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Warning: This book contains sexually explicit content which is only suitable for mature readers. This story has been rated *Total-e-sizzling*.

SOMETHING FAERY SPECIAL

C.S. Chatterly

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Dedication

To my husband, Lee, and all those who dream of things when common sense tells you not to. Good reading to you.

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Chapter One

Shea held up the tire iron, gripping it until she could feel the cold metal grind into the palm of her left hand. "Look, just get the hell outta here," she pleaded. "I don't want any trouble."

The three men she faced were a sad surprise to her vacation. One of them—the largest—grinned and came closer. She backed away, hoping he'd leave her alone.

"Sure'n she doesn't want any trouble, lads, but she still doesn't want to hand over her pocketbook, either. Now, to my way of thinkin', that doesn't seem like a friendly gesture, does it?" Paddy Flynn remarked.

Shea glared at the brown-haired giant of a man who'd just spoken to his two friends. Of all the places to get robbed. She could have stayed in New York instead of coming all the way to Ireland for that particular experience. Still, her purse contained all her money, her ID and passport. She wasn't giving it up for anything. If they wanted a fight, she was ready. Though some small voice in the back of her mind advised that getting hurt wasn't worth it, she hadn't saved for months to come on this vacation to have it spoiled. The part of her brain housing her considerable temper overruled the more prudent region.

"If you leave now, I won't go to the police," she declared and backed against the small car she'd only just rented.

"Now, be reasonable," Paddy coaxed. "Just give us your pocketbook, and we'll be on our way. 'Tis your sad luck you broke down where ya did. You'll be callin' no one for help."

Shea was shaking so hard she was almost paralyzed with fear. Still, she gripped her only weapon with both hands and brandished it higher. One of the two men behind the larger one was suggesting something that caused more concern than the loss of her money.

"Go on, Paddy," one of the younger men insisted. "Take her damned money and shag the bitch! It ain't like she's gonna be here long enough to do nothin' about it. She's American from the sound of her."

Paddy laughed even harder and glanced back over his shoulder at the other men. Then, he fixed his gaze on Shea again. "Now, that would be my brother, Luke. I suggest you give me the pocketbook, lass. Else you'll have to fight off my little brother, and we'll still have your cash."

"If I g-give you the money, you'll g-go?" Shea shakily asked.

Paddy shrugged. "Oh, I'm not makin' promises. But the quicker I get Luke outta here, the safer you'll be."

The third man finally chimed in. "That's the truth. Luke has got a taste for takin' women the hard way. Don't you, boy'o?"

Shea saw the men's expressions, and instinct told her they weren't going to let her just walk out of this situation. She could identify them and even heard them call each other by name. She took the bull by its horns and swung the tire iron. It struck the outstretched hand of the biggest thug.

Paddy howled in pain, withdrawing his broken hand and its dangling fingers.

"Now you've done it," Luke growled out, and proceeded to unzip his pants. "You'll think this is the longest day of your life by the time I'm done, you stupid bitch!"

Shea's mouth went dry, but she wasn't going down without a fight. She was bent on drawing as much blood as she could, deciding there would at least be enough evidence left behind to convict them. It was far, far too late to get back in the car and simply close the doors and lock them. She should have done that when she'd first seen their old truck rumble over the nearest hillside. Instead, she'd fallen for their faked smiles and offers of assistance. For that, all of them were going to have at least a few broken bones before she was done.

"Shaggin' hell! What the fart does 'e want?" Paddy exclaimed as he gazed down the road.

"Let's get outta here, Paddy," the third man warned. "I don't want nothin' to do with 'im! This is 'is territory."

Shea looked in the direction the three brothers did and saw only more trouble. Coming down the road at breakneck speed was a very large man on an incredibly shiny, black motorcycle. *God, not another one.* The man approaching had long black hair which flowed behind him like a flag on a pirate ship. Even from that distance, she could see he was larger than any of the three robbers, who'd come upon her a good sixty miles away from the nearest town. If this was 'his territory', as one of the robbing brothers had put it, she'd just jumped from the flames and straight into hell. She could only

stand there silently praying as the huge giant pulled his bike up behind her broken-down rental. The slow, lazy grin he presented made Shea's heart fall. That was when she believed that all four of them would take turns with her. For that very reason, she wasn't putting her tire iron down. She simply licked her dry lips and confronted this new, bigger man the way she had the others.

"If you want a piece of me, I swear to God I'll put this right up beside your head, just like I will with these other sons-ofbitches," she yelled out.

After turning off his bike, Rory stopped, tilted his head and gazed at her through the dark lenses of his sunglasses. The woman not only had spirit, but it was to a fault. She was about to not only get herself robbed but probably raped if he knew Paddy and his brothers. If women failed to do what they asked on the first demand, the brothers tended to get rough. No one as yet had the nerve to file charges with the local law enforcement personnel, because they feared what the rest of the Flynn family would do. But there were other forms of justice in this world. He slowly took off his glasses and looped them through a leather epaulet on his left shoulder as he got off his bike.

Rory stared the brothers down. "Afternoon," he glibly greeted. "I believe the last time I saw you three was just outside Corrigan. You were raiding old Mrs. Kearn's chicken coop and had her and her husband shut up in the house, frightened half out of their wits." He paused and strode deliberately toward them. "As I recall, I told you then what I'd do if I ever caught you botherin' folks in these parts again."

Paddy held up one hand. "Now, look here..." he began, but stopped quickly when Rory picked up his pace.

Rory wasn't about to let the conversation continue. Once he was past the woman, and in a position where she couldn't see his face, he lowered his head and gazed directly at Paddy, then his two brothers. He took a deep breath before speaking.

"You'll leave this county and never come back," he commanded. "If we meet once more, it'll be for the very last time. I won't warn you again. You take your evil philanderin' and be gone. We want none of it here."

The Flynns ran back to their beat up truck, parked down the road. Only after they'd got in their truck and were headed in the opposite direction did Rory turn to the woman.

Shea held up her tire iron again. "J-just stay back. I don't want to use this, but I sure as hell will."

Rory stopped and smiled at her. With her brown hair blowing in the wind and those aqua-coloured, anger-tinged eyes staring him down, he got the sudden impression that this woman would have made a formidable warrior. In the old, old days, many like her had faced down enemies on this very same land. Indeed, women had made some of the fiercest warriors and leaders his country had ever seen. But her accent was decidedly *not* that of his countrymen.

"What part of America?" he softly asked.

Confused even more than she had been, she responded with one word. "What?"

Rory leaned on the hood of her car to allay her fear. He decided conversation was the best course. "I was wonderin' what part of America you're from?"

"New York," she blurted. "Why?"

"I've no intention to hurt you," he drawled out. "You can put that bloody piece of iron down."

She gripped her only weapon harder. "When frost forms at the outermost regions of hell, mister!"

He tried to suppress his mirth. There was nothing to laugh at really. The woman had just been threatened by three men, who'd have willingly raped and beaten her. His only reason for smiling was that she had no idea who she was really dealing with. No matter, she was going to fight to the last. He could admire that and the mesmerising sight she made in her green sweater, blue jeans and boots. Slender, tall and exceedingly feminine, even the piece of iron she wielded seemed graceful in her hands. "Look, I'm Rory Finnegan." He held out his hand. "What's yours?"

"Why?"

"Just bein' friendly. I told you. I'm not goin' to do anything."

"Like I'm supposed to believe that." She took one hand off her tire iron and pointed down the road where the robber brothers had fled. "You're in cahoots with them, aren't you? What are you guys? Some kind of local screw-with-the-tourist screwballs?"

He slowly shook his head and dropped the hand he'd offered in friendship. "I've nothing to do with those other men. And this isn't the kind of response I'd have expected from an American. Especially one who was just rescued."

She lowered her weapon only slightly. "Thanks. Now go."

"Usually, your countrymen are generous and kindly," he said, then shrugged and put his sunglasses back on. "Guess I was wrong. I'll be lettin' you get on your way, and I'll be on my own."

"Wait!"

Rory immediately turned around and walked toward her again. He was pleased to see that this time she let him get quite close and didn't so much as raise the damned tire iron. "Was there somethin' else you'd be wantin'?" he slowly asked.

Shea inhaled sharply. When he took off his sunglasses, he was close enough for her to view the blackest eyes she'd ever seen on any human being. She swallowed hard and took a supreme chance. "I-I didn't mean to sound so rude. I thought you were with those other men. You all seemed to know each other."

He nodded. "I know 'em all right! They're about the worst lot that ever came out of creation's fartin' black hole. If you'll excuse the expression."

Mentally shaking herself to keep from staring at the man's face—a face that was so handsome and captivating that she could barely speak—Shea held out her hand. "Shea Fitzpatrick," she softly introduced.

Rory gently gripped her palm, and she felt an unusual electric-like shock go up her arm. "Rory Finnegan," he said.

"I-I'm here on a vacation," Shea offered as an explanation.

"My car broke down, and I was standing on the side of the road when those ... those men came over the hill."

"They won't trouble you again. I've put the fear of death into them," Rory declared.

Shea coyly dropped her head for a moment. "Thanks for your help again. I don't know what I've had done if you hadn't come along. Really," she insisted, "I didn't mean to sound so ungrateful."

