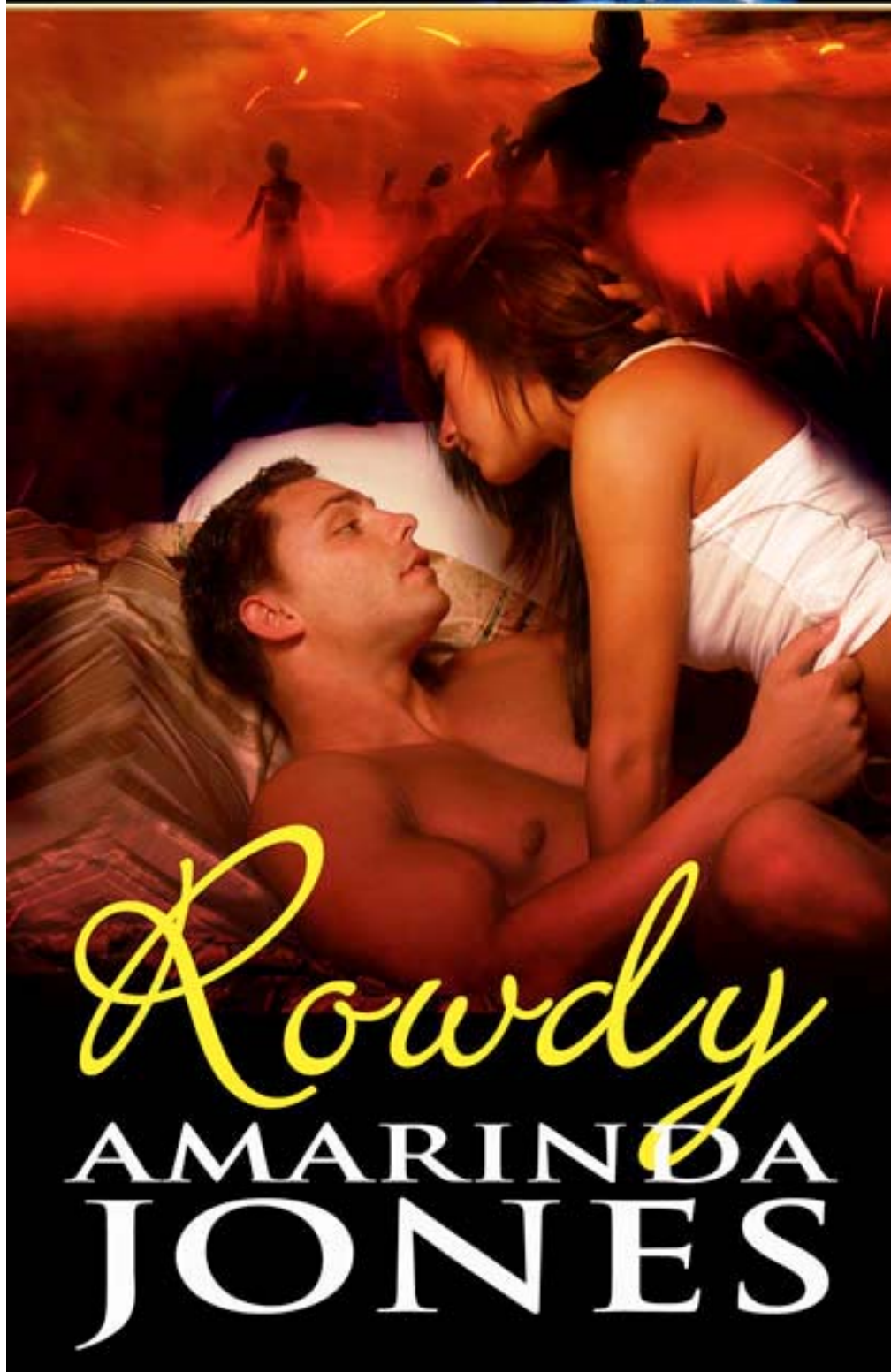


ELLORA'S CAVE TWILIGHT



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Rowdy

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ROWDY

Amarinda Jones

Dedication

To every woman who knows in her heart that “the one” exists and will not accept pale imitations.

And, as always, to the loyal Amarinda Jones readers. As we’d say in Australia, you are beaut.

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Prologue

From this day forth, no Cardissan will be able to resist the lure of the Law-giver. Fate will bring them together when the Law-giver is three decades old and only if so chosen will death separate them. In their great need to be one, worlds will collide and the cost of what they do will wreak havoc on many. Bond they must and great hardship and danger will they endure. Their weakness will be their strength and many will suffer because of it. Only through the bonds of matrimony will the fate of many be made right and no curse be brought to bear on the innocent.

English translation of The Karmic curse circa 1471AD brought down by the witch Hester le Juriste burnt at the stake in the village of Plum, by order of the Fifth Earl of Cardissan.

* * * * *

2009 – Just over a week ago.

When his tongue touched her clit, Augusta threw back her head and screamed. Her long dark brown hair twisted underneath her as she clutched at the broad shoulders of the man who licked and sucked insistently on her soft flesh. Her chocolate brown eyes were focused on him as her fingers threaded through his shoulder-length hair. Augusta squirmed under him. She was on fire with a need so raw that denying it seemed impossible.

“Oh my,” she panted as she tried hard to keep what was left of her control. “Please...” She shivered at the wild sensations that shot through her body. Augusta knew she should make him stop and yet she could not give the command to do so for it was against every instinct and feeling she had at that moment. “Oh please...”

He looked at her, his dark eyes full of deep desire.

“Anything you want I will do.” His hands stroked her outer thighs as he lifted her legs up to lock around his waist.

Augusta was completely open and exposed to this man and any rational thoughts about what she was allowing him to do to her were but fleeting. The feel of his hard cock on her inner thigh made her want him to thrust inside her deeply and never come out.

“I want—”

“What?” He leaned forward, his hands moving from her thighs to her stomach and stopping to caress the mounds of her breasts.

She sighed at the exquisite feel of his touch. *I am made for him only.*

"I want you to love me." To her own ears, her voice sounded desperate but she needed him to understand how important this moment was to her.

He smiled softly as if he did.

"I always have and I always will. You are my true love."

True love. Yes, that was what this was. Augusta pushed her body against his wanting more, trying to entice his shaft to fill her as she craved.

"What if—" Was this too perfect? She looked at him in panic. Nothing in her life had ever been this glorious.

The man tenderly pushed back the hair from her face and kissed her lingeringly.

"There are no what ifs between us. You are mine as I am yours."

"Make love to me."

"I can't." There was a tortured sound of regret in his voice. "This is not the time. But soon, very soon..." He pulled her lower body up to meet his mouth as his lips fastened on her clit and he sucked hard.

Another scream tore through her. Augusta tried to hold her lover to her but he was dissolving in her arms until there was nothing left but her and an empty bed with twisted sheets. She curled into a ball and closed her legs together tightly as if trying to keep in the wondrous feeling that assailed her.

"Soon," she murmured as she drifted off to sleep, knowing it was inevitable that their worlds would collide.

* * * * *

The next day, Augusta "Rowdy" Lawrence stopped dead in her tracks when she saw him. The man from her dream. The man she had dreaded meeting, up to this point in her life. A dream was one thing but reality another and her reality sucked.

"Oh crap." The dread in her voice made everyone look at her in wonder. The Cardissan. It had to be. *Not now. I cannot deal with him now. I need more time.* She swallowed hard on the nervous hiccup that caught in her throat. It was the one thing that gave away that she was scared. Normally she controlled it well and no one ever knew what she felt. But then Argon Cardissan was not just anyone. He held a power over her life that so few held. Augusta pushed her glasses up her nose and girded her loins for the battle that was to come.

"Rowdy this is Argon, he is the Grand Poobah of the spellbinders." Tilly Moor looked quite pleased when the man in question scowled at her words.

"Yes I know." Augusta's voice was tight with barely contained emotion. Every instinct screamed at her to flee yet she knew she had to remain calm. Surely that was a dream last night? *He couldn't have... I wouldn't have... There was no way.* Her thighs started to sweat just thinking about that dream.

Argon's eyes were riveted on the dark haired woman as if he could not believe who he saw.

"Hello, Augusta."

"Do you two know each other?" Tilly looked surprised at her friend's reaction.

"No." Augusta was most insistent on that fact. She did not want to explain how or why. That he was suddenly in her life was more than enough to deal with. Augusta again pushed her broken, taped-together specs back up her nose and glared at him as if daring him to disagree with her.

"No," agreed Argon with a slight tinge of amusement to his voice.

"Okay then," Tilly murmured in confusion. "Argon here wants me to walk into something I know will be dangerous."

Rowdy's eyes never left Argon's.

"I would assume Argon would know that forcing people into situations does not work."

"Sometimes you have no choice." Argon's voice was full of meaning.

"Everyone has free will," Rowdy snapped at him. *Arrogant sod. I will not submit to you. Curse or no curse.*

"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."

Two others looked on from afar.

"Those two are destined to be together. They have no choice, Amarantha. You know that."

Amarantha Lawrence, of the family of Law-givers, looked at the couple who faced each other warily.

"Yes but—"

"It was no different for you or me." James Cardissan kissed his beloved's hand, his dark eyes passionate on hers. "We were meant to be together."

"That was a very long time ago James and the world was different." *Was I ever that young?* Amarantha sighed and slipped her hand into his. The warmth still thrilled her after so many centuries. "Our time was not so hard and uncaring."

"Every century has its problems, dear one."

That was true and they had seen terrible things happen as each decade passed. She did not doubt that this latest incarnation of Cardissan and Law-giver or Lawrence as they had chosen to be known, would battle what they faced and be stronger for it or perish like the very first of their kin.

"Hester was too strong for the lord of the manor."

"Aye, he was felled by passion. It can do that to a man."

"And a woman." Amarantha knew that only too well. It had worked out for her and James but it was not always that way for the Cardissans and the Lawrences. Not everyone would marry. Not everyone had the strength to face their fate.

"Augusta is thirty in just over a week. You know what that means. I worry about my kinswoman. It has not been easy for her. They must marry but she will fight it."

James nodded in agreement.

"Yes they must and she will lead him on a merry dance. I can see the Lawrence stubborn streak in her eyes." He smiled lovingly at the woman beside him. "What do they call her again?"

"Rowdy."

"Ha! Just like her ancestress." James kissed Amarantha lingeringly.

She pushed her hands half-heartedly at his chest.

"Oh, you Cardissan men are all the same." And she would not change one second of her time with him.

"Adorable?" James asked with a twinkle in eye.

"Arrogant," she responded coolly.

He pulled her to him and hugged her as if never wanting to let go.

"Yes, but then immortality does that to a man."

Amarantha did not want to see this child suffer the fate of Hester and the other Lawrence women who had died because of love. *This one is special. I know she is.* When the immortal Cardissan line met the mortal Lawrences the outcome was never certain. Over the years the line had diluted and the strength with it, leaving the weak to die because of their passions. But these two had a strength that would carry them past the passion.

"Do you think he will give it up his immortality for her?"

"Yes." There was no hesitation at all in his voice.

"You are so certain?"

"I gave it up for you." James touched her face gently. "If I hadn't I would not be with you now. I never thought I'd make it to heaven."

"Yes, I was surprised," Amarantha quipped arching her eyebrow at him. "You Cardissans do err on the side of Hell."

"But you love me."

"Yes, forever." She kissed him like it was her first taste of him and she could not get enough.

"I expect she won't make it easy on him. You law-givers never do."

"We Lawrence women expect the very best and we get it." The proof of that was the man standing at her side. He was everything that she wanted and never would she regret making the choices she had.

"Looking at the latest line in Cardissans, he's got the bluff and the arrogance but he hasn't got a chance." James shook his head as if in memory of another time.

"No, Augusta will bring Argon to his knees."

"And he will love every second of it."

Chapter One

Two days later

"What do you want?" Augusta was neither alarmed nor surprised when Argon Cardissan appeared magically out of the blue in her apartment. She just eyed him coolly through her smudged, taped-together spectacles. Maybe it was the wine she was drinking or the strawberry cheesecake ice cream she was eating straight from the carton that had temporarily shored up her crumbling defenses. Besides it was not like she hadn't been expecting him. For nearly a week, Argon had been hovering around her as if waiting for something. It was as if he was considering his options, her reactions and the right time to make his move. As far as Augusta was concerned there was no right time. He was just another problem in her life – albeit rapidly becoming her number one problem – she had to worry over. *I will be calm. I will not hiccup. I will not fear him. He is just a man. He means nothing to me.*

"You know what I want – what we are fated to do."

"Well, you're not going to get it from me and fate can go screw itself," Augusta snorted in contempt as she sucked down another spoonful of the pink ice confectionery. *Why couldn't he look ugly or smell?* Why did his dark, passionate eyes and wavy black hair, that just kissed his broad shoulders, call to her in such a way that her body heated up just looking at him? She kept her eyes on his face. To allow them to travel down the length of his tall, lean body would be inviting trouble. He was dark in that brooding Heathcliff way. Augusta wondered if their children would look the same. *Frig, stop thinking of kids.* You had to have sex to do that and she was keeping her legs closed on that one. So far it had worked better than any condom.

Argon sighed softly in frustration as if he did not want to fight this argument with her again.

"Augusta we have no choice in this."

"Yes, and how bloody romantic that sounds." She had known this would happen around her thirtieth birthday but that did not mean she liked it or was going along with it. She was not an aggressive person by nature, but she planned to fight this for all it was worth. *And I'm not thirty yet. I will not be a victim of fate like the others of my kin.* A week could make a world of difference.

"Do you want romance, Augusta True?" He smiled as if the idea appealed to him.

"Don't call me that." *Especially not in that deep, husky tone.* It sent a shiver down her spine.

"You are my true love. Would you prefer I call you 'Rowdy' as Tilly does?"

Augusta balanced the carton of ice cream between her pajama clad knees and poured herself another glass of wine from the bottle at her side. She needed to look calm and not threatened by him. She chugged down a slug of wine. *Give me whatever I need to handle this now.*

"That true love crap is all a fable and I plan to take no notice of it." Just as she went to take another sip of her wine the glass disappeared from her hand. "Hey, mystical-almighty-powerful-pain-in-the-ass being, no party tricks with my wine."

"Getting drunk is not going to change things." Argon waved his hand and also made the bottle disappear.

"It can't hurt." He was right though. The problem, Argon, would still be there tomorrow, whether she was drunk or sober.

"What are you scared of?"

"Not you." They both knew she had said it too quickly to be convincing. "I just don't want my fate determined by a fairytale from 1471."

"I was not pleased myself. Like you I knew this would happen one day. Being immortal does not give me the power to stop fate, Augusta."

"Yeah but you've had a century to think about this." Surely he could have come up with a plan to stop it? What was the point of being an immortal spellbinder, ruler of many, if you could not manipulate things your own way?

Argon chuckled at her words.

"I have been rather busy stopping wars, solving problems and saving nations to have had time to think about what would happen when you turned thirty."

"You knew it would be me?" While Augusta had never known exactly who the Cardissan would be who was destined to crash into her life, she knew the moment they had met last week at Tilly's home that he was the one and it had terrified her down to her toenails.

"No, only that I would be called to you when the moment was right."

"I'm not thirty yet." Not that it made much difference. Argon was here and she had to deal with him.

"In a week you are."

"I'm not going to marry you." It was crazy. The thought of having this man in her life forever scared the bejeezus out of her. *Stuff the curse.* The hiccups she had been holding back let fly in wild torment.

Argon grinned indulgently.

"We'll see."

"It's not even that we like, let alone love, each other." *Hiccup.*

"No, not straight away I didn't."

What did that mean? He loved her now? The man was demented. Love did not come that fast and if it did it was suspicious.

"You barely know me." Augusta was not dumb enough to think he was suddenly besotted with her. Argon was immortal. He had probably had hundreds of women falling at his feet begging him to love them and she wasn't about to fall in a heap for any man, let alone him.

"Can't you see that fighting this is just a waste of time, Augusta True?"

Militantly she refused to believe she could not change her fate. Just because her kinswomen hadn't been able to didn't mean she had to follow suit.

"Anyway...whatever." It was a half-assed answer but then the man made her nervous and her intelligence seemed to have deserted her momentarily. She watched as he moved toward her where she sat on the sofa. "What are you doing?" *Hiccup, hiccup, hiccup.* He was getting way too close for comfort.

Argon waved his hand and a glass of water appeared in Augusta's hand. She gulped it down quickly.

"I want to sit down." He sat down on the sofa cushion beside her.

Augusta clutched the now empty glass as if for protection.

"What's wrong with the chair over there?" *I will not hiccup. I am in control.*

"You're not over there, Augusta True." Argon reached over and took the carton of ice cream from between her knees.

Hiccup.

The ice she had been relying on to keep her cool was suddenly replaced by a warmth that shot up Augusta's spine as she felt the heat radiating from his body where his thigh brushed hers. She closed her legs together quickly.

"Nervous?" He dipped into the strawberry ice cream and ate from her spoon. "Mmm, delicious." Argon looked directly at her.

Hiccup, hiccup, hiccup. Oh the sexy, knowing smile. She knew, the first time she saw him, it would be her undoing.

"I..." *What the hell was I going to say? God he smells good. Is that sandalwood? Are you going to do what you did to me in that dream? Lord, mental head slap, get a grip woman!*

"Yes Augusta True?" Argon leaned into her, his lips a bare kiss away from hers. He gently plucked the spectacles from her nose and smiled at the crude repair job holding them together. "You're so cute."

Hiccup.

"Um, you should go." *If I kiss him I am surely doomed.* She moved backward from him.

"Should I?"

Hiccup.

What was he asking? Should he go? *Hiccup.* Should he kiss her? *Hiccup.* Augusta was not the most rational person to answer those questions at the moment. All she

could think of was that fate was a bastard to put her in this position. *Bloody Hester and her words of doom.*

"Yes." *What am I saying yes to? "Er, you should, you know. Go, I mean." Hiccup.*

"Oh, Augusta True this can't be stopped." Argon caught her in his arms before she had a chance to stop him and kissed her.

When their lips met and bonded, time seemed to stand still. The most wondrous heat flooded her body. It was like new life was being breathed into her. All her nerve endings were alive with a crazy electricity that surged into her blood and made her push forward for more of the sweet, insistent suction of his mouth on hers. It would have been impossible not to melt into the arms that held her so gently, yet possessively against his chest. *He is mine. I am his.* Was that the truth or was she being seduced by skilful kisses into believing something that a moment ago she would never have acknowledged? Augusta pushed at his biceps to free herself.

"Stop it," she panted frantically.

"Why?" Argon placed a line of soft kisses down her throat as his hands moved slowly up and down her back, stroking her body.

"I...ah—" *Oh Lord how am I supposed to concentrate when he does that? "I don't want you or this." Though his warm breath against her ear was mighty nice. Hiccup.*

"Liar." He took control of her mouth once more.

As their tongues met, Augusta's hands curled around his neck and whatever thoughts she had about fighting him disappeared as she responded with a wild hunger she wasn't even aware she was capable of. It was like her starved senses recognized the desire that she had been denying for so long. *This is wrong, yet so right.*

"Hiccups gone?" Argon murmured, as they drew apart, both breathing deeply. His eyes were knowing on hers.

"Uh-huh," she mumbled in a daze. The raw need she saw in his eyes dazzled her. Could any woman do this to him? He was a sexually potent male. Was this more than just raw physical attraction and anticipation of sex that had them both momentarily blinded by lust?

"It's all you Augusta True," he affirmed her unanswered question. "You and I are an unbeatable combination." He placed soft wet, kisses against her mouth

And then the truth hit her with an astonishing clarity. It *was* both of them. Neither would feel this way without the other. *No Cardissan will be able to resist the lure of the Law-giver.* Was she drawn to him because the curse had been so long a part of her life or did she truly want him as a man? Why couldn't she just have had convict ancestors like a normal Australian?

"Argon," Augusta gasped as she felt his hands descend on her braless breasts under her pajama top. The feel of them molding her flesh was exquisite. She made herself push back from him once more and grabbed his hands. In doing so, her own became engulfed in his. "This is crazy." His body was pressed against hers and she

could feel his cock straining hard against the fabric of his trousers. She had the urge to know what it would feel like inside her and that was sheer madness.

"You feel so good."

"So do you... I mean we have to stop." Augusta didn't want to but she knew the minute his body claimed hers, it would be forever and she wasn't sure she was ready for eternity with this man.

"What do you feel at this moment?"

Hiccup, Hiccup. "I don't know." She was hot, scared and confused. Her thoughts were in a mess and making any grand decisions at that moment seemed dangerous.

"Be honest, Augusta True." Argon's eyes locked on hers as he pulled their entwined hands to rest against his heart.

She saw so much in those eyes that she wanted to believe. Passion, need and love. But could she? And should she? Did she want him because she believed she had no choice or was the hunger she felt natural and meant to be?

"Hester's curse —"

"It's just words." Argon kissed her lingeringly.

"That brought you here." Augusta knew that without the curse they may never have met.

"This has everything to do with who we are and you know it."

She ran her tongue over her lips as if savoring the taste of him.

"But it brought us to this point." *Would I be considering anything with him if not for the curse? Why this man and not the others who had crossed my path? Because he is the one. Fairytale or curse? Or am I so desperate to be loved that any man will do?*

"Maybe that's true but I need you and not because of some words a condemned woman spoke centuries ago. Can you honestly say you do not feel the same?"

At that moment Augusta ached with a need she had not realized she was capable of. She had deliberately made her world so safe and sterile that any strong emotion was alien to her and she was unsure how to channel it. She had learned not to need any one person and yet all she wanted at that moment was this man. Why him when she had resisted every other man?

"I dreamed —" She stopped when she realized what she was about to say. *That I had sex with you that I want to try it again awake and aware and I want it to be real.*

"What did you dream?" His eyes were locked on hers as if he knew her thoughts.

"Nothing." This was all too soon. "I've never —" Augusta immediately halted the admission that sprung to her lips. She hiccupped madly and blushed. Argon kissed her with a tenderness that astonished her. *How does he know what I need?*

"I know."

"What?" How could he know she had taken no lovers? She was almost thirty years old and pathetically a virgin in a day and age where it was most definitely not the

norm. Augusta had always told herself the reasons behind that were many and complex, and yet when she looked into his eyes she knew he was the only reason there had been no one else. No one else was supposed to touch her but him. The thought that someone could have such a power over her scared her. Harsh reality told her to fight what she was feeling but instinct told her it was useless.

"I know everything about you." Argon's voice sounded confident.

"How?"

"Because you've always been mine." Argon smiled at her confusion as he pushed her back into the sofa. "And you know that, despite every word you may throw at me. We are meant to be together."

Augusta's back hit the cushions and the gentle weight of his body on hers made her gasp. He was hard and hot and despite knowing this was all too fast and too soon she also knew it could not be stopped.

"Love is not as difficult as you want to make it." Argon's fingers stroked her cheek softly.

"Love?" *He thinks he loves me?*

"Of course it is. What else could it be between us?"

Before she could contemplate his words any further Argon waved his hand and they were suddenly standing in her bedroom. Or was it? It looked like hers but not. Hundreds of candles flickered softly and rose petals were strewn over her bed. *Hiccup, hiccup.*

"Ah, this is a tad clichéd." And awkward and yes, very sweet and romantic, but she was no sexual sophisticate who could drop her clothes and take any man no matter how romantic the setting. *But he's not just any man is he? And damn, those petals are going to take forever to clean up.*

"I want our first time together to be memorable." His hands linked with hers as he pulled her against his body.

Argon could have taken her in front of the television with the cricket droning on in the background and it would have been unforgettable. Augusta felt his hands unbuttoning her pajama top. She grabbed them to still their progress.

"Please stop." No one had ever seen her naked and the thought of it made her nervous. "I ah..." *Hiccup, hiccup.* "I don't want you to..." *Hiccup.*

"See you? Touch you? Taste you?" Argon smiled in soft understanding. He clicked his fingers and his clothes disappeared leaving him naked.

Hiccup, hiccup, hiccup.

"Oh, Argon," her words were choked by shock and awe and hiccups. Of course Augusta had seen naked men before in pictures but none of them had looked like Argon. He was so tall and muscular with a solidness that made her feel hot and needy and yet protected at the same time. She looked at his erection and subconsciously licked her lips as she imagined that hard cock inside her. It was taut, on edge and pointed

skywards. *Hiccup*. "Good grief." She felt her heart pound with excitement just at the thought of him inside her.

"Touch me." Argon reached out and pulled her hand to his chest.

His skin felt like velvet yet there was a hardness underneath her hand that belied that. The fine sprinkling of hair she felt sent a thrill her up back as she imagined it against her breasts.

"You are beautiful." There was no other word to describe it. Her mouth felt dry and her heart pounded wildly. Augusta wasn't sure what love was but she was certainly feeling lust.

Argon chuckled at her words.

"That's not something I have been called before."

He was right. It probably sounded gauche and naïve. She blushed as she realized she was a grown woman gobsmacked over a naked man. For God's sake not many women were still a virgin at thirty. *But for him...*

"Other women –"

"Are not you and there will be no other for me but you ever again." Argon's voice was adamant on that score. "Now you have seen me, Augusta True, I need to see you.

Oh boy. *Hiccup*.

"Ah, well you see, I'm kind of pudgy and –"

"Please, for me."

The soft, loving way he said that made her want to drop her clothes instantly if not for the spiral of panic that was shooting through her body. This was what she had been waiting for all those years and yet the thought panicked her. *Once I take this man we are destined to be together for life*.

"I'm scared." That was the plain truth of it.

"Why?"

Augusta shook her head. There were so many reasons why. It was him and the curse and the fact that to need someone made her feel vulnerable. But he did not need to know that. Weaknesses could be exploited.

"I don't know." Before she could say anything else, Argon waved his hands and her clothes disappeared. Augusta gasped in shock. "Hey!" *Hiccup, hiccup*. She tried to cover herself with her hands but he pulled them away from her body. Her face was hot as his eyes roamed her naked body and then locked with hers.

"Now you are true beauty."

Hiccup. Augusta felt she was anything but. She had big hips, a fat ass and her breasts had never been perky.

"You need your eyes tested."

"There is nothing wrong with what I see." Argon took her hand and drew her over to the full length, oval mirror beside her dressing table. He moved her in front of him and came to stand close behind her. "Every inch of you is lickable."

Augusta jumped forward in surprise as his hard cock made contact with her bottom.

"This is embarrassing." And yet the prodding cock was exciting in a forbidden kind of way.

"Relax, Augusta True." Argon pulled her back against him, their bodies pressed tightly together. He sighed at the contact. "It's just you and me and neither of us can harm the other." His hands encircled her waist and came to rest on the swell of her stomach. "Just relax." Argon eyes locked with hers. "Do you know what I see?"

Augusta shivered and shook her head, trembling at his touch and the heat their bodies created.

"I see a body that is meant to give and receive love. I see generous comfort and great beauty." His hands moved up to cup her full breasts. "I want to suck these so badly that I could come against you now just at the thought of it. I want to taste every part of you and feel you squirming beneath me. I adore hips that I can grasp and generous, real women's thighs to lie between. I want your legs wrapped around my body as I take you hard and fast, soft and slow. I need you Augusta and the thought that you may deny me would kill me."

