced him in annoyance.

"Have you got something against Newton?"

"You spend too much time with him," Argon told her, his voice barely polite.

"I'll do what I like without you interfering."

"You are the most aggravating woman."

Tilly held up her hand.

"I thought this was all about me?" she quipped.

Titch interrupted all three of them.

“Can we focus on the freak thing and you two can sort out your love life later.”

“Taliesin’s right. We have three hours and I plan to make them count.” Tilly was not about to waste time with empty words.

Chapter Twelve

"Are you sure your shoulder is up to this?" Titch lay on his stomach on her bed in her bedroom. There was no Argon, no Rowdy. It was just them. She and Titch had sorted out a plan of action to deal with the freaks. It was nothing very cunning. Titch would go over there and see if he could find the relic first. Just because Argon said no that did not mean they would follow his lead blindly. If Titch failed to find the relic then Tilly would go to the freaks with the virus, most likely lose an extremity or two while Titch and Argon looked for the relic unhindered. Rowdy would wait outside in the car with the shotgun full of salt and lime in case any major problems arose. It wasn't ideal but then Tilly knew life rarely was. That was why this time now with Titch was so important.

"It's fine." Argon had healed her like new. She had contemplated asking if he could smooth out some cellulite and whip off a few excess pounds at the same time but she knew Argon did not like her much and he would probably just add them to spite her. "Besides, I have the most pressing need to do this."

"I have never had anyone do this before."

"I think we both agree I'm not just anyone, Taliesin." She smiled as she went about her pleasure.

"No, *cariad*, you're not." Titch was lying stomach down on the bed while Tilly licked the tattoo on his lower back. It had bemused him when she suggested it but he was happy to go along with it for it meant she would be touching him and that was all he cared about at that moment—being close to her. She sat across the backs of his thighs and he could feel her wet pussy rubbing enticingly against his skin, her bare breasts pressing into his ass. She licked his tattoo in long, deliberate strokes. His cock was on fire to take her but Titch also wanted to prolong the blissful agony of it all. As moments went, it was priceless.

"You are most yummy," she murmured as she tongued the intricate curves of the tattoo.

Titch chuckled in amusement. *How he adored her.* She was fearless and shy, possessive and sweet and she was his and it made him feel like the most powerful man on Earth.

"I'm happy I please you, *cariad*." It was his plan to do so for the rest of their lives.

"You do in so many ways." Tilly ran her hands up his back and lifted herself so her pussy came down on his ass with her legs spread open. She started rubbing herself against him.

The back-and-forward motion of her body grinding against his was driving him wild with need.

"Are you trying to drive me crazy, *cariad*?" His voice was the low growl of a man with his desire barely contained.

"You don't like it?" Tilly asked as she leaned forward and whispered in his ear.

"I love it but one of my best parts is missing out on the action." Titch wanted to bury himself deep within her and never come out.

Tilly smiled and sat back up as she continued sliding back and forward against him.

"I look forward to paying that particular part some attention very soon."

Titch could hear the low moan come from the back of her throat and the moisture between her legs intensified as she scraped her clit over and over against him.

"Don't come."

"Why not?" She sounded like a woman on the edge of doing just that.

"I want us to come together."

Tilly smiled and stopped rubbing against Titch. She had teased herself extremely close to orgasm. However there was something she wanted before that. In fact she craved it. Tilly planned to make Titch do it to her.

"I'll do what I want and you can't make me do otherwise." *But please make me.* She skimmed her clit over him one last time and held her breath as she willed herself not to climax.

Titch chuckled at her cool tone.

"You sound positive on that."

"Oh I am, Taliesin, and we both know I am a woman who will only do what I want to." And she knew if she rubbed herself one more time against him she would explode. "I am in control." *Barely.*

As expected, Titch rolled over suddenly to test her. Tilly tumbled to the soft carpet of her bedroom floor. Before she had time to collect herself, Titch had her on her knees pushed her up against the bed with her ass out. He gave her no room to move as he lifted his hand and smacked her butt.

The delicious sting of his flesh against hers sent a shiver through her body.

"Who's in control here?" Titch pressed his body close to hers and whispered against her ear.