"No harm done. You were scared and rightly so." He paused. "Now ... as to your problem, why not call your rental company and have them come pick you up? If you're concerned, I'll wait with you until they get here."

She grimaced in response. "See, that's just it. I, uh ... I tried to call and my cell phone isn't reaching anything. The international plan I bought before I left New York isn't. International, I mean. I don't suppose I could borrow your phone?"

"Certainly. If I had one, but I don't. Never use the things."

She sighed in frustration, ran one hand through her hair and tossed the tire iron back into the passenger side of her car. However menacing he looked, she was now pretty sure that Rory Finnegan wasn't going to hurt her. She was five-feet-nine. He was at least six-feet-six. This close, he could have overpowered her at any second. There was no sense in using a tire iron on a man who was roughly the size of a heavy-weight boxer. "Any suggestions?" she asked.

He let out a long, slow breath. "One. But I'm not sure you'll like it."

"Why?" she asked and gazed up at him in trepidation.

"I could get you to a phone. By now, wherever you rented your car will have likely closed shop. The small towns around this part of the countryside don't keep city hours, even for tourists. But if you want to trust me, I'll get you to a very

good inn for the night. The owners are friends of mine. They'll see that your car gets back to wherever you want it, and even have a replacement delivered if you'd like."

"That would be great," she said in a large exhaled breath. Then, she glanced at his bike. "I ... I suppose the only way is to ride with you?"

"There's no other way unless you want to wait for me to ride there, then someone would have to come all the way back for you ... so on and so forth," he explained. "All that drivin' about could take some time. By coming with me now, you could lock up your rental, take a small overnight case and whatever else you'd like and throw it over your shoulder. I can promise you, I'll be busy drivin' and won't bite. My friends will have you a replacement rental at the inn tomorrow along with the rest of your luggage. All you'd have to do is give them your car key and trust us. We'll set everything to rights. There isn't a one of us who'd like to see a visitor to our shores thinkin' badly of us. Especially not because of a bunch of pinheaded bastards like Paddy and his brothers."

She finally smiled and nodded. "I'm in no position to turn down the offer, Mr. Finnegan. Thanks so much. And ... my country has its share of pinheads, by the way."

Fifteen minutes later, Shea had her luggage all locked in the trunk of her rental. She had a weekend tote thrown over her shoulder along with her purse, and she mounted that customized black motorcycle behind a very uncustomary man. She wrapped her arms around Rory's waist and felt the strong, hard muscle beneath the black leather of his jacket.

The heat from his jean-clad thighs radiated upward and warmed her, just as the afternoon turned to evening.

"Great bike," she commented.

He glanced over his shoulder. "I like things that are American built. They seem a bit tougher."

She ignored the obvious compliment as he gazed down at her for a long moment. "Um, shouldn't we have helmets?"

He shrugged. "It's the law. As I don't have any, we'll just have to make do."

His chivalrous rescue not withstanding, Shea would bet every last dime she had that this man didn't give a flaming fig about certain aspects of the law. Still, she'd gotten on the damned bike with him and had metaphorically handed over her safety. As he revved up the powerful engine, she grinned wickedly and tightened her embrace around his waist. It seemed he leaned a little back, and she thought she heard him chuckle. As far as she was now concerned, the holiday wasn't turning out so bad after all.

Rory drove north and had the very devil of a time keeping his mind on the road. With every minute that passed, the woman behind him was gripping his body a little tighter and unknowingly fuelling his libido at the same time. Maybe he could get her to stay at the inn more than just the night it would take for the rental agency to send out a new car and deliver the rest of her luggage. And maybe ... just maybe ... he could convince this enticing American tourist to spend a little time in his world. A few brief days, then he'd encourage her to be on her way. She'd be no worse off for having dallied

with him, and he'd be all the warmer for having spent some time in a new lover's embrace.

For thousands of years, Faeries like Rory had encountered humans and satisfied sexual urges in just these coincidental ways. Used to be, the human would wander into a glen on horseback. Now, they occasionally wandered across his path while he was riding a motorcycle. The details of the actual encounter and the century were certainly different, but not the lovemaking that followed. That was as old as time itself.

Rory glanced back and saw her smiling up at him in a way that was all too seductive. She might not have meant her expression to appear that way, but he knew the signs all the same. Shea, darlin', get ready for the vacation of your life. He sped up and hoped the cool wind would temporarily diminish the heat already rising between his thighs.

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Chapter Two

It was twilight dusk as Rory finally drove up to the inn. He could already hear the revelry beginning inside, and his Faery's heart gravitated to it. Faeries loved nothing better than to sing, dance and make merry all night long. He hoped his new American friend would be accommodating to her hosts' peculiarities in this respect. He turned off the engine and waited for her to get off the bike first.

"This is the Wailin' Spirit Inn. My friends, Peg and Connell O'Sullivan, are the owners. You'll like it here."

"How beautiful! Why didn't the guy at the rental place tell me about this inn? This is exactly the kind of place I'd asked about booking."

"I'm sure your car rental agent wouldn't know about it. It's a local secret," he explained with a wink.

Shea hitched up the tote and the strap on her purse. When Rory would have opened the front gate for her, she tentatively put a hand on his arm to stop him.

He turned to find that lovely smile on her face again. The way her full lips perfectly bowed almost took his breath away.

"Could I ask what you told those men to make them leave me alone? You said something to them in Gaelic."

He laughed. "I just told them I'd beat the crap out of them if they stayed one more minute," he lied. What he'd really told them was much, much worse. That and his illuminated eyes had made Paddy and his brothers run like demons were on their heels.

She accepted that explanation. "Gaelic is a beautiful language. I wish I could learn it."

Here was an opening he'd been looking for. "If you'd care to stay at the inn for more than a night, I'll try teaching you a few words at a time. I'll even throw in my services as a tour guide."

"Is that what you do for a living?"

"Aye, when I've the time." Especially if the tourist was a beautiful young woman he'd come across in some bar or was stranded as Shea was. "And if you're wantin' references, Peg and Connell will provide them as well as anyone inside, I should imagine. I grew up around here. People know me well."

"Would, uh ... Mrs. Finnegan mind if you served as my guide?" she slyly asked. "Would I be taking you away from other responsibilities?"

"There is no Mrs. Finnegan. Well ... sure'n there must be hundreds throughout the country, but none of them would be *my* Mrs. Finnegan," he joked. "As to other responsibilities, you could say I'm on a holiday of my own and free as lark. I'd be glad to share my time and knowledge of the country with you."

She nodded, boldly looped her arm through his and walked through the garden gate by his side.

Rory arched one eyebrow at the audacious physical gesture, but couldn't wipe the silly smirk off his face for anything. Moment by moment, everything was falling into place in a grand way. By this time tomorrow, he'd not only be

her tour guide but her vacation lover. If he was careful and played his cards right, that is.

The instant Shea walked into the inn, she was enchanted. A couple of dozen men and women sat around the room on various stools, near tables and at the bar. Big picture windows gave a view right out onto the front garden and all of the patrons greeted Rory in a huge way. Some called out his name, others walked forward to clap him on the back in a good-natured fashion. Shea watched as a servant girl grabbed him by the front of his jacket and placed a solid kiss on his full lips. She got the impression Rory was not only well-liked but expected. As he led her through the crowd, greeting people in a personable and open way, Shea found herself somehow attracted to him even more. She'd never walked into a room with a man and seen such a welcoming response.

"This is Connell O'Sullivan," Rory introduced, then turned to the inn owner. "This is Shea Fitzpatrick. She's a visiting American whose car broke down about an hour away on the old sheep road. Sadly, when I met her, Paddy Flynn and his brothers were givin' her a hard time."

"You don't say?" Connell asked and shook his head in anger. "Why, those bastards ought to be beaten to within an inch of their lives, they should. Tell me you did it this time, Rory."

"No. Afraid not. They fled as they usually do. Not a whit of courage in their flabby hides."

"Those men confront tourists often?" Shea asked them.

"Often enough as to warrant the law searching for them," Connell explained. "But no one wants to file the charges, as there are more at home just as foul and fierce as that older brother, Paddy. If you lock one up, the rest find you and have their revenge. Some day, Rory will put a stop to their shenanigans! Why, once he..."

Rory shook his head. "Uh, that's enough, Connell. I'm sure Ms. Fitzpatrick doesn't want to hear about Paddy and his family. She came all the way from America for a vacation. We should see she gets a better experience than what she's had so far. If you'll give her a room for the night then arrange for her rental car to be picked up, that'd be grand of you. The rest of her luggage is locked in the boot. She'll give you the keys to get it."

"Absolutely," Connell gaily agreed. "Now, let's just get you a room and get you all snug and settled."

"That's *Miss* Shea Fitzpatrick," Shea supplied, when the inn keeper wrote her name in an old-fashioned book register. She wanted Rory to know she was unattached and didn't miss the way Connell winked when she emphasized her single status.

"If you'll let me have your bag, Miss Fitzpatrick, I'll show you to your room," Connell told her. "Of course, you'll be joinin' us downstairs in the pub. My wife, Peg, has a grand stew on tonight. And I'll wager a pint of stout won't go amiss, either. I'll be puttin' you in room thirteen. And don't think of it at all as unlucky. Sure'n it's the finest room in the inn."