Augusta was amazed at his words and the love in his eyes. *I'm all that to him? He needs me?* Was this what he really felt? What he needed? He was saying everything she wanted to hear and it scared Augusta because she wasn't sure if she could believe it.

"Really?" She trembled as his lips touched the skin on her neck. Augusta turned in his arms and looked at him. Who was he really? Was he the man she had feared all these years or was he the lover that his sweet words suggested?

"Oh hell yeah and your ass is spectacular." His hands caressed the flesh in question. "I have many thoughts about what I can do to this ass." Argon chuckled as she jumped in shock. "But most of all I want to bury myself inside you and just be with you as I know we are meant to be."

"Why me?"

"I have been alive more years than I care to remember and yes there have been other women but not *the* woman for me—not the woman I want to laugh with, make love to or to have children with."

It was everything she wanted to hear and yet everything she feared.

"Oh, Argon I'm scared." She was more scared of herself than him. Augusta had denied wanting anyone for so long that it felt like a dam was going to burst and swamp her. *And I don't want to make a mistake. But then I don't want to miss out either.*

"I know but I'll never hurt you." He picked her up in his arms and carried her over to the bed, his mouth on hers kissing her with a passion that made her cling to him as if

nothing else mattered at that moment. Argon laid her down on the bed and then moved to lie beside her.

This was just like the dream but better. Augusta was awake and completely aware of everything. When his lips suctioned onto one pert nipple she gasped at the sensation.

"I shouldn't," she moaned as she held his head to her breast. *How can I walk away from him after this?*

"Why not?" Argon let go of her nipple with a loud wet pop of satisfaction. His eyes met hers.

"I don't know you." *So why do I have this overwhelming need to have you?* She unconsciously opened her legs, inviting him to lie within.

Argon immediately accepted the invitation, settling himself down so the full length of their bodies touched.

"Yeah you do. You just don't know yourself." One of his hands rose up to cup her chin.

He had the most expressive eyes. When Argon looked at her like she was the most beautiful woman on the planet she wanted to believe him

"W-what?"

"You have let no man touch you like this and why is that?"

Hiccup, hiccup. His hands were now sliding down her body setting all her nerve endings alight with anticipation.

"Because it was always meant to be me and you knew that deep in your soul, Augusta True." Argon lifted her legs and pulled them up around his hips.

This was just like her dream. "Is this real?" She spoke the words without meaning to.

"It is an awakening." Argon pulled her body up to his and trailed a path with his tongue from her breast down to the curls at her pussy.

Augusta gripped the sheet beneath her as instant heat shot through her veins. She knew she had the power to stop him but for the life of her she couldn't.

"Why me?" she panted out as she felt the hot breath from his mouth on the inside of her thighs.

"Because I have always loved you."

When his tongue touched her clit Augusta shrieked loudly. It was exactly like the dream as his lips moved over the pink inner flesh licking and sucking. She writhed beneath him trying to get closer to him. Her body tightened like a bowstring as a thrill of pleasure shot through her. It was followed by the most wondrous feeling of contentment.

"Oh, Argon..." His hands and mouth were all over her body and she felt utterly, wantonly powerless to stop him. This man was so wrong for her in so many ways and yet if he stopped what he was doing she would be devastated.

"Are you ready for me, Augusta True?" Argon's voice was hoarse with contained passion as his eyes met hers.

"Yes." There was no other possible answer she could give. Augusta needed him and to deny herself that would be denying the truth of her feelings. "Um, condom?" It wasn't the most romantic thing to say but sex was one thing, unplanned babies were another.

"Of course." Argon waved his hand and one appeared. "Do you want to put it on or are you not ready for that just yet?" He smiled wickedly as she shook her head. "We have plenty of time to learn more about each other Augusta True."

As impossible as it seemed, the thin membrane of rubber managed to fit over his straining shaft without tearing.

"Amazing." Augusta licked her lips as she looked at his cock. All that was going inside her. *Is this even possible?*

"Oh, it will fit very nicely I assure you." Argon positioned her legs around his hips and the tip of cock at the wet core of her. "Ready?" He laughed suddenly. "You're gritting your teeth. It's not the Inquisition you know."

"I'm just —"

"I know." Argon linked his hands with hers and raised them over her hands as he started to slide within.

Augusta eyes locked with his as he entered her. She could see everything he was feeling and for one second she wanted to cry because his eyes were so soft and tender on hers.

"Augusta True?" He stopped in concern.

"Don't stop, Argon." The heat of his penis pushing into her made her body stretch, welcoming the fullness of him. It was almost like it recognized this was some missing part she had been needing. Augusta had heard the expression of two becoming one but she never really understood it until now. His total full possession of her body made her stiffen in shock but his mouth sought hers to soothe whatever discomfort she felt.

Once fully inside Argon stopped. "Okay?" He kissed her lips lingeringly.

"Oh yes." It was the first time in her life that Augusta felt beyond okay. She actually felt loved and as crazy as that was she wanted to experience every second of what she had right now.

"Want more?" Argon's voice was low and husky with the sound of a man barely in control. His hands unlinked with hers and caressed her breast.

Augusta sighed with pleasure. "Oh, Argon." This was almost too perfect. Normally perfection worried her but right now she wanted to think of only him and her and nothing else.

Argon grinned at her and kissed her nose. "That's my girl. Hang on Augusta True."

Her hands sought out his ass and gripped it as he started to move within her. The rocking sensation had a primal rhythm that Augusta started to pick up and she began to move with him.

"You are so lovely," Argon growled as his mouth lowered onto her breast and sucked on her nipple.

Somewhere in the back of her mind, Augusta remembered her best friend Tilly telling her first time at sex was awful.

"This is perfect," she murmured out loud not meaning to do so. Never had she imagined that she would ever feel this close to anyone. It was not just her body joining to his, it was kindred spirits meeting and acknowledging a deeper connection. Her body was on fire and she knew at that moment she would never be the same again. When she heard Argon chuckle she blushed slightly.

"It always will be so for us."

"Oh, Argon," she gasped as the orgasm hit. *What was happening?* Augusta's whole body felt like it was going to explode. It was like nothing she had ever imagined. The intense feeling of pleasure radiated all over her body making her shake as she tried to keep pace with it. She clutched Argon to her never wanting him to leave. This was why she had waited. She knew no other man could ever make her feel like this. Augusta felt his body stiffen and his cock jerk inside her as he came. Her eyes met his.

"Don't leave me," she whispered breathlessly.

"I will never leave you." There could be no more solemn promise to Argon than that. As much as he wanted to stay locked inside Augusta he knew it would be uncomfortable for her. He withdrew from her body, waving the spent condom away, and rolled onto his side, pulling her into his arms. Despite walking the Earth for centuries, he had never felt more alive then he did at that moment lying beside Augusta. "I love you." He smiled softly when he saw the panicked realization in her eyes. He knew he was not the only one feeling the intensity of the emotion that engulfed them. *Excellent.* "This is for you, Augusta True," Argon waved his hand again and a ring appeared. He picked up her hand and slid the ring on the appropriate finger on her left hand. It was never too soon for a Cardissan male to claim the woman he loved for they never changed their minds once made up. Augusta was his woman.

"It's beautiful." Augusta gasped in amazement as she stared down at the solid platinum band that adorned her ring finger like a promise of more to come. The twisted vine-like band was thick and studded with glittering diamonds. It ran from the base of her finger to her knuckle.

Good, he wanted to shock Augusta. He was going to have much pleasure in initiating his woman into the delights of love making. He, too, remembered the dream she mentioned briefly and was pleased she had. Although it was impossible for him to sleep, as immortals did not need to, there had been a moment when he had gone to look at the sleeping Augusta. But one thing led to another and temptation had gotten hold of

him. The need to touch and taste her had been overwhelming. It had taken all his control not to make love to her then as she had writhed uncontrollably beneath him. Argon wanted her but he wanted her awake, willing and aware for he would not take her otherwise.

Argon knew by the sleepy, sensual look in her eyes that Augusta was as content as he. As much as he longed to plunge back inside her, he refrained for he knew she would be sore from his possession. That she had waited for him to be her only lover filled him with power and pride and yes, sheer male delight. *My woman. My lover. My wife.*

"It is a Cardissan tradition to give a token of affection to his lover." Argon did not add that a Cardissan only presented his bride with such a ring and once on, it meant they were married and that ring would never come off. Whether Augusta chose to believe it or not, they were meant to be together. Argon was more certain of that than ever. His eyes ran over her beautiful, naked flesh and he thanked Hester for her curse. Maybe others fought their fate, but Argon embraced it with a passion that surprised him. *I have waited long, lonely centuries for you my love.* He lifted her hand and kissed her palm. *With this ring, I thee wed.* The bond they now had would never be broken. Once married, Cardissans never divorced.

"Why give this ring to me?" Augusta looked uneasy as she sat up, clutching the sheet to her body as if suddenly aware she was naked and with whom.

"You know why." Argon sat up with her, not surprised when she let out a wild series of hiccups. He smiled as she tried to pull the ring from her finger as if the significance of it suddenly occurred to her.

"Look, we had sex." *Hiccup.* "I do not expect any commitment from you." *Hiccup.*

Even her hiccups were cute to Argon.

"But I expect it from you, my love." He had a feeling it was going to be fun seducing Augusta into giving into what they both wanted. He hadn't been challenged by anything really meaningful for years.

"If this is just because you were the first—" *Hiccup.* She yanked furiously at ring.

"And the only one ever for you."

"That's pretty old fashioned—*hiccup*—of you."

"As are you Augusta True. I like that you waited for me." If there had been another, it would not have mattered for in the end Augusta Lawrence was always meant to be his woman. But Argon had to admit there was this primitive and masculine feeling of possession that he had about being her one and only. It was not something he took lightly.

"Oh for God's sake, I was not waiting for you." *Hiccup.* "Why won't this damn ring come off?"

"Because you are the true owner." Argon just smiled when she let fly and slapped his chest. He caught and held her hand against his bare flesh.

"Did you do some magical thing to it?" She tried to pull her hand out from under his.

"The only power that holds it in place is the power of you and me and our unbreakable love for each other."

"Now you sound like a greeting card." Augusta yanked her hand free. Toppling backward as she did. "I think you should leave." She folded her arms over her bare breasts to cover them.

"We cannot go back." Argon had no intention of doing so. He eyes slid down her creamy flesh to the uncovered juncture of her thighs. He longed to taste her once more and while the look she gave him was "don't even think about it" he knew it would take very little to have her writhing under him in passion once more. *But now is not the time, man.*

"And we cannot go forward." Augusta crossed her legs tightly as if she suspected where his thoughts were headed.

Argon leaned down over her, his body lightly skimming hers.

"How I adore you." He kissed her nose teasingly.

"Piss off," Augusta enunciated with clear intent.

"I'll be back." That was a promise. Argon would be with Augusta come hell or high water, curse or no curse. "You are mine, Augusta True."

"Oh fuck, what have I done?" she muttered as he disappeared from the room.

Chapter Two

Present day

"Fucking curse," Augusta Lawrence swore and then hiccupped as she slammed the Markwell file in beside T for Taylor in the filing cabinet. She had long since given up worrying whether the filing was alphabetical or not. How could she concentrate on names when she kept seeing that ring on her finger? It was taunting her, reminding her of what she had done. "What an idiot you were." She hiccupped again, dumping all the files but one into a heap on the floor, as she leaned against the metal cabinet and stared at the ring on her finger. It was beautiful. It was the sort of ring any normal woman would kill to have. "But I'm not normal and neither is he." He. Argon Cardissan. Just thinking of him made her feel wet. "Great now, I'm not only depressed but horny." She sighed heavily and filed Xenides under C beside Cartwright.

But then uncertainty made you do dumb things like jump into bed with the sexy, forbidden man and take on an incredibly boring filing job like she was doing. The bed thing she did not want to think about. As for the filing, Augusta needed the money and there was no other option. While she understood that her best friend Tilly no longer wanted to keep the Matilda Moor agency going, it had been a personal blow to Augusta. She had genuinely liked the job. Sure, investigating supernatural beings and dealing with plain crazy people was not always easy but then it was never dull. She and Tilly had seen some stuff that would make most people's hair turn white. But not them. They liked investigating weird phenomena, hunting down supernatural misfits like ghosts and werewolves and convincing vampires it was time to move on. That was until those carnivorous freaks of nature had targeted Tilly and forced her to act. Although they had won that battle, it was understandable that after that Tilly wanted to give up the agency and do something simple with the love of her life, Taliesin Trevelyan. Both he and Tilly had been through a lot to be together. It was only natural they wanted to stay that way in peace and not have deal with the unknown and potentially dangerous.

So the Matilda Moor Agency, housed in the exotic surrounds of Tilly's garage, had closed down and Augusta, at nearly thirty years of age, was suddenly unemployed. The agency had been the only job she had known. Tilly's Aunt Sage had started the agency after many of the clients who came to her for clairvoyant readings asked her to do other things like exorcise malevolent spirits or rid people of what they considered evil. And surprisingly there was a lot of that around even in the suburbs. Augusta had thrived on the job. She loved researching legends and myths and working with the two crazy Moor women. However with the closure of the agency, Augusta was at a loss what to do. There was not much call for a sidekick to a hunter of the supernatural in the employment adverts. She was even toying with the idea of re-opening the agency.

"You're smart, Rowdy. You can do anything." Tilly was the only one who called her Rowdy. It went back to their childhood. They had met in Miss Woodburn's math class when they were five years old and although they were totally different those differences worked for them and they became fast friends. Augusta was always the quiet watchful one as Tilly's aunt had observed. "Almost like you are waiting for something you know is coming." She was so quiet that Tilly started to call her Rowdy and the name stuck. Tilly had rubbed her friend's arm supportively as they had stood in the cleaned out shell of an office cum garage a few days ago. "You'll be okay."

"Sure," Rowdy had replied, not having a clue what to do. The agency job had given her a routine and a chance not to think about her thirtieth birthday and what that would mean.

Several years ago, before she had died, Sage Moor had taken Augusta aside.

"I don't know exactly what it is that you fear," the clairvoyant had said. "But I know that you will have to face your destiny and choose one of two paths. I fear that both have the power to destroy you if you are not strong."

"Yes."

"I feel there is a dark man." Sage watched as Augusta nodded. "Whoever this dark man is, remember to look beyond the surface into the substance of the man. He has the power to heal and destroy and you can control him if you are strong enough."

"And if I don't want to?"

Sage smiled sadly and shook her head.

"Child, you know you cannot change your fate."

Augusta looked at the ring on her finger once again. She was turning thirty next week and she knew only too well what that meant. "Fucking fate." *Hiccup.*

* * * * *

On her sixteenth birthday, Augusta Lawrence's adoptive parents had handed her a letter and said to her, "This will explain all your questions."

As a child growing up so many questions brewed in her mind. Augusta knew she did not fit into the neat, tidy world she had been placed in. She had always felt she was an outsider, so as each year passed she asked why. What was wrong with her? *Who am I?* But the only response she got was that she would be told when the time was right.

"What does that mean?" she would ask, hiccupping nervously as she did. It was a habit she had when stressed.

"Just be patient, Augusta. Things happen for a reason and it's not the right time for you to know."

It wasn't that she was adopted. That was no surprise. It had been one of the first things Augusta had been told as soon as she had the ability to understand what it meant. She appreciated knowing that truth. Although the people she called her parents cared for her and loved her, she always felt like she did not belong. Consequently as

Augusta grew up she tended to be a loner. Only Matilda Moor, with her crazy Aunt Sage who gave spooky palm readings and chased ghosts, understood her.

Augusta had phoned her about the letter and the teenage Tilly had immediately gone to her friend's home.

"Wow, you are so lucky. A mysterious letter is so exciting." Tilly had been a drama queen even at sixteen. "I bet it's from some long lost relative who is actually a King in an immensely rich land or maybe you were kidnapped by gypsies when you were young and—"

"Do the McDowalls look like gypsies to you?" Augusta clenched the unopened letter in her hand and looked at her friend. They were in her bedroom with the door shut.

"Well, no, Rowdy, but you have a different surname from them and I've always thought that was odd."

Augusta laughed for the first time that day. Sixteenth birthdays were supposed to be turning points in a young woman's life and yet all she felt was this terrible sense of something approaching that she was not going to be able to stop.

"Odd? Coming from you, Tilly, that's funny." Sometimes Augusta wondered who was the weirder of the two of them. Yet it bonded them and she was grateful for her dramatic friend.

"Hey, I can't help it if Aunt Sage is spooky."

"I like your Aunt." Sage Moor was quiet, thoughtful and never judgmental. She made Augusta feel infinitely at peace when she was around her.

"Yeah, Auntie Sage is crazy but then who isn't?" Tilly belly flopped onto Augusta's bed. "So read the letter."

"What if it's bad news?" Augusta already knew in her heart it was not good news.

"What if it's good? Do you want me to open it?"

"No, I'll do it." Augusta took a deep breath and opened envelope and pulled out the letter. Her eyes widened as she read the curse.

"What is it, Rowdy?"

"Nothing." Augusta hiccupped three times in a row as she tried to catch her breath. Whatever she had expected it wasn't this.

Tilly sat up in alarm. "You've gone white."

"It's just the shock about—um—finally knowing about who my real parents were and stuff."

"Cool. Let me see."

Augusta quickly put the letter behind her. She needed time to digest what she had barely scanned. It was hard enough for her to take it in let alone having to analyze it with Tilly.

"Maybe later. I just need to be alone and to think."

After Tilly left she'd re-read the letter slowly, each word permeating her brain and driving home what she already knew. Augusta now had positive proof of something she had suspected all along. She was not normal.

From this day forth, no Cardissan will be able to resist the lure of the Law-giver. Fate will bring them together when the Law-giver is three decades old and only if so chosen will death separate them. In their great need to be one, worlds will collide and the cost of what they do will wreak havoc on many. Bond they must, and great hardship and danger will they endure. Their weakness will be their strength and many will suffer because of it. Only through the bonds of matrimony will the fate of many be made right and no curse be brought to bear on the innocent.

"Cardissan? Law-giver?" Augusta read the words again slowly. "Death", "hardship" and "danger". A cold chill ran down her spine and she swallowed hard on the hiccup that caught in her throat. "Matrimony?" The curse was eerie, however the elegant, spidery handwriting below it made her shiver uncontrollably.

My dearest child,

Take heart, there is never a good time to hear certain truths. As a Law-giver – a Lawrence – you are faced with great challenges. I need you to understand what you, as a young woman, will be faced with. A dark man will come into your life and tempt you with such wondrous beauty that you will be faced with decisions that will affect all those you love for years to come.

I took the wrong path and paid for it. Cardissan men are not to be trusted. I refused Bennett Cardissan for I loved your father. Bennett and your father are no longer with me. My choices destroyed them as they will me. I pass soon and only by the grace of God do I have the gift to see you born before I die. You will be faced with the same challenge when you turn thirty. I cannot tell you how to act or what to do as you will make your own way regardless. But be watchful of the dark man – the Cardissan. He will either be your salvation or your destruction. The choices you make will affect many and once made they cannot be changed. Do not use your heart. Rely on your head. Do not allow passion to overwhelm common sense. You have great power. Choose wisely how you use it.

I leave you in the safety of my beloved friends, the McDowalls, who will care for you until it is time for you to make your own way in life. I made my choices and regret them all, but for you.

Your loving mother

Adrianna Lawrence

Augusta hiccupped madly as she clutched the letter in her hands and tried to breathe deeply. She always knew there was something more to her life. But this? Had her mother been mad? Was she hallucinating? Had she read what she had? Augusta's eyes traveled over the words once more. From what little Susannah McDowall had told her of her parents they sounded like a nice couple who had been tragically killed in a car accident. But this? What was this? Augusta scanned the letter again. A dark man?

Destruction? "Certain truths" had to be told to her yet her mother had spoken in riddles. Why?

"Because you have to work this out yourself," Augusta muttered out loud. What to do? It was not like it was something she could avoid like homework. She went to the pretty pink desk beside her bed and switched on the computer. She liked the internet and relied on it when all other knowledge failed her. Augusta knew it was a shot in the dark but maybe there was something or someone who could tell her more about who she was and what it meant. She brought up Google and quickly tapped the names Hester le Juriste, the village of Plum and the Fifth Earl of Cardissan into the search engine. Part of her expected to find nothing and another part knew that what she would find would change her life forever.

* * * * *

Augusta hiccupped and kicked at the files at her feet. She could stare as much as she liked at the ring on her finger but it changed nothing. The dark man was already in her life and at that moment she knew there was nothing she could do about it.

"But it will not always be that way." Just because her mother and Hester and countless other Law-givers or Lawrence women died because of their passion, their love and their hatred, it did not mean that she had to follow suit. Augusta's mind went back to the dark man in question. Argon. "What do I do about him?" She wanted to believe it was a fluke that he had wandered into her life just before her thirtieth birthday but she had never believed in coincidence.

"Dummy," Augusta muttered to herself, pleased that no one but the desperate for cash who were paid to file, came into the small filing room. For years she had hardened herself against the moment that she knew would come, yet in one night all that resolve had crumbled in a matter of minutes. She had fallen into his arms so easily. She could have blamed the combination of wine and strawberry ice cream but she knew it had been more than that.

The ring on her finger was like a claim Argon had over her, and for the life of her she could not remove it. Augusta had tried everything to free herself from the platinum that bound her as surely as the curse did. She wished she could just cut it off but it was too beautiful. Soap and oil could not remove it. Nothing worked. It was on her finger like a constant reminder of what she had done. People assumed she was engaged. There was no way Augusta could tell them the real story for who would possibly understand? So she told anyone who asked it was an old family heirloom. Did immortal beings have family? "I don't frigging know." The thought of others like Argon running around was scary "Bloody man." Argon may be an immortal being but that did not excuse him from being a pain in the ass.

"Thinking about us, Augusta True?" Argon smiled as he watched the woman he loved jump in surprise. He longed to taste her once more. For the last two days Argon

had deliberately left her alone to think about him and what she needed to do. That she was his, he did not doubt. The ring on her finger claimed it as fact. The shy, yet militant look in the dark eyes hidden by those awful spectacles indicated she planned to fight the inevitable. That was okay with Argon, for as far as he was concerned the battle was already won. *She is mine.*

"There is no us." She hiccupped on the "us" making it sound strangled and panicked.

There it was, the sign that Augusta was on edge. When he had first met her he thought she was an ice queen and was not all that eager to live up to his part of Hester's little diatribe. He had not wanted to get involved with her at all but the more he saw of her with Tilly and Titch and in the intervening days, he had become more attracted and less worried about how the curse would affect him. He also discovered the ice was merely a façade and the woman behind it was passionate, sweet and shy. Her nickname of Rowdy was a cute paradox.

Argon had always known he would come across her one day. He had never known her name only that he would be called to her when the time was right. It was not something he looked forward to. But then Argon had never dreamed she would be this hidden goddess who went out of her way to dull down her natural beauty. That in itself intrigued him. He was a man who could have had any woman he wanted, yet a woman with broken glasses, scraped up hair and who hiccupped intrigued him. While Argon really had no need to stay now that the problem with his colleague and friend Titch had been resolved, he found he could not leave. Argon always thought he would run from the one who was his fate, but when he found her he couldn't. The curse had been an inconvenience up until he'd found Augusta.

"You are a terrible liar," he responded and smiled as his words were greeted by yet another hiccup. What had happened between them was unforgettable. She had allowed herself to give in to passion and give a part of herself she had withheld from all men but him. There was amazing power in that one act. But then Augusta was fated to be his as he was hers. What once may have scared him now exhilarated him. Part of him had no idea what was to happen to them next, but he had no plans to leave this woman. "We made love, Augusta True. It's not something I will ever forget."

"It was okay." Her voice was tight with unexpressed emotion.

"You screamed," he pointed out, remembering the moment she came in his arms, shuddering and calling his name.

"Well, you surprised me." Augusta hiccupped three times in a row.

"Want me to kiss those hiccups away?" Argon moved toward Augusta. She backed into the filing cabinet with a crash in her need to move away. "Want to be surprised again?" He watched as her eyes widened. Argon reached over and withdrew her glasses.

"Here?" She looked around her wildly. "I mean no," Augusta corrected herself quickly.

Argon pulled her against his body and kissed her. He had to. The need to taste and touch Augusta once more overwhelmed him. His hands moved down to her skirt-covered ass cupping the plump cheeks as he rubbed his hips against hers. His cock was already hard with need and it was a need that only Augusta could fulfill.

"Don't," she choked out as she broke off the kiss, her eyes glazed with passion.

"Really?" Argon placed soft wet kisses against her mouth. He would stop if she really meant it but he could see in her eyes she was confused. That was understandable. What was between them was new and wild and a sweet madness that he was glad to give into.

"Argon," Augusta panted in between kisses. "This thing between us cannot possibly work."

He chuckled lightly at her words.

"We have proved it can. We fit together nicely."

"What about Hester's curse?"

"I thought you said this was a silly rhyme?"

"We both knew it is more."

"Oh yes, much more." Argon dropped to his knees and flipped up her skirt.

"Stop it," Augusta demanded in a panic. Not because she was worried about someone walking in on them. It was more that she was enjoying his touch and it was the last thing she should be inviting any further into her life. Sex with Argon was supposed to have been a one-off. *Yeah right*. Augusta pushed at Argon's shoulders then realized she should have been smacking the hands away that now had her underwear down around her at her ankles. The man had fast, fine hands. "Argon, we can't. Not here."

"Why not?" He was pushing her legs apart.

"I barely know you and in the biblical sense doesn't count."

"Remember the dream? Remember two nights ago?" His fingers found her clit and he smiled as she moaned. "I believe I have known you forever, Augusta True."

"Don't this to me." Her fingers curled into the soft curls of his hair. She wanted to push him but she did possess the power to deny either of them. "Please, Argon..."

"Yes, Augusta," he murmured as he leaned in and licked her clit.

Augusta felt her knees wobble and she clutched at his shoulders to stop herself from falling. Argon continued to lick her in long stokes that made her shake.

"The door isn't locked you know." It was a half-assed plea even to her ears.

Argon waved his hand, the soft sound of a lock clicking shut sounded.

"It's locked now." He looked up at her. "Any other objections and don't tell me it's wrong."

She shrieked when he sucked down on her clit. Her hips instantly arched forward for more. Augusta's knew her nails were probably scoring his flesh but to lose contact with him now would have her collapse in a trembling heap on the floor.

"What if—"

"We'll face the what if's when and if they come Augusta True." Argon lifted his head as his hands gently stroked her thighs. "I need you."

The hot desire she saw in his eyes made her heart pound. *I want him. God help me, I want him.* Was this way her Lawrence ancestors had felt? Totally out of control with need?

"I...um..." Hiccup *Do I say yes and temp fate or say no and agonize over what could have been?* When his fingers moved into her vagina, Augusta knew there would only ever be one answer. "I'm going to fall." she said it more to herself than him.

"No, you won't." His fingers toyed playfully within her, giving her just a taste of what was to come. "I'll never let you fall, Augusta."