"I am," she told him, knowing what his response would be. As his hand struck her backside firmly but teasingly, Tilly shivered in delight and shoved her ass out for more.

Titch laughed at her actions and slapped her rear end one more time.

"You really like this."

"Maybe." The hands caressing the now pink flesh made her dizzy with pleasure. If Titch was not in her soon she would scream in frustration. She butted back against his body.

"Maybe nothing." Titch moved in even closer behind her. "I really need you now."

"And you can really have me now," Tilly purred back encouragingly as she spread her legs and waited for the heat that would join their bodies together once more.

Titch quickly sheathed himself in a condom and ran his fingers down between her legs to the creamy moisture pooling at the entrance of her vagina.

"You are delicious to fuck, *cariad*."

"So do it. Don't just talk about it." Tilly gasped as she felt his cock rammed high up inside her in two long thrusts. "Oh Taliesin." This was what she needed. Just to be with him like this forever. He kept one hand on her waist, holding her close as she felt the fingers of his other hand now slip between the cheeks of her ass. She pushed herself as far as she could into the side of the bed to give him access. "Oh yes." One wet finger sank inside her tight anus and began to move in time with his cock thrusts. "How did I ever live without you?" She closed her eyes and just enjoyed the sensation. When Titch pulled out from her abruptly she whimpered. "What? Why?" She turned to look at him.

"I want to see your eyes as you come." Titch gathered her in his arm and gently laid her back onto the carpet.

Tilly willingly lifted her legs to encircle his waist.

"Fuck me hard." Her eyes locked with his. There was nothing hidden about her need for Titch.

He gripped her hips and lifted her toward his engorged penis.

"What about carpet burn?"

"Just a badge of honor, darlin'."

Titch threw his head back and laughed. He sank into her once more.

"Open your eyes, *cariad*."

As he drove them on to a body-shaking orgasm, neither one broke eye contact. This was all about them and what they really meant to each other. The timing and the craziness of their situation did not matter.

"I could not bear to lose you," Titch murmured as he rolled her into his arms and they gave into the last of the tremors that racked their bodies.

"You won't." She leaned in and kissed him lovingly. "I'm the annoying sort. I'm not gotten rid of easily."

* * * * *

"Hello, Matilda."

Tilly froze when she heard the man's voice. Although she had never heard the male freaks of nature speak, she knew in her gut that this was one of them. How had he got

into her house? She turned to look at the bland, pale-faced, spectacle-wearing man dressed in his business attire. He looked like the average man in the street. But then that was the freak's forte. To blend in and to be inconspicuous until the last moment. Tilly wondered if he knew that Titch had gone to his house searching for the relic in order to avoid her getting hurt.

"Ronnie," she said dismissively, assuming this was Oberon their leader. She had only had vague glimpses of him in the past and all freaks tended to look the same. Tilly thought about Rowdy in the garage doing research. She hoped she did not decide to come in. She did not want Rowdy hurt.

"My name is Oberon," he corrected, as his eyes assessed her for weaknesses.

"Same difference." Tilly stood up under his scrutiny. She would not be found wanting by him.

"You killed Jeri."

Technically she didn't but he did not need to know that.

"If ever someone needed killing it was her." Tilly was pleased how cool she sounded despite the wild beating of her heart and the crazy phantom pains that stabbed at the nonexistent fingers on her right hand. Could she bear that pain again?

Oberon looked around him as if expecting company to appear.

"Where are your lover and your friends?"

"They're here."

"Liar," he grinned knowingly.

The needle-like teeth that showed between his lips made her want to shiver but she fought the feeling.

"You don't know me well enough to call me that."

"But I'm going to get to know you intimately." Two other freaks appeared and instantly grabbed her arms.

Tilly struggled to break free as they lashed her wrists together.

"What do you want?"

"Why you, Matilda. I'm going to gobble you up. But first, we're going to have a little fun."

Tilly was lifted bodily onto the shoulder of one of the henchmen.

"She's heavy," he complained.

"That's prime flesh there." Oberon licked his lips lasciviously.