"I'll be in the pub if you feel like meetin' me there," Rory offered, then nodded at both of them and left to join his friends for a cold pint.

Shea was momentarily taken aback. Her saviour hadn't even stayed long enough for her to thank him again, but she reasoned he understood she'd be coming right back down anyhow. She shrugged and followed the affable innkeeper up to her room.

As she followed Connell up the narrow oak staircase, Shea was overjoyed with her luck. The place was lovely. Every single detail was in perfect order, from the flower-filled vases to the doilies beneath them on the hallway tables. So, too, was her room. It was sweetly decorated with pastel colours and more flowers from the garden. She thanked her host, then pumped her fist in excitement as soon as he closed the door behind him. Running to a large picture window, she threw it open and looked out onto the back garden with its plethora of flowers. They were so brightly coloured that they almost glowed in the evening light. Their lovely smell filled her room in moments. This was exactly the kind of place she'd wanted when talking to the tour guide back home. They'd showed her pictures of lovely inns across the country, but this one was all of them rolled into one.

She ran a comb through her hair, re-applied some make up, then decided to join the merry-makers downstairs.

Rory sat at the bar while Peg poured him her usual crockery mug full of Faery Bog Wine. He could already feel the cool drink running down his throat and couldn't wait to introduce it to Shea.

Peg squeezed his cheek. "So, you found yourself a lovely girl, Connell tells me."

"That she is," Rory responded, laughing when he saw the look in Peg's mischievous, gleaming eyes.

Peg shook her head in disgust. "It's a good thing you came along when you did, or she'd have been a crime statistic."

Rory waved a hand in dismissal, refusing to hear one more thing about the Flynn brothers. He'd already explained what happened concerning the American at least six times. All he wanted now was his Bog Wine and a good bowl of Peg's stew. "Let's forget how I met her and figure out how to keep her here for a while," Rory told his hostess. "I've told her I'm a sort of tour guide."

"That always worked before, so it should now," Peg agreed.

"I don't know. I sense something different about this woman, Peg. She's got courage, to be sure. But, with a name like Fitzpatrick, she's got old blood in her, blood from this country. She might not be so easily fooled into following me around like a spring lamb wantin' a tit to suck."

Peg waved a hand in a dismissive gesture. "She'll follow you like all the other women. You'll charm her socks off, if she's wearin' 'em. If she's not, you'll charm off somethin' else. You always do."

Rory pressed his lips together to keep from laughing at her bawdy remark. Still, there was something in Shea's personality that seemed different. That he bedded women often wasn't an issue. In fact, his propensity for doing so was the subject of open bets for many of his comrades. As he glanced backward and saw some of them lift their glasses in a toast, he knew they'd already placed their wagers as to when

he'd get the lovely newcomer into his bower. That was the sport of the fey, one of only a few games left to them nowadays.

But the sport was never to harm or cause grief. That wasn't their way. In fact, most of the betting had to do with how well he'd service his human lover. He must give her as good a time as he got before she left, unharmed and unfettered.

As a passing serving girl bawdily reached around his waist, gently squeezed his cock and gave a thumbs-up signal to the rest of the room, the others let out a rowdy cheer. He couldn't help but laugh. All right, he had a hard-on that could drive spikes through a rail-road tie. Shea was a beautiful woman, and they all knew him to be a very virile man. As their leader, it fell to him to bring in the human women and serve as the consort. He was the only one of a few left who had no woman of his own. He could play the game without remorse. He'd done it all last summer when women tourists needed a place to stay. He'd amiably lured them to the inn, then done his stuff. He was more than ready to begin the season with Miss Shea Fitzpatrick. Still, there was something about the way she'd handled herself with those brutish men. Her courage captured his attention. He slowly sipped more Bog Wine, then caught sight of his current quarry as she wound her way through the tables of partying but disguised fey.

He slowly turned and let his gaze wander over the American's slender frame and ample breasts. He could almost

taste the sweetness of her skin as he'd kiss it. She'd be sweeter still when in his bower.

"Hi," Shea greeted, then sat next to him.

"The room to your liking?" he smilingly asked, and waved a hand just behind her to quell the odd comments he was afraid she might hear from his fellow Faeries. Many were openly wishing them good luck and making similar, uncalled-for remarks. If they didn't shut up, she'd get suspicious and make his game all the more difficult to play.

Shea simply smiled at the others in the room who were lifting their glasses in her direction then put all her attention on Rory. "The room is beautiful, and I'd like some of whatever you're having ... if you don't mind."

He half-smiled and took his chance to introduce her to a Faery beverage. "Uh, Peg, will you bring Miss Fitzpatrick a mug of wine?"

"Not stout?" Shea asked.

"Not tonight," he said as she took the mug Peg readily offered. "This is Peg O'Sullivan."

"I met your husband earlier," Shea said as she took the larger, red-headed woman's hand and shook it heartily.

"Oh, you're a bonny lass," Peg complimented and stared.

"A right bonny lass."

"You, uh, have to forgive Peg," Rory explained. "She's nothing if not quick with the truth."

"Thank you." Shea graciously took the compliment and lifted her glass to the older woman. "Your inn is wonderful. In fact, I think I'll make it my residence for the remainder of my vacation. If you're not booked up, that is."

Rory saw Peg's eyes open in surprise. Things were going suspiciously right. Almost too easily, in fact. He drew Shea's attention by clinking his mug against hers. "There's always room at the Wailin' Spirit Inn," he attested.

"I'm absolutely starving. What's on the menu?"

Rory heard Peg hoot and walk away to fill someone else's mug. At this rate, all he'd have to do was lead her out the back door and service her. Things were going a bit too fast, and he was used to being the seducer. Shea was clearly over her fear of him and looking him over as if he was on the night's dessert tray. "Peg will bring us some Irish stew. If that's what you'd like."

She scooted her chair closer to him. "I'll eat whatever you're eating."

When he gazed into her lovely face, the look in her eyes could only be described as hot. Rory felt his body responding handily at the way she purposely leaned toward him and pressed her breasts against the arm closest to her.

Shea lifted a finger and slowly ran it from his lower lip to his chin before taking it away from his face. "What could I possibly do to thank you for rescuing me?"

"Th-that was a gentlemanly act. Any man in his right mind would have stopped and helped," he responded, then swallowed down some more of his wine. He was vaguely aware of his comrades laughing at the back of the pub. They sensed his discomfort at not being the one to initiate the intimacy between them. Soon, however, he totally forgot their presence and gazed deeply into Shea's eyes. Something about her direct stare held him transfixed. "Why don't we get

that stew and take it out onto the back porch? It's quieter out there. We can talk."

"Sounds like a wonderful idea," she softly agreed, placing one hand on his knee and caressing it.

"Peg, would you bring us two bowls of tonight's special ... out back?" When the older woman nodded and hid her glee behind a bar cloth she held to her lips, Rory knew he had to get Shea out of the pub quickly. Everything they said was being overheard, though the din would probably have made Shea believe otherwise. Plus, he wanted to get to the bottom of the American's sudden desire to come onto him. What had happened since he left her at the registration desk to make her act so ... seductive? And just how was he going to handle the situation?

He grinned as several ways came to mind.

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Chapter Three

Rory eyed Shea with growing fascination. As they ate their meal and drank their Bog Wine, the frightened but courageous young beauty by the roadside was completely replaced by a lovely woman who was doing everything she could to turn up the heat. Well, if that's what she wanted, far be it from him to be so ungallant as to cast the offer aside. Why, it'd be positively antisocial and would create a dent in foreign relations for him to do anything other than acknowledge Shea's overt, sexual signals. Right now, her eyes had a come-hither look that rivalled any seductive stare in the Faery kingdom. His blood heated with passion.

Indeed, she was as bonny a creature as he'd ever laid eyes on. Her high cheekbones and turn-up nose reminded him of Glen Brownies, but that was where the resemblance ended. While her face was sweet and had a wholesome look about it, the rest of her body was made for pure loving. He could just imagine squeezing her rounded breasts against either side of his face as he kissed his way up her lean, strong body.

To try and get his engorged cock to lie back down and behave, he pushed his bowl away and reached for the pitcher to refill his glass. Normal conversation was the ticket. No more fiery glances and gazes for the moment. "So ... what would you be wantin' to see?" he asked, keeping his attention on his mug.

"First, why don't we discuss your fee?"

The way she said 'fee' forced him to gaze into her sparkling aqua eyes again. "Um, there's no charge. Consider my services a way of trying to make up for what some of my countrymen did. Frankly, I'd enjoy the company."

She leaned forward and took one of his broad hands in both hers. "Surely, there's something I can offer you?"

He half-choked on his wine, cleared his throat and slowly smiled at her. "You know, if you keep lookin' at me like you are and usin' that sultry tone of voice, I might just be gettin' some very wicked ideas."

She suddenly let go of his hand. "Might? Good God, I was hoping you'd have got the message an hour ago! What does a woman have to do? Have an 'I'm available' sign tattooed on her forehead?"