"I need you." The words were out of her mouth before she could think.

Argon removed his fingers and stood up.

"Forever?" He caught her to him and ripped open her blouse, buttons popping off in all directions.

It was so primal and possessive that Augusta now understood the whole concept of bodice ripping. It was love powered by passion and need and clothes just got in the way.

"Forever?" Hiccup. "Well, at least for now."

The chuckle that came from Argon was rich in disbelief. "You are so bloody stubborn and yet I love you."

Her bra was off and Argon's mouth on her nipple before she knew what was happening. His hands cupped her ass pulling her forward against the hard cock that pushed impatiently against his trousers.

"This is crazy." *Yet I want every mad minute of it with him. Only him.* Augusta tried to pull his shirt undone, the need to feel his bare flesh against hers overwhelming.

Argon lifted his head and wrenched his shirt off as if reading her thoughts.

"Crazy is good." His head went back to her breasts, his hands lifting her up so her legs wrapped around his waist.

"What are you doing?" Augusta was being carried. The mouth on her nipple let go suddenly and the hot, intense eyes of Argon were upon her. The passion and love she saw made her breathless.

"Looking for a place for you to sit." He headed to a solid bank of filing cabinets.

"K to M would be better," murmured Augusta as she pointed to the cabinet in question.

"Why?" Argon changed direction and followed.

"Not as high and better access." Who was she kidding? The need for him to be inside her overrode everything else.

"Smart woman." Argon placed her on the metal surface. "Just right." He pulled her body forward.

"It's cold." The shiny metal surface sent a chill up her spine.

Argon leaned in and kissed her hard and possessively. "I'll heat you up, Augusta True."

I bet you will. Were they her hands that sought his zipper? His eyes locked with hers.

"Go on," he urged softly, as he reached forward and took her glasses off, placing them on a nearby table. "Scared?"

"Yes." That was the truth of it. Bizarre, new thoughts waged with old ideas and conditioning and it went against everything she thought she could have in life before she met Argon. He held her hands and helped her to free his penis. She gasped at the size. Yes, that was how she remembered it. "Condom?" *I am going to have sex in the filing room and I don't care.*

"Whatever you need, Augusta True." A condom appeared and was quickly rolled over his cock.

"Are you all right in there?" A voice called from outside. "The door is locked."

"Oh crap," she mouthed silently to Argon. "Yes, just made a bit of a mess and want to clean it up before anyone sees it." *Hiccup, hiccup.*

"Well, okay then but hurry up."

Augusta cupped Argon's ass and pulled him toward her. "We have to be quick." It did not occur to her not to have sex with him.

Argon chuckled at her words. "Talk about performance pressure."

"Hey, if you're not up to it..." She licked her lips teasingly. Augusta had to admit she liked the power she had over Argon.

"Oh but I am." His positioned his cock at the wet centre between her legs. "I wanted to savor the moment."

"In a filing room? Get real."

And then it got very real as he pushed the hard length of his shaft inside her vagina. Heat instantly flooded her body and cold metal was no longer an issue. She could feel nothing but Argon. Augusta moaned and her head fell forward on his shoulder as he started thrusting inside her. She grabbed hold of him, not wanting to miss a moment of contact.

"Real enough for you?" Argon's hips kept up a steady, demanding pace that had them both sweating.

"Oh, Argon." The feeling was so exquisite that words failed her.

"I love it when you say 'Oh, Argon' like that," he growled in primitive, male satisfaction.

And I love you. Oh crap where did that come from?

"I know." Argon lifted her face to his.

"What?" she panted out, feeling the welcoming tightening of orgasm approaching.

"What you refuse to say." Argon pulled out and then slammed back into her.

Augusta screamed as the most intense feeling shook her insides. She hungrily accepted the deep, passionate kiss Argon gave her. *So this is life. I like it.* Augusta gripped her man to her and reveled in his final thrusts, pleased that she was not the only one caught up in the moment.

Argon broke off the kiss. "You love me." He lifted her hand, kissed the ring on her finger and left.

Chapter Three

How Augusta got home, she wasn't really sure. The car was on auto pilot and her mind was on Argon.

"Like it could be anywhere else." Her thighs ached pleasantly and she still felt the heat of him within her body. This was all so confusing. Just when she had decided she could ignore him, he went and did stuff to her that made her insides feel like molten liquid. How did you ignore a fire when you were being engulfed? Sometimes it was better to burn and think about the consequences later. "And they're going to suck." It wasn't that Augusta didn't believe in love and marriage. She did. Some people did those very well. But then they hadn't been forewarned by a crazy ancestor about fate and suffering just before she was burned on a stake as a witch. "Yep, my life is beyond weird."

Augusta let herself into her apartment, shut the door and instantly went to her computer to turn it on. It was a throw back to the days when she was working with Tilly at the agency. The email was constantly monitored as people relied on them to rid them of whatever supernatural being they thought was after them, or they were awaiting information on how to tackle said being. Neither Augusta nor Tilly were experts in what they did. They pretty much made it up as they went along, relying on the information supplied by their network of cyber friends.

Getting caught up in email and not thinking about Argon was exactly what Augusta needed right at that moment. She sat down at her desk and clicked on the email icon. She had linked the old agency inbox to her own personal one as some people still emailed them wanting something done. Augusta felt compelled to check and tell them of the closure. Tilly did not check but then Tilly was in love and her mind was on other things. Momentarily, Augusta thought back to Argon and how having sex on the filing cabinet had loosened some of the drawers in K to M. *Among other things...*

"Stop it." She chastised herself. "He is not for you, he is not for you, he is not for you." Chanting it out loud didn't make her feel any better though. "Let's hope the email has some complex problem I have to solve."

"Perfect." Fifty-seven emails awaited her. The first one was from Newton Cadwalder in Wales. He was part of what Tilly liked to call the geek squad. But without Newton's geekiness they would have been in trouble many a time. Augusta liked Newton. She had first met him online when she was sixteen and trying to work out the whole Cardissan-Law-giver thing. Newton was the one who had helped her find the link to Hester le Juriste who had died because of Lord Cardissan. They discovered that the Earl had been too weak to stop Hester from being tried and condemned for witchcraft. Together Augusta and Newton has spent countless hours conversing online

trying to work out the Cardissan-Lawrence history. From what they had discovered, after Hester died the Earl died. Some said he took his own life while others said it was the curse they heard spoken from Hester's lips. Unfortunately, legend, fact and gossip all got mixed up so it made it hard to grasp what was real and what wasn't. All Augusta learned that was the curse often skipped decades of Cardissan and Lawrences for no apparent reason at all. She was inclined to agreed with Newton that only the truest strains of DNA were touched by Hester's words as intermarriage with other families and deaths in either family made only some susceptible to the curse. Some Cardissans did not appear to be as immortal as others. This all made their research almost impossible as there were so many branches to the trees of both families.

Augusta clicked on Newton's email hoping he had something of interest to tell her. He often did. She had never met him in person yet she considered him a friend.

"Hello, Rowdy, I know you have closed the agency but I believe you need to check out this. I have attached an email from a man called Fred Wade who is the manager in an office in the heart of Brisbane City. He believes zombies are using his office basement as some sort of meeting point."

"What?" Augusta sat back in her chair and smiled. That was a new one on her. Sure, she knew zombies existed but she rarely saw them or more to the point smelled them. The stench of burnt garlic and moldy leather was unforgettable.

"Seriously, Newton?" she typed.

"Have I ever lied to you?"

Augusta always had a strange feeling when Newton said this—and he said it a lot. Maybe it was just a habit of his but why did someone have to keep indicating to people he would never lie to them? Maybe it was something Augusta would have the same feeling about regardless who said it. Newton had been incredibly helpful and useful but in the end, Augusta really only trusted Tilly and Argon. She stiffened in surprise.

"Crap. When did I start trusting Argon?" Augusta shook herself and focused on the screen before her. "Stop thinking about him."

"So you'll help him?"

"Sure why not?" She would email the hapless Fred and see why he thought zombies were lurking in his office. This was no weirder than the last job she and Tilly had at the agency when they had to deal with the headless duck that was supposed to be terrorizing the next suburb over. Of course it turned out to be some rare breed of European swamp fowl that could retract its head low into its body. But they were the best cases. The ones where a simple investigation proved fears to be groundless. Augusta believed in listening to people and their concerns as many had turned out to be genuine. Not the duck of course but it still had to be checked out. *Maybe I will re-open the agency. At least it was interesting.*

"Good. I knew you would. What are you doing now?"

"Filing and admin work." Augusta wondered again what Newton did that allowed him to be online any time she emailed. Whenever she asked all she got was a vague

answer of “this and that”, so she pushed it no further. People had secrets. It wasn’t up to her to push them into divulging all.

“Sounds boring”

“Mind numbing but no different from what I was doing at the agency.”

“Rubbish. You were using your skills.”

Augusta snorted as she read his words. Her fingers quickly tapped out a response.

“What skills? Typing, filing and ordering bulk supplies of rock salt and lime to kill freaks with?” It was not the stuff of great resumes.

“You are more talented than you know.”

“Why do you say that?” Sage thought the same thing. Augusta did not feel particularly talented in any field.

“Just something I sense about you.”

Augusta snorted in self deprecation as she responded on the keyboard.

“Well if you met me you would know that wasn’t true.” She picked up the small mirror that was among the other assorted junk in her out tray. Augusta glanced at herself in the reflection of the picture—busted glasses, average face, average hair and fighting off the beginnings of a double chin. There was nothing special about her.

“You’re unique.”

“And you’re pulling my leg.”

“I mean it.”

It was nice to think someone judged her on merely her words and thoughts and not outward physical appearance. That rarely happened anymore.

“What about Argon? Is he still there?”

Augusta blew out a sigh. He was and she had no idea how to deal with wanting him but not wanting him.

“Yes.”

“And?”

“I don’t want to talk about it.” Not with him or anyone. Maybe if Tilly were around... But she had gone up to the Sunshine Coast for a couple of days with Titch to be alone.

“I see. So email the zombie guy.”

“I will,” Augusta finished her transmission and sent an email to Fred Ward at the address Newton had supplied. She needed direction in her life and the agency had always provided it.

“Who’s that email from?” Argon suddenly appeared behind her chair, making her jump. *“Is it Newton? You still talk to him? Why?”*

Augusta removed her glasses and tried to calm herself but that was hard to do with Argon leaning over her, his hot breath against her neck. He was acting as if he was jealous. She was not his. *I’m not.* Denial could be good for the soul.

"He is a friend." Well, more like a long-standing acquaintance but that had nothing to do with Argon.

"What sort of a name is Newton?" Argon's hands descended on her tight shoulders.

"You're named after a colorless gas." Oh, his hands felt so good. Memories of the filing room came to mind.

"And yet you love me." He leaned in and kissed her neck.

Augusta knew he would have felt the shiver that ran through her body. It could not be interpreted as anything else but desire.

"I'm tired." *I haven't had a chance to shower, my hair is a mess and I am borderline premenstrual and yet he looks at me like I am a goddess.* He is either mad or truly divine.

"I feel you're also pretty tense, Augusta True." His hands worked her shoulders gently.

She closed her eyes and gave into the sweet, skilful pressure of his hands. After losing her buttons in the filing room, Augusta's blouse was only held together with two haphazardly placed safety pins. It would take very little for it to fall from her body.

"You make me that way."

"How so?"

"Just by being you." The laughter she heard made Augusta feel happy and she hadn't felt that way on the longest time.

"Getting to you huh?" Argon's hands started to slide down the front of her body.

When he cupped her breasts as she longed for him to do, Augusta sighed. As much as she needed his touch, she knew she should be pushing him away because where could this possibly go between them? She did not want to be pushed into anything by a curse.

"Isn't there some spellbinder you have to go off and mentor?" That was his job after all. Argon sent spellbinders off on missions to help those in need. He oversaw the results and extricated people from trouble if necessary. Spellbinders were initially human beings who'd died and were chosen to be spellbinders because of who they had been in their lives, either good people deserving reward, or bad individuals who had to learn about helping others.

"They don't need me at the moment but you do."

Yeah, I do. "Who are you exactly?"

"Seriously?" His hands moved down to grab the arm rests of the seat. "You really want to know?"

"Yes." What little she knew of him was based on her fear of Hester's curse.

Argon spun the chair around so she faced him. He dropped to his knees before her so they were almost eye level.

"Why now?"

"You never gave me a chance before." That was a weak excuse and Augusta knew it. She was in control of her life and no one else.

"You could have asked at any time and I would have stopped and told you." His eyes were earnest on hers. "You're important to me, Augusta True. I want you to know me, to understand me.

His words shook Augusta because that was exactly what she wanted. She needed to know this man she had begun to depend on.

"Okay so tell me." She wanted to know everything. Augusta wanted to base her opinions on fact and not fear.

"I am not a spellbinder."

She nodded. "I guessed that. You're different from Titch." Taliesin Trevelyan was daylight to Argon's night.

"How so?"

"You're more commanding." Augusta had to admit that was a quality she found amazingly sexy, that take-control attitude of his. "Titch is very laid-back. You seem more like a general than a captain."

Argon smiled at her words as if pleased and amused.

"Cardissans have been working with spellbinders for centuries. Titch was one of my first charges."

Centuries?

"How old are you?"

"One hundred and fifty-seven years old."

"Wow!" Of course she knew he was immortal but it was still amazing to have it reinforced by his age. But what sort of a future, if she wanted it, could she ever have with Argon? She would age and he would not. Augusta could not imagine someone as healthy and virile as Argon wanting to be stuck with an old woman.

"I'd give it up for you in a heart beat."

"What?"

"Immortality. All Cardissan males are human until they turn eighteen. It is their choice to take immortality as it is their choice to cast it aside."

How did he know her so well?

"I could not ask that of you." *Because I don't know what the hell I want.* "Besides, it's who you are."

"And you are who I need." Argon ran his hands lightly up her legs.

"Because of a curse." It was not the way most people started off their lives together. That was if she wanted a life with Argon.

"Maybe it's a blessing."

His touch was so reassuring that Augusta was more confused than ever. She had spent years willing this moment and this man not to come into her life and yet here he

was and every reason she should push him away did not seem sufficient enough to do so.

"I don't know."

"What?"

She shook her head. "Anything and everything."

"Come here." Argon held his arms out to her.

"Sex doesn't solve everything." But being close to him certainly made her feel better. *Do I take what I can get or push him away before this all becomes too hard?*

"Maybe I just want to hold you." Argon grinned when he saw her eyebrow arch questioningly. "Okay and make love to you. Being with you is like regenerating who I am. I feel like more alive then ever. You are a part of me as I am of you. I need you in my life."

"Really?" Augusta was surprised to hear him say that, as Argon always came across so self-sufficient and in control.

"Augusta True, I have seen too many horrible things. I'm immortal but not without the ability to be horrified even after so many long years. You give me a sense of peace and happiness that is invaluable."

She left her chair and fell into his arms, at the sad tone of his words. The need to give comfort was overwhelming.

"What's between us is really not as hard as you are making it seem." Argon lay back with her in his arms.

Augusta shifted slightly to increase body contact and felt the hard length of his erection lying in wait. She looked at him in wry amusement.

"Okay that's hard but everything else is so beautifully easy between us." Argon's hands stroked up her legs and under her skirt.

"You just want sex." *But then so do I, but only with you.*

"And you have no underwear on." His hand slid between her legs.

"Oh crap!" *Hiccup, hiccup.* "I left them in the filing room." Augusta went red just thinking about her panties on the floor beside the heaps of useless files she had not got around to re-sorting when Argon had left her.

"You're not going back to that job are you?"

The fingers stroking her clit were mesmerizing. If she had been asked to go anywhere at that moment she would have said no for it would have been impossible to leave break away from Argon's touch.

"No."

"So what the problem? Argon removed his fingers and sat up. His hands moved around Augusta's waist and lifted her to her knees.

"What are you doing?"

"Getting you on your hands and knees." He positioned her hands in front her. "Don't look so worried you'll enjoy it, Augusta True." Argon flipped her skirt up to reveal the plump flesh beneath. "Excellent ass." His hands caressed the cheeks slowly as if he was savoring the moment.

"You think so?" Augusta had spent a lifetime trying to keep her flabby derrière covered.

"Beautiful." He leaned forward and kissed each cheek before parting her legs.

"Argon..." She wanted him. She was ready for him but there had to be more to their relationship than just this. "I think we should take this slower." *Or not...oh hell, I don't know.* It was hard to concentrate when you were anticipating the first hot thrust of male flesh within.

"Why?" Argon hesitated from unzipping his trousers.

Augusta turned her head to look at him.

"Well, I don't want you to think... I mean, I don't want to come across as—"

"Desperate?" He smiled at her gently.

"Yes." From going to no sex to full-on sex could definitely become habit forming but she did not want to come across as needy.

Argon moved his body over the top of hers and kissed her ear.

"Augusta you are my true. I adore you, I respect you and I would never think ill of your desire for me. It's natural and I am pleased by it." He rubbed the front of his body down her back. "If you want me to stop I will."

The heat of Argon's touch was intoxicating. His words were sweet. *So what is my problem?*

"I don't want you to," she felt him move from her body, "to stop."

Argon chuckled in relief.

"Thank you, Augusta." He reached down and unzipped his fly and quickly covered it with a condom. "May I come inside?"

With a hot throbbing cock pressed at her ass there was only one thing she could say.

"Yes, please." It felt totally different being entered from behind. It was like she was more exposed and open than ever. When Argon sank his full length inside her, she trembled. The feeling was exquisite. It was as though he was more a part of her than ever before.

"Do you like this Augusta True?" He started pumping deep and slow inside her.

"Oh, Argon," she moaned, closing her eyes and giving into the sensation. The previous two times had been hard and fast and thrilling but there was something about the slow leisurely thrust and parry of his cock moving within her that had her never wanting the feeling to end.

"This will work between us, Augusta."

She did not want to analyze the “if I should or if I shouldn’t” arguments. Augusta just wanted to enjoy the slow building orgasm that was tightening her stomach in anticipation. When Argon pulled all the way out she whimpered in disappointment.

“Argon, please.” She pushed her butt back against him trying to force re-entry. She felt so empty without him.

“Say it Augusta,” Argon growled low and husky in her ear. “Please say it.”

She knew if she said it there would be no going back. But if she didn’t that hot cock at her ass wasn’t going forward where she wanted it.

“This is blackmail.”

“I just want the truth.” Argon licked her shoulders.

Augusta blew out a long sigh. She knew what he wanted her to say and she knew the cost of saying it.

“Okay, damn it. I love you.” That hadn’t been as difficult as she thought it would be. But then she was in dire need of him to re-fill her and need had a way of getting to the truth and making all things possible. “Happy now?” She turned her head to look at him. The happiness in Argon’s eye made her gulp. *I did that?*

“Yes.” He leaned in and kissed her lips lingeringly.

“Well come back inside me,” she demanded as the kiss ended. Augusta sighed as he plunged back inside her and began moving once more. “What would you have done if I had refused to say anything?”

“I knew you would.” His hands reached round to caress her swaying breasts.

“I didn’t mean it you know.” Augusta was breathless as she said the words. His pace had increased and she could feel a wave of pleasure shoot through her.

“Liar.” Argon slapped her ass lightly.

The slight sting of his hand was enough to push her over the edge.

“Oh, Argon...”

“That’s what I needed to hear.” He held her to him as they came together, bodies shuddering and hearts pounding.

Chapter Four

Newton Cadwalder sat back and thought about Rowdy. He had known her for over a decade. They had never met yet he knew her better than she knew herself.

“And I plan to use that knowledge to take your inherent powers from you, dear girl.” It was something he had been working on for fourteen years. He knew she wanted to re-open the agency. He wanted to encourage it as it also kept a link open to her if he got her working again.

When he first came across an online post from another teenager, in Brisbane, Australia, he had been intrigued. Firstly, because she spelled her words out correctly, not using the shortened version so many favored. And secondly, because she wanted to know about a curse and not for reasons of the usual Goth-emo angst. Augusta Lawrence was on a quest to find out something and she was prepared to drop into every chat room where anyone with any knowledge of history, myths, legends or the occult hung out. In some ways it was a dangerous thing for a teenage girl to do, but Newton would soon discover Rowdy was anything but your typical teenager.

From the minute he had heard about it the whole Cardissan–Law-giver curse, Newton had been fascinated. He had immediately started to research it. Why? It could have been the quiet desperation in Rowdy’s words. But it was more that he felt the hair on the back of his neck rise with excitement. There was something about this that gripped him with a sense of urgency, almost as if he knew that this was his destiny. Maybe that would have been considered crazy for another seventeen year old but Newton had big dreams and he knew there was more to life than just conforming to what his parents believed.

He wasn’t looking for love. But he would use it to get what he wanted. Newton wanted power. He sensed Rowdy was the key to that power. He also knew something extra about Hester’s curse. There was another part to the curse that very few people knew about. Just as Hester was consumed in flames her last agonized words were muttered and recorded by a nun from St Anne’s Convent.

Augusta, le destin de tous les Législateurs est avec vous. Vous avez le pouvoir inhérent de profiter à beaucoup. La connaissance d’augmentation d’entre vous les capacités et l’utilisation cela judicieusement. Beaucoup dépendront de vous dans l’avenir. Bénit être l’enfant.

Augusta, the destiny of all Law-givers is with you. You have the inherent power to benefit many. Gain knowledge of your abilities and use it wisely. Many will depend on you in the future. Blessed be the child.

How many other people knew that Augusta Lawrence held the fate of all Law-givers? At first, Newton worked feverishly to find out what powers she did possess. Something that Hester believed could benefit all indicated immense power. After days

of research on the Law-giver clan, Newton discovered two things. All Lawrence women were witches and that there was a verbal legend that the Lawrence woman of the twenty-first century had powers that even Hell was said to be wary of.

"And I want them." Newton contacted people for years trying to track down someone who knew how to seize inherent power from a witch and he found them. Or more to the point they made it easy for him. A Hell-spawned demon had been watching Newton and offered him the spell to usurp Rowdy's powers on the promise Newton then used those powers to aid Hell. When questioned by Newton, the demon explained that no one from Hell could approach the Lawrence woman. She was like poison to them but they were more than eager to aid her friend in being her downfall. The only cost was if Newton failed. "But I will not." From what he could work out, Rowdy had no idea she was powerful in anyway. Sage Moor did, but that old lady was dead, and that was just as well as, like her niece, Tilly, the old biddy had made it clear she did not care for him him.

"I just need to get a chance to use the spell." He picked up his recently acquired passport and tapped it thoughtfully against his goatee-covered chin. Rowdy was turning thirty in a couple of days. He was on his way to Australia, spell in hand, for the big occasion. He was booked on the evening Qantas flight into Brisbane. Rowdy was unaware he was coming. "It will be a big surprise for you my love." There was only one problem. Argon Cardissan.

When Newton had first heard that this immortal had made contact with Rowdy he was alarmed. Although she indicated it was purely to do with Tilly and the mess she was in, Newton doubted this. While Tilly had the ability to get herself into problems like no other person he had heard of, he also knew that there was no such thing as coincidence in life especially when it involved a Cardissan and a Lawrence. Part of him was pleased that Rowdy had been angry enough to mention Argon's presence to him. She had raged against him in fact. Newton was thankful she had for he had pushed ahead as quickly as he could with his travel plans.

Knowing Cardissan was there and acting on it was going to be difficult. To Newton's knowledge no man had turned Rowdy's head until now. In the last couple of days Rowdy's emails had been short and evasive and he sensed a change in her.

"So I'm going to have to get rid of you, Argon." Newton knew this was not an easy thing to do. From what he had read some immortals could be killed but it took a lot and the consequences of killing them were perilous. What Newton planned to do was weaken Argon by using his love for Rowdy. He had no doubt the immortal loved her. Cardissan men were fated to meet and fall in love with Lawrence women. And although his ancestors were reported to have had many women in their lives, there was only ever one who could weaken a Cardissan and that was their true love. Newton was astute enough to know that Argon was meant to stumble into Rowdy's life just before she turned thirty. It was as Hester's curse foretold. Whatever that pair were doing now and he could only speculate angrily on it, Newton could not allow them to marry as the

bond would never be broken and any hope he had for acquiring power through Rowdy would be dashed forever.

The zombies he had paid handsomely to infiltrate Brisbane would help distract Rowdy. It was a bonus to find the timid office manager emailing him for help as Newton suspect he would when he set up the bogus *zombierid.com* website. Everyone relied on the internet for answer. When Rowdy was sufficiently sidetracked with the zombies her precious Argon would be taken by them. He had promised the zombie leader, Andervarle, an immortal as the final payment.

"My plan will work. I will not fail." Newton slammed his fist on the desktop angrily. "I will not let that happened," he vowed angrily.

"Did you feel that?" Augusta shivered and turned toward Argon for warmth. "It was like a clap of thunder without the sound."

"I only feel you." Argon was the happiest he had ever been in his long, lonely life. His hands caressed her full breasts, delighting in the trembling he felt run through her body. They had long since abandoned their clothes, those lay in an untidy pile beside them. *My love needs me and I am content.* Yes, he had to force the declaration of love from her lips and he expected Augusta to deny it straight after but that didn't matter. That she loved him was all that did.

"What if..."

"What?" He knew Augusta was going to throw up every possible barricade she could think of to negate her feelings for him. She was scared. Argon understood that. This was all new to him but he was prepared to do whatever he had to in order to keep her at his side. *Bless you Hester for uttering those words.*

"What if this is wrong?"

"It's not." There was no question that it was right in Argon's mind.

"Hear me out." Augusta sat up and looked down at the man. "What if we're just reacting to something that is not specifically about us?"

"You're not serious?" Argon shook his head and smiled at the woman he loved. She was so beautiful to look at that it made him catch his breath in wonder.

"I am. This curse has been with me forever – as it has you – I wonder if anyone with a Lawrence or Cardissan surname had wandered into our lives would we be feeling what we are now."

And the first barricade went up.

"Augusta True, that's crazy and you know it." Argon knew in every fiber of his being this woman had been created for him as he had been for her. "What do you feel in here?" He placed his hand over her heart. The strong sure beat was as true as the woman herself.

"I'm confused."

"Are you really?" Argon suspected fear of the unknown was more likely the reason. And Augusta did not quite know everything about who she really was. Argon planned to tell her but now was not the time.

"Yes but what am I doing with you?" Her tone was that of frustration.

"We're making love."

"I think it's just more like plain old lust." She looked specifically at his erection.

Argon laughed at her words and pulled her toward him so she ended up straddling his thighs. His eyes strayed down to the curl-covered entrance between her legs and his cock jerked in excitement.

"Nothing wrong with lust." His hands moved down to cup her backside and urge her forward. "I love you."

"How do I know you're not just saying that because you want to find a home for this fella? Her hand reached out and squeezed his cock gently.

Argon closed his eyes momentarily and enjoyed the hand that seemed in no hurry to leave his turgid flesh.

"You know this could all just be some weird family history thing and you're just some immortal bloke with a weird name who I happened to stumble across."

"What?" Argon opened his eyes and looked into his beloved's face. Augusta looked so serious that he tried not to laugh, but failed.