At that moment Rowdy appeared with a shotgun full of rock salt and lime. She aimed and scored a direct hit on one of the freaks. He dropped like a stone, screaming in agony as the mixture began dissolving the flesh from his bones. The other freak, who carried Tilly, threw out his hand and smacked Rowdy hard. She fell, hitting her head. The freak dropped Tilly instantly to the floor with a thump to go and eat the fallen woman.

"No, not her, you fool," Oberon hissed in warning. "That one is too powerful. She is poison to us." He dragged Matilda up by the scruff of her collar. "Come along, my dear."

Tilly was unceremoniously thrown into the trunk of the car. Although Rowdy was hurt, Tilly was pleased they had left her friend behind. She hoped they were taking her back to their place. Titch would easily find her there. That gave her hope. After a long, bumpy, twenty-minute ride, Tilly was pulled out of the trunk. Tilly looked around frantically. Where the hell was she? She could hear water lapping. She saw the council street sign—Nudgee Beach. She was not at the house the freaks had been living at and she was miles from home. How the hell would Titch find her?

* * * * *

"What are you doing here?" Argon asked as he suddenly appeared beside Titch at the home of the freaks.

"I could ask you the same." Until that moment Titch had been alone in the house. That in itself was odd. He had expected resistance but there was none. Where were the freaks?

Argon sighed in mock disappointment as he looked at the other spellbinder.

"I knew you'd go against orders."

"I've never followed your orders to the letter." Surely Argon had worked that out by now.

"Yeah, I know that." He looked at the casually dressed man before him in bemusement. "You know you've never looked like one of us."

"What? All dark and mysterious? I can live without the dramatics." Titch sized Argon up questioningly. "Why are you lurking about here?"

"I wanted to see if I could find the relic before..." Argon stopped before he said too much.

"Before Tilly made her move?" Titch filled in the rest of his words. "You like her." He knew it. What was not to like? Added to that they were amazingly similar in their stubbornness.

"Yes," Argon admitted. "But don't tell her. I like the pissy relationship we have."

"The relic isn't here." Titch was angry at the futility of his search. Clearly the freaks had cleared out of the house.

"What?" Argon asked as if it was the last thing he expected to hear.

"You heard me." Without the relic they had no bargaining power.

"Where the hell is it?" Argon stopped suddenly and tilted his head to the side as if contemplating something. His eyes snapped open wide. "Your woman is in trouble, Taliesin."

Titch started in alarm.

"How do you know?"

"Rowdy – don't ask – we need to get to her now." It took barely seconds for them to transport themselves back to Tilly's home.

"Are you okay?" Argon gently touched Rowdy's shoulder. She had a nasty bruise on her cheek and blood was in her hair.

Rowdy shrugged his hand away as if his touch was the last thing she needed.

"I'm fine."

"You took one out I see." There was an edge of pride to Argon's voice that no one missed.

Rowdy looked uncomfortable under his scrutiny.

"I can look after myself."

Argon looked at her as if he believed otherwise.

"Where did they take Tilly?" Titch was frantic. He had never felt this way before. As a spellbinder he was always in control. With Tilly missing he felt anything but. He could feel her presence but he could not pinpoint where.

"Calm down and it will come to you," Argon told him as if sensing his struggle.

Argon was right. Panic would not help. Titch closed his eyes and visualized Tilly. He could see her in a house by the sea. Two freaks were with her. One as a guard and the other was Oberon. He stiffened angrily and clenched his fists.

"He's going to rape Tilly." Titch was going to kill Oberon.

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"Take off your clothes," Oberon ordered when Tilly's hands were released from their bindings.

"Piss off," Tilly spat out at him. Like she was going to strip off at his command.

Oberon found her words highly amusing.

"I like women with spirit."

"Well, women with spirit do not like you." Tilly looked around the room to assess the exits. There was only one door and the windows were covered by metal grills. She had two freaks, who were physically stronger than her to deal with. She needed the element of surprise.

"You know, I've already seen you naked and being fucked every which way by the spellbinder." Oberon licked his bottom lip as if the thought excited him.

Oh puke. The other freak looked like he wanted to be anywhere but watching her strip and that suited her. Of course the other one just wanted to eat her, which was another problem again.

"You are disgusting." If he thought he was going to have her, he could think again. Tilly would fight him tooth and nail. She would rather die than have him inside her.