He burst out laughing. "You must think I'm incredibly dense, but a man has to be sure. After all, we're still strangers."

"After what happened today, I'd say we could move past that, don't you?"

He scooted his chair closer. "You're right. So, what would this offer entail?"

She was quick with an answer. "Got a place to stay for the night?"

He gazed straight into her eyes. "I have a permanent room in the inn. Connell and Peg are like my own parents."

"Would it shock you too very much if I asked you to share mine?"

"Now, I know you've got Irish blood in you," he teased.

"Of course I do," she admitted, "but what has that got to do with sharing my bed for the night?"

"Most Irish women get straight to the point. That's what I like about 'em."

"So?" she softly asked.

"I make it a rule never to disappoint a client." He reached out and stroked her cheek with one index finger. "And if you'll let me plan the itinerary, I can show you as good a time tomorrow as I'll show you tonight."

"Uh, meet me in my room in at twelve. I've always wanted to tell a man to meet me at the stroke of midnight."

With rising anticipation, he watched her saunter away. He couldn't wait to get out of the restrictive clothing Faeries so disliked and into her bed. The ease with which this was happening had him bewitched. But who was he to question Shea's good judgment? For however long the American tourist chose to stay, he'd be a willing partner to her lusts. And if some might choose to think her a loose woman, he could readily reply that she wasn't having a fling all alone. But then, Faeries never made such estimations concerning the humans with whom they played. It was all a game; they were all adults and knew the score. No one was ever hurt, and the interlude was usually deemed a success by all involved. With the single thought of making wild love to Shea on his mind, he eased himself out of his chair and headed toward his room and a long, calming shower.

She'd never done anything so impetuous in her entire life. Around the insurance office where she was a secretary, Shea was known as dependable, reliable, steady and totally boring.

She was about to toss all those adjectives out the window in favour of a new, more enlightened persona. As she thought about the man who'd meet her, she could barely control her body's response. Having pleasured herself in a soothing bath, she was even more ready. She closed her eyes and imagined her big Irish rescuer without any clothing on. Surely all that strength was due to a lot of hard physical work. If there was anything that turned her on, it was the sight of a well-honed male body. She loosened the tie to her blue silk robe and let her hand slide to her left breast. It would feel fantastic to have him play with her nipples and suck them while she ran her hands through all that long black hair. Fashion trends aside, that long pelt of his was definitely just her style.

Tweaking her left nipple through the thin robe she wore caused a gush of moisture to pool between her bare thighs. He'd know she was ready, and she hoped to get right to business. It had been months since she'd had a man, and that occasion had ended with the guy falling straight to sleep after pleasuring himself and not her. For some reason, she had the notion that Rory wouldn't be so selfish. A selfish man wouldn't have stopped to rescue a total stranger, placing himself in harm's way by doing so. And a man unworthy of a woman's attention wouldn't have received the boisterous, friendly greetings he had upon entering the inn's pub.

She hadn't come to Ireland looking for a vacation quickie or a romantic fling, but what the hell. Women and men did it all the time. She was tired of always being so stuck in a rut. When this perfect opportunity presented itself, she was glad to have grabbed at it with both hands. She'd seen the look in

Rory's eyes. Men had never been repulsed by her looks, but she'd gotten tired of looking for one who'd see to her needs before his own. Or see to her needs at all for that matter.

When the hands of her bedside alarm clock reached exactly midnight, there was a soft knock on her door. Shea took a deep breath, then made herself walk slowly toward it and pause before turning the knob and opening the barrier.

Rory moved into the room and softly closed the door behind him. A breeze from the open window wafted through the space causing the gauzy curtains to billow, and her hair to lift from around her chest.

Shea loved the black, unbuttoned silk shirt he wore. For some reason, it went well with his jeans and bare feet. She surmised he hadn't worn shoes so as not to disturb the other residents of the inn, but who cared what he wore on his feet? The ensemble worked for her.

She glanced toward an ice bucket where some champagne was chilling. "Since it's my vacation, I thought we'd splurge."

He stopped sauntering toward her and moved to the chilling champagne instead. After popping the cork and filling two glasses, he handed her one. "Here's to our American cousins and allies across the sea. May they ever have the same luck as we."

She smiled and sipped her drink when he did. Then, she looped one strand of hair behind her ear and moved to the open window. She stared at the lovely garden as she turned her back to him. "Y-you must think I'm incredibly bold ... asking you to my room like this."

"I think a man and a woman should respond when nature calls," he said, draining his glass and setting it on a nearby table. "You know I want you. You're a very beautiful woman."

She heard his soft voice from directly behind her and felt his breath on the back of her neck, even through the thickness of her hair. She turned to face him. "I don't want you to think I'm doing this just because you rescued me."

"Nor would I want you for that reason." He took her glass and sat it next to his, then he put his hands on her soft shoulders. "Just relax and let it happen."

Shea swallowed hard as his hands came up to frame her cheeks. She stood absolutely still as he lowered his head and began to kiss the corner of her mouth and her jaw. He moved his hands into her hair as he did so.

"Your hair is as soft as a spring mist." He breathed in her scent again. "And you smell fresh. Like a warm day in an orchard."

She ran her hands up the inside of his shirt and heard him suck in air. "You're strong. Stronger than I'd imagined." Beneath his shirt, she slid her hands over his back then up his chest, exposing the expansive muscle there. "You work out hard, don't you?"

He grinned and gazed down at her. "I like to stay in shape."

She took a deep breath. "Th-there's a gym around the corner from my apartment. I-I used to go there and watch the men lift weights."

"For what reason?"

"I just liked watching them. They were ... virile."

"Then you're a woman with hot appetites. Isn't that so?"

"Not so that anyone would notice. Back home, everyone thinks I'm quite dull. I always do what's expected. I'm always on time for work. I never call in sick. I always get my assignments done on time, and everyone depends on me. Quite predictable, actually."

"Are there no men in your world with eyes? Do none of them see what I'm seeing right now?" he whispered.

"There are no men in my world like you."

Rory ran his lips across hers in a barely grazing touch. Her response was to caress his back then pull him forward. He let her push his shirt off his torso even as the hot, wet and torrid kiss continued. He backed up towards the bed. Before he could actually pull her down with him, however, she pushed him hard. She unbelted her robe and let it fall to the floor.

"Shannon's Mercy!" he uttered, then quickly sat back up and began to run his hands over her soft body. He momentarily buried his head between her breasts before beginning to assault her nipples with his tongue.

Shea thrust her hands into the straight strands of blueblack hair that fell just below his shoulders. As she watched him kiss and caress her body, it seemed his hair and skin began to glow then shimmer. It had to be a trick of the halflight; a muted effect created by the lamp and its opaque shade. Her clit began to actually throb and tingle for want of him.

He laved her body with kisses and circular caressing motions until she cried out from desire.

Shea had no problem straddling his thighs and helping him off with his jeans. Once she pulled them down his well-defined and muscular thighs, she could see he wore some kind of leather thong, and its exotic, unexpected presence excited her more than she would have thought possible.

Rory kicked his jeans off, and she let her fingers wander, experimentally, over the thong. "Do you like that, darlin'?"

"Yeah. I really do," she readily responded and lowered her head to tongue the insides of his legs until he opened them wider.

Rory had never experienced such passion or wild lust. Even the Nymphs of the Faery world weren't known to be so tender, explorative or generous in their loving. He stroked Shea's shoulders with one hand while lifting her hair with the other so he could see exactly what she was doing. "If you want it off, you have to bite through the leather on either side of the pouch," he instructed.

Shea lifted her eyes off the enormous bulge between his legs and stared at him for a long moment.

In that look, he saw the feral gleam of some wild thing, not a woman. Shea was like a creature possessed. In that instant, he knew she'd either been sorely lacking for male companionship, or she had never had any at all. In her gaze, he saw a covetous ache and need that surpassed any expression he'd ever seen on a woman's face. And Rory had seen many, many women look at him with lust in their eyes. Shea, however, was uncontrollable and magnificent in her desire. Her response was like watching a tempest brewing at

sea. Her gaze was stormy, and in it, he saw a mystical light of excitement and intensity that thrilled him.

While still staring at him, Shea took the left side of the thong within her teeth. She pulled hard until the thin strap broke and his engorged penis sprang from the pouch that was now loose and lying to one side of his body.

"Damn!" he muttered, and lay there waiting for what would come next. Free from the restraining leather bond, his sensitive flesh hardened further in the night air.

Shea took his penis in her hands and began to stroke upward. Then, she took him in her mouth. Rory gripped the bedspread with his hands, but the rest of his body froze. Every single nerve he owned seemed centred right in his groin. And when Shea pushed his thighs farther apart so she could lick his testicles, he couldn't speak. He wanted to moan out his appreciation and instruct her as he did with the Faery women with whom he caroused, but he simply couldn't utter one single sound—not a syllable or even a grunt.

"I want you inside me," she passionately whispered. "Deep inside."

Finally able to croak out his wish, Rory said, "Do it. Damn it all, take me."

Shea moved slowly up his body, letting her hair drag over his rock-hard abdomen and all the rippled muscle there. Then, she took his penis in one hand, stroked her clit with it several times and slid down it. She took every bit of him in, one slow inch at a time.