"Well you are. And how do you know I'm not just some desperate spinster looking to get laid?" She toyed with the flesh in her hands.

"Are you?" But then they were both desperate—for each other and that was a good kind of desperation.

"No, well I thought not. I have done pretty well without you or any man in my life but maybe I am just desperate for sex and any man will do."

Argon shook his head as she threw up her next barricade.

"Augusta, I think you've been lonely. I too have been lonely." He did not realize how much until he met her. In the past he covered up a lot with his brash ways but all that was unnecessary with Augusta. She made him want to be the best man he could for her.

"You were lonely? Really?"

"Oh yes." Argon removed her hand from his cock because if she kept stroking him as she was he was going to come all over her. And that would be such a waste, as being inside her was so much more fulfilling. He linked her hands with his. "I also believe you want to talk yourself out of what you feel for me as you're scared."

"Bet you've never been scared."

"I am now. I don't want to lose you." The thought of that terrified him.

"You can't lose something you never had."

Argon rolled his eyes in exasperation.

"Are you trying to piss me off? Because if you are it's not going to work."

Augusta leaned in and looked down at him, the tips of her breasts scraping his chest.

"No, I'm just being realistic. I don't want to be pushed into marriage because an ancestor of mine muttered something dramatic for effect. Hell, I would have done that to scare people if I knew I was going to die."

"Augusta I don't know what's going to happen when you turn thirty." It was constantly on his mind as was the need to tell her the whole truth. "Maybe the world ends, maybe we end, maybe nothing, maybe everything. But I know right here and right now I need to be with you."

"I can't promise anything." Her eyes were earnest on his.

Argon kissed each of the hands that were linked with his.

"You have promised more than you know without realizing it."

She pushed back from him.

"Sex is not a promise."

Her naked and available body belied the prudish look she tried give him. *May my true love never change.*

"What is it then?" He watched as she moved her body so she was poised to lower herself on his straining shaft. Argon quickly waved a condom on to encase the flesh. What a drag it would be to be mortal and have to delay the moment fiddling with packets. *And yet I would give it all up for Augusta.*

"Well, this is enjoyable." She sank down and covered his cock, her eyes closed as she took delight in the moment.

That he could give her such pleasure made Argon's heart swell with love.

"And you're a desperate spinster right?" His hands grasped her hips and helped guide her pace. For someone who had denied herself such intimacy with a man, Augusta was a quick learner and Argon was happy to be the teacher.

"And you're available

"Liar." Watching her breasts bounce up and down made him smile.

"What are you smiling at?" she asked looking at him in puzzlement.

"You're beautiful." No other words could describe Augusta. She was beauty. *She is mine.*

Augusta stopped moving and looked at Argon in wonder.

"You make me feel that's possible."

"Augusta True, you have always been beautiful, you have just never allowed yourself to believe it." Argon pulled her down into his arms and rolled her over so he was on top of her, his cock still lodged tightly within her. He ran his tongue over her lips, then down her chin, delighting in the shiver of excitement he felt from Augusta's

body in response. From there he licked her shoulders in long slow strokes savoring every moment. "You taste so delicious." He wanted to taste every part of her.

"I need more now," she whimpered as her fingers moved to his butt trying to urge him to move inside her.

"But I want to play." The feel of her hands on his butt was driving him wild. As much as he wanted to pound away inside her, Argon also wanted to remember every touch. He chuckled against her skin as she sighed. Augusta sounded both impatient for more and happy for him to continue his exploration. The valley between her breasts was especially tender to his touch. Argon smiled as she squirmed and a wild hiccup let loose from her lips. Knowing more were sure to follow, Argon's lifted his head and placed his mouth on hers. He could kiss Augusta for hours. There was a innocent, sweetness to her that Argon found enchanting.

"Now!" Augusta demanded, wriggling beneath him.

Argon could only stand so much himself. He could see no reason to deny either of them further. He pulled out of Augusta and pushed back in thrusting deep and slow as he placed kisses on her mouth, each one ending with him sucking her bottom lip on release. The completeness of the moment was not lost on either of them.

"Oh, Argon," she choked out the words, as if too caught up in the intensity of what she was feeling to say more.

"I know." He cupped her face. "I love you." The tears Argon saw in her eyes made his heart swell. *My love loves me. I can ask for no more.* "Hold on, Augusta True." Her arms wrapped around his body as Argon increased his pace until Augusta squealed with excitement and came, then relaxed, limp and satisfied. As he felt his cock explode inside her, Argon knew a sense of peace he had never dreamed existed. "Anything you want from me I will do." It was his vow to the woman he loved.

Chapter Five

I'll be the one out the lobby with the yellow stress ball in my hand. That was what the reply email from Fred Ward had said. Not carrying a red rose or wearing a trench coat as was the stereotypical stranger meeting guise.

"I probably would have guessed a stress ball as the next option," Augusta mused to herself as she shook her head and scanned the people in the polished, marble lobby of the Post Office Square building. The people she and Tilly had met when the agency had been in full swing were never normal nor did the expected things. Augusta had definitely decided to re-open the Matilda Moor agency. She liked the idea of being her own boss. She would keep Tilly's name as people were familiar with it and Augusta knew her friend would not care one way or the other. At present, due to lack of funds, Augusta planned to run it out of her apartment. She had some savings, probably enough for a month or two. Only problem was there had never been money in the agency when she and Tilly had been doing the job. Ends were only just met but then, as much as she loved Tilly, the woman was no financial genius.

"So where are you stress ball man?" Augusta watched the people who walked fast, talked fast and jostled each other to get wherever they seemed hell-bent on going. Brisbane City was no different from any other metropolitan city. People had places to go in the shortest amount of time and time was money. "Thank God, I don't work in the city."

Augusta blew out a sigh and wondered what Argon was doing. She looked down at the ring that sparkled on her finger. She no longer tried to pull it off for it seemed determined to stay as did the man himself. Augusta felt her heart flip-flop as she thought about last night. The sheer luxury of being able to drop her defenses, if only for a moment, to touch and taste Argon was a gift. How long it would last she did not know. Yes, she loved him but Augusta knew life was never that simple and love that happened so fast made her naturally wary.

"Oh you know he's wrong, wrong, wrong for you," she murmured as she thought about her birthday that was in less than two days time. "And yet you're daydreaming about him."

"Rowdy?"

Augusta swung around surprised at the sudden intrusion into her thoughts. For a moment she had almost forgotten why she was there. The man before her was average height, weight and coloring and if he had not been squeezing the rubber stress ball in his hand so tightly she would never have guessed he was the man she had come there to meet.

"Fred Ward?"

"Yes." The man looked at her tensely.

She held out her hand. "Augusta Lawrence." The man in turn stiffened alarmingly and she had a feeling the ball in his hand was about to explode if the whiteness of his knuckles was any indicator.

"You're not Rowdy?"

Whatever was scaring this man was doing a good job of it.

"Rowdy is a nickname." Like Tilly, Newton also called her Rowdy. It was natural to assume he would refer her on as "Rowdy".

Fred Ward breathed out a long, relieved sigh.

"I didn't know what to do. I went on the internet and found people talking about monsters and to my mind zombies are monsters and I found this website and Newton and he sounded like he knew what he was talking about and he suggested you as you are in Brisbane and —"

"Hey, take a breath or you're going to faint." The man's words rushed out so quickly and his face was so pale that Rowdy was worried for his health. She motioned him over to some neatly upholstered seats that were in the far corner of the lobby and away from passersby. If they were going to conduct business of a supernatural kind it was better to do it away from the normal public. There was less likelihood of being overheard.

He sat down gratefully, stress ball taut with pressure from his grip.

"I don't know what to do."

"Why do you think zombies are meeting in the basement?" It was not something that most people would come up with as their first answer for strange behavior.

"At first I didn't. I just thought they were employees wasting time by hanging out down there."

The fever-bright eyes that looked into hers would have made Augusta think Fred was a zombie. She had only seen a couple of them but they burned with almost an inner hatred that shone like a beacon on the outside. But Fred did not smell of burnt garlic or moldy leather. He was more nervous sweat, too much coffee and breath mints.

"All right so —"

He interrupted her. "It was the smell. It was awful. It was a mixture of garlic and something moldy like suede shoes. Your friend Newton told me what that smell indicated."

Okay then. Stress ball man has zombies. But how many? And why did I not come better prepared for this? Even Tilly would have carried at least a hammer.

"So how do we get rid of them?"

"Destroy the brain with a good whack to the head." Augusta murmured absently. She watched him go pale again. "You have to get a grip Fred." She stood up and re-adjusted her glasses, ready to do battle. "Where's the basement?"

"What are you doing?" Argon suddenly appeared beside Augusta.

"Holy crap!" She spun around and slapped his chest, annoyed that he frightened her and pleased that she was not alone as she descended the stairs to the basement. "I'm doing my job." Augusta reluctantly let go of his shirt. The heat from his body, while comforting, gave her other thoughts and now was not the time to indulge in those. *I am a woman on a mission.*

"You no longer do this for a living, Augusta." Argon followed closely behind her as she moved on. "Actually you never did this for a living. Tilly did. Why now?"

"I changed my mind." She reached the bottom. If Augusta had been skeptical about Fred's words, the smell in the basement confirmed it. "Do you smell that?"

"Yes, it's eau de zombie." Argon pulled her around so she was behind him.

"Hey!" Augusta was not happy with his manhandling her. She knew she was capable of dealing with this.

"I'm immortal remember?" Argon turned around and looked at her. "I can deal with this a little better than you." He put his finger to her lips to stop her from speaking. "I love you. Shut up and humor me."

"Fine...whatever." She wasn't about to get into an argument with Argon now. Augusta pushed his hand away. It was hard to see much with Argon's solid body before her. She clutched at his hips and moved forward with him, peering this way and that. Augusta had to admit it was nice to have the strong presence of Argon with her. *So sue me for a moment of weakness.*

"I'm not happy about this." He scanned the dim room with suspicion.

"It's not a requirement that you have to be." The basement looked fairly standard. Boxes, old office equipment and what looked like an air conditioning unit.

"Your safety is."

"I got on perfectly well on my own before you wandered into my life."

"You're not on your own any more, Augusta True." Argon turned his head and looked at her. "'And for someone who does not need help, you're holding on to me pretty tightly lady. But then I like it when you touch me.'"

Her hands sprang away from his body. Augusta had not realized she had been holding onto him. It just seemed like a natural extension of who she was.

"You can stay and help, or leave." She wanted to say, "Please stay as I have no idea what I'm doing" however her pride wouldn't let her. Augusta wanted to be seen as strong and independent. She had been all her life, yet around Argon she felt all gooey and emotional.

"I'm staying."

Excellent.

"I don't need you to." *I am so screwed up.* When he turned around and faced her, Augusta felt like Argon could see right into the heart of what she was thinking and all the bluff and bravado was not going to fool him, yet it was a game she felt she had to play until she accepted whatever this thing was meant to be between them. Supposedly it was love, possibly it was lust. *Maybe I should phone a friend for the right answer.*

"Yeah, I know you're fearless and that's what worries me." Argon crossed his arms over his chest. "What's the plan?"

Augusta felt her mouth go suddenly dry at the biceps she saw bulge up enticingly. She mentally slapped herself. *Pay attention to the zombie not the hottie.*

"Well, I've never done this before. It was Tilly who did the checking weirdos out thing." Augusta's job had been to do the research and prepare Tilly with possible scenarios.

"Tilly?" Argon snorted softly. "Great role model there."

"She did okay." She was Augusta's best friend since forever and she would have no one, including Argon, malign her.

"She lost fingers and lots of blood."

Yeah well, there was that.

"But she is still alive."

Argon eyes lit up with soft pride. "I seem to remember that had a lot to do with you shooting a freak who was attacking her."

"That freak pissed me off by going after Tilly."

"And you protect those you love." Argon's reached over and touched her face with a gentle hand.

Hiccup, hiccup. *Crap, I have to stop doing that.*

"Yes." Hiccup. Kisses stopped hiccups. Augusta's eyes went to his lips, licking her own unconsciously.

Argon's hands moved to her shoulders and he pulled her toward him.

"You're not so tough."

"Am too," she muttered in half-hearted defiance, her hands at resting on his hips. Hiccup.

"Are not," he murmured back, as their bodies touched. Suddenly he stiffened. "Uh-oh."

"What uh-oh?" Uh-ohs were never good in Augusta's experience.

"Do you feel that?"

"Um..." Augusta felt Argon's heart beat, his erection and the corresponding wetness between her legs. "This is not the time—"

"Not me—though I am flattered—the room."

Augusta did notice a sudden spike in temperature but she thought that had to do with her hormones. She looked around and froze. Rapid temperature rise equaled close zombie proximity.

"Oh fuck." It was too late to do more than swear as the zombie charged them. One minute she was on her feet and the next she hit the ground with Argon on top of her. The stench of garlic and mold encompassed them but the zombie ran on past, leaving them in a heap. Thank God zombies only attacked in packs otherwise she and Argon would have been in deep trouble. She squirmed underneath Argon's body.

"Hello there," he said. His lips were but an inch from hers. Argon pushed her spectacles back up on her nose to sit evenly.

She could feel the hard throb of his cock between her legs. The urge to wrap them around his waist was overwhelming but she resisted.

"You cannot be serious? Now?" *Could I? Forehead slap – of course I can't. The floor is filthy.*

"Augusta True, I would want you if a ship was sinking, the building was on fire or I was gasping my last breath."

That was so sweet and yet terrible timing.

"Get off me." She pushed at his shoulders, resisting the urge to caress and explore further. "We have to go after the zombie." *For God sake, remember you are a woman on a mission.*

"Zombies are too fast even for immortals like me." Argon's tongue flicked out and touched the top of his lip teasingly.

Hiccup, hiccup.

"How disappointing you're not as magical as you make out." *Hiccup.*

"I can't concentrate on anything else but you when you're near me."

The feeling was most definitely mutual.

"This is not the time for this." *Though, I could always wash my clothes or throw them out of they got too dirty.*

Talk about not being able to concentrate. All Augusta wanted at that moment was Argon's mouth on hers and his cock driving hot and unrelenting inside her. "Later, maybe."

"Maybe is as good as a yes."

* * * * *

"Did you see it?" Fred Ward rushed over to Augusta, wringing his hands anxiously. He reeled back and his face went white when he saw Argon. "Oh my Lord! Is he one of them?"

Augusta grabbed Fred's wrist before he could run. She did not have to see Argon to know he was smiling at the timid man.

"No, this is —"

"I'm Augusta's fiancé." He reached over and shook the other man's hand.

Augusta refrained from the eye roll she really wanted to do. She wasn't about to respond to what Argon said as he expected that. She was not about to fall into whatever silly game he had in mind. This was the man who had picked her up and dusted her off, very intimately, after the zombie had fled. She had slapped away his hands as she slapped down her own need for him. *Honest to God, am I on heat or what?* For one lust-hazed moment she had considered taking up Argon's invitation to click his fingers and go straight to Rome or Paris and forget all this "zombie business" as he called it and just make love until they couldn't think straight. And that was the problem. The more time she spent with Argon, the less she was thinking at all. Augusta gave herself a mental shake. *I have a job to do.* Besides how could she walk out on the stress-ridden Fred?

"Yes, I saw the zombie." *But I have no idea how I am going to help you.* But Fred did not need to know that. Now Augusta understood just how often her best friend Tilly flew by the seat of her pants when it came to hunting down the supernatural.

"Will you take the job?"

Augusta said, "Yes" at the same Argon said, "No". She looked at the dark man at her side. He was drop-dead, gorgeous. Just looking at Argon made her hot and needy but sheer bloody-minded spite made Augusta want to defy him. She might be a victim of Hester's curse but that did not mean she had to willingly accept what she set down for her, nor would she be dictated to by Argon.

"Yes, I will." *Stick that in your ear oh-immortal-one.*

The sigh that escaped Fred was loud and deep almost like he had been needing to take that breath for a long time.

"I am so relieved."

* * * * *

"Wow."

"What?" Augusta and Argon walked away from Fred Ward after she had discussed terms for ridding him of his zombie problem.

"You charge a lot." As soon as they were sufficiently alone, Argon reached for her hand and transported them back to her apartment.

Augusta gripped his hand as the rush of speed dropped her swiftly back in her living room. She swallowed the wave of dizziness that played havoc with her stomach.

"You okay?" Argon steadied her against his body.

Nice. I could stay here all day. But where would that get me? Clinging to a fantasy she could never have. Or can I? Fuck, why can't I just have a normal life? Augusta pushed away from the warmth of his body.

"Yep, fine, perfect." *Not.* "As for the charging, as much as I love Tilly she did not have a clue how to run the business." When it came to bills, her best friend tended to file them under "b" for bin and wait until she received the "pretty ones with the red writing" on them, before Tilly paid them. "Besides, I have to look after myself."

"You have me."

"Do I?" Augusta took a good long look at the man beside her. She felt an intense need to believe Argon, yet she was also a realist. The old catch-cry "if it sounds too good to be true, then it probably is" kept coming into her mind. "How long do you think this will last? You're immortal. I'm not. Even if I was madly in love with you —"

"Which you are but you are too stubborn to admit it unless forced to."

"If I was, we can't be together. It's impossible." Augusta knew she had been crazy to accept that first kiss, that first touch from Argon, but it had been too hard to deny her need to taste and experience and just for once in her life throw caution to the wind. "I'm going to age and die and you're not."

"Is that what's tying you up in knots?" Argon shook his head in disbelief. "I told you I would give up my immortality for you in a heartbeat."

That was only half the problem. That bloody curse of Hester's still hung over her head and who knew what was supposed to become of them if they stayed together? It was not a curse that guaranteed pleasant times ahead. Maybe they would end up hating each other for being forced together.

"I wouldn't ask you to give anything up for me." What would he get in return? A woman who was pre-menstrual for two weeks out of four? It was not like she was some drop-dead gorgeous diva who would guarantee him happiness. Augusta was well aware that she was average and boring. Was the man under some spell that he did not see her as she was? Broken spectacles and all?

"Augusta True, I would do anything for you."

She sighed in frustration. She did not want to hurt him but she could not see how this would ever work between them.

"This is what worries me. You are all caught up in this and what if this thing ends between us tomorrow?" *What if the blinders come off and you see me as who I am – nothing special?*

How was it possible that the woman who stood before him could be so blind and stubborn? But then Argon knew fear could shake the strongest being to their foundations and have them questioning everything. He, too, had experienced a moment when he first met Augusta when he wondered why he was being called to answer a curse that he only half believed in. It had been rattling around the Cardissan family for as long as he could remember. Argon had never really taken the whole curse by a witch thing seriously. That was until saw Augusta and he realized that what he had been searching for was right before him. Who knew the ramblings of a condemned woman would bring him everything he had ever wanted in his very long and lonely life? The

males of Cardissan always acted like meeting a Lawrence was a fate worse than death, but then Argon suspected that they were never going to be the ones the curse was specifically about. Some of them were immortal, some were not. Some were chosen for great love, others avoided it. To have avoided Augusta would have denied himself pleasure and Argon selfishly wanted what she could give him that no one else could – eternal love.

He smiled as she nervously pushed her glasses up the bridge of her nose. Argon could have fixed her taped-up spectacles so many times with a mere click of his fingers if she had asked. But that was the thing about Augusta. She did not ask anything for herself. She existed, awaiting a curse to be fulfilled and reached out to no one for fear of endangering them. Augusta saw Hester's prophecy as her problem and therefore pushed people away. Argon was not about to be pushed any further. He knew why she was starting up the agency. Augusta wanted independence from needing anyone to rely on and her birthday was in less than two days. A busy woman was one who did not have time to dwell on the what ifs in life.

"This 'thing' as you call it will not end tomorrow or the next day, Augusta." Argon planned to grow old and gray and die in his wife's arms. She was everything he had ever wanted and did not believe he would ever have. *Thank you Hester.*

"How do you know? Because of a fairytale from 1471?"

"Because we are meant to be together and I would have found you regardless of a witch's words."

Augusta favored him with a cynical eye roll. "Hester wasn't a witch."

"You really don't know do you? Argon was amazed by her innocence. It was sweet but it could also cost Augusta if someone chose to use it against her.

"What?" *Hiccup.*

Even her hiccups were sexy to Argon. He wanted to kiss her breathless until whatever scared her went away. But now was not the time for kissing. The woman he loved needed to be told the truth.

"It was not fluke Hester died as she did. All Lawrence women are witches."

Chapter Six

Augusta slapped his chest and rolled her eyes. "We are not." *Do I have a sign saying dumb on my forehead?* "I'm a Lawrence and I'm not a witch." It was insane and why was he looking that way, as if he knew something she didn't?

"How do you know?"

"Well, I would know if I was a witch." *Wouldn't I? Shouldn't I?* Hiccup, hiccup. *I can't be a witch. That's just crazy and yet...* Hiccup. *How would I know?* Who would have told her the truth? She had not known about Hester and the curse until she had gone digging around to find out more information. A sudden shiver ran up Augusta's spine. *Who the bloody hell am I? What do I know about my life other than an old letter from my mother – a woman I never knew?*

"Augusta –"

Hiccup, hiccup. At first she did not feel the gentle hands that descended on her shoulders. It was only when she looked up into Argon's dark, soulful eyes that she knew he was telling the truth.

"Really? I'm a witch?"

"I would only ever tell you the truth."

In her heart Augusta knew that. He was a good, although annoying, man.

"But how? Why didn't I know?"

"I don't know why you were never told."

Suddenly Augusta found herself telling Argon about her childhood, the mother she had never met and the letter she received when she was sixteen. Things that only Tilly knew or had guessed came pouring out of her. Every insecurity and fear she possessed sprang forth from her lips. When she was finished, Augusta was part horrified and part relieved as it felt as if a huge weight had been lifted from her knowing that someone else knew and he did not judge her badly for her thoughts.

"It sounds like your mother cared for you."

"Not enough to tell me." But then would it have made her life any different? Would she have missed out on the man who held her so gently and looked at her with such understanding?

"People don't always know what to do." Argon lifted one hand and caressed her face. "They are so caught up in protecting those they love that they forget knowledge is what people need."

Hiccup, hiccup.

"I have no idea why I told you all that."

Argon leaned down and kissed her lips lightly. "Yeah you do and I'm glad you did."

At that moment, Augusta wanted to throw herself into his arms and never leave. It was the safest she had felt in a long time. But feeling safe didn't mean she was safe. She still had zombies to move on and now a whole witch thing to deal with. *Give me a break.*

"I should have felt something." How could you be a witch and not know it? "I thought Hester died because of a weak Cardissan man and the times she lived in." Anyone the slightest bit unusual back then would have been condemned a witch and burned at the stake just to get rid of them as a problem.

Argon pulled her against his body and held her as if she was something precious to him.

"I'm sure the fifth Earl was weak and spineless and people were inclined to believe what they were told to avoid the same fate befalling them," he told her. "I'm telling the truth Augusta."

"Yeah, I know." She gave a soft sigh of contentment. The responding chuckle Argon gave made her smile. *Okay, so he knows I'm not going to fight him...at the moment.* She was still unsure where this wildfire love affair would go but giving into need did not mean she was ready to give herself over to Hester's curse. Free will had to play its part and her will was still wanting to fight the inevitable.

"I have no powers."

"You have more than you know." Argon tipped her face up to his.

She licked her lips as she looked at his mouth. The desire to kiss him was overwhelming but desire did not solve her problems. It only complicated them.

"Sage used to say that I was special, that I had hidden talents." Augusta had always believed it was just Sage being nice to her and trying to make her feel like she belonged in the crazy Moor world.

"She was right. The powers you have and need are there waiting for the right time to be used." Argon ran his fingers over her lips. "I know you have not had the easiest life. You don't have to be stoic all the time. You can let go and give into what you feel."

"I'm scared." That was the truth and only with this man could she admit it.

"I know." His hands went around to stroke her back.

Augusta looked into his eyes in wonder. "How do you know me also well?"

"When I look in your eyes, I see myself. You want so much but you're afraid to give in to what you need."

Argon was right. Wanting was one thing, having another. Reality could be scary when you were scared about messing up what you had been given.

"You're never scared." Augusta could not imagine that the strapping man who held her so possessively could ever be frightened.

"Augusta True, I'm terrified you'll push me away."

"Oh, Argon—"

"I love it when you say that." He grinned at her. "I'll help you with your witch powers."

Not only did she have to deal with zombies and a legend but the witch thing as well. Some days were just too hard.

"I don't want to be a witch." She had done pretty well in an okay, boring kind of way up until now without the real knowledge of who she was.

"You have no choice, Augusta."

She sighed tiredly. "That's the story of my life."

"Everyone's destiny is already chosen when they are born. You are lucky that you had a clearly defined course set for you."

"What? A riddle about a dark man and marriage, worlds colliding and saving innocents? That's a hell of a course."

"Well, I grant you its more colorful than most but you can't run away from it or me."

Augusta leaned her forehead against his. "I just want..."

"What?"

"To be normal."

Argon shook his head at her words. "That's never going to happen, Augusta. You are one of a kind. You are unique, special. You have a gift."

"What? That I can do the Vulcan hand salute?" She lifted her hand and spread in fingers hard in the sci-fi cult classic salute.

Argon laughed and caught her hand in his, kissing the palm gently.

"Some stuff is hard to accept but railing against it so bad can have the opposite effect on you."

Augusta felt a shiver run down her spine as he kissed her palm again. It was like he was savoring the taste of her.

"I am not railing." On the whole she felt she was handling this curse thing pretty well.

"You did not want me in your life."

Yes, that was true but things change and Augusta had to admit she was getting used to Argon being around.

"Well you weren't interested in me either."

"Until I met you and that changed."

"Because of the sex." Augusta wanted to believe otherwise but at heart she was a realist. Sex changed a lot of things. Her problem right at that moment was confusing sex for love.

Argon tut-tutted. "No. And you know it." He linked her hand with his. "Now about the zombies."

She had been wondering when the conversation would switch back to the walking dead.

"I have a job to do." Why she had to explain her life to him was beyond her. He had no say in her what she did and if she wanted to earn money chasing the smelly, life-challenged that was her call.

"It's a bad idea, Augusta." His tone was stern.

"I'm not asking for permission, Argon," she mimicked back to him.

"You have other things you must do in life."

To think a month ago all Augusta had allowed herself to think about was whether the internet bill was paid for the agency and whether Tilly fed her pet goldfish before she went off chasing freaks.

"I'm not marrying you just because we had sex." It wasn't the nineteenth century where people were forced into marry someone just because they were deemed "compromised" for looking sideways at a man.

"Can't you see it's not worth fighting?"

"Jeez, that's so romantic." Augusta rolled her eyes at him cynically.

"You want romance, Augusta True?"

Before she could answer she found herself lying naked in a field of wildflowers, the sun gentle on her skin as a light zephyr made the flowers sway.

"You're mighty quick at getting me naked."

Argon rolled her onto her back and smiled. "You like it." His hands moved up to touch her breasts.

Actually, I love it. But there was no way she was telling him that. Argon had too much power over her already.

"Our being together is important. We have the power to do great good."