"I want a turn and I shall have a turn. Now take your clothes off."

Tilly thought quickly. She needed to divert attention until she could see a chance of escape. Added to that, there was no way she was taking her clothes off for anyone but Titch. That was a pleasure, anything else was just wrong.

"Where's the relic?" She seized on that thought.

"Oh, you know about that?"

"Yeah, show me that and I'll strip." *Really, really slowly so that you'll fall asleep in boredom.* What was it with men seeing women naked? It was not like she had anything that the average woman did not have.

"A trade-off?" Oberon asked with a small smile as if he found her situation amusing.

"But if you don't have it..." Tilly let her voice trail off as if she found it doubtful he would.

"I have it."

Males—so predictable. They always had to prove themselves.

"Show it to me then." *And hopefully I will be able to think up some amazing way to save my ass in the interim.*

"Quayle," Oberon called to his associate. "Bring in the relic."

"But Oberon." Quayle was not happy with his command.

"Do it and don't question me." Oberon waited for the other freak to return with the relic. "Show her." He smiled evilly at Tilly. "I want to indulge her before I fuck her senseless."

Tilly tried to hide the gulp of horror that caught at her throat. She would have to be senseless for him to touch her as she would not allow it if she was coherent and feeling. She looked at the small metal box that the one called Quayle held out before her. It was slightly bigger than a match box and it was old and dull as if years of people touching it has worn the surface away.

"That's it?" She was amazed when the lid was lifted to reveal a small fragment of bone that could have belonged to anyone or anything for that matter. "That's what everyone wants?"

"It's very powerful, my dear," Oberon responded, his eyes locked on her. "Now strip."

"No."

"Quayle, strip her."

She watched as the other freak pocketed the box and reached out for her. Tilly knew by the look of hatred in his eyes he would make his touch as painful as possible.

"Okay, I'll do it myself."

"Why can't we just eat her?" Quayle whined. "I'm hungry."

"I have a different hunger to satisfy first. You may leave us, Quayle. Matilda will cooperate now I'm sure."

Not bloody likely. However she would play along for the moment. She started to unbutton her blouse. She kept her thoughts on Titch. She hoped if she did so he would somehow be able to tune in to her.

"I know how much you like to be fucked, Matilda." Oberon came to stand before her, his eyes on her lace-covered breasts. "Take off the bra."

Oh fuck off. Tilly smiled at him, throwing him off guard. He smiled back. She put her hands on his shoulders, loathing the feel of him. She saw the look of desire in his eyes so she did the most obvious thing. She kneed him hard in the balls.

Oberon doubled over in pain.

"You bitch!"

"Sticks and stones, asshole," she responded as she ran to the door. Quayle appeared at the sound of the commotion and made a grab for her. Tilly slammed the door back in his face. He dropped the relic, allowing Tilly to snatch it up and start running. As she tore outside she saw the house was on the shore. She looked around wildly. The only direction to run appeared to be along the sand. Tilly ran down the wooden steps that led away from the house and across the dry sand. After a few minutes her calf muscles were killing her. Those *Baywatch* women had made running on sand look so easy. And her bra, while functional and pretty, was not one made for athletic pursuits. Her breasts were bouncing madly, threatening to take an eye out, but she had no intention of stopping. She could hear the shouts of anger behind her.

"I am not going to be anyone's fucking three-course meal." She pounded along breathlessly. Realistically she knew there was no way she could outrun the two freaks. "Taliesin, I really need you now." Tilly stumbled past some startled holiday makers. "Nice day, isn't it?" she gasped out as she shot past. They appeared to be too surprised to do anything but nod at her words. It was not every day you saw a woman in her bra and jeans running along the beach.

The relic started to heat up in her hand. Tilly took a quick glance at it. Was it her imagination or was starting to glow? She heard the freaks coming closer. They would catch up to her soon.

Suddenly a voice told her to stop. *What the?* It did not sound like Argon. He was the only one she knew who did the voice thing. Tilly kept running and fought the urge to obey. That was weird in itself as she was not the type of woman to obey anyone.

Stop.

"Look, whoever-you-are, piss off. I have my own problems to deal with." Why did she always attract the crazies?

You must stop now.