Rory was finally able to lift his hands and his head. He gripped her shoulders and ran his palms down to her luscious

breasts and tweaked her nipples. Her resounding moan told him she liked the small amount of pain. But it was with extreme difficulty that he played with her body at all. She was wrapped so tight and hot around his cock that coherent thought almost left him. Wet, intense heat massaged every curve and crevice that made up his cock. He was being gloved by exquisite, volcanic-like silk.

When she began to buck against him like a wild mare, he was pulled up and down with her. It took every bit of physical strength he had not to shapeshift right there and use his more massive Faery physique to make love.

Her cries echoed off the walls when her orgasm hit her deep and hard. Rory felt his seed pooling within her as he, too, experienced an almost bone-splitting orgasm. It took him out of reality and into a world of sheer sensation. He thrust up over and over until she fell against him and lay there panting. He held onto her tightly, and only let her go when she pushed away and sat up.

Shea gazed down at him, using her fingers to untangle his long hair and gently pull it away from his sweat-soaked face. "Thank you," she murmured.

There was a reverence in her voice that shouldn't have been there. Rory felt something tug in the vicinity of his heart, sat up and hugged her hard. "You take my breath away, darlin'. You truly do."

Her only response was to hold onto him tightly.

As he held on and rocked her, Rory began to regret coming over the hill that day. Not that he'd wanted anything to happen to Shea or any other stranded woman, but it might

have been better for them both if someone else had been her Lancelot. She wasn't the same as other women. Something about her called to him in a way he didn't understand and the sensation frightened him.

Soon, she'd be gone and wouldn't even remember this episode or any other they shared. His magical influence would fade when there was some distance between them. Why it bothered him was a mystery. He tried to shake off the feeling, but it just wouldn't go.

Shea leaned back and ran her fingers down his cheeks. "You're quite a man."

Stop looking at me that way. I'm not the man for you. He pulled her back down and caressed her body until her soft breathing told him she slept.

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Chapter Four

Shea woke up alone, but somehow wasn't surprised. It was well into the morning. She didn't expect Rory to stick around, waiting for her to get over jet lag. As she wrapped her robe around her body, there was a firm knock on the door.

"Come in," she called.

"Hello, dearie," Peg sang out as she shouldered the door open and walked into the room carrying a breakfast tray.
"You might remember me from last night? I'm Peg O'Sullivan, Connell's wife," Peg introduced herself again.

"Of course I remember," Shea said as she gazed down at the try of fruit and porridge the woman was placing on a table. "What's all this?"

"Rory ordered you up some breakfast. He was concerned you might not be feeling all that well after yesterday's goings on." She clicked her tongue. "Those Flynn brothers are a snotty lot-full, I must say. It's a cryin' shame you had to see that part of our culture."

Shea simply shrugged. "I'm afraid you'd see worse if you were to come to New York. There are bad people everywhere. I'm just glad Rory came along when he did."

"And that's a fact." Peg nodded her head in confirmation and placed her hands on her hips. "But it's all put to rights now. Rory has gone and had a long, long talk with 'em. He wants to make extra sure they leave the area and cause no further harm."

Shea felt her eyes widen automatically in surprise. "Pardon me for asking, but ... is that his job? I mean, why doesn't he just let me make a complaint to the police?"

"What? And spoil your vacation with all that inquest business and paperwork?" She waved her hand in blunt dismissal of that idea. "Nonsense. Why, Rory will take good care of everything. He's a right wonderful man! If I had a son, I want him to be just the same." She went about tidying the room. "Now, you go on and eat up. Rory said I was to make sure you ate every single bite. He should be back around midday. I think he has a special treat planned for your afternoon tour. In the meantime, you can rest and have a nice walk around the garden. There's a beautiful view at the top of the hill, at the back of the property."

"Uh, I was hoping I could find a way to get the rest of my luggage and take care of my car rental..."

"Oh, not to worry. Rory has that all arranged. My Connell is bringing your luggage here even now, and should be back by the time you've had a nice long bath. There was one wee bit of a glitch though."

Trying to gather the flow of information and assimilate the rapidity with which Rory was assuming control of everything, Shea shook her head to clear it. "Glitch?" she asked.

"Well, you see ... Rory found the number to call your car rental company in your glove compartment. Unfortunately, this is the height of the tourist season and all they could do was come tow the car. They didn't have a replacement." Peg waved a dust cloth as she walked around the room, sorting things and cleaning. "Not to worry, though. Rory has that nice

bike of his. He'll take you wherever you want to go. I think he even means to find a spare helmet or two since you mentioned something about wearing one."

Shea simply shook her head again. "Well, I guess ... I guess I'll just eat and take a shower then."

"Good for you, dearie. And when Connell gets here, I'll do your unpackin'. You needn't even lift a single finger. Gracious, we do so want you to have a grand time."

All Shea could do was grin and eat her wonderful breakfast of porridge and fruit. It seemed the buxom, older woman had everything as under control as Rory. On occasion, Shea'd had the luxury of staying in some very fine American hotels that wouldn't have gone to this kind of trouble. It was almost as if the people at Wailing Spirit Inn were doing every single thing they could to make her want to stay put. She was more than convinced she should, and couldn't wait to see her male rescuer again. That thought kept her grinning all morning and through the amiable gossip Mrs. O'Sullivan readily dispensed.

Later in the day, she was walking through the enchanting garden when Rory walked towards her wearing his sunglasses, leather jacket, blue jeans and biker boots. Shea waited expectantly, not knowing whether the previous night's encounter should be acknowledged or let go as a one-night stand. The choice was his. The last thing she wanted—after their sexual romp and the strong way she came on to him—was to appear desperate and needy.

"Hi," she amiably greeted.

Rory stopped several feet in front of her, not just to get a good look at her slender figure in jeans and a light blue

sweater, but to take in the almost half-enthused way in which she greeted him. He expected more gusto after what they'd shared. "Are you feeling all right? I was worried that the incident with the Flynn brothers might have caught up with you."

"No. I'm fine." She paused and grinned. "Actually, I'm a lot better than just fine. Mr. O'Sullivan delivered my luggage; Peg unpacked it and fixed me breakfast and a light lunch. You arranged to have my rental towed and everything seems settled."

"But?" he questioned, sensing she wanted to add more.

"I ... I sort of get the feeling everyone is trying a little too hard to get me to stay. I mean, I have no intentions of leaving but people needn't put themselves out on my behalf. After all, I'll be gone in a couple of weeks."

He moved closer and gazed down into her unusually coloured eyes. "That might be so. But it's our way to be hospitable. And, to be honest, Peg and Connell don't often get that many visitors. The inn is a bit off the beaten path, as they say."

She nodded. "Well, I can't fault the service. Yours either," she blithely added.

For some reason, the way she so flippantly addressed their lovemaking didn't sit well with him. "You say that as if I came with the room and board."

Shea shook her hair out of her eyes when a soft breeze blew it forward. "I didn't mean it that way. In fact, I was the one who came onto you. And I don't regret it. It's just that, I

wanted you to understand it's just a holiday fling. No strings attached."

That should have been his line. That the basic reason for their sex was being so bluntly addressed by her bothered him, but he didn't know why. He let his gaze wander over her perfect features. "So, that's it, then?"

"Not at all. That is, if you want to continue, I won't complain. Let's just not make it too personal."

Confused, he tilted his head and asked, "How in the world could it not be personal?"

"It's just sex. We wouldn't be getting personal if we don't get into each other's histories too much. I don't need to know anything more than I do about you. And you don't need to know anything more about me. Our private lives are our own."

Rory saw the utter control on her face, the way she stared straight into his eyes as if she meant every cold word. He frowned and put his hands on his hips. "Are you married? I didn't see a ring on your finger, but are you trying to keep someone from finding out what we did together? Is that it?"

"No. I'm not married. I'm not cheating on anyone," she angrily replied. "But as we won't ever see each other after I leave, then I don't see what good it will do to get to know each other for anything but the sex we share and the places you might like to show me in regards to being a guide. Let's just keep it impersonal."

Rory mentally shook himself. The woman was confounding. On the one hand, she was open to the most lustful, intimate sex. On the other, she didn't even want to know about the

man sharing it. Most women wanted to question him to death about every single detail, and he'd had to lie about most of his life because of their interrogations. More and more, Shea Fitzpatrick was an enigma he wanted to investigate. Her insistence that her life was to be kept private fuelled his need to know even more. Unless he wanted to chase her off before his game was finished, he'd have to give in.

"All right. Have it your way," he grudgingly relented.

"Good," she blurted, then walked forward, grabbed him by the front of his jacket and pulled him down to her height.

Rory didn't even have time to vocalize his shock when she kissed him slowly and sensually. All he could do was respond. He pulled her to him, rotating his hips against her body in a passionate gesture. When she finally ended the seductive contact and stepped back, he'd never felt more out of control in his entire life. The sensation was a new one and not to his liking.

"Did you have some tourist plans for this afternoon?" Shea softly asked. "Peg said you did."

Strangely angered by her stoic control and the loss of his, Rory could only respond with a curt few words. "Yes. My bike is out front."