Oh, he was very good. The warmth of his body on hers was making Augusta have trouble focusing on coming up with rational responses to everything Argon was saying.

"Haven't you felt there was something different about you?"

She fought the urge to wrap her legs around his waist and entice the hard cock against her inner thigh inside her body. Augusta was already wet with need.

"No. I'm pretty boring." She pushed her pelvis up against his.

"Liar." Argon lifted her legs around his body. "You see and feel things others don't. You probably have since you were a child."

Her hands automatically held onto his shoulders ready for the first hot thrust of his cock inside her.

"It's not up to me to save the world."

"No but it's up to us to save the part we have been destined to save."

Augusta looked into Argon's eyes. She loved him. Whether it was right or rational was too hard to say. While lying in a field of wildflowers was wildly romantic, it was not who she was. Her life was caught up in a curse. That she could not control. What she could control was the here and the now with this man. Augusta wanted to be real with Argon.

"This is—

"What?"

"This is sweet but I want more than this."

"What?"

"I want to be with you but I don't want fantasy. I want reality." Her eyes locked with hers. "I just want you." Yes, it was an admission and Augusta could see that hope in his eyes. *He really was the sweetest man when he wasn't being aggravating.* "Take me home, Argon." In the blink of an eye she was in her bedroom on her bed lying in Argon's arms.

"Is this better?"

"Oh, Argon," she sighed as his mouth attached to one of her nipples and he sucked hard. Her fingers threaded through the dark waves of his hair and held him close to her. Maybe this was wrong. Maybe it was right. Augusta no longer knew what to think. She had spent years fearing Argon's arrival in her life yet here he was in her arms and she feared nothing. She ran her hands down his strong back, feeling the muscles shift and flex at her touch. Augusta wrapped her legs around his body. She was so wet with need that with anyone else she would have been embarrassed.

"Please," she murmured.

"Anything for you, Augusta True," Argon said as he lifted his head and shifted slightly to wave his hand for a condom to magically appear over his erect penis.

Augusta giggled. "Think how many men would love to have the ability to do that."

"I'm not many men."

No, he sure wasn't. "I think I have worked that out. I never wanted any man until you." Anyone else would have been a poor second best.

Argon kissed her hard, a fierce passion and pride in his eyes.

"You make me feel so good."

The thought that anything she did or said made a difference to this man was so important to Augusta. The need to please him, and in turn herself, was paramount. Argon wasn't so tough behind the immortal front he put up. But then, neither was she.

"Wanna try something different?"

Argon voice was so low and sexy that she would have tried anything he had suggested at that moment.

"Yes." It was the only possible answer.

"You're mighty fast to agree, Miss Lawrence." Though Argon appeared pleased that she had.

"I know I will enjoy it." Why lie to him or herself? This was all about mutual pleasure and Augusta wanted that for both herself and him.

"Excellent. Scoot up to the bed head and get on your knees."

Augusta did as requested. The first time he had taken her from behind had been exciting because she had not been able to see, only feel. She clutched the wooden struts of the bed head hoping for the same experience.

"Spread your knees." Argon made sure they were wide enough for him to crawl through. He wriggled around until he was on his back, directly below her pussy. Augusta looked down at him. He smiled back at her. "Hello beautiful."

She gave into the insane urge to giggle. *Where has my boring old life gone? Wherever it is keep it there.*

"Whatcha doing down there?" Two weeks ago a man between her thighs would have been an unknown concept. Now, Augusta could not wait to see and feel what was going to happen next.

"This." Argon wrapped his hands around her lower thighs and licked between her legs.

Augusta shrieked. It was the only possible response.

"Oh, Argon." She felt the reverberations of his delight as he chuckled against her flesh. As he slowly and thoroughly licked the pink folds of her pussy, Augusta unconsciously ground her pelvis against his mouth, moving in time with his tongue strokes.

"I want to come." For a moment she did not recognize her own voice, it sounded so hot and desperate.

"Not yet, Augusta True." Argon lifted one of her legs and removed himself from under her.

"What? Where are you going?" Surely he wasn't going to stop now was he? That would kill her. Her fingers went down to touch her swollen, tender clit.

Argon moved in close behind her and stilled her fingers, placing them on the bedhead and out of the way.

"Don't ever think of doing that again. That's my job."

"But—" Augusta stopped as she felt him part her butt cheeks, making her hands slide down lower on the wooden supports as she found herself being bent forward and positioned so her ass was pushed out to him. "Argon I need—" She gasped when what felt like cold gel was squirted into her anus. "Argon?" She felt one finger slide inside her and start moving. "Oh..." This was a totally new sensation. A second finger joined the first and Augusta pushed back against him for more. When a third one was added and his other hand moved to her clit and started stroking, she moaned loudly. "Oh, Argon..." Augusta thought she would explode with pleasure.

"Do you like that?" He smiled as she nodded wordlessly. "'Want more?'"

"Yes." Argon's fingers slid out of the places that she needed them most. "No..."

"Patience Augusta True." Argon positioned the head of his cock where his fingers had been."

"Argon?" She queried as he grabbed her hips in both hands. Augusta had a good idea what he was going to do but that was a whole lot of cock to be going into one small area.

"Relax," he murmured as he pushed inside her.

"Is this going to work?" The logistics of it seemed impossible but that did not mean she wanted him to stop. The hot, burning feeling wasn't painful. It was just slightly uncomfortable as his cock sought entrance into the tight puckered hole. "You're awfully big you know."

Argon leaned in and whispered in her ear. "Thanks for the compliment."

Augusta felt the tight muscle inside her give way and he pushed further within.

"Oh," she whimpered. This was good. Strange but good.

"You like?" Argon pushed all the way inside and stopped.

Augusta felt so full and hot. She pressed back instinctively against him

"Are you going to move?" She had the heat, now she needed the friction.

"I wanted you to get used to me." Argon kissed her shoulders.

Augusta giggled at his words. "That never stopped you before."

"True," he responded with a chuckle. "Hang on." Argon wrapped his arms around her waist and began thrusting.

The slow, moving sensation was so unusual that Augusta closed her eyes savoring every push and pull of his body against and inside hers. She held on to the bedhead and moaned softly as Argon's mouth fastened on her neck in a wet, sucking kiss she knew would leave an amazing love bite. But Augusta cared nothing for appearances. This was all about a moment of giving because to do anything less would be beyond either them. When his hand touched her clit, she stiffened.

"I want you every where." Augusta dropped her head back against his.

Argon lifted his mouth, his free hand caressing her breasts. "You are greedy but I adore that."

"Adore me some more," she whispered, grinding her butt into him. "I have hot and hard now I want faster."

He chuckled at her words. "You're very pushy."

"I know what I want." And at that moment she did. Any old fears were gone as the man at her back held her close and loved her slowly and completely.

"And that is?" He stopped his actions.

Augusta turned her head to his. "I will only ever be with you." They both knew that. Argon smiled and kissed her. She sighed and turned around. "Now hurry up or I'll be forced to act on my own."

Argon's response was to pull out slightly and push back in with determination. "Not on my watch, lady."

Augusta panted with excitement at the increased pace. Her body was tingling everywhere. The fast, needy thrust of his cock was so different from the soft kisses she felt on her shoulders. When she came, her cry of delight was strangled with the emotion of the moment. Her knees shook and she had trouble holding on to wooden support.

"You make me feel so powerful, Augusta True." He slammed into her until she could barely remain upright as his climax hit. Argon caught the panting woman up into his arms, holding her against his heaving body.

"You can be powerful with me anytime, beautiful man." He pulled out from her and twisted them both around until they fell back in an entwined heap on the bed, each trying to catch their breath.

Every time with Argon was excellent. So much for magazine surveys indicating that lovers could grow bored with each other.

"What?" Argon saw the whimsical look on her face.

"I was just thinking about all those magazines that tell you how to make your sex life better."

"We don't need them to give advice. We have love and that's what makes it work."

Sweet, romantic man. She sighed. Romance was one thing but reality was another. In a day she would be thirty. What would happen then?

"We don't have to marry you know."

Argon reached over and tweaked her nose playfully.

"Augusta, don't be crazy. We will get married."

"Because a curse says so?" That was hardly romantic. *And why do I suddenly want romance? After a lifetime without it why do I need it now?*

"Because we love each other."

That was why. This man made her want everything she thought she could never have.

"I know nothing of love." Reading romance novels didn't count.

Argon leaned in and kissed her lips. "I know and I want to teach you."

"Yeah, but what about the witch thing?" That was something else she had on her to do list. *Fight zombies, deal with curse, lust after the dark man and study witch 101.*

"That I can't teach you but I know someone who can. Nell."

Nell? Amazingly Augusta felt a shot of jealousy shoot through her veins.

"Who's Nell?" *And why do I care if he mentions another woman?*

"Nell is an amazing, smart and beautiful woman."

Rowdy

I hate her already. "Really?"

Chapter Seven

Argon had to admit he was pleased at Augusta's reaction. He could feel her body tense up as if awaiting unpleasant news. If only she stopped and thought, Augusta would know that if he really wanted another he would not be in her arms. Argon had loved many women in his life but he would only ever want one for life and that was Augusta. No other could ever compare to her.

"Jealous?"

"No," Augusta responded as she pulled away from him. She sat up and assessed him. "She's probably some old crone of a wise woman you know."

Argon watched as she drew her legs up to her body and crossed her arms defensively. He was sorry that Augusta had such a strange childhood as it made it hard for her to deal with love. *But I will change that.*

"Yes, if blonde and beautiful means old crone. Relax. Another is for her." Like Augusta, Nell was not the easiest woman to deal with but at least they had that in common. *Poor Gervaise. He had his job cut out with him with Nell.*

"So, she's a witch?"

"Yes, and she knows of the curse." Argon smiled softly as her arms and legs relaxed somewhat at his words.

"How?"

"Everyone in the supernatural realm does. It's no big deal to them. Stuff like curses happen everyday. It's just humans who don't accept it so easily." Compared to humans, supernatural beings were incredibly jaded. As much as Augusta tried to pretend she was the same, she was sweetly naïve in so many ways. "We need you to meet Nell."

"So this blonde witch will help me?"

Ah, still a tinge of jealousy there. Excellent.

"You're a witch, Augusta True." Argon sat up and lifted one of her hands into his. "Nell will help you." He wondered if she knew, despite her defensive pose, how incredibly sexy she looked with her breasts squashed up against her chest and the curls of her pussy visible between her crossed legs.

"What if I don't want to do the whole witch thing?"

"You have no choice." Like Argon, he had no choice in his long, immortal life until now. The coming of Augusta was the gaining of freedom and peace in his life. He wanted the woman and peace. He was tired of being all powerful. It brought him nothing but loneliness.

Augusta gave a long sigh. "Because it's my frigging destiny."

"Yeah kiddo, you, me and the witch thing." As destinies went, it was one Argon was more than happy to follow. "Will you see Nell?"

"I guess so. I have nothing to lose."

* * * * *

Nell Fenwick was exactly like Argon described her. Blonde and beautiful and the sort of woman you hoped was cosmetically enhanced but knew wasn't as her beauty was too natural.

"Everyone has flaws, Augusta," Nell said as if reading her mind as they were introduced. "Some are hidden deep within and are never allowed out." She led them through her modest, inner suburban Brisbane home to the place she called her workshop.

Augusta had seen the sudden deep pain in the other woman's eyes. *I am a judgmental bitch*. She turned to Argon. "This is secret women's business."

"Yes, run away Argon, we're not going to scratch each others eyes out."

"Call me and I will take you home when you're ready." He kissed Augusta and left.

"Argon in love." Nell shook her head in amusement. "Oh, how the mighty fall," she misquoted as she smiled at Augusta's amazed look. "Women have been chasing that man for years. And yes, he bedded many but none held his heart as you do."

Hiccup, hiccup.

"You have a tell," Nell remarked. "Most witches do. Like sharp-eyed poker players, we can spot another's weakness and we try to hide our own."

"Really? What's yours?" Already Augusta was feeling at home with Nell. That was weird considering she had come expecting to hate her.

"That you must discover for yourself," Nell replied enigmatically. "So what do you know about witches?"

"Well, I watched *Charmed*." Even to her own ears that sounded dumb when dealing with a real life witch.

"Yeah? I like that show but you're not a 'charmed one'."

"Bummer," Augusta murmured as she looked around the room. For a witch's workshop it was pretty average. There were lots of books, a couple of crystals and a lot of dust.

"I like dust."

"You have a great collection of that." But then Augusta was certainly no Mrs. Clean.

"Did you know dust is a form of protection?"

Augusta arched her eyebrow with interest. "Who knew I was saving my life all these years?"

"So, let's get to the point of why you are here. "Your power and Argon's combined make you an invincible force for great good."

"Seriously?" Augusta had some vague theory that Nell would tell her a couple of spells and show her the secret witch handshake and she'd be on her way. Being a "force for great good" just didn't seem like her. Augusta pushed her glasses back onto her nose, wishing she had gotten around to fixing them. She felt distinctly dowdy beside the beautiful Nell.

"Only those bonded by deep love can change the world."

Change the world? Augusta just wanted to sort her little piece of it and move on without too many dramas.

"I'm not in love." It no longer sounded convincing to her, yet self preservation made her keep saying it almost as if it was a mantra.

"Uh-huh. And you think you're not beautiful."

"Oh crap, you're a mind reader." Augusta liked to keep her thoughts to herself.

Nell laughed lightly. "No, but some people are easy to read. We all hide a lot inside us and it's only the truly expert at hiding stuff who can read another." She spread her hands out wide, rings sparkling on every finger. "So why are you here, Augusta?"

"Argon said I should come and..." She stopped. That sounded like she did what Argon told her to do, like he had some sway over her decisions. Actually when she was naked with him, he had changed her mind a lot. *Note to self. Try to resist being naked with Argon.*

"Yes?" Nell looked at her meaningfully.

"Look do you want to tell me something or not?" Augusta folded her arms impatiently over her chest.

"Who are you, Augusta?"

"What?" This was not a question she has expected to be asked.

Nell walked over to a full length, old oval mirror on a stand. "When you look in the mirror who do you see?" She motioned Augusta over.

"I don't know." She wandered over, thinking about the last time she stood looking into a mirror. She had been naked with Argon and he was telling her what he saw.

"Sure you do."

Augusta blew out a breath, the air pushing her fringe up as she looked at herself in the glass.

"I see an average woman, with average looks and a big butt and —"

Nell interrupted her. "Close your eyes and look beyond the superficial."

"Huh? Close my eyes and look?"

"Stop being so perverse. You are seeing the outer image. Look inside."

Augusta turned to look at the other woman. "Oh my God, you're a hippy."

"Just shut up and do it."

Deciding to humor her, Augusta faced the mirror and closed her eyes.

"I see darkness, as one would expect having your eyes closed and all." She heard Nell sigh in exasperation as she told her to look again. "This is not what I expected."

"You have to know yourself before you can claim your power."

"Why is everything so difficult?" Augusta muttered as she stared into the darkness of her mind.

"Relax and concentrate."

"I have not been relaxed since I turned twenty-nine." Augusta tilted her head from side to side and rotated her shoulders. She stood for several minutes seeing nothing until a sudden light appeared. "I see –"

"Who?"

"Argon." He was smiling and reaching out her. Augusta had to stop herself from lifting her hand.

"Why do you see him?"

"Probably because he is plaguing me at the moment."

"Is that what they are calling sex now?" Nell asked with a grin. "You see him because he is part of who you are and the power you have. If you accept him without question, without prejudice, then your power will come to you fully."

"Well, I probably won't be getting the power for a while then." She was struggling with what she felt for him. Love was not as easy as all the greeting cards made out. "I think –" She stopped suddenly and held a hand her chest in alarm.

Nell moved toward her quickly. "What is it?"

"I feel extreme heat. I see bodies and another man." Augusta could not make out his face but she could feel great evil coming from him in waves. It mixed with the intensity of the heat the scorched her skin. It was almost like the heat she had felt when the zombie had rushed her and Argon. She snapped open her eyes and staggered forward. If not for Nell she would have fallen down such was the uncontrollable weakness that rushed through her body.

"This is why you need Argon." Nell helped her over to a chair.

Augusta sank down into it. Whatever it was that had just happened made her legs shake.

"I'm not weak." The inference that she needed Argon to make her strong annoyed her. She had been on her own, relying on her own strength for so long, that it was galling to admit that she needed help.

"No, you're not, but what you have been called upon to do is not something you or anyone can do on their own. It takes two."

Augusta knew she was right. Argon was in her life for more than just one reason and she had to let go and accept his help. That was a big thing to do when you weren't used to relying on others. Sure, she and Tilly depended on each other but they had years together and a relationship built on that.

"Who was the man?" She remembered only a hazy shape to his face.

Nell shook her head. "I don't know but I felt the heat coming from you. It was quite powerful."

"You know, this is not what I expected when it came to being a witch."

"Witches are sensitive to all around them. They are a link, a bridge. It's not all hocus pocus and Macbeth's three witches sitting around a cauldron stuff."

No, Augusta got that now. This was much more than a television show or a Shakespearean play.

"I have felt that heat once before." Her mind went back to the zombie who rushed them. Was the man a zombie? She had not smelled their telltale smell. "This is all so confusing."

* * * * *

Newton Cadwalder paid the taxi driver and got out of the car in front of the building that was Augusta's home. It looked so average and boring for one so powerful and yet he knew that was often the way. The most unlikely people held the greatest power.

He stiffened when he felt the wave of heat near him. The stench of garlic and moldy leather made the fine hairs on his neck stand up on end. Newton told himself to be calm. To show fear now would be his undoing.

"Hello, Andervarle, Warren." Two zombies stood before him, their burning hot, red-rimmed eyes on his. One zombie scared the shit out of him while the other made him want to laugh. It was hard to take Warren seriously. He had been an accountant in his past life and still looked like one in his short-sleeved pale blue shirt, complete with pocket protector, and neat, striped tie. Though zombies were hard to spot normally, as they made it their business to blend in, Andervarle would never blend in anywhere. He had an elegance that made you look and wonder who he was. Although he was dressed simply in jeans and a leather jacket, the blond man with the burning eyes made Newton squirm with a need to flee the sheer, evil power that emanated from him.

"Cadwalder," Andervarle murmured as if it was almost beyond him to be polite to a human.

"All is set?" Newton had a plan to get Augusta. Either she would come willingly with him or he would use the zombies of Brisbane against her. There were zombie enclaves in every city. One just had to make it worth their while to act.

"As you decreed. We have made it possible for the woman to chase us." Andervarle loomed over the shorter Newton. "Now we had better get what you promised us."

"Yeah," Warren said as he added his puny weight to the other zombie's.

If it wasn't so deadly serious and life threatening, Newton would have laughed at the zombie accountant. Instead he bit back on his laughter and looked at Andervarle.

"Oh you will, that and much more." Newton wasn't silly enough to do a deal with zombies and not have an out to save his ass. The deal he had done with Hell guaranteed him protection as long as he succeeded in his task. *And I have to succeed.* The alternative was too frightening to contemplate.

"When?"

"When the time is right." Newton had not even met and assessed Augusta in person yet. Email was a poor indicator of the person and their ability, as one could hide so much on email.

"Do not make me wait long."

"And do not push me, zombie. You are only here because of me."

Andervarle's hands clenched in fists as he raised them toward Newton. "I could kill you now."

"Me too," Warren mimicked.

"Back off little man." Newton glared at Warren. He was a vicious little nerd but containable. "Hurt me and you will get nothing. Keep me alive and you will get everything you want." *As will I.*

"We must have the immortal." Andervarle's tone was uncompromising.

Newton couldn't care less what happened to Argon Cardissan.

"You can have him. He only needs a little more time before he is sufficiently weakened by his love for the woman."

"We want the witch as well."

Never going to happen. You'll be destroyed before you can touch her.

"After I'm finished with her." Newton planned to extract every ounce of power from Rowdy.

Chapter Eight

Augusta looked at her desk calendar and grimaced. One more day to go until her birthday. Some people feared aging. Augusta didn't. If she could skip thirty altogether and go straight to thirty-one she would have been more than happy to do so.

"But no, frigging life does not work out that way." She pulled off her glasses and rubbed her face and thought about the dream she'd had last night. Argon had not stayed with her. It had been Augusta's choice and he had accepted her need for time to think and to be alone. In retrospect she wished he had stayed because she may not have had the dream she did. "More like a nightmare." It had been frighteningly real. She'd been faced with two possibilities—save his life by forfeiting her own or walk away knowing he would perish.

"I will not allow you to sacrifice yourself for me, Augusta." Argon had been most adamant.

"But I love you." To her, there was no choice. Augusta wanted to be with him no matter the cost. "I will fight Hell for you to be safe."

"How sweet," an unknown man had murmured as he watched the lovers. "Either way you are doomed. If you save him you only prolong his death. If you don't he dies alone and you'll spend your days agonizing over what you chose to do."

"No, I will not allow you to suffer, Augusta True." Argon vanished before her eyes.

No matter how much she called out to him he would not come back. Augusta woke up hiccupping madly as she tried to catch her breath.

"Just like the man to walk away and be all stoic," she muttered as she placed her glasses back on and looked blankly at the computer screen. Hours later, Augusta could not shift that dream from her mind. "Not like I don't have enough to think about." The crazy thing was the dream had felt so real. It had her questioning what she would do if faced with losing Argon. Would she risk herself to save him? Yes, unquestioningly. But would he go and disappear before she had a chance to tell him what she really felt? Hmm...that was an interesting question. While Augusta acknowledged she had fallen in love with him, forever meant marrying Argon and fulfilling the curse. Did she want to do forever with Argon? Added to that she did not want to race ahead and fulfill Hester's curse without thinking. But then time was against her and her thoughts. Tomorrow was her D-day.

Augusta snapped out of her daze as she heard the buzzing sound that came from the apartment's intercom. Someone was downstairs. Augusta did not want to deal with anyone today, because she was supposed to be thinking up some cunning plan to get rid of zombies. Unfortunately Tilly was not answering her cell phone so she could not get any advice from her. Augusta ignored the constant buzzing for a full minute until she could stand it no more. She got up and stomped over to the intercom. "What?"

"Hello, Rowdy."

It was a male voice that she did not recognize but obviously he knew her if he was calling her Rowdy. Maybe an old customer of Tilly's agency? Augusta blew out a sigh as she tried to summon up her customer service skills. If she did not need the money she would have told them to push off.

"Can I help you?" *Does that sound like I care?*

"It's me, Newton."

"Holy snapping ducks! Newton from Wales?" She was stunned and amazed. *Hiccup, hiccup.*

"One and the same."

Of course he was. He had the lilting Welsh accent.

"What you doing here?" He was the last person Augusta expected to see.

He chuckled at her words. "Are you going to let me in?"

"Oh crap, sorry—*hiccup*—yes." Augusta hit the button to allow him entry to the building. It seemed to be never-ending surprises in her life at the moment. Argon, zombies, being a witch and now a man she knew only by email was knocking at her door. A strange sense of almost dread rushed through her. It was crazy of course. Augusta knew it had to be excitement and nothing else for Newton Cadwalder was an old friend.

Augusta opened the door and the dread surged up within her again as she looked at the tall, thin, dark haired man before her. *He is a friend. Why do I feel this way?*

"This is such a surprise." She looked into his pale blue eyes and felt a shiver run down her spine. It was crazy to feel this way after how much he had helped her over the years but Augusta was a great believer in following gut instinct. She avoided the arms that stretched out to hug her, instead preferring to shake his cold hand.

"What's wrong?" He dropped his arms. Her hesitation was obvious to him. "Are you wondering if I am who I say I am?"

"Well, yeah." Actually Augusta hadn't been. She was more concerned with the tense feeling inside herself. Identification of any unknown person was always the thing to ask for, and she was annoyed she was more caught up in feeling instead of reasoning, to have demanded ID straight up. She pulled her hand from his, a cool shiver running down her spine.

"I understand, Rowdy. You're going through a lot." Newton pulled out his British passport and license from his wallet and handed them to her.

They proclaimed him as Newton Cadwalder. Augusta handed them back to him feeling a little silly but still tense.

"I'm just in shock. I never imagined we would meet." And in some ways talking to someone over the internet was easier than face to face. This really unknown man knew too much about her. It had never occurred to Augusta that he would come to visit her.

"I thought you'd like the surprise."

I hate surprises. Augusta was pretty sure she had told Newton that. Her life had too many surprises in it.

"Well, come in." Maybe she sounded a little begrudging but Augusta could not help it. *I do not need surprise visits now.* It was only her innate good manners that could not allow the man who had helped her stand outside in the hallway. "So why you are you here now, after all this time?" Augusta wasn't surprised Newton looked at her with shock. It was hardly a great welcome for someone who had come thousands of miles.

"I thought with your thirtieth birthday approaching you might need a friend."

Right. Of course that sounded logical and yet that niggling feeling in her gut warned her to be careful. She pushed her glasses up onto the bridge of her nose and assessed him. On the whole he was pretty weedy looking and he fitted Tilly's description of being part of the geek squad perfectly.

"You're beautiful, Rowdy."

"I'm not." And him saying she was made her feel even more ill at ease. *Hiccup.*

"You are." Newton's eyes roamed her face and body in fascination.

"You sound amazed." And why was he looking at her as if she was some sort of science experiment?

"No, it just you build up a picture of someone and you're not what I expected."

As expectations went, this was not how she'd imagined Newton. The man who had helped her all these years seemed different in person. *Am I judging too harshly? Am I tense because of my birthday tomorrow? Because of that dream?* Was it him or the situation she was in making her feel this way? Something told her all was not as it should be yet she should be glad to meet him. He had aided her as no one else had when she had been searching for answers. Tilly's words about him being useful but needing to watch him rang in her head.

"Is Argon still here?"

That was who she needed right now. Argon. Augusta wanted to tell him what she felt about Newton and see if he agreed. She caught herself slightly when she realized how important Argon's opinion was to her.

"He's around."

"You've fallen in love with him."

This was definitely not something Augusta wanted to discuss with Newton. He knew too much about her life already. Besides, it was none of his business.

"Do you think it's because you're just caught up in the whole curse thing that you think you love him?"

Think I love him? Like I am too stupid to know otherwise? His words got Augusta's back up.

"It's complicated." She moved over to her desk where her can of Mace was. He was a friend and yet friends did not make you feel like you had to Mace them.

"Tell me, Rowdy," Newton urged as he followed her. "You always tell me everything on email."

And yet in person I don't want to because you are creepy.

"I don't want to discuss Argon." As she said his name, Augusta sent out a silent prayer for him to come to her. She needed to feel safe once more. Argon's presence did that. "What I need to do is get rid of zombies." Work was a safe topic and it was something that she could discuss with Newton. Anything else like her birthday or Argon, Augusta was reluctant to get into. Regardless of whatever else she felt about Newton, he knew how to deal with the supernatural.

"So, you spoke to Fred Ward?" Of course Newton knew she had. He had planned for the timid office manager to get the zombies, then offer help to get rid of them. He had to keep Rowdy dependant on him for aid so she would be too caught up in saving an innocent to save herself when she really needed to. He smiled as she hiccupped once more. That was cute and it was a good indicator of how insecure she was at that moment. All Newton needed to do was continue to undermine that security and she would be ripe for the plucking.