"They'll kill me. Fucking great. Now I'm talking to the voices in my head." It had to be lack of oxygen.

You will live a long time, Matilda.

"Promise?" she asked the powerful-sounding voice. She really wanted to stop before she had a heart attack.

Yes.

She skidded to a halt. Die of cardiac arrest due to running or death by freak? Both options sucked. The easiest, and no doubt craziest, option seemed to be to listen to the voice.

"What do you want me to do?"

Throw the box.

"Who the hell are you?" Everyone wanted the box but the voice in her head wanted it gone.

Throw it toward the ocean.

"Why?"

Because mankind does not need to hold onto such things. They only cause problems.

Tilly had to go along with that. She wasn't religious so she wasn't sure if she was having a religious epiphany or a dizzy spell due to lack of oxygen from running. However, she would enjoy denying the freaks the relic.

"Are you sure this is the right thing to do?" If people were looking at her Tilly did not care.

Yes, Matilda. Set it free.

"Okay then." She pulled back her arm back and threw the relic toward the waves. It flew through the air almost in slow motion.

"Cariad." Titch appeared beside her. "Was that the relic?" he questioned as he watched the small box fly in an arc toward the sea.

Argon appeared beside them.

"No," he shouted angrily as he aimed his hand at the relic and tried to pull it back but a force stronger than Argon held onto it.

"Too late." Tilly watched its slow descent. Just before it hit the waves a flash of light caught and held it before lifting it up into the air. It soared upward until it disappeared in a starburst of light.

"Holy crap." Tilly was gobsmacked.

Titch pulled her into his arms.

"Are you okay?" His eyes searched hers anxiously.

"Out of breath due to lack of exercise but no resolutions to start doing that." She smiled at him. Lord, he was a lovely man.

"You threw the relic away." Argon could not believe it.

"Get over it," Tilly told him dismissively. "Rowdy?"

"She's okay," Titch assured her.

Tilly blew out a breath in relief. She turned to see the freaks had caught up with them. It was not over yet.

"You cannot win, Oberon." Titch stood in front of Tilly to protect her.

"As long as two of us still stand we'll continue on and Tilly here will have to suffer knowing she was the cause of people dying needlessly."

Tilly stepped from behind Titch and looked at the flesh eater.

"How do you figure that, Ronnie?" Out of the corner of her eye she saw Titch grin at the name.

"If you come with us now we will not harm anyone else."

"No, she will not." Titch was most adamant on that score.

Tilly stopped still and thought about what Oberon had just said. He would continue harming people because that was what his kind did. She traded a look with Argon. He raised an eyebrow and then nodded imperceptibly as if he understood the thoughts she was directing at him. Tilly put her hand behind her back and felt the cool glass vial slip into it. Argon said nothing. He just watched and waited.

"I have to do what Oberon says. I cannot let innocent people suffer." She looked at Titch's horrified face.

"No." He tried to pull her into his arms but she pushed him away with one hand.

"This has to end." She looked at him meaningfully. Titch hesitated for a moment as if reading her thoughts then dropped his hands to his sides. He did not look happy but from the look in his eyes she felt he understood what she was going to do.

"I will go with Oberon if you promise no one else will be harmed."

"I promise," he smiled obsequiously at her.

Tilly knew his promises were full of crap. She looked at the man she loved.

"I adore you, Taliesin."

"*Cariad*, I love you."

"Very touching," snapped Oberon, his patience obviously shot. "Now come to me." He held out one pale hand toward her.

Tilly walked to him, flipping the lid off the vial as she did.

"You are mine now."

Tilly smiled sweetly at him.

"In a pig's ear, mate." She brought her hand up and around and splattered the contents of the vial over the faces and arms of Oberon and his henchman.

"What was that?" Oberon grabbed hold of Tilly.

She felt Titch's arms around her waist as he tried to pull her from him but the freak held fast.

"Just a little something we all hope is going to kill you." Oberon was holding her very tightly for someone who was supposed to be dying. "How long does this take, Argon?" She was relieved when Titch managed to pull her free.

"It should be any second now."

"I'm not happy you did that, *cariad*." Titch's mouth was a thin line of disapproval.

"I had no choice. I had to stop him."