"Let me get my purse. I'll be with you in a couple of minutes. I'd like to see anything that isn't normal," she instructed and walked away.

Rory was left standing there, wondering what the hell had happened between last night and now. The contrary woman was blowing hot and cold and, to his Faery senses, the switch in attitude was almost maddening.

Shea walked away holding her breath; her room seemed to be the best place to collect her thoughts. Once there, she sat down and took stock of the situation. The man was far too virile. Everything about him mesmerized her in a way that seemed almost magical; almost too good to be true. He was a cross between all the heroes she'd ever dreamt of with a bit of that bad-boy attitude that made him stand apart. Having such a masculine presence thrown in her path was *not* the way she envisioned her vacation. Her life was her own, and she wanted to keep it that way—no entanglements. More than anything, she didn't want to care about him. Any man that had ever got too close had only done so for a good piece of ass and a ready squeeze of her tits. Boring as it was, her life was just fine. All she wanted was to make it fuller, with a tinge of excitement. Getting involved wasn't on the menu; the superior sex was so long as Rory understood he didn't own her. As she'd told him, she wanted no strings attached to any encounter they might share. If her words had been short, they'd been protective. She was guarding her heart.

Rory stood by the bike when she bounced out of the inn and down the walkway. She smiled as if she hadn't a care in the world. He, on the other hand, felt like a piece of meat being used for a tourist's pleasure. That angered him until he remembered how many women he'd slept with in the past, for the sake of a Faery game. It was all about getting them into his bower, then letting them go on their way. Using his magic to make sure they remembered nothing was simple. It had always been so easy, with no one hurt in the process. Now, however, he was beginning to regret playing around. He

found that he didn't want Shea to forget one single thing about him. He didn't want her to leave in a few weeks, only remembering some nebulous tour guide and some lustful nights in a bed. Eventually, even those memories would fade and all Shea would recall would be her trips to the sites where he'd take her. His face would become one of hundreds she'd see in Ireland ... nothing to be remembered or regretted.

He tossed his misgivings aside and readied himself to play the professional tour guide most people would expect.

"Ready? The first site on the tour is an old stone circle. It'll only take five minutes to get there." He waited for her to take the helmet he offered, get on the back of the bike and securely seat herself. His attention was on driving safely; nothing else. And once they were at the location he'd mentioned, he waited for her to hop off and made sure the bike was secure before following. To his amazement, he saw her laughingly run around the stones, touching each one reverently.

"I know I shouldn't put my hands on them even though they're stone," she told him. "If every tourist fondled the surfaces, there wouldn't be much left after a few hundred years."

"The stones will be here forever," he countered. "They're on private land. No one is allowed here."

She stopped and stared at him for a long moment. "Do we have permission?"

"The owner won't mind."

"That's not what I asked..."

"I'm the owner," he roughly finished. "And I say you can touch them all you want."

She slowly walked toward him and gazed deeply into his eyes. "Why didn't you tell me?"

"You didn't want to know anything personal, remember?" When she remained silent, he boldly continued despite her professed desire to remain ignorant of his life. "I'm what you might call an *un*developer ... for lack of a better term. I buy up parcels of land and make sure no one builds on them. There are too few places left in this part of the world where men don't encroach."

She placed her hands on his chest. "Why? What's in it for you?"

"Do I have to have a motive?"

"No. It's just that there aren't that many altruistic people left in the world. And it would take a great deal of money to accomplish such a goal."

"But you don't want to know about that, do you? I'm just some man to play with until you get back to your New York apartment. Isn't that it?" he angrily questioned, and was inflicted with yet another cool, calm gleam in her eyes.

"And you wouldn't be above using a female tourist as a plaything, would you?" she asked pointedly.

He looked away so she wouldn't see any telltale guilt in his expression.

Trying to bring some semblance of civility and friendliness back into their short-lived relationship, Shea took his hands in hers. "Tell me about the circle. Please?"

"Why would you care?" he shot back.

"Please, just tell me," she requested again and smiled.

He sighed and relented. "It's over three centuries old. No one knows how it got here," he lied. His people had constructed it centuries ago to honour the ancients of this land.

She pulled him toward one of the upright megaliths which was well over eight feet high and three feet across. Shea put the palm of her hand against the rough stone.

"It's sort of magic, isn't it? Can't you feel it?" she asked as she lifted his hand and forced his palm against the stone, next to hers. "I heard stories about them when I was a little girl. My grandfather used to tell me the Faeries danced in places like this."

That was an opening into her life he hadn't imagined she'd let slip. Especially after her small lecture on the subject before leaving the inn. "How far back does your Irish ancestry go?"

"My grandfather and grandmother both came from County Cork. My grandmother died a few years back. My grandfather three months ago. I miss him," she finished sadly.

He saw the immense sorrow in her gaze just before she quickly turned back to the stone and continued examining it.

"Why didn't he ever return home?" Rory gently quizzed.

"Money. Or lack of it. Then his health wouldn't let him. I'm sort of making this trip for the both of us."

Again, he was completely mystified. Here she was, opening up part of her personal life to him after having stated she wouldn't. Rory found that he didn't want her to stop. There

was something about the conversation that made him want her to continue. "You were very close to him. I can see that."

She put one cheek against the stone and closed her eyes. "He raised me. My mother took off when I was five. I don't know where she is and don't care. I don't know who my father is and don't give a damn about him, either. Only Grandpa Sean and Grandma Molly mattered."

He was beginning to see why she might not want to talk too much about herself. The shaking in her voice told him she was very near to crying.

She opened her eyes and promptly turned away. "See? This is what happens when ships-passing-in-the-night talk too much. You don't want to know about my family, and it won't matter a week after I'm gone. So, why bother?"

He gripped her shoulders and turned her around. "I do care. We all have to or the world will become colder every time we pass a stranger and don't share something of ourselves. Not wanting to get involved makes it easier to hurt others. Maybe it makes it harder to be hurt, too. Isn't that true?"

She nodded and leaned into him.

"Your Grandpa and Grandma were everything to you."

She turned her face into his chest but didn't respond. He already knew the answer, or he wouldn't have stated it so bluntly.

"There now, lass. If he had you, he could be counted a lucky man."

"He w-wanted to come home so m-much," she wept. "He told me to come to the stone circles and see the real Ireland.

I wasn't ever sure what that meant." She looked up at his handsome face. "I think I'm beginning to."

Rory's heart cracked. The tears in her lovely eyes sunk him. He lowered his mouth to hers and kissed her very softly, for a long time.

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Chapter Five

"Would you like to join me in the pub tonight?" Rory offered after pulling up in front of the inn.

She shook her head. "I-I think I'd like to just grab something and take it to my room, if you don't mind."

With those words, his good mood lapsed, but her next request had him soaring just as quickly.

Shea put one hand on his chest, handing him back his helmet at the same time. "Would you join me in my room tonight? I'd love to wake up next to you."

After tossing the helmet aside, he cupped her cheeks and bestowed what he hoped was his warmest, brightest smile on her. "Sure'n, I was hopin' you'd ask."

She nodded and turned to walk away. Then, she stopped and looked over her shoulder at him. "I'm sorry I was so cold about us. It's just that ... I'll be leaving. Understand?"

"I do."

As he watched her walk away, something deep inside didn't want to acknowledge her common sense. After roaming the wildflower-covered hillsides, viewing the ruins of an ancient castle and even more stone circles, he'd seen a side to Shea that was altogether too enchanting. Her bright smile made the sun dim by comparison. She seemed to push back her sadness concerning the death of her only family member and celebrated where she was and the magic associated with all the places they'd shared.

Forgetting her vow not to speak of her personal life, she began to open up and tell stories her grandfather had shared about a country the old man had never gotten to see again. That alone was enough to break the heart of any good Irishman. And Rory was much closer to the land than any human ever could be. He understood the pain that unknown old man must have felt. Shea, as his granddaughter, was trying to capture the memories for her dead loved one while making new ones for herself. And when she'd turned her face towards the sky while doing so, he'd lost a little part of his heart each and every time.

Confused and troubled by his feelings, Rory headed for the kitchen and the gardens beyond. He needed to be outside, not in the cottage. He was delayed to his destination, however, when Peg stopped him in the kitchen. She was stirring a large pot of potato soup.

"Here now, where's that smile of yours?" Peg asked as she laid a hand on his arm to stop him from going outside.

"Weren't you even goin' to stop and offer so much as a hello?"

He gazed down at her in her human appearance and thought how very appropriate her disguise was. As always, she was the one to whom they all went when bothered. The matronly countenance she took on seemed congruent with the friendly ear she always lent.

"It's Shea," he blurted.

Peg waved her hand at a chair by the kitchen table, inviting him to take it while she sat on the opposite side. "You

seem to be gettin' along in a grand fashion. What's the problem?"

"I don't like playing the game with her." He saw Peg's eyebrows shoot up and knew there'd be a lecture to follow.

"Rory, darlin', we're Faeries. It's what the single young men of our kind do. You're supposed to see if you can get a willing mortal woman within your bower, in a specified time. Having done that, she'll go on her way none-the-wiser. You've done this a hundred times before, and in so many centuries that I can't keep track. What's different about this time?"