"Yeah, trying to work out how to move them on."

They won't move without your beloved Argon's head in a sack. It infuriated Newton that Rowdy was so politely distant from him and that Cardissan was still in the picture. But not for long. Zombies love immortal flesh and Rowdy would be too caught up in chasing them to know what was happening to her and her lover until it was too late. Newton had it all planned. The minute she turned thirty her full powers kicked in. He was very certain he was one of the few people who knew how powerful she would become. *And I know how to take those powers from you witch.* Newton had been practicing the spell to strip her powers for the past two years. He had it down pat.

"It won't be easy." Nor was this. The woman he expected to see was someone like a shy Olive Oyl, someone he could manipulate because she was not aware of her powers. But Rowdy was anything but. She dressed plainly in shorts and a t-shirt and had those awful glasses but beneath all that she was dazzling. And she was wary of him. That was only too evident to Newton. He planned on winning her trust back. He needed Rowdy to trust him again. "How many zombies are there?" He knew there was likely to be a dozen.

"We saw only one."

So Argon had been with her. *Damn his immortal hide.* Newton looked at the ring on her finger and his gut tensed. A Cardissan matrimonial ring. This was not good. The immortal was bound to her and it would make it harder for him to take either of them by surprise. Was Rowdy even aware she was married?

"They travel in groups of four." *The other eight will be a surprise for you.*

Augusta tilted her head and looked at him thoughtfully. "I read it was usually more than four."

"Trust me Rowdy. I know of what I speak."

Another cold shiver ran down her spine at his "trust me Rowdy". *This is all so wrong.* Just as Augusta was considering her options on how to get rid of her guest who had traveled thousands of miles to see her, Argon appeared at her side. She saw Newton stiffen in shock. Augusta felt Argon's hand curl possessively around her waist. *Now I am safe.* She had never needed anyone to make her feel safe before but then Augusta had never had anyone like Argon in her life before either.

"Augusta, my love." He kissed her lips, his eyes on hers, filled with understanding as if he knew what she was thinking.

Hiccup. Although she felt better for his presence, that one last hiccup was hard to hold in. She watched as the two men sized each other up.

"Newton." Argon nodded but did not offer his hand.

"Argon." Newton stood taller as if preparing for a battle.

Men were fascinating creatures. It was all about who was louder, bigger and who could piss further.

"I've just come to visit Rowdy," Newton's eyes never left Argon's. "We have been friends for a long time."

"Yes, so I've heard. I have to wonder why you show up now after all this time."

"Does there have to be a reason other than friendship?" Newton's tone was defensive.

Augusta felt Argon's hand tighten at her waist. He felt it to. She was sure of it. There was something not right about Newton being here now.

"It just seems odd that it's around Augusta's thirtieth birthday."

Newton brushed off a piece of lint from his sleeve. "'Just a coincidence.'"

"Really?"

Everyone in that room knew that Argon did not believe that.

"You've had a long flight Newton. Maybe you should have a rest and come back later." Augusta needed time to think about this latest happening and she could tell Argon wanted to throw the man out on his ass, but even a creepy guest was entitled to walk out of their own volition.

"I'm fine." Newton stood his ground, reluctant to move, his eyes on Argon.

"You heard the lady." Argon was not a man to take a threat to those he loved lightly.

"I do what I want." Newton's eyes narrowed at the dark man.

Argon flexed his hands into fists. "You'll do what I say."

As if turning thirty and dealing with the witch, possible forced marriage and the worlds colliding thing wasn't enough, Augusta now had to deal with two men wanting

to beat each other up. Of course the smart money was on Argon but cleaning up blood to win the bet wasn't something she wanted to do.

"Okay let's just calm down."

Newton turned on her. "He started it."

"Did not," Argon mimicked the other man's whiny voice.

Augusta barely suppressed her smile at Argon's tone.

"I don't care who started it. I don't need this now." Augusta pulled away from Argon. She gave him the look that she wanted her visitor gone. He nodded his head. Although it was totally against all radical feminist ideals, there was something to be said for having a knight come to your rescue.

"Whatever you are after Welshman you will not get it." Argon moved up to the man until they were toe to toe. "I will protect Augusta with everything I have."

"I mean no harm to Rowdy at all."

The way Newton said it sent a shiver down Augusta's spine. *There is something not right with him but what?*

"See, I have this distinct feeling that you here to try to use Augusta for some purpose of your own."

"What? Don't be ridiculous." Newton was instantly on the defensive.

Argon flicked a piece of fluff from the other man's shoulder.

"You know as much as any of us about Hester's curse."

"I've tried to help Augusta," Newton's words came out in an angry rush.

"Just make sure you don't help yourself in your efforts. I don't like people giving my lady a hard time."

Newton stepped away from Argon. "I will go but I'll be back."

Augusta watched him leave. Only when the door shut behind him did she feel full air capacity come back into her lungs. A wild series of hiccups exploded from her. A glass of water appeared magically in her hand. As she gulped it down, Argon rubbed her back gently.

"Something is not right about your Welsh friend."

Augusta swallowed the last drop of water. "No," she agreed as she placed the glass on a nearby table.

"I'm glad you called me, Augusta True."

Who else would I call? Who else would care enough to come running?

"You heard me?" Augusta went from feeling chilled with Newton to warm and cared for by Argon. *So this is love? I like it. Can I depend on it is the question.* The habit of being alone was hard to break.

"Of course. We are linked. Don't you feel that?"

Oh yes.

Argon looked down at the computer on the table. He spotted the old logo from Tilly's agency and a can of Mace. The Mace he was happy to see. It meant Augusta could look after herself if she had to. The agency stuff did not please him. It meant she planned to chase the zombies.

"What are you doing with this stuff?" Argon knew the answer already. He could see the determination in his wife's eyes as she twisted the matrimonial ring on her finger. How would she react when she knew they were married? Argon was pretty sure that would take precedence over chasing zombies. Augusta would be madder than hell but he could handle that. Augusta in danger was harder to deal with and Newton Cadwalder spelled danger.

"What does it look like?" Augusta nervously paced away from him.

Argon sighed. "Why?" He knew the reason. She was a stubborn perverse woman and he loved that about her.

"Well, I have the zombie thing to sort out. People need the agency back up and running." Her eyes locked with his. "And I need something to take my mind off—"

"What? Us?" Argon knew that the wildfire of emotions that had sprung up between them was burning fast and furious and Augusta was having trouble with being out of control but there was no other way for them. They would always be an all or nothing couple, and nothing wasn't an option for Argon.

"Maybe I need to slow down a bit," Augusta admitted with a tired sigh. "Maybe I don't know what I am doing. It's all going so fast and I'm scared."

"Of what?" Argon would fight any demon she had, but fighting her fears was harder. "I love you, Augusta True." He never imagined he would have gotten to say that to anyone in his life. It felt good.

"I know you think you do."

She was so pigheaded sometimes. "Augusta—"

"I'm just confused," she interrupted him as she reached for Argon's hands. "I had this dream."

Argon listened as Augusta told him what she had seen and felt in her dream. That she felt it was real he did not doubt. She clutched his hands as if he was her lifeline. *I am*. The dream told him two things. She loved him. She might struggle with the words but the feeling was there and that made him feel like he was the most powerful man on the planet. Technically he was the seventh most powerful man, and there was infinite power and then there was the power of love. It kicked immortality's omnipotent ass. The other thing was, Augusta was prepared to fight for him and no one had ever done that before for him. Pride mixed with intense love made him sweep Augusta into his arms and hold her, never wanting to let go.

"I'm not going anywhere."

Augusta looked at him as if she wanted to believe him but was just too scared to.

"How do you know?"

"I know." Argon had been through his fair share of wars and hard times. He knew what it was like to struggle with everything around you. Being immortal was no guarantee of happiness. Argon knew his happiness stood before him and he would do whatever it took to make Augusta feel safe and loved. "You're just scared by the unknown, about what will happen tomorrow on your birthday."

"Yes."

"It may just be good." Argon lifted each hand in turn and kissed the palms. The small sigh of pleasure that escaped Augusta's lips made him smile.

"Or bad." *Lord, he was the sweetest man.* When Argon looked at her as if she was the most important person on the planet she wanted to believe everything would be all right. Augusta also wanted to burst into tears. No one had ever cared for her like this before. It made her feel that she was special.

"Whatever happens, we will face it together. I'll never leave your side no matter what." Argon lifted her face to his. He saw the sudden sparkle of tears in her eyes. "Are you going to cry?"

Probably.

"No, I never cry." Augusta could not remember the last time she'd had a good howl. She sniffled then hiccupped as she looked into his eyes. *Beautiful man.* "No one's ever cared for me like you have." Augusta had not meant to say that but it was out of her mouth before she could think. And that was what Argon did to her. He disarmed all her fortress gates and slipped in so easily behind her defenses before she had time to think.

Argon brushed away the stray tear that slid down her cheek.

"I love and adore you, Augusta True. Caring for you makes me happy. You make me happy. Before meeting you I can't remember the last time I felt happy." He walked them over to the chair and sat down with her sideways on his lap.

"Really?" Was it possible she had the ability to make him happy? *Oh, I hope so.* The thought that she could mean that much to anyone made her feel strong.

"Oh yeah."

And then he kissed her. Augusta pressed forward, giving in to the feeling and not caring if it was wrong or right or Hester's curse was about to bite her on the ass. There was only here and now, mouth to mouth and arms wrapped tightly around the man she loved that mattered. *Newton? Zombies? Screw the lot of them. I have Argon and he is all I need.* She could feel his cock pushing at the fabric of her shorts. Augusta pushed at his shoulders, breaking the sweet seal of their lips.

"What?" Argon looked at her puzzled.

"Are you always like this with every woman?" *And I believe I hate very one of them that you have ever touched.* Rationality was for other people. As confused and scared as Augusta was, she wanted sole possession of this man.

"No, only you." Argon pulled the glasses from her nose and placed them on a nearby table. "I cannot get enough of you, Augusta True" His hands went to her breasts, caressing the fleshy mounds. "I cannot think of other women when I am with you."

"Bloody good answer." Augusta felt the same about him. This was why, despite the curse, she had wanted no other man before Argon. It was not that she was saving herself or some moral reason. She just wanted "the one" who could make her feel everything she had longed to feel. No other man had even come close to that before. Augusta wanted Argon with a passion that both amazed and scared her. The rush of wetness between her legs confirmed that fact. "I am sure I must be on heat." She stopped and hiccupped when she realized she had said the words out loud.

Argon threw back his head and laughed in delight.

"Nah, you love me."

"Possibly."

"Stubborn wench." Argon freed her, allowing her to get up from his lap. He tilted his head to the side thoughtfully. "What are you thinking?"

Augusta stood up and faced him. She had the sudden urge to make the first move on him but she wasn't sure how she went about that. She knew what she wanted to do to him – drive him wild and have him begging for more. *But do I have the nerve?*

"Just wondering about something." She had the need to taste him but never having gone down on a man before Augusta wasn't sure how to go about it without looking dumb. *Do I drop to my knees, unzip and pull that bad boy from its confines or what.*

"What?" Argon leaned back and the chair and surveyed her.

"Wondering what you taste like." Augusta knew she was going bright red even as she said that words and the hiccup that escaped her lips was no surprise either. She felt incredibly dumb and naïve. It was not like she had not made love to Argon before. It was more that he always made the first move. "I'm not exactly sure how to go about this but go with me on this." She dropped to her knees before him.

"Augusta True, I'll love anything you do to me." He waited for her next move. "Need a hint?"

"Nope, I am a woman." She reached forward and unzipped his trousers. The thought of what she was about to do made her feel hot and amazingly turned on. The idea that giving pleasure to Argon could make her wet with need was exciting. When her hand freed his cock, Augusta smiled as Argon groaned. This was true power. Driving the one you love wild with sensation. She stroked the bulbous head of his shaft with her thumb. "Do you like that?"

"Yes," he hissed out as if trying to control himself.

"What about this?" Augusta dropped her head down and licked the tip. She felt the muscles on Argon's thighs bunch up and clench tensely. *Excellent*. Needing no more encouragement, Augusta sucked the head of his cock inside her mouth as she wrapped her hand around the base of it. The contrast with the softness of his skin to the hardness of his flesh was interesting. She sucked his shaft deeper into her throat, wanting to take as much as she could inside. Lengthwise she could only hold so much in her mouth, so Augusta decided to concentrate on sucking what she could and running her hand back and forward along the exposed cock. She was pleased when she heard the deep, feral growl that escaped Argon's lips, for she was in total control of her man.

"Augusta?" Her name came out choked from between his lips.

She tried to ignore the hand that tried to gently push her away. Augusta had never thought cock sucking would have been an enjoyable experience for a woman. She now knew that it depended on the man. Making love to Argon was all that mattered.

"Augusta." The words came out more firmly, a hint of desperation in their tone. Argon succeeded in pushing her mouth from his flesh.

She licked her lips and looked up from his shiny, wet cock to his face. "What?"

"You know what." Argon ran one long finger over her bottom lip. "I am about to come in your mouth."

"Getting turned on there, oh powerful immortal?" Augusta teased as she wondered what that would taste like.

"I want to come inside you. Now stand up and take off your shorts."

The thought of Argon commanding her to strip was so exciting and hot that she stood immediately.

"Yes, sir." Augusta reached for the waistband of her shorts. She pushed them down until they dropped at her feet leaving her standing in only her pink cotton knickers. "Anything else I can do for you?"

"I want to see your breasts."

"You could just strip me with a wave of your hand." She stood in her knickers before a man she had in essence only just met and yet not one hiccup threatened her. But then Augusta was not nervous. She knew exactly what she was doing.

"Yes, but I want you to do this of your own free will."

The idea of stripping for him was such a huge turn on that Augusta wished she had been wearing something more exciting.

"It's not the clothes, Augusta True," Argon said as if reading her mind. "It's you."

She needed no further encouragement. She pulled her t-shirt off over her head and flung it across the room to land over a lampshade. Augusta then stopped and rubbed her hands over the lace covered mounds of her breasts. Her eyes locked with Argon's. She was aching for him to touch her.

"Take your bra off." His words were clipped almost as if he was annoyed that he was having trouble keeping control.

"Yes, sir." Augusta's hand moved around and undid the snap of her bra. She had never really understood the fascination men had for these lumps of fatty tissue but when Argon looked at her breasts as if he wanted to devour them she didn't need to analyze it further. Desire was all that mattered. "My knickers?" she asked teasingly. "Do they come off?" Augusta looked at Argon's cock. It was standing up rigid and twitching. *Something was definitely about to come off.*

"Yes, take them off now." His voice was hoarse with need.

Augusta slid her hand down her stomach and into her panties feeling the wet curls between her legs. She touched her clit and massaged gently, her eyes never leaving his.

"Augusta," Argon growled low in his throat as he watched her.

"Yes?"

"Stop that."

"Why?" Though she knew why. And touching herself wasn't anywhere near as good as Argon's hands between her legs.

"For a woman who says she doesn't know what she is doing you are driving me wild."

"That was my fiendish plan."

He patted his thighs. "Hop on, Augusta True." A condom appeared instantly.

She fought the urge to slide on down the length of his erection.

"Do you need me?" She stilled her fingers on her clit because she was in danger of making herself come.

"Yes."

"How much, beautiful man?" *Crap. I did not mean to say that last bit out loud.*

Argon's eyes crinkled into a tender smile and he held his hand out to her.

"Please come to me, Augusta True. Be with me."

That was it. Any other plan she had to tease him dissolved under that smile and those words. She went forward and straddled his lap, body poised above his cock. As she slid down the hot length of him her eyes never left Argon's.

"Oh, Argon..." Her eyes closed as she allowed sensation to take over. Augusta felt his hands on her breasts as she began moving back and forward on his lap. She pulled at his shirt buttons in the need to touch his skin. Augusta was seconds from coming. *Will it always be so for us? So desperate?*

"I would be a happy man if I died now."

"You're immortal." Buttons shot off in all directions as she reached her goal.

Argon trapped her hand against his chest. "If I could die."

"Well, it would be kind of hard to explain." *Naked woman found straddling smiling, dead man. News at eleven.*

"But worth it." Argon held Augusta to him as she stiffened, her body tense under the orgasm that hit. She shuddered and her mouth found his in a hungry kiss full of passion.

"Oh yes," Augusta panted against his lips as she felt him jerk within her. She wanted to feel his essence spurting up inside her. She wanted everything he could give her.

"Soon, Augusta," Argon said as if knowing her thoughts. "Very soon."

Chapter Nine

An hour later, after a long, hot shower with Argon that left them both clean and very much sated, Augusta turned on the television and watched the news with him. It seemed so natural curled up beside him on the sofa, in her robe, as they listened to the usual events unfolding—religious and political debates, wars raging and the economy going to hell in a handbasket due to financial mismanagement. The various world leaders pontificated on this and that but nothing in particular that would help solve problems. People would still die, be crippled by debt and attack one another for greed.

“Have world leaders always been this stupid?” This man had been alive for a couple of hundred years. Argon must have seen it all.

“Yeah, pretty much,” Argon agreed as one of his hands massaged her satin covered thigh. “Nothing changes and no one seems to get any smarter.” He stopped talking when Augusta straightened up as she listened to a report on a man slashed by a fuel-powered lawn edger by a stranger who was reported to be smiling as he calmly shredded the man’s skin before walking away as if nothing had happened. It was stated as being the third similar attack in as many days. “And people are still sick and cruel.”

“Yes,” Augusta murmured absently. That last report about the attack was horrific and yet there was something about it that played on her mind. When the next news item came on she knew what it was that worried at her. “Oh crap.”

“What?” Argon looked at her perplexed.

“They’re talking about the annual Zombie Walk.” She listened intently to the newsreader. “I forgot about that.”

“People dressing up like zombies and pretending they’re the living dead?” Argon responded as the report finished. “What’s the point of that?”

“Well, there is none.” The man had been alive forever but trivia seemed to have passed him by. Luckily Augusta was the queen of useless information. It had been necessary when the agency had been running as neither she or Tilly knew when it could come in handy. “Every year there is a Zombie Walk in Brisbane City. Lots of countries do it. People dress up to look like the undead or at least that’s what they think zombies look like.”

“But you and I know they don’t. Zombies, apart from their smell, look like most humans.” Argon waved his hand and turned television off. “So why do people do this Zombie Walk?”

“Because they can.” Augusta stood up. The need to get to her computer and check out some facts was overwhelming. “Why does anyone do anything they do?”

Argon followed her over to the office she had set up in a corner of her apartment.

"So you're thinking if we suddenly have real zombies it would be the perfect time for them to make an appearance for real zombies could fit in with the fake."

"Exactly." Normally this would have been the time Augusta would have emailed Newton for information. He had, in the past, held a veritable storehouse of knowledge in his mind. But she was not comfortable dealing with that man any more. He had changed from a friend to someone bordering on foe. The fact that both he and the zombies were in Brisbane at the same time did not escape her either. Normally she and Tilly only heard of maybe one or two zombies every couple of years. Four, or more likely a dozen, for she did not trust Newton, did not turn up without reason. "Newton—"

"No, not a coincidence to me either, Augusta True."

Argon's accuracy at reading her thoughts had gone from annoying to necessary for Augusta. That he knew what she was thinking and did not think it was unusual was important to her because it provided her with something she needed. Someone to trust. Yes, she trusted Tilly but having Argon to trust was different. Tilly would follow her heart with Titch and she was divided by loyalty. Argon was totally hers.

"So why now?" Although she knew the answer. It was something that had been on her mind forever.

"It has to be your birthday."

"Yes." That was the obvious answer. Neither of them knew what tomorrow, her birthday, would bring and that's what made it all the more dangerous. "So we know Newton is here for that reason but the undead?" What was the connection there? As far as she knew, zombies cared for no one and did nothing unless there was something in it for them. But what? She was a would-be witch about to have a supposedly auspicious birthday. It was not like the zombies were looking to bake her a cake to celebrate.

"We know zombies are not as Hollywood portrays them. They do not eat brains. Zombies are spiteful creatures who maim and kill for no reason." Argon's eyes were thoughtful on hers as Augusta sat down in front of her computer. "They could be here for any reason. The attack on those people was classic zombie. They're technically dead so they believe why can't everyone else be."

"I had read that they were childish in their spite." In fact Augusta had almost as good a knowledge as Newton due to years of working with Tilly. It was amazing what tidbits of information she retained. "They also want to create more of their own kind." There was the belief that if you were killed by a zombie you became one. "Tilly thinks they kill as part of a membership drive."

Argon smiled at her words. "Tilly always thinks outside the box."

There was an interesting relationship between Tilly and Argon. Tilly was in love with Titch, an ex-spellbinder, who used to report to Argon. Neither Tilly or Argon spoke to each other without arguing and there were times when Augusta believed they enjoyed that snappy relationship. "Tilly likes you despite the games you two play."

"I like her too." Argon watched as Augusta tapped on the keyboard searching for information. "What do you hope to find?"

"I'm not sure." Augusta had clicked on her favorites and was going through the list of chat groups that always discussed the latest supernatural events. "Newton found me via the internet and I want to see what the various chatters are saying about zombies and in particular Brisbane." *And me.*

"And maybe an ancient curse?"

"Yes." There was no point lying. Argon knew all there was to know about her.

He sighed. "You could leave this alone but I know you won't."

Augusta's eyes caught the words "A sudden stirring in Brisbane." Others called it "inevitable" and one other mentioned the curse. She pointed them out to Argon.

"It's a problem that has to be fixed."

"And you're going to fix it?"

"If I can." Though I have no idea how. But the thing was she felt responsible somehow for everything that was starting to happen around her. If Newton was mixed up with the zombies and they were in Brisbane because of her, then Augusta felt guilty for those people who had been attacked. It wasn't rational but so little was in her life at the moment.

Argon stood behind her and began to massage her shoulders.

"You're a good person, Augusta True." He placed a light kiss on her lips as her head dropped backward and some of the tension was eased from her body.

"You're biased." *How did I go from hating Argon one moment to loving him the next? The universe was beyond weird sometimes.*

"I wish I could help with more knowledge but I only control spellbinders and then we only take on jobs for a specific purpose." Argon's voice indicated his lack of power in this situation was not something that pleased him.

"I know." Augusta understood. He was an immortal who did much good but only as the universe dictated. "What is happening with your spellbinder charges at the moment? Aren't you worried they're running amok?"

"You are so much more important to me at the moment and they have always been able to take care of themselves," Argon told her. "I am here to support you. I won't leave you."

A sudden flash of the dream she had crossed her mind. Bodies everywhere, uncomfortable heat and Argon disappearing before she had a chance to say goodbye. Augusta shivered at his words. "I won't leave you". *But will you have a choice?*

"It will be okay," he assured her, hugging her close to his body.

"God, I hope so." But instinctively Augusta knew there was more to come.

* * * * *

"What are they, rabbits?" Andervarle's voice was full of distaste as he watched through the window of Augusta's apartment as the lovers embraced.

"Yeah, rabbits," Warren repeated as he tried to spit in disgust but only drool ran down from the corners of his thin-lipped mouth.

Newton tried not to shudder in horror. Zombies were abhorrent to him. From their burning red-rimmed eyes to the disgusting smell they emitted.

"You were human once," he reminded them though he was not sure about Warren. He reminded Newton of a ventriloquist's ugly dummy perched on someone's knee waiting to say something ridiculous. "You would have had sex."

"Yes, but thankfully never again," Andervarle answered as if the idea was appalling to him.

"Yeah, never again." Warren nodded his head obediently at the other zombie, mimicking his words in slavish devotion.

Andervarle looked at the little creature at his side. Pure hatred shot from his eyes.

"I doubt very much you ever had sex Warren, unless it was with yourself."

"It still counts," Warren insisted in a high pitched whine.

This was too much information for Newton. He needed them to carry out his plans but there was no way he wanted to know anything more about them than was necessary.

"Anyway back to the topic at hand." The sooner he could finish this discussion the sooner he could go and have a shower to rid himself of the garlic and mold smell he was sure clung to him.

"Yes, you want the woman's powers and we want the immortal." Andervarle sounded bored. "How do you propose to get her powers?"

There was a very old spell dating back to Hester's time but they did not need to know that. He had promised much to the demon who had given it to him.

"None of your business. Once I have them, you can have the woman."

Andervarle looked down at his nasty companion.

"Do you hear that Warren? You'll be able to get your rocks off with a woman." He turned to face the human. "So you know our terms."

"I watch your back while you take the immortal." Newton would do anything to get Argon away from Rowdy. The man had too much power over her and the sooner she was free from him the better it would be. Newton had contemplated keeping Rowdy with him once her powers were drained however he had a minute amount of conscience and he knew seeing her accusing eyes on his would be too much. Just the way she had looked at him when they met face to face still made him angry and sad. Angry that he had helped her for so long and sad that whatever friendship they had developed had died. "There will be no problems." Newton doubted Rowdy would have a clue what her powers were anyway. She had been fighting this moment for so long that it was unlikely she would embrace them.

"Good. See that there's not. Humans can get quite pissed and want to cave our heads in and that doesn't work for us."

The intense hatred that he saw in Andervarle's burning eyes always chilled Newton.

"Argon is weakened by his love for the woman. He will be no challenge." Newton had to believe that. All past sources regarding Cardissan males indicated once mated with a Lawrence their strength started to leave them. The immortality stayed but they were not the same powerful beings they once were.

"Do we trust him, Warren?" Andervarle looked Newton up and down, taking the measure of him.

"Yes. No. Yes," muttered Warren as he glared at Newton. "Maybe. No."

This earned an eye roll of contempt from Andervarle.

"I keep him nearby as he does what he is told and is no threat."

Newton nodded his head in understanding. "That's fairly obvious."

Warren roared in sudden anger, glaring hotly at them before he belched obscenely ruining the effect of his wrath.

"See? Pathetic." Andervarle slapped Warren in the head.

Whatever. "Her birthday is tomorrow. That will be the time to strike." Everything relied on timing if Newton was to get what he wanted and come out of this unscathed.

"Yes and I suspect after a quick birthday fuck the immortal will be weakened even further." Andervarle looked pleased with himself.

"Good, so first thing tomorrow –"

The tall zombie shook his head. "No, we want to have some fun first."

Newton had been all through this was the zombies before. There were to be no "fun" zombie side trips.

"The Zombie Walk was only meant as the perfect cover for your being in Brisbane in case someone got suspicious." Newton knew there was at least ten other zombies who traveled with them. They always traveled in packs yet they had the ability to ignore any of their brethren if they required help.

"Say what you like little Welshman but that many people *en masse* pretending to be our kith and kin? We cannot pass up that opportunity. We will not."

"Kill, kill, kill. Hee, hee, hee," Warren chortled in a sick parody of glee as he danced around.

"Really Warren," Andervarle cuffed him again, "try to control yourself."

The smaller zombie stumbled to a halt and hung his head in shame.

"We're going to the march because we're selfish bastards. We want not only the immortal but some would-be-if-they-could-be-zombies."

Newton sighed and ran a tired hand through his hair. He had not slept since had had left Wales.