"If I had lost you..."

"But you didn't."

They watched as Quayle fell to the ground in agony. Oberon tried to stay standing as if he was trying to fight the virus off. He looked at Tilly with venom in his eyes.

"I'll see you in hell."

"Yeah, try to wear a pink carnation so I recognize you, will you?" she answered tartly. She felt nothing but relief when he collapsed to the ground dead. There may be other freaks still out there but knowing these particular two were dead made her feel safer.

Argon waved his hands quickly and the bodies disappeared.

"We can't have dead freaks stinking up the beach."

Tilly turned to him.

"So do it."

"What?" Argon looked at her, knowing all the time what Tilly wanted.

"Give Taliesin his life back." It meant everything to him and to her. It was a new beginning they both needed.

Argon surveyed the blond man.

"Do you want that, Taliesin?"

"To be with Tilly forever?" Titch smiled at the woman who curled her hand in his. "Yes. I have done my time, Argon. I need to be with the woman I love."

Argon sighed as if he knew there was no hope of talking him around.

"It seems pretty extreme to me. I don't understand it at all."

Titch shook his head and laughed.

"Old friend, I expect you do but you're fighting it."

"Well?" Tilly looked at Argon pointedly.

"What?"

"Do it." Argon was the most frustrating – well, whatever he was. "Stop acting like an arrogant prick and give Taliesin his life back."

"It's done."

"Just like that?" Tilly asked suspiciously.

Titch laughed at her skeptical look.

"What did you expect? A fanfare? A bolt of lightning?"

"Maybe," she murmured as she looked up at him. "Do you feel different?"

Argon looked affronted.

"I don't lie, Matilda."

"Oh shush, not everything's about you, Argon." She liked the miffed expression on his face. He was okay apart from the arrogance thing.

Titch pulled Tilly into his arms and kissed her heartily.

"Yes, I feel wonderful." His eyes were tender on hers. "Thank you, *cariad*."

"What did I do?" Whatever it was she would do it again to be kissed like that.

"Oh, just about everything." Titch touched her nose playfully, the adoration clearly evident in his eyes.

"I would do anything and everything for you, Taliesin."

"Shame about the relic," Argon said, interrupting the moment between the lovers.

"There was this voice that told me to throw it." She looked out to the ocean in wonder. Had it been God or someone of that ilk? She had never contemplated the existence of such entities before, which was insane as she made a living sorting out rogue supernatural beings.

"I think it's better out of mankind's hands." Titch turned her face back to his. "Too many wars are fought over who holds religious power and a piece of bone is just a piece of bone unless people decide to worship it." He pushed a stray tendril of hair from Tilly's face. "Let's go home, *cariad*."

"What about me?" Argon sounded a little left out.

"I suspect you have stuff you need to take care of." He smiled at the dark man. "And Tilly and I have a long walk home."

She pushed back and looked at him as the reality of their situation hit her.

"That's right. You've lost all power."

"I have the power that counts, *cariad*."

Tilly touched his face tenderly.

"Yes you do."

Chapter Thirteen

"That was the longest walk of my life." It had taken them two hours to get home. She flopped onto the sofa in a heap. "I'm exhausted." At first it had started out as a nice walk with the man she loved, toward the end she had to fight hard not to accept the offer of a piggyback. Tilly had not wanted to cripple the man. She had definite plans for him when she got her second wind.

Titch reached down and pulled off her shoes and began massaging her feet.

"It's going to be odd yet good being normal again."

Tilly sighed as his fingers worked their magic on her feet.

"I don't believe you were ever normal. You are exceptional."

Titch smiled at her words.

"Thank you, *cariad*." His hands strayed up under her jeans to her calf muscles. "I'll need to get a job."

"What did you do before all this happened?"

"I was a carpenter."

Tilly was not surprised. His hands were one of the first things she noticed about Titch.

"What about you, *cariad*?"

Tilly knew she could no longer continue on with her aunt's business. Her interest was not there and she really had no talent at it anyway.

"I've never done anything else but the agency stuff. I'm not sure I would be good at anything else."

Titch moved up the sofa and leaned down toward her.