"She's followin' a dream. She isn't just lookin' to get laid the way all the others were."

"I sensed she was," Peg quickly countered.

"No. She wants to have a good time, to be sure. But I feel like this isn't something she normally does. She's lonely. Her grandfather was a countryman. He died recently, and she's here to visit his homeland, because he could never come back." He leaned forward and whispered the rest. "He taught her the old ways. She knows all the old stories about us and shared them with me. He told her all about how the Faeries dance in the stone circles, and how he always respected the fey, even when in America. She said he'd always leave a small gift of whiskey on his back doorstep, just in case any of us had followed him to the States and wanted to wish him well. That shows a steadfast heart in the face of so much worldly disbelief. I feel like I'm takin' advantage of the situation and a believin' old man's only kin. It doesn't seem right to me."

"There are lots of people who come to Eire searchin' for their roots. They come and visit the crystal factories. They buy the wool sweaters and kiss the Blarney Stone, then go home. I still don't understand the difference with Shea," Peg affirmed.

"I can't explain it with words. There are none. I just sense a difference in her," he insisted, then headed for the back door.

"Where are you goin'?"

Rory shrugged. "To my bower. I need to think."

After he left, Peg began to smile and dance around the kitchen while preparing the evening meal. "I don't think it's the girl who's different, my lad. I think 'tis you," she muttered.

* * * *

Shea ran a brush through her hair once again, then put it down. She walked to the window and loved the way the thousands of bright flowers were illuminated in the coming twilight. As before, it looked as if they were almost glowing in the semi-darkness. But something far, far back in the garden caught her attention.

A light flickered there.

Curious as to its source, Shea belted her robe more tightly and didn't even waste time putting on slippers. She bolted out the bedroom door and down a back stairwell. Wonderful smells of baking told her she was approaching the kitchen. But when she entered the room, no one was tending the bubbling pots and the pie in the oven. She could vaguely hear

the rowdiness from the attached pub, but the sound of all the partying faded as she exited the kitchen and walked down a small stone pathway toward the light. From the ground, she couldn't see it. But she let her instinct draw her deeper into the garden where she thought the small beacon might be.

As she slowly walked, Shea didn't remember the flowers or trees being so dense. She'd wandered what she believed to be the entire expanse of the garden before and didn't recognise where she now was. There wasn't any fear. The path she was on was clearly laid out. She could certainly follow it back to the kitchen, but it went on farther than she'd have imagined. Guessing she might have walked a full mile, she finally stopped. Even from her window, she couldn't have seen any lantern so far away. Still, she felt compelled to walk forward. A sudden fervency filled her.

She took several more steps, then a rustling sound stopped her. Again, she wasn't afraid, but some deep instinct bid her to take great care and to be silent as she could. Where the cobblestone path suddenly ended, Shea parted the waist-high ferns before her. The air literally left her lungs. She silently sank to her knees and watched. There was no fear in her. For a brief instant, she felt absolutely nothing but shock. Then, the beauty and wonder of the scene froze her to the spot. She couldn't have moved, even if her life depended on it.

Shea knew she was crying, but couldn't even raise her fingers to wipe the tears away. Before her was the most enchanting, beautiful sight she'd ever beheld. Rory was completely nude. Even with the physical change in him, there

was no mistaking his magnificent, muscular body and captivating face. But the change between man and what he now was had her transfixed. The long black hair that was normally just below his shoulders now trailed in a long straight line down his back. It was infused with some sparkling substance as was every inch of his skin. His body appeared almost silver and perfectly matched the silvery black wings that sprouted from his back. They were like the wings of a butterfly. He was kneeling before a white candle and fireflies flitted throughout the lovely little glen.

He stood and the bottom half of his wings trailed behind him like some kind of regal robe. The jet black curls between his thighs were also sparkling and seemed to gently caress the massive cock jutting from his body. Even his testicles seemed larger and appeared to glow as much as the rest of his skin.

When a warm breeze lifted his thick hair, she could see that his ears were greatly elongated at the top. The tips came to a sharp point and seemed to move and twitch the way a cat's ears might. Some instinct told her he could hear any movement she made. Indeed, she had no reason to think otherwise, but something told her he knew she was there and watching.

Grandpa had been right. They did exist. The only person in her life who'd ever really loved her hadn't been making up stories after all. Part of her wanted to weep for her grandfather and his not being able to come home again. Part of her wanted to weep—for her—because Rory's world might just be disappearing, and he was trying to save it by buying

up property so no one would pave it over or build on it someday.

Now he was walking straight towards her. Shea held her breath, found the strength to stand and backed away. As she'd correctly surmised, he'd known she was there. Still, she wasn't afraid so much as embarrassed at having been caught spying and befuddled as to what one said to a real live Faery. If she could fight off three men with a tire iron, however, she could find the courage to stand her ground and confront this beautiful magical being. Something told her Rory wouldn't hurt her. He hadn't so far, and there'd been dozens of chances. She backed away only to give him room. His wings trailed behind him at least six feet. The last thing she wanted, after spying on him, was to follow up by stepping on his appendages.

"H-hi," she stupidly muttered. "J-just out for some fresh air." She saw how his eyes seemed to glow like fine black crystal. Even in the coming darkness, she could perceive every inch of his boldly sculpted form.

"Don't be afraid of me," he whispered.

She shook her head. "I'm not. Not really. Just pretty damned startled!" She saw a slow smile spread over his handsome face, then couldn't help but grin back. "Damn! There really is magic in the world, isn't there?"

"More than you know." He glanced back. "I don't know why I did that—light that candle, I mean. I should have known you could see the light from your room. It's higher up than all the others."

"M-maybe you wanted me to find you?" She phrased the explanation as a question.

"Maybe. I don't know. I came here to think. It's peaceful. Only the sounds of the forest invade my bower."

She slowly approached him, scanning his body as she did so. "You're so beautiful! I don't think I could have ever imagined anything so awesome. But you'd have never told me, would you? I'd have left Ireland never knowing."

He turned slightly away and swallowed hard. "You won't like what I'm going to say, but I have to tell you."

Shea moved even closer. She lifted a hand, to touch his shoulder where a lovely Celtic knot was tattooed, glowing silver in the coming darkness. It hadn't been there in his human form. "Just tell me everything." As she said the words, it seemed she could see another smaller tattoo forming on one of his cheeks. She guessed their appearance might have something to do with the setting sun, but held her thousand questions concerning his form, allowing him to speak first.

Rory decided to spill his guts. There was no point in hiding what she'd want to know, even if she'd forget him and what she'd seen soon enough.

"I'm eight centuries old. Faeries age extremely slow. We love to play with humans, though we mean no harm in doin' so. You ... you were the latest game."

"Game? What are you talking about?"

He momentarily closed his eyes, not wanting to anger her. "Unattached Faery men love to lure women into their bower. Mine is just there." He pointed to his right, from the glen where she'd seen him. "Once there, I'd have made love to

you in my Faery form. You'd have been enchanted to believe the entire event was a dream, then wake up, wanting to leave and explore the rest of the countryside the next morning. Eventually, you wouldn't even remember me or the inn at all. The experience here would blend and meld into others you'd have while travelling throughout our country. The inn, its residents and me would all be jumbled together with some other bed-and-breakfast or hotel you'd stayed in. I'd become one of a half-dozen tour guides you'd have met. There would be no memory of us making love. No memory of that kind of experience at all, unless it was just as a one-night stand with a stranger. That's the way our magic works. It always has."

"I was just ... a *game* to you?" she asked angrily.

He quickly turned to face her and strode to cover the distance between them. "It was. But not any more. I can't do it. I can't take you into my bower." He looked away, staring into the woods. "I-I don't know why."

"You mean, I'll remember this now?"

Rory slowly turned his face towards her again. "Yes. The enchantment won't be complete unless I take you into my bower and make love to you there. So long as I don't..."

Rory could see her expression change from wonder, to sadness. Then, a fleeting glimpse of irritation passed over her features.

"Please, don't hate us," he begged. "We don't mean to be manipulative. It's just in our nature to toy with humans with whom we come into contact. We can't help it."

"By 'us' I take it everyone at the inn knew about this? Even Peg and Connell?"

"They're all Faeries. We travel in Troops. Those I'm with have been together for many, many centuries as you reckon it. To us, a few hundred years is just a small span of time."

"I trusted you today. I told you things I wouldn't have told another living soul," she whispered.

"I think that's why I can't play the game with you. You opened your heart when it's clear you aren't used to doing so."

"Wh-what happens now?"

That mixed-up expression in her lovely gaze caught his heart and held on. "I-I could leave your memories in tact. I'd promise not to lure you into my bower if you could accept me as I am. It would be a magical memory you could take into the future. No one would believe you if you ever spoke of it, so I know it would be just between us." He watched as she considered that option. "It'd be a gift from my world to yours. I could do this in remembrance of your grandfather's loyalty to our ways and for teaching his granddaughter the old legends. The others wouldn't dare question me. I'm their leader, and they'd agree. You needn't fear any of us or any Faery magic," he insisted.

She lifted one hand and slowly brought it towards him. "C-could I touch you?"