"As long as I have the woman by four thirty-nine p.m., I don't care what you do."

"What? She turns into a pumpkin after that?" Andervarle laughter was nasty sounding.

No, I die. The cost of the spell was a deal with a demon. They liked to have fun at a mortal's expense.

"You have until four thirty-nine p.m. to take her powers and serve us or we send the Hounds of Hell for you," the demon had told him.

"Why that specific time?" Newton wanted the spell and he knew he had little chance to gain it quickly by other means.

"It amuses us."

"I will do it." The minute he said those words the spell had become his and his life hung in the balance.

"I care neither way. One soul is the same as another."

"Tomorrow we must do this," Newton told the two zombies. Everything rode on Augusta's birthday.

Chapter Ten

Augusta opened her eyes and looked at her bedside clock. It was seven o'clock in the morning, the sun was shining, birds twittered outside her window and Argon's hot, naked body was pressed up against hers.

"I'm thirty." The day she had dreaded for so long was finally here. "Bugger."

"Happy birthday, Augusta True." Argon moved in and kissed her in a slow, leisurely way as if savoring the moment. "What is it?" He asked as he broke off the kiss. "You're pulling a face and I have to tell you that does nothing for my ego."

Men. "Your ego could not be dented with a sledge hammer, mister." Augusta liked his cocky attitude. It was all male and wantable. "It's just that "I don't feel any different." She was supposed to be a witch descended from a long line of witches. *Shouldn't I feel something? Anything?*

"Did you expect to?"

"Well yeah, you know the whole worlds colliding thing, mixed with the havoc and danger stuff." That curse had been engraved on her memory since she was sixteen. It was not like Augusta could forget what was supposed to happen.

"Our worlds have collided."

Augusta shook her head. "It can't be that simple." Nothing ever was and why put a perfectly good curse out there with all the tough bits in it and then let it all fall to pieces? It was like Rhett walking out on Scarlett. You knew there had to be more than him being slightly miffed.

"You haven't exactly made it easy for me if that makes you any feel better." Argon rolled on top of her, lying in between her thighs. "Do you want your birthday present now?"

"I think I know what it is." His cock was pressing into her inner thigh. They had not had sex last night when they had fallen into bed together. They had had merely gone to sleep in each others arms. Well, Augusta had slept but immortal beings did not sleep. She wasn't real sure what they did. "What do you do if you don't sleep?"

"I watched you." Argon kissed her nose playfully. "You're gorgeous."

The man was blinded by love and she liked it. Augusta reached for her glasses on the bedside table, knowing that wouldn't have taken six hours to do. "And?"

"And thought about us." In particular whether to tell Augusta the truth of their marriage or not. Did he wait to see what happened or plan a life with her regardless, curse be damned? That was as soon as she got over the shock of the marriage, of course. Not for one moment did Argon think Augusta would take that news calmly. He picked

up her left hand and looked at the ring. Cardissan legend had it that only the true owner of the ring could make it sparkle as fiercely as it did on Augusta's ring finger.

"You okay?" she asked with concern.

"Perfect." He kissed her hand and thought about the day ahead of them. It held an unknown quality. A feeling something was going to happen but he was not sure what. It was unusual for Argon not to have some inkling of what lay ahead but his powers, when with Augusta, were not as strong as they normally were. Immortals were always weakened by love. But he did not mind. Argon planned to give up his immortality for Augusta once he knew all danger had passed. He was tired of being alive forever without really living a full life. Being in love with Augusta was worth giving up any powers he had. Argon pulled back the sheet and looked at her bare body hungrily. *How did I ever live without this woman? She has given me everything I could ever want. Please God give me the ability to make her feel happy and safe.*

"Should we be doing this?"

"What?" Argon's hand went to her breast. He could feel her heart pounding with excitement. Her energy matched his.

"Going to have sex." Augusta squirmed beneath him.

"Why would you think that was my gift to you?" He grinned down at her, amused at her cynical eye roll.

"Because there is a big, hard pointy thing between my legs." Her hands went up to his shoulders. "What's it doing there?"

"Just resting, seeking shelter." The kind that only Augusta could provide. "Do you want your birthday present now?" He had something special to give her that he knew she wanted.

"Is that it?" Augusta looked at his upright cock.

"One of many."

"There's no bow on it so it's not a real present."

Argon waved his hand and a red ribbon appeared tied on a jaunty angle at the base of his shaft. Augusta burst out laughing. The sound of it made him smile with happiness. He would do anything to make her happy.

"Want to unwrap it?" Argon sat back on his haunches so his be-ribboned erection was presented to her.

Augusta licked her lips in anticipation. "Yes please." As she sat up to untie the ribbon, she stopped.

"Do I make a wish?" *What was the etiquette of wishing on a cock? Was it the same as a candle.* Both were hot.

"Anything you want." He watched as she closed her eyes and whispered her wish to the heavens. "What did you wish for?"

You and me forever.

"It won't come true if I tell you." A wish begging the universe to keep Argon by her side was a big ask and it was crazy to believe it could come true. She climbed onto Argon's lap and started on the bow, her fingers teasing his firm flesh as the ribbon slowly came undone. The thought of having all the hardness ensconced within her once more was an excellent birthday present.

"You're trying to kill me aren't you?" Argon groaned as pulled her further onto his lap. His eyes shone with delight. "You're wet."

And she wasn't the slightest bit embarrassed because her need for him was too hard to hide. The curls between her legs were drenched due to need.

"I always am with you. Will it always be like this for us?" *God, I hope so.*

"Yes, because we love each other."

"Argon, powerful immortal felled by love."

"Yes, ma'am and I do not regret it one bit." He urged her forward. "Now are you going to accept my present to not?"

"Slap a birthday condom on it and you bet." Augusta burst out laughing as a bright neon purple condom appeared over the length of his penis. She lifted up and on top of his cock, sliding down the length of it her eyes never leaving his. "I love purple and I love you."

"Now that is a gift I will treasure." His lips met hers in a hot, demanding kiss.

Augusta rode Argon slow and deep, never once letting their flesh part. She wanted to have the feel of him against her imprinted on her body forever. That memory would be the best birthday present ever. She ran her hands up and down his strong back feeling the muscles. The taste and texture of his body fascinated Augusta. She planned on turning him over later and licking each muscle slowly in turn. Argon gave her the freedom to do that. It was a gift she was going to give herself. But for now, she was more than happy to make love to his mouth, their tongues teasing and twisting together as they kissed.

"Whatever you want, I will do." Argon's fingers ran in light, teasing circles around her nipples.

Augusta sighed. "I have some ideas."

"Excellent." Argon looked at her in confusion as she started to lift from his body.

She felt the immediate loss of heat as his cock slid from her. But she needed more. Being in control was one thing. Having another take control and take her was another. "I want something harder."

"I cannot get any harder, Augusta." Argon's hands reached out to her.

She giggled at the affronted male pride in his voice. "I know that." Augusta moved so her butt was facing him. "This is what I want and now." She spread her legs in wide invitation.

"Yes ma'am." Argon moved quickly to do her bidding.

As his cock slid into her from behind, Augusta sighed. This was what she needed. His hands on her hips, controlling the motion and her not being able to do anything but enjoy the moment. "Thank you." She settled into the fast, hot pace.

"No, thank you." Argon's arms wrapped around her waist, his hips thrusting and his tongue tickling her back.

Augusta squirmed at the competing sensations— one playful, the other intense. "You know I am going to want this every birthday." She stiffened as she realized what she had said. Argon for life? When had she come to accept that as a given?

He stopped and leaned, kissing her cheek tenderly. "That's a promise."

The warm breath against her ear made her shiver. "Hurry up."

Argon still did not move. "Eager to come, Augusta True?"

"On the edge." She wiggled her butt against him.

He laughed. "Well, I cannot leave my woman there." Argon pulled almost all the way out of her wet core then rammed back in making Augusta jump and shriek.

Oh yes, she was his as much as he was hers. There was no point fighting it. She gave in to the wild heat that tore through her body at every cock-stroke within her. Augusta could feel the length of him right into her stomach and it was triggering the most delicious sensations within her. The intensity of the orgasm when it caught at her made her fall face first into the bedding, screaming as she came.

"Good present?" Argon murmured in her ear.

"The best." The words were muffled by the blankets as she tried to catch her breath.

"I can see I am going to have to stock up on purple condoms if this is the result." Argon continued to pump into her body until he came moments later. He fell forward over her, his weight on his elbows.

"Purple, pink, orange, as long as it's you, the color is irrelevant." Augusta welcomed the heat of his sated body on hers. "Thank you for finding me."

* * * * *

An hour later, though, she wasn't so thankful. Argon had left on "business". He had not been forthcoming on what sort of business and would not be pushed into disclosing it. Augusta had been slightly peeved that he had left her on her birthday. While it was true most birthdays had just been her and Tilly, this year was important. This year she had Argon. Augusta stopped in her tracks and thought about that. She went from worrying about the implications of turning thirty to concentrating on the fact that she had Argon in her life. Whatever happened with the curse happened. There was not much she could do about that other than try to protect those she loved. And Argon was one of them. She had gone from having no one to having someone and she was very close to becoming all gooey over the man.

"If I haven't already," she murmured to herself as heard the doorbell ring. She was still wobbly kneed after her "birthday present" this morning. She opened her front door

and found Newton holding a bunch of flowers and grinning at her. *This is wrong, so very wrong. What is he up to?* Augusta could not reconcile the sweet, helpful man from the emails to this man. Although he appeared pleasant, she had the feeling something was not as it should be.

"Happy birthday, Rowdy." Newton handed her the flowers and leant in to kiss her.

Augusta avoided the kiss with skilful step to the left as she accepted the flowers.

"Thank you." *Now what do you want?*

If he was upset about the overly polite greeting, Newton did not show it.

"How do you feel?" he asked in the same carefully polite tones Augusta was using.

The man was once again looking at her as if she was a science experiment. *What do you know that I don't? What caused you to haul your ass from Wales to be here?* Augusta wanted to ask him flat out but she knew she would not get the answer she sought. There was a cloak of evasiveness over the Welshman.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, you're now the big three-oh."

His friendly, overly jovial smile did nothing to ally her thoughts about him.

"The same as yesterday." She looked at the flowers. Perfect roses. Perfect to the point of falseness like the man before her. Augusta wished Tilly was there as she would have handled Newton in typical kick-ass Tilly Moor style. She sent a silent, selfish plea for her best friend to come to her. It had worked with Argon and although the connection was different, she and Tilly had a deep bond of friendship.

"No different?"

"No. Why?" It had never occurred to Augusta that this man had been friends with her for a reason. But then she had been a desperate sixteen year old when he had come into her life. Newton had also been a teenager. Back then he seemed to care. Now Augusta was wondering exactly when that caring had turned to self interest.

"I thought –"

"What?"

"Maybe you felt something different inside you when you awoke this morning."

Augusta thought back to the hot cock that had been inside her earlier. Every time with Argon was a little bit different but she was fairly sure this was not what Newton meant.

"Why are you suddenly here, Newton? What is it you hope to gain?" Augusta was tired of pussyfooting around the topic. Time to channel Tilly Moor sentiments.

Newton sighed angrily as if whatever point he was trying to make was lost. He reached into his pocket and pulled out a crumpled piece of paper. He looked at her then the paper.

"Spiritueux des morts –"

"Anyone home?" Nell interrupted Newton's words. She looked him up and down, seemingly not impressed by what she saw. Her contempt was thinly hidden as they were introduced. "What's that you have there? A birthday poem? Starting off with 'spirits of the dead'? I hope it gets more cheery from there."

"No." Newton stuffed the paper back into his pocket.

"Welsh huh?"

Augusta stood and watched in fascination. Nell made no attempt to be friendly.

"Ah, yes—"

"Cadwalder? Was that your surname?"

"Yes it is." There was a slight hesitation in Newton's voice like he was uncomfortable with the blonde woman and her questions.

"Any relation to Ranuld Cadwalder the Evil who betrayed his whole village and allowed everyone to die so he could gain land from the English?"

Nell said the words so pleasantly that Augusta had to control the smile that came to her face. What did she know about him? And why was Newton so on edge?

"I, er, believe that's a fable."

"That's written in your history books," Nell pressed on.

Newton turned to look at Augusta.

"I should go. But I will be back to talk to you soon, Rowdy." He left without further farewell.

"Rowdy?"

"It's a nickname." Augusta pushed her glasses up her nose, knowing she was the least 'rowdy' person there was.

Nell assessed the woman beside her.

"Yeah I can see that. You hide a rowdy spirit and don't tell me you don't. Everyone has stuff they hide."

"Do you?" Nell appeared outwardly confident but she suspected like her best friend Tilly, much of it was a front. But then who was Augusta to judge? She had been hiding herself away for years.

"I'm not here to talk about me," Nell responded with an enigmatic smile. "This is all about you." She turned and looked at the door. "The Welshman is trouble."

Augusta nodded her head. "You feel it too?"

"We have to keep you away from him."

Nell's blue eyes were intense on hers. Augusta knew this was than just a personality clash between her and Newton.

"Why?"

"He is a usurper."

"A what?" Augusta had been hoping for something a little less vague but then her life had always been vague so why would that change now?

"Cadwalder's kind hunts for power. You have it and he wants it."

Augusta threw her hands up in the air in confusion.

"What power? I have none or if I do I have yet to see it."

Nell reached over and touched her shoulder.

"You have more power than you imagine."

How was this possible? Augusta felt no power surging inside her. Shouldn't she at least feel something? A tingle? A twitch? All that came out was a hiccup.

"Augusta, you have no choice. It's your fate."

"Fucking fate!" Augusta swore. "I am sick to death of it." She cursed some more because it made her feel better.

Nell just smiled and let her go.

"Nothing like a good swear. Feeling a bit better now?"

"Sort of." Augusta knew she would only feel better once she knew what fate had in store for her. It was the not knowing that was hard to deal with.

"So how exactly do you know the Welsh guy?" Nell listened quietly as Augusta told her the story. "We have to get rid of him."

Augusta liked Nell. She was decisive and similar to Tilly but for the lack of diva dramatics.

"How? Turn him into a frog or something?"

"Maybe." Nell pondered their options.

This surprised Augusta. Before Nell had her looking into a mirror with her eyes closed. It was not at all witch-like but turning people into frogs was more like her idea of witchcraft.

"We could? Seriously?"

Nell nodded her head as if it was merely a simple thing to do.

"We can do that but we need something more permanent."

Being a frog seemed like a pretty permanent solution to Augusta.

"Like what?"

"Well, you may not like it."

Augusta rolled her eyes. "There have been so many things already I have not liked. What's one more?"

"We change Cadwalder's mind."

"Huh?" That sounded too simple and Nell was right. Augusta didn't like it. If she had access to power she wanted to use it.

"We put a 'change his mind spell' on him so he forgets what he wants from you."

"Sounds too easy."

"The best things are." Nell moved over to Augusta's desk and grabbed a pen and a piece of paper. "We have to act quickly because what he plans I am sure will harm you."

For a moment, Augusta was sad. Newton had been one of the few people she had been able to rely on. To know he had been biding his time to use her for his own purposes stung.

"I know it hurts, Augusta but he needs to be stopped." Nell started furiously writing down a list on the paper.

Nell was right. There was no time for sentiment. It was her survival over Newton's greed.

"How do we do it?"

"This is what we need." Nell handed her the list.

Augusta scanned the neat writing. "Seriously? This is more like a grocery list."

The blonde woman smiled. "We don't do 'eye of newt' anymore."

"Bummer," Augusta murmured.

"So where is tall, dark and sexy?" Nell looked around the apartment.

"Argon had business to attend."

"Good, he is thinking and acting as he should."

"Huh?" *What did that mean?* Augusta knew she was missing out on something but what?

Nell looked reassuringly at her. "Nothing you need to worry about."

"Well I'm a little pissed I am missing out on a secret that you two seem to share." Augusta liked Nell, but she would not be averse to some serious hair pulling if she thought the blonde witch was going after Argon.

"Ah jealousy." Nell nodded her head in understanding. "No need. I have my own issues when it comes to men and their usefulness in my life."

"Okay then." Her claws retracted.

"About your man," Nell hesitated as if weighing up her options. She saw the puzzled look on the other woman's face. "He hasn't told you yet has he?"

Oh, that did not sound good.

"What?" A feeling of anxiety swept through Augusta and she let out a wild stream of hiccups.

"You'd accept your natural power more if you knew all there is to know."

Hiccup, hiccup, hiccup.

"What?"

"It's not right to keep something like that from you as uncertainty dilutes power."

Hiccup, hiccup, hiccup.

"You are either talking in riddles, Nell or you are stoned. Whatever you have to tell me, just say it."

"You're married to Argon." Nell stood quietly and awaited her reaction.

Augusta just stared at her in disbelief. She did not hiccup because for a moment all the breath had been knocked out of her body.

"I am not." But even as she said the words, Augusta felt a shiver of reality run up her back.

"Yeah you are," Nell responded matter-of-factly. "Have you ever wondered why you could not take that ring off?" She pointed to the elaborate diamond ring that glittered on Augusta's finger.

The wearer looked at it herself. *It's just a ring. Isn't it?*

"It's just tight." Even to her own ears, Augusta thought that sounded weak. *But how? Why? When?*

Nell was ready to answer those questions.

"It's a Cardissan matrimonial ring. Once placed on your finger you are legally and irrevocably married."

Augusta twisted the ring in agitation. It was one thing to have sex with the man but marriage was supposed to be a consultative matter. *I don't recall any discussions.*

"But there were no vows or paperwork." *Hiccup, hiccup.* Now she had caught her breath a thrill of panic shot through her.

"Augusta, marriage was never meant to be a big frou-frou white extravaganza of who can spend the most money. That's just all commercialism to get people indebted forever trying to pay it off." Nell's words were logical and straight to the point. "Marriage is a simple bond like the exchange of a ring and the love of your life at your side. The rest is just fairy floss to create a spectacle."

"But he... I..." Augusta stopped and thought back to their first time together. She had been so overwhelmed with sensation that Argon could have done anything with her and she would have gone along with it. "That bastard." That was obviously what he had counted on. Seduce the horny virgin and get married to fulfill Hester's curse. "He lied to me." *Why? Argon knew she loved him even if she had not said the words.*

"Well, technically, Argon just omitted to tell the truth."

Augusta stared at Nell as if she was mad.

"That's splitting hairs! I would not have known about any of this unless you told me." Why had Argon not told her the truth? Was he hiding something?

"I imagine Argon believed he had his reasons," Nell said trying to calm her down.

"What? A roll in the hay?"

Nell sighed as if she wished she had not said anything.

"Argon's position is complicated."

"And it's going to get a damn sight more complicated."

Chapter Eleven

After Nell left, Augusta went down to empty the trash. So far, as birthdays went, this one sucked but that was par for the course. Birthdays had never been a big deal for Augusta. What was a big deal was being lied to by Argon.

"My husband." Augusta crashed the lid down. The whole thing was just so galling. Why exactly had he married her? For love? To save his ass from the curse? Or was it something the universe had called on him to do. "Fucking universe, always interfering." She gave the trash can a swift kick. "If we were really married then Argon would be taking out the trash."

"Talk to yourself a lot do you?"

The overpowering smell of mold and garlic hit her like sledgehammer. She turned to look into the bright, burning eyes of two zombies. One was tall and elegant. The other looked like a creepy, ten dollar accountant. *Great. Not only do I find out I am I married on my birthday but I have zombies in my backyard and me without a hammer to bash their zombies brains in. Can the day get any better?*

"What do you want?" She stood her ground and refused to be scared. The stench and heat coming from them was appalling. Augusta had read that zombies used that to terrify people. *But not me.*

"My name is Andervarle." He smiled a charming yet nasty smile at her.

"I don't care if it's Marion."

"That's not very polite, Augusta."

"I'm not in the mood to deal with you." She looked him up and down in contempt.

"Happy birthday."

"What? No present?" Augusta turned on the feral little zombie who growled at her words. She bared her teeth back at him. He backed down.

Andervarle cuffed his associate hard.

"Leave the lady alone, Warren. You are no match for her."

Warren? Of course. No one would be scared of a bad guy called Warren.

"You're here because?" Augusta waited for the head zombie to get to the point.

He looked at his nails casually. "Did you know your dear Welsh friend sent us to your fair city to cause trouble and get your attention?"

There it was, proof positive against Newton. "And?" Augusta returned just as casually.

"Well I thought you and I could come to a deal."

Augusta was fairly sure whatever the deal was it was not going to be to her benefit.

"I don't make deals with your type." The thing that interested her was that neither zombie had made a move to attack her? Why? Zombies were not exactly known for their finesse.

"Not even to save your lover?"

Andervarle's words made her heart skip a beat. They wanted Argon?

"What?" Augusta knew by the sinister smile on the zombie's face that he had the upper hand. *For the moment.*

"Our deal with the Welshman was for us to get your lover while Newton would have you. We were to distract you." Andervarle had a pleased look on his face as if he knew she was on the defensive now. "Immortals are quite a prize to have as captives.

Augusta snorted in derision "Like you could ever catch Argon." He would not be silly enough to walk into any zombie trap.

"Normally no, but he is weakened by love and, I suspect, all the bunny rabbit sex you two have doing." Andervarle looked at her distastefully.

Damn, he was right. Immortals were weakened by love. Augusta remembered the problems Tilly had with Titch being weakened.

"So why are you telling me this?" The evil chuckle of triumph from the zombie was unnerving, but then it was meant to be.

"Although we want him, you can save him."

Despite the pain gripping her sinuses due to the smell, Augusta knew she had to listen to what the zombie had to say. She had no choice. Argon's life was in danger. Even though he was a liar, she still loved him.

"What's the catch?"

Andervarle leaned on the fence behind him, the smaller zombie mimicking his actions. If it wasn't all so serious, it would have been laughable to Rowdy. *Stinky and stinkier.*

"We wanted his power but you have more."

Of course, it was obvious. Zombies always wanted the most or best.

"You want me. So why not take me now?"

"Well, as much fun as that would be, we want to teach Cadwalder a lesson." Andervarle's eyes burned bright with hatred. "And there is the Zombie Walk."

"Naturally you would not pass up an opportunity to maim and kill *en masse*." The nod of pleasure he gave her was sickening. "You are both spiteful and greedy."

"Yet charming."

"And smelly." When the smaller zombie rushed her, Augusta stopped him with a palm to his forehead. He kept moving his feet although he wasn't going anywhere. "Couldn't have got someone a little smarter?"

Andervarle threw Warren to the ground.

"Agree to come with us and we will leave the immortal alone. They're difficult at the best of times."

Tell me about it

"How can I trust you?" *I know I bloody can't but what choice to I have? I cannot have Argon taken by these losers.*

"Well, normally you can't but if we hurt him it's hardly going to help us get you is it? I suspect you may dig your heels in and refuse to join us."

Damn straight. "Why are you looking at me like that?" It was creepy, inquisitive and bordering on unnerving.

"You have no idea the scope of your powers do you?"

Not a clue.

"Even better. A virgin witch," he murmured to himself.

"Virgin?" Warren sat and started drooling. "Virgin?" He started sniffing the air. Andervarle smacked him in the head again, knocking him out.

"Annoying simp... where was I? Oh yes, it will please me much to see you parted from your beloved." He smirked at the look she gave him. "Yes, we are spiteful bastards but it's our one joy in life."

"What about Newton?" Where did he fit in all of this? And this was nowhere near the dream she had. Yes there was heat but the only person who was destined to leave to save anyone was her.

"He is a manipulative sod who will get what he deserves. So, are you in or not? We'll even give you twelve hours for the tearful farewell. It also gives us time to have a little fun with the population."

When the hell were these powers supposed to kick in? Augusta really wanted to smash Andervarle's annoying face in. But in lieu of wondrous powers, she knew there was only one thing she could do. Augusta had to save Argon.

"Fine, okay, I'll do it. Just leave Argon alone."

"I knew you'd cave in for love. You mortals are pathetic."

"Bite me."

"I may just do that," Andervarle said chomping his teeth together obscenely.

"Hello, Rowdy," Tilly Moor called out as she rounded the corner and came upon them. "Who are your smelly friends and why is there never a blunt object around when I need one?" A groggy Warren reached for Tilly's ankle. She kicked him in the face with her size nine Doc Marten boots. The zombie crumpled back down. "Zombies. No staying power."

Augusta was overwhelmingly pleased to see her best friend but she knew Tilly was in danger because while the zombies wanted her, they did not need a mouthy mortal ass kicker like Tilly. Augusta grabbed her arm and pulled her close to her side to protect her. She shook her head at the questioning look Tilly gave her.

"Well, isn't she perfectly ghastly?" Andervarle ignored the rude gesture Tilly made at him and turned to Augusta. "See you tomorrow."

"Wankers," Tilly murmured over-sweetly as Andervarle picked up Warren's foot, walking off, dragging him behind as he went.

The two women embraced once the zombies could no longer be seen.

"What the hell is going on?"

"Zombies." *And I have twenty-four hours to save my ass.*

"Well duh, I mean with you."

Augusta looked at her best friend and tried to think of a quick condensed version to everything that has happened but there was none.

"It's involved."

"Everything is always is with us, Rowdy." Tilly sighed tiredly. "Where's Argon? Did he leave?"

"No, he's around." *Hiccup.*

Tilly looked her in the eye and drew a deep breath.

"You had sex with Argon!"

Oh how did she know? Augusta really did not want to get into this with Tilly. As much as she loved her friend, she knew Tilly would not leave her alone until she had all the details. Augusta knew time was limited.

"We have zombies to deal with Tilly."

"So tell me about it."

"I think there's at least four maybe more of them," Augusta responded knowing that was not what Tilly wanted to know.

"No. I mean about you and tall, dark and impossibly arrogant Argon."

Augusta could agree on the fact the man was annoying but not arrogant. At least not to her.

"He isn't and we don't have time."

"Make time," Tilly insisted. "I want to know everything."

Augusta sighed deeply. "Okay let's see, I have been having sex with an immortal and it seems I'm married." She lifted her hand to show her friend the ring. "Up to speed now?"

Tilly was agog. "Wow. Really?" She grabbed her hand and looked at the ring.

"Yes, apparently once this is on my finger I'm married to Argon."

"Okay, so why did you marry him?"

Would I have married Argon if he had asked me? I would have liked the chance to find out.

"I didn't know until this morning when the witch told me."

"The witch?"

"Nell. Oh and by the way I am apparently a witch too. I have amazing powers but I have no idea what they are."

Tilly sat down hard on a trash can.

"Right okay. What else?"

Augusta had to hand it to Tilly. Nothing shocked her.

"Newton turned up."

"Newton of the geek squad?" Tilly's eyes opened wide with surprise.

Now she's shocked. It was proof that Tilly was human under her tough façade.

"Yes it appears he wants my fantastic powers."

"I always suspected he was a rat fink." Tilly slammed her fist down on her denim clad knee. "Hmm, go back to Argon. Wasn't this the guy you were scared of being with?"

"Things change." *Who knew strawberry cheesecake ice-cream and wine were aphrodisiacs?*

"Yeah, I know how that happens," Tilly said as if remembering another time of her own.