"I would love you to allow me to provide for you." He put his fingers to her lips quickly. "But I know you would never agree to that. However, I also know you would excel in whatever you chose to do." He replaced his fingers with his lips and kissed her softly.

That Titch had such faith in her made her feel all warm inside.

"Really?" She touched his face lovingly. She was looking forward to growing old with this man.

"Yes."

"You're so sweet." A sudden thought occurred to her. "Er, so if you have no more powers I guess no more instant condoms." And she certainly didn't have any in the house at the moment and really wanted one or two or even three now.

"No," Titch confirmed, a sexy, knowing smile on his face as if he knew what she was thinking.

Tilly looked into his eyes and saw such promise, love and safety there.

"That's okay, we don't need them."

"What?" Titch jerked up in concern as if that was the last thing he wanted to hear. "Whatever you're thinking please re-think it, *cariad*."

Tilly laughed at the panic-stricken look on his face.

"What? Did you think I'm going to deny myself the pleasure of your, er, company?" It was pushing most pressingly against her thigh at that moment. "I'm on the Pill." She had been for years. Not because of sex, because there had been none. It was more to sort out the level of her hormones. Normally Tilly considered it a drag having to buy and take the tablet. Now she was grateful that her doctor had insisted. "You are the only one I will ever want, so do we need condoms?" The look of pure, absolute love he gave her made her heart swell. "I want to really feel you inside me, Taliesin."

"Oh *cariad*, are you sure?"

"Positive." Tilly pushed him from her and stood up and started stripping her clothes off. She was hot and sweaty but then so was Titch. They were a perfect match in all the ways that mattered.

"I thought you were exhausted?" Titch commented as he watched her clothes drop to the carpet.

"For some things, not for others, now drop those clothes, mister."

"Yes, *cariad*." Titch did not need any further prompting. He kicked off his boots and started to rip the shirt off over his head.

"Slowly though, I've only ever seen you whip your clothes off within the blink of an eye." Tilly wanted to enjoy the show. "Mmm," she sighed as she watched him peel the shirt from his chest.

"You sound like a happy woman." His hands went down and unfastened the snap of his jeans.

There was something about a man in half-done-up jeans that made Tilly's thighs sweat. It was all that promise of what was to come. She bit her lip softly as he dropped the denim to the ground and the hard length of his cock had her entire focus. *Yum. All for me.*

"I am very happy." She walked to him. "You make me so." She plastered her body against his, the heat melding their flesh together nicely.

"What about we go into business together?" Titch ran his hands down to cup her ass.

"Your craftsmanship and my business ability?" She shook her head. "I have to tell you I suck at keeping books, paying bills and making money."

"No, you were just in the wrong business, *cariad*." He lifted her up into his arms, smiling as her legs wrapped around his body. Titch carried her forward.

"I have virtually nothing but a mortgage." She was pleased when she felt her back hit the wall. She wanted Titch in her now. Tilly pushed her hips forward in encouragement. She was so wet she was dripping with need.

"I have a little money stashed away." Titch angled her so he could penetrate her easily. "Enough to get us by for six months until things sort themselves out." He thrust hard inside her.

Tilly clutched at his shoulders and looked into his eyes. "How does an immortal being go about amassing money?" She gasped in realization. "Did you steal it?" She was not shocked. People, even immortals, did what they had to.

"It does not matter how. The fact is, I prayed that one day I would become mortal again. I wanted to be prepared."

"This is why I love you." She did not care that his thrusts were making her framed watercolor rattle against the wall. "You're smart." Tilly kissed him hungrily.

"And?" Titch asked as he continued to ram into her, ensuring their mutual need was fulfilled.

"Oh..." she moaned as the pressure inside her began to build. "And sexy. So sexy." The watercolor fell to the ground with a crash but Tilly could not care less. She was on the edge of orgasm and paintings meant very little at that moment.

"And?" Titch thrust into her one last time.

Tilly's head thunked back against the wall as the climax grabbed her and Titch's hot seed shot up into her body.

"And mine."

Epilogue

"Happy, Taliesin?" Argon smiled at his companion.

"Yes." Titch had Tilly and she was all he needed. Super powers were okay but loving Tilly was excellent. "What about you?"

Argon snorted in amusement.

"It's not within me to be happy or not happy."