He closed his eyes as her warm, soft palm rested against the ancient markings on his cheek. "I could never enchant you into making love to me. I swear I couldn't. I'd want you to come to me of your own free will. Just as it has been so far."

"Just as it'll be tonight," she quietly promised and leaned towards him.

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Chapter Six

Shea brushed her lips lightly across his. She felt a tingling sensation, withdrew a few inches then barrelled ahead. Not wanting to touch his wings without permission or knowing what would happen if she did, she carefully looped her arms around his neck and let the kiss deepen. His tongue and hers sparred in a sensual war that made her clit drip. No matter what he looked like, Rory Finnegan was still all male.

He unbelted her robe, let it pool around her waist then pulled her up against him. "I can't lay back because of m' wings. But there are other ways Faeries can make love."

"I-is it different from when you were in human form? Does it feel any different?"

"Well now, I'll let you be the judge of that, pretty Shea."

When he looked her over, Shea saw his strangely glowing eyes positively spark. He swiftly took her hand and turned away. She let him lead her wherever he wanted. It seemed as they walked that the night air grew warm and heavy with flower-scent from the garden. Shea was reminded of that Shakespearian story about enchanted folk making love on a Midsummer Night. Perhaps others had known the pleasure she was about to now enjoy. Maybe that old story had been true and had been written to tell a tale of Faery loving to enchant the ages.

When they entered a clearing a little smaller than his bower, Rory turned to her and held up her hands so she could see her palms and her arms. "Wherever you've touch me,

you'll have Faery glamour on you. It'll make you experience sensations more fully, but you won't be harmed. It'll disappear with the morning's light."

She gazed at those parts of her body where the shimmering silver dust was now prominent. "It's beautiful."

"So are you, my darlin' ... so are you." He pulled her to him, spread his wings and let them cover both their heads as they kissed.

Shea's skin felt heated and her nipples ached to be toyed with when they came in contact with his chest. She could feel his erection jutting into her abdomen and his soft pubic hair as he undulated his hips against her lower body. The kisses he planted along her jaw line and throat were soft and sweet. She alternately gripped his hips and ran her fingers over his backside.

Rory carefully pushed her away and turned his back to her. "Touch my wings. Run your fingers down the veins. Faeries love that. It makes us crazy," he half-panted.

She delightedly did as he asked and saw his entire body sparkle even brighter. He thrust his hips forward and backward when she found a sensitive spot between his wings, at their base. "You really get off on that, don't you?"

He dropped his head back and ran his hands through his hair. At the same time, he spread his wings farther to each side, leaving her with full access to his back and butt. "If you keep that up, I'm goin' to shoot all over the plants instead of inside you!"

She quickly skirted the outstretched wing on his left, and knelt before him. "Don't do that. I don't want to waste a single drop."

Rory watched her take him fully in her mouth. He let out a long, low moan he was sure his comrades would hear all the way back to the inn. She teased every part of his man-rod and took time to caress and carefully tongue his balls. He lifted one leg and put that foot on a rock so she could have better access to his sensitized flesh.

"That's it, lass. Take it all into your mouth. You can't believe how shaggin' good that feels. Roll your tongue over my balls and suck them."

When he saw her left hand snake down her body, between her thighs, Rory knew she'd experience an orgasm on her own if he didn't act quickly. He grabbed the upper part of her arms and gently hauled her up against his body. Then, he turned her away so that her back was against his chest. "When I lift you up, relax and let me do everything. You just enjoy."

Having no idea what he intended, Shea simply did as he instructed. When he lifted her up, his hands were under the back part of both her thighs. Her butt was high up against his chest, but he began to slowly lower her. She felt him enter her from behind as she was virtually impaled on his cock, facing away. The intensity of his entrance and the angle was perfect.

Rory kept to his task. Nothing on Earth or in his fey realm could stop him now. As she tossed her hair back towards him and cried out in ecstasy, he rested his right cheek against her

left one. He thrust upward, over and over. He cried out between delighted gasps, "Someday, I'm going to take you again like this, but in front of a mirror. I want you to see what it is I'm doin', lass. I want you to see the way we are together and how you look when you're covered with Faery dust as you are right now."

Impaled on the standing Faery as she was—with his hands under her thighs and her palms gripping his forearms—all she could do was utter incoherent groans of supreme satisfaction. But then she cried out in ecstasy as he thrust more deeply from behind, over and over. The bouncing of her breasts, against her knees, was exquisite. She could feel her nipples against her own flesh, and the rubbing sensation was fantastic. His shaft seemed thicker than it had been in human form, and the very tip of his cock felt as if it was actually rotating within her pussy. Reality as she knew it flew away. For the moment, her world consisted of the ethereal male who held her and his knob-head pounding into her vagina. The delicious driving made her grip his arms with all her strength. She'd never known such a magnificent tingling feeling could originate from her clitoris. One or two more thrusts, and she was encompassed by an orgasm that was immediately followed by another. Both her clit and her pussy contracted hard, at the same time.

Rory felt himself lose control entirely. His seed spilled forth, both into her and down the front of his thighs. He clenched his jaw and thrust faster and faster until he was sure she was spent and he had no more left to give.

Shea's eyes were closed, and her head was back against his shoulder when he lowered them both to the ground. His heavy breathing matched hers. She lay back against him spent and replete. How could she ever want another man after this? There would be no comparison. Every experience would come far short of satisfaction. Without opening her eyes, she turned into his embrace, and he held her tightly against his body.

"Look at yourself," he invited. "You're covered in glamour," he breathed. "My glamour!"

The way he said those last words was almost possessive. Shea finally opened her eyes and saw her skin as he did. It was completely gilded in a layer of star-like shiny powder that glistened in the rising moon's light.

Rory saw the way her full breasts rose up and down as she struggled to catch her breath. Some other man would someday play with her full tits. Some other man's baby would nurse at them, and some other man would slide between her beautiful thighs and cry out in the night. The thought of these scenes made him furious. "I can't stand the idea of another man makin' love to you! I don't even want to think about it!" he angrily ground out between clenched teeth.

"I-I don't think I would let anyone ever have that chance," she whispered back. "Not now. But what can we do about it? I have to go back to my world, Rory. And you have to live in yours."

"I know. But I don't have to shaggin' well like it!" he gruffly responded and held her all the tighter.

She took a deep breath and shifted to her feet. Pushing away from him, she ran back to where her robe was still lying and quickly pulled it back on.

"I'm leaving tomorrow. This has gone too far," she sobbed.
"I know you didn't mean it to and neither did I. But we don't belong together. My God, we don't even know each other!"

Rory grabbed her shoulders from behind and pulled her against his chest. "Don't say that, lass. You have the rest of your vacation. We have time to be together."

Without turning, she blurted, "Why? What good would the sex be when you and I both know we're getting too close and that I can't be with you for more than a few days?"

Rory lifted her hair and let the long loose curls wind around his fingers before saying, "Maybe I was supposed to find you out there on the road. Maybe all this was supposed to happen. Faeries don't believe in coincidence. There's always a reason for whatever circumstance we encounter."

"I'm scared," she softly uttered.

"Truth be told, so am I. But don't leave yet. You're no coward. You faced down three brawny men in the road all by yourself. You can handle one relatively harmless garden Faery."

She slowly turned when he let her hair go. "I don't think anyone could remotely describe you as 'relatively harmless'. You're the most sensual, romantic, mysterious man I've ever known. Not to mention the fact that you're built like a damned mountain with equipment that could service a harem. My head tells me to get the hell out of here while I can. But

my heart and my body don't want to budge. Tell me what I should do, Rory? What's your best advice?"

He put his forehead against hers. "I say you stay. Live life to its fullest for the time you've got left in Ireland. Live it with me. I'll show you the parts of this country your grandfather meant you to know. I'll show you magic and wondrous things that'll make you soar with happiness. We won't think about tomorrow. We'll grab onto the enchantment of now, and we'll live with no regrets for having thrown caution to the winds."

"All right then. To hell with running away." She lifted her hands to his chest and stood on her toes. "Make love to me until I can't stand. Show me everything in your world, and I'll leave here and not look back when it comes time."

Rory kissed her hard and felt her hands tangle within his hair. It was as if she was holding on to him for dear life. He felt they were both on a precipice from which they could topple at any moment. But it would be a sweet fall if they dropped. He should have known and recognised the immediate attraction when he'd first taken her hand. There'd been that strange initial tingle he'd never experienced before. But it was too late to let her simply leave. They'd started the journey together and must now finish it, to whatever end. He was immortal, she wasn't. She'd someday die, and he'd remember. And that was the part of the game that he'd live to regret.

However, the days that followed were the sweetest in his existence. During the mornings and afternoons, Rory took Shea to the most legendary places he knew, explaining each site's history. They visited sites in County Tyrone, such as the

portal stone at Altdrumman, the portal tomb at Athenree, the Beaghmore stone circles and rows, the stone circles at Castlemervyn and a wedge tomb at Dunnamore. During the night, he made love to her in the garden, forsaking the company of his own kind and their bawdy insistence that he put an end to the game and make love to Shea in his bower. To be fair to her, he knew it would be kinder to follow Faery tradition. If he kept her