"It's just sex." *Fantastic sex but still sex.* Added to that the man was a liar. There was the reason to hate Argon, but for the life of her Augusta could not muster up any real venom.

"Uh-huh." Tilly looked at her skeptically. "You want to come up with something a little more convincing for the woman who has known you for most of your life?"

Augusta started pacing. Maybe it would help to get what she felt out into the open.

"Okay, it may have been more."

"Like love?"

"Yes, but Argon lied to me about marriage." Augusta explained what happened to her friend.

"Men are strange," Tilly pronounced as she stood up from the trash can. "Frig and what about you? I leave you alone for a week and you lose your virginity to an immortal you hated and now love and are married to, you've got zombies visiting your house and a geek wanting your secret powers. And you know what surprises me most?"

"What?" Wasn't all that enough?

"You haven't fixed your glasses yet."

"I've been a tad busy." Augusta pushed the specs in question back up her nose. "Back to zombies. What do you know about them?"

"They're smelly, red eyed and always in a pissy mood," Tilly responded succinctly. "What's the plan? Smack their skulls in with hammers?"

Augusta knew Tilly had never destroyed a zombie but she knew how to if she had to. Tilly was a suburban warrior woman.

"They also plan to take part in the annual Zombie Walk through the city."

Tilly's eyes opened wide with alarm.

"Oh no, we can't let them. That would be like shooting fish in a barrel."

Augusta agreed. "Yep, lots of people thinking they're having a fun, silly day out are going to be in a lot of danger."

"Fucking zombies." Tilly searched her friend's face. "There's more isn't there?"

"Newton did a deal with them to take Argon."

"Weedy little geek."

"But the zombies will punish Newton and not take Argon if I agree to go with them."

Tilly shook her head. "And you said yes."

"Yes." What else could she have said?

"Never a dull moment with us, is there, Rowdy?"

It was good to have Tilly back. Things were so easy to explain to someone whose mind was always open.

"No, never. Want to come to a 'change of mind' ceremony?"

"Sure," Tilly said as if it was an everyday occurrence.

"Where's Titch?" Augusta looked forward to seeing him again. He was such a casual and relaxed soul who made her feel at peace.

"Inside, he thought we may need to be alone." Tilly looked at her friend quizzically. "You know it was weird but I thought I heard you call out to me so I told Titch we had to come here straight away."

"I did." Augusta had always been able to call on Tilly since they were five years old.

"We'll get this all sorted. There is no way you are going with those asshole zombies."

"No." Augusta pitied any zombie who tried to take Tilly and her size nine Doc Martens on.

"And when I see Argon I will give him a piece of my mind for lying to you."

Augusta smiled and shook her head. Initially, she had planned to rant and rave and stamp her feet when she saw Argon. Now she had another idea.

"Oh, I have a plan for him."

"Torturous?"

"Oh yeah, he'll be squirming."

Augusta stood naked before Argon.

"To what do I owe this pleasure?" He reached out for her but she slapped his hand away.

"Do I need a reason?" Augusta swallowed the nervous hiccup that caught at her throat. Seduction was not one of her natural talents.

"No, Augusta True, you don't."

"Take off you clothes and—" The words were barely out of her mouth and Argon had waved his clothes away with the stroke of his hand. *What a beautiful man.* Augusta shook her head to focus on the task at hand. She wanted to teach him a lesson, not stare hungrily at his body. "Lie down on the bed."

"Sounds like I am going to enjoy this."

Augusta reached into her bedside table and pulled out the handcuffs she had pulled out of a box of old agency stuff. She crawled onto the bed beside his stretched out, naked body and grabbed one of his hands. Argon in turn slipped his other hand up her inner thigh, edging toward her pussy.

"No, my game, my rules." She secured one hand and then removed the other before it could go any further and secured it to the bedpost as well. "Would you say most of your powers are centered in your hands?"

"Yes." Argon looked at her with curiosity.

"So being tied you up you would make you helpless."

"To a point." He grinned at Augusta. "What now?"

"I lick you all over." Argon's cock had already been erect but now it looked almost painful as it tensed skyward at her words. Augusta knew it would not take long for him to get to the point of no return. She lifted one of her legs over his body, straddling his hips, his cock pushing toward her pussy for attention. But Augusta ignored it preferring to concentrate on licking a long, slow line down his chest, stopping every so often to place a wet, sucking kiss on his flesh.

"Augusta True..." The "true" part came out choked as if Argon was concentrating more on controlling his body as opposed to his tongue. He bucked his hips toward her impatiently. "Are you trying to kill me?"

"Again, you're immortal so death is not an option but torture certainly is." Augusta moved back and grabbed his cock, rubbing it over her breasts. The low growl that escaped his lips had the dangerous edge of a man losing control.

"And why would you want to torture me?" Argon swallowed hard when she sandwiched his cock between her breasts and squeezed.

"Gee, I don't know. Have you done anything wrong lately?" Augusta pulled and pushed his cock between her breasts. She was supposed to be angry with him but it was hard to be when touching him like this made her wet between her legs.

"No, nothing."

Augusta let his penis fall from between her breasts and took it firmly in her hand.

"Nothing at all?" She licked the head of his cock and smiled when Argon groaned.

"You know don't you?"

She swirled her tongue over the tip.

"What? That we're married and you didn't bother to tell me?" She dropped his cock and pushed back from Argon.

"So you decided to torture me?"

"Pretty much," she answered knowing he was not the only one in torture at that moment. *I want him.*

Argon pulled at his restraints. "I know it was not right what I did but I love you Augusta, naturally I would want to marry you."

"Most normal men propose." She pointed out the obvious trying to concentrate on anything else but the empty ache between her legs which only Argon could fill.

"I'm not normal."

"I know." Augusta got off the bed to stop herself from touching him. "You should have asked."

Argon looked at her, his face strained with need. "Would you have said yes?"

"Maybe. Okay, yes." Not that it mattered now. Unless she and Tilly came up with some plan, Augusta was zombie bait. *Where are these frigging powers?*

"I'm sorry. I should have asked but I just panicked that you would run scared from me." Argon's voice was soft with explanation.

Yeah I probably would have. "You lied to me."

"I'm sorry."

Augusta looked down at the ring on her finger. It was beautiful. She looked at the man struggling to keep control.

"You've been my wife from our first night together."

"Manipulative sod," she murmured not meaning it. The sexy smile Argon gave her made her heart flip flop.

"But you love me."

"Yes, I do." *And after today I may never see you again.*

Argon looked at her in concern. "What is it?"

"Nothing." Augusta looked at the cuffs at his wrist. This was not how she wanted it to end with Argon. "Crap." She slapped her head. "I don't have the key." She had not even thought about that when she pulled the cuffs out.

"Don't joke."

"I wish I was."

"I need you, Augusta True," Argon ground out tensely.

She could see that and she absolutely wanted to help him out.

"I need a condom. Where are they?" Augusta looked around frantically. The man was set to blow and she wanted to hop on and ride him.

Argon closed his eyes and groaned.

"I don't have them. I make them magically appear remember?"

Fuck – or not in this case. His hands were cuffed so no magic was going to happen to produce a condom.

"Can't you wave your foot or something?" Augusta licked her lips as she contemplated his straining cock. It was magical but in another way.

"Augusta True, do you love me?"

She moved over to the bed beside him. "You know I do beautiful man."

Argon smiled at her words. "Are you every going to want another lover?"

"No. Are you?"

"You know the answer to that. Never."

This was sweet and touching but it wasn't helping the situation. "So what's your point?"

"Do we need a condom?"

Yay! A solution! Then reality hit through the haze of lust.

"Pregnancy." Damn. Though not like that was going to matter with the zombies tailing her but still... Augusta did a rapid calculation of days and weeks and safe periods. *Thank God I paid attention to something in health class at school.* "I will be okay."

"Excellent. Climb on."

Augusta did not need to be told twice. "'Got some issue with control, oh powerful immortal?"

"With you always."

She straddled his thighs and placed the head of his cock inside her vagina. Augusta pushed herself down the full length of his shaft, closing her eyes as the sensuous heat flooded her body

"Oh boy."

"Marriage is good huh?" Argon responded with a smile.

"The best." Augusta concentrated on rocking back and forth on Argon, grinding her body against his, her clit being triggered with each downward thrust. She was so close to orgasm. So was Argon.

"I can't hold on much longer." Argon's voice was hoarse and strained.

"So don't." Augusta increased her pace, her back arching as the orgasm hit. She felt his cock jerk hard inside her and a hot rush of fluid shoot upwards. "Oh, Argon..." Augusta collapsed against his chest trembling as spasms of pleasure racked her body. When she recovered slightly she kissed his lips lingeringly then looked at the cuffs. "I'll call Tilly. She'll know where the keys are."

Argon sighed loudly. "Great, I'm never going to hear this end of this from her am I?"

"No, but what a great memory." *That may be all either of us have.*

Chapter Twelve

"Hello, Newton." Tilly opened the door to Augusta's apartment. "I've been expecting you."

The Welshman looked confused. "Do I know you?"

"Tilly Moor," she replied looking at him over-sweetly.

"Oh..."

"Yes, oh, I seem to have that effect on some people." She grabbed his arm before he could move away. "Come in we've been waiting for you."

"Newton," Augusta murmured, accusation shining in her eyes. It was only Nell's hands on her wrist that stopped her from going for his throat.

"What is this? Macbeth's three witches?" Newton jested nervously.

"How funny." Tilly pushed him into a chair. "I swear all this sex is good for my health. I have muscles I was never aware of before."

Titch grinned at her words. "I'm pleased to hear that, *cariad*."

"Time for being all gooey later you two." Augusta looked at Newton. "I know what your plan was. I will not allow Argon to be used and nor will I allow zombies to kill and main during the Zombie Walk because of your greed."

"I can't see how you will stop them," Newton responded, his eyes on hers. "Though if you knew what your powers were —"

"Here's the thing," Augusta interrupted him. "I don't give a rat's ass what my powers are. I don't plan to use them." As far as she was concerned ignorance was bliss.

"That's a waste, Rowdy."

"Did you ever care for me as a friend?"

"No." Newton shook his head. "You were an opportunity."

"Honesty at last." His words did not hurt her as Augusta was no longer that sixteen-year-old girl who needed help. She could help herself and those she loved now.

"I want your power."

Augusta shook her head in disgust. "You don't seem to get it do you? This is over. You did not win. What I may or may not have will never be yours." It was pathetic to see a man so convinced he could still have what he had schemed to get from her for over a decade.

"You can get rid of me but not them."

Them. The zombies. *One problem at a time*.

"Yes we know about your zombie mates." Tilly's look was one of utter loathing.

"They were supposed to derail you from what I wanted until it was too late. I just had to say simple spell and you would have been mine."

The thought of that chilled Augusta to the bone. *What if I had never realized until it was too late?* She shook herself. Argon was right. What ifs were irrelevant. Living was what mattered.

Nell came toward Newton, a large metal goblet in her hand.

"Speaking of spells, we have one for you."

Newton looked panicked. "What's that?" He tried to rise but Titch moved over and forced him back down.

"It's a nice little drop that's going to help you forget all about Augusta and her powers," Nell explained, her eyes hard on his. "It will leave you with the memory of your life in Wales and how to get home only."

"I won't drink it." Newton closed his mouth militantly.

"Titch, please hold the nasty little man down while I open his mouth." Augusta was determined to make him drink it but he refused to open up. It was only when Tilly punched him in the stomach, that his lips opened to expel air and the liquid went down his throat, splashing his clothes in the struggle. Newton howled with anger.

Nell then held her hands above her head and began to chant.

Memory be, memory be

All your thoughts of Rowdy be free

No longer to roam, find your way home

And darken no doorstep of mine

Memory be, memory be.

"Wow." Tilly looked impressed. "You could probably do that seeing as though you have the witch thing in your blood."

Augusta rolled her eyes. "If I wanted to but I don't." As soon as this was all over she wanted to forget all about witches and curses. *Not that that's likely to happen.* She looked at Newton. A glazed look had crossed his face.

"Who are you people?" Newton's voice betrayed his confusion.

Titch helped him up. "You just wandered in. We thought you may have been in trouble. You don't know us?"

"No, this is so embarrassing," Newton mumbled as he stood slowly and headed to the door.

"Can we help you? Maybe call a taxi?" Augusta offered politely, instinctively knowing Newton was not feigning his ignorance. There was something so small and pathetic about him. If it had been anyone else she would have felt sorry for them. Newton however did not deserve her pity. What he had done he had brought on himself.

"Um, no, I'm fine. I'm sorry to have bothered you." Once outside, two large Hell Hounds seized him in their razor teeth and dragged him to Hell. He had forfeited his part of the deal and they had come for their due.

"Did you hear dogs?" Augusta cocked her head to listen. There was a "No pet" policy in the building.

"No," Nell responded calmly, her eyes full of ancient knowledge that only the chosen would ever know.

Somehow Augusta felt that Nell knew more than she was letting on but what secrets she chose to keep were hers.

"Now we have to fix up the other problem." Augusta wished she could have sounded more positive but she knew it would take more than a loss of memory spell to get rid of the zombies.

"I will not let those zombies take you." Titch was adamant. "I would be happier if Argon knew."

"If Argon knew what?" The man in question said as he pushed open the half closed door.

Bugger. Hiccup, hiccup, hiccup.

"Augusta?" Argon went and stood before her? "What's going on? And don't tell me it's nothing as we know your hiccups betray you."

To lie or not to lie? Technically she would be saving his life if she lied. Augusta looked into his dark, soulful eyes and her heart contracted with love. *I can't lie to him.*

"Well you see I sort of made a deal with the zombies. They wanted you but would accept me instead."

Argon sucked in a deep breath, then blew it out.

"I would have gone with a lie," Tilly murmured, meaningfully looking at Titch.

"Why, Augusta?" His hands went to her shoulders gently.

God, wasn't it obvious to him? She would do anything for him.

"I love you."

"And I love you but I can't and won't live without you."

"Aww..." Tilly sighed and moved in close to her beloved.

It was sweet and exactly what she expected Argon to say.

"You're immortal." But the meaning behind what he said was enough even if the actual ability was there.

Titch smiled. "You're not any more, are you Argon?"

Augusta clutched at his chest. What had he done?

"What does Titch mean?"

Argon cupped her face in his hand.

"It took some persuasion but the powers that be set me free. I feel like a huge weight has been lifted from my shoulders." He exchanged a meaningful nod with Titch, who had also given up his immortality to be with the woman he loved. "I don't want to live forever, Augusta True, if I don't have you. It's my birthday gift to you."

It was everything she wanted to hear Argon say but Augusta feared that it might still be too late for them.

"Damn," Tilly cursed in annoyance. "We could have used your magic to get rid of the smelly walking dead guys."

"My dear Tilly, we will have to use logic instead."

Tilly mumbled something about "logic sucking badly" which made Argon smile. He turned back to the woman he loved. "You are not going to sacrifice yourself for me." Argon kissed her softly.

Augusta licked her lips as she rested her hands on his chest.

"I think it's more a case of them coming to me."

Argon shook his head at this. "No, we'll think of something."

"We need to get into the city and stop them. The Zombie Walk is due to start in twenty minutes." Titch ran a hand through his shaggy blond hair. "Not a good time to lose the power to orb us there."

"It's okay. If Tilly drives we'll get there in no time." The woman was a speed demon and normally it scared Augusta to death to drive with her but time was of the essence. Driving with Tilly was only marginally less dangerous than being zombie bait.

"Don't worry about this, Augusta True, something will come to us. We will not let those bastards win."

* * * * *

Dead bodies littered the Queen Street Mall in the heart of Brisbane City. It was exactly like Augusta's dream. She clutched Argon's hand scared that he would leave her as he had in the dream.

"I'm not going anywhere," he said as he leaned down and whispered in her ear. "And they're not dead, Augusta True, they're just pretending."

Almost on cue the zombie walkers rose up and started trudging slowly along, eyes glazed and hands outstretched. Their clothes were splattered with fake blood, some had limbs missing while others had weaponry protruding from their bodies.

"I don't get it." Tilly watched as the would-be zombies pretended to be the living dead.

"People are strange," murmured Augusta, searching the crowd for the real zombies.

"We're not strange," Tilly responded.

"Of course not." Augusta only knew what two of the zombies looked like. One was tall and elegant and the other a feral looking wombat of a zombie. She was relying their telltale smell and body heat to identify them. "I can't smell anything."

"Let's spread out," Argon suggested. "Titch, you and Tilly head north and we'll head south. We'll come back and meet in the middle at the news stand."

Augusta scanned the crowd, impatient to find the zombies. As going armed in public wasn't an option, she wasn't sure how they would get rid of the creatures she sought. They could only be killed with a decisive blow to their head, crushing their brain. She held tight to Argon's hand holding faith in the man who believed "something would come to them".

Augusta looked around at the building works being carried out in the mall. It had been awhile since she had been in the city and she was surprised at the cranes and safety barricades that were set up to protect shoppers during the creation of the new buildings. She stiffened as she smelled garlic and mold.

"Yeah, I smell it too," Argon surveyed the crowd. One figure instantly stood out. "Fred."

Augusta turned in the direction Argon faced. Fred Ward, building manager, was coming toward them and the stench of garlic was vile.

"Oh, poor Fred." The zombies had gotten to him. "I feel kind of guilty." She saw Argon's incredulous look. "Well, because of me and the curse, Newton wouldn't have come to Brisbane out—"

"None of this is your fault."

"Uh-oh." Augusta saw Andervarle and Warren in the crowd stalking the walkers. She had an idea. Augusta called out to them. "Hey Warren, Andervarle, I think you are a pair of sissies who could not fight their way out of a wet paper bag." The zombies turned angrily toward her. "I have a plan."

"What?" Argon started pulling her away.

"Run." They took off at a fast pace with zombies joining in and giving chase. Augusta was not the most athletic person and already she was puffing and panting. They ran down Albert Street until Augusta skidded to a halt. A sudden, irresistible urge had come over her. "In here." She pushed past a safety barricade and into a building that was in the midst of being repaired.

Argon looked around him. "There are no exits."

"Go with me on this," she told him. "I have this feeling I am meant to be here."

Argon pulled her close to his side, ready to do whatever he had to in order to protect Augusta.

"Well, well," Andervarle murmured in pleasure as he came to a halt before them, his zombie companions behind him in a bunch. "Looks like we get both the witch and the immortal."

"Let her go. Take me."

Augusta looked at Argon in horror. They would tear him limb from limb when they realized he had no power.

"No, I am worth more to you."

Andervarle threw up his hands in disgust.

"What is it with you two? Always trying to save the other. It's quite nauseating."

"Like your stench?"

Feral little Warren ran for Augusta. Argon slapped the man down with one meaty blow to his head.

"What the hell was that?"

"That's Warren. He gets slapped quite a bit." Augusta looked around the virtually gutted building. She wondered why she had been urged inside. There was nothing but old heavy metal beams supporting the ceiling, workmen's tools and plastic sheeting. She looked at the beams again. An idea struck her? *Could I? What do I have to lose?* Augusta concentrated on the beam that was directly above the zombies. *Hester, you owe me. Help me.*

"Enough talk," Andervarle snapped. "We will have both of you and you have no say in the matter."

"Come and get me stinky," Argon urged, as he moved away from the woman he loved.

Augusta kept her eyes on the beam and her mind focused solely on it. *Move, damn it move.* Almost in response it shifted slightly. She almost cheered but now was not the time to get cocky. *Fall and squish the zombies, beam.* A sudden rattling went almost unnoticed. Only Argon flinched slightly and glanced up quickly.

"Come on you pantywaists, who's got the balls to take me on?"

For fuck's sake, fall beam! This looked so much easier on television. Augusta could feel the sweat dripping down her face as she willed the beam to move. Just before the zombies charged Argon, Augusta gave the beam one more mental shove and it fell, flattening the zombies before they knew what hit them.

"And that children is how Auntie Rowdy killed the zombies," quipped Tilly as she and Titch arrived to see the aftermath of the falling beam. "We saw a weird glow coming from this building. Titch had a feeling it was you."

"You're shaking." Argon pulled Augusta into his arms.

"That was scary." Augusta let out a wild series of hiccups. "I don't ever want to do that again. I don't want these powers."

Argon cradled her close to his body. "You don't have to use them ever again if you don't want to. "It's up to you."

"Really?" Augusta had no idea what magical ability she had and she was happy to keep it that way. "I've had enough of being the weird one." She looked at the strong face before her. "Hester's curse has been a nightmare but it did bring me one good thing – you, beautiful man."

"Uh-oh, I think they're going to kiss." Tilly reached out to Titch. "We'll wait outside."

When Argon's mouth met hers. Augusta's body flamed with sweet, loving heat.

"I am going to make it my life's goal to look after you, Augusta True."

"Take me home—in a taxi. Dealing with zombies is nothing compared to Tilly's driving."

* * * * *

"You know what?" Augusta said much later as she lay curled on her side facing Argon. His cock was buried deep inside her body and her legs were scissored around his hips. They had made love for what seemed like hours when they got home. "It has taken me all this time to understand what this curse really is about."

"Oh yeah?" Argon ran his hand lovingly down her thigh.

"Yeah, I reckon Hester was part drama queen and part wise woman. The weak Earl had pissed her off so she made up the curse to teach him and all descendants a lesson about love." Augusta squealed as Argon turned her onto her back. *How is it possible that I could come again?*

"How so?" Argon moved slowly backward and forward inside her.

Augusta re-wrapped her legs around him allowing him full access to whatever he needed.

"Um, where was I? I was making some sort of point." Though the point inside her was becoming more persuasive.

"Descendants of the drama queen," Argon reminded her as his thrusts became harder.

"Right," Augusta panted out as she gathered her thoughts and held on to him. "I believe Hester wanted her descendants to think about the cost of what they were doing in their lives and if they truly loved someone then they would overcome any fear or prejudice to be with them."

"Like us," Argon murmured against her lips.

"Uh-huh." Whatever else she had planned to say was lost as his mouth devoured hers in a soul searching kiss. *Thinking was overrated anyway.* Augusta moaned softly as she felt her insides once more shudder with the intensity of the moment. She was so close to coming but she wanted it to be at the same time as Argon. She needed to see the pleasure in his eyes.

Argon's mouth left hers and he cupped her face with his hand "And maybe there is also the other lesson that no matter how powerful you may be, that power cannot compete with true love and to give up love is the real curse."

"Oh, Argon..." Not only were his words sweet but the feeling that burst inside her with even sweeter. Augusta eyes closed as his last hard thrust pushed them both over the edge.

"So what was your birthday wish, Augusta True?"

"That you would never leave me no matter how premenstrual or stroppy and annoying I become."

"Granted. Though how premenstrual are we talking?" He smiled down at her.

"Vicious."

Argon kissed her nose playfully. "You're worth it."

"Oh, foolish mortal," Augusta murmured in response. "I love you."

"And it's forever."

Epilogue

"Well that was fairly messy," James Cardissan commented to his wife.

Amarantha smiled. "What is it they say? The course of true love never runs smoothly?" She was not surprised it had been a bumpy ride for the two young lovers. Amarantha was pleased Augusta understood the curse in the end. It was only what you made it to be. If you thought it was evil, it would be. If you loved someone strongly enough, the curse would not crush you like it had done others. Only the strong survived it.

"They are right. I seem to remember we had our moments but it was worth it."

Yes it was. "I like Argon. He reminds me of you though he was naughty not telling her about the marriage." Amarantha wasn't sure how she would have handled such deception. She twisted the ornate, diamond encrusted wedding band on her finger.

"We Cardissan men have to, in order claim our rightful brides," James pointed out as if his kinsman's actions were justified. "You Lawrence women are very stubborn."

"No, we are careful. There's a difference." She knew Augusta would be okay now. The powers she did not want would remain in abeyance until she needed them. "I suspect they will make a mess of things here and there but no more than any other couple in love." There were times when Amarantha never believed she and James would make it but they did. They were fated to.

"What was that you left for Augusta on the table?"

"Just a simple note." Amarantha had felt the need to fill in the last piece of Hester's curse. "Just something to help her understand that she will be okay."

James smiled lovingly at his wife. "Nothing is ever simple with you my dear." He held his hand out to her. Come my love. We must be off. I have plans for you." He winked at her.

Even after all their years together, she still felt giddy when James touched her.

"You are insatiable James."

"I may be a spirit but all the parts still work the same and I like the way you scream my name as you come in my arms."

Amarantha shook her head and blushed. "James, really." He was the most adorable, incorrigible man.

"You love it." He pulled her close to nestle against his body.

"I love you."

"I am content."

Augusta could have sworn a ghost had walked past her and touched her shoulder. She shivered, not in fright, more in realization they she missed her chance to talk to someone important, someone who knew her. Augusta picked up the letter that had not been there a moment ago. Fine old copperplate writing was neat on the outer envelope.

"Spooky," she murmured as she pulled the letter out.

"What is?" Argon asked as he sat down on the chair beside her. "Letter from a friend?"

"I believe so." Augusta smiled as she looked at the signature. "It's from Amarantha Lawrence."

"I vaguely recall she married James Cardissan but that was many centuries ago."

"Funny, she was just here." It was nice to think someone cared so much that they crossed time and space to come to her.

Argon smiled at her. "You felt her?"

"Yes, though I wish for once a Lawrence woman would say something in person rather than in a letter." All written communication had foretold doom and problems.

"You are dramatic women." Argon leaned in and kissed her softly.

As the kiss ended she stuck her tongue out at Argon. He licked his lips in return. Marriage to Argon was fun. Augusta looked down and started reading the letter.

"How sweet. I wish I could have spoken to Amarantha." She passed him the letter.

My dear Augusta,

You have come through your trial and I am proud of you. It is hard to love a Cardissan man and harder still to give into it. I wish you the same joy and happiness I have with James. Death will never part you. It will only be the beginning of yet another adventure. Until then enjoy what you have and never hold back the boundless love in your heart. You are chosen for great good and great love.

There is one last part to the curse that very few know. In French it is—

Dans le siècle vingt et un, les deux derniers amants, l'homme sombre et la femme sombre, casseront le juron et réuniront de tous spiritueux perdus dans le ciel. Tout le passé les péchés seront pardonnés. Laissez la fin d'obscurité avec eux.

Je suis exonéré.

Hester Le Juriste

The translation? In century twenty-one, the last two lovers, the dark man and the dark woman, will break the curse and reunite all lost spirits in heaven. All past sins will be forgiven. Let the darkness end with them.

I am absolved.

Hester Le Juriste

Be happy.

Yours fondly

Amarantha Lawrence Cardissan.

"Death will not part us," Argon repeated the words as if pleased by the knowledge. "I like that."

Augusta shot him an eye roll. "Crap. It seems I'm stuck with you forever."

"Hey, you're not the easiest and most biddable person on the planet you know."

"But you love me." If she knew nothing else she knew that and that was all that mattered.

"Yes I do." Argon stood up and reached for her hand. "Come with me, Augusta True."

"Uh-oh I know that look in your eye." *Lucky me.* She placed her hand in his and let him draw her up.

"And it's only for you."

"I am content, beautiful man."

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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