"This is about Rowdy, isn't it?" Titch would have been blind not to have seen the surreptitious looks the two gave each other when they thought no one was watching.

"What a ridiculous name," Argon scoffed lightly.

"Augusta then." Titch looked at him knowingly and grinned.

"You know?" Argon sighed heavily as if the weight of the world was on his shoulders.

"It's pretty obvious." Both he and Tilly had discussed it in depth.

Argon shook his head in frustration.

"I'm not happy about it."

"I can't imagine Augusta would be either." But Titch doubted either of them had much of a say in whatever they were caught up in. Fate had a way of doing what it wanted irrespective of others' wishes.

"Why?" Argon looked affronted at his suggestion.

Titch knew, despite the arrogant persona, Argon was just as needy and sensitive as any other man. He just chose to bury it deeply within himself. The job he did and the power he commanded consumed every part of him.

"You're not exactly a catch."

"I'm not sure I want to be caught." Argon began pacing in irritation. "I like what I do. All this love stuff is different for you."

"I see." *Oh how the mighty fall.* "So what are you going to do?"

Argon blew out a deep breath.

"I have no idea. Augusta Lawrence is a hard woman to work out."

* * * * *

"I'm glad you're giving this up." Rowdy looked around their agency housed in the garage.

They'd had some good times and some bloody hard times within these walls. Tilly could not say she would miss it. She would however miss the dark-haired woman beside her.

"What are you going to do?" She looked down at Shalimar who as always was oblivious to the drama going on around her. *Oh to be a goldfish sometimes.*

"You know, I'm not sure, but I want us to stay friends." Rowdy touched Tilly's arm gently.

That was about as affectionate as they ever got with each other. They loved each other and were loyal to the end but neither liked clingy people.

"We'll definitely stay friends." Nothing would change that as far as Tilly was concerned. "You have a lot of talent, Rowdy—I mean Augusta." She wondered when the other woman would get her glasses repaired.

"I like it when you call me Rowdy."

Tilly smiled at the woman who was the least rowdy person she knew. There was such a quiet strength within her that Tilly stood in awe of her.

"What about Argon? What's the story there?"

Rowdy's mouth thinned into a determined grimace as if remembering a long-made resolution.

"That's a very long, very involved story."

"They usually are when they're important." Tilly wanted to know but she would not push. She sensed this was no lovers' tiff.

"It's all to do with fate, Tilly." Rowdy did not sound happy about it at all.

"Fate can suck."

"Yep." Rowdy picked up the stapler from the desk and toyed with it. "You know how Madam Zarina curses you when the mood takes her?"

Tilly smiled at the thought.

"Crazy old bat, I'm going to miss her."

"Do you believe in curses?"

Tilly felt a shiver run down her spine at Rowdy's words. She was not a woman to say anything random.

"No, but that doesn't mean they're not real."

"It's my fate to marry to stop a curse." The words came out of Rowdy's mouth in a soft rush.

"Fuck, really?" That was the last thing Tilly expected to hear. "Argon?" But then, who else but the dark man?

"Yes." Rowdy was not happy.

"What are you going to do?" What could she do? Fate was not something you could always fight.

Rowdy sighed deeply as if the insides of her ached with overburdened thoughts.

"I don't know. Maybe run and hide?"

Augusta was the last person Tilly imagined hiding from the hard stuff that life stuck a person with.

"Do you think it will be as easy as that?"

Rowdy shook her head and smiled a tired, small smile of resignation.

"No, I knew this day would come."

"So you'll stand and fight?" Tilly could not imagine what she would do in that circumstance.

"You have to care to do that, Tilly."

"And you refuse to care?"

"Yes." Rowdy dropped the stapler to the desk. "And fate be damned."

About the Author

Amarinda Jones believes anything is possible and sometimes just asking for the impossible will surprise someone enough that they will give it to you. Writing is like that. Put it out there and wait for a response. There is always the possibility you may fall on your ass, but after all, that's what cellulite is for. Amarinda believes in taking chances, speaking her mind and aging disgracefully. Twenty years from now she plans on being the neighborhood witch that all the kids are scared of. But then, everyone has to have a hobby.

Amarinda 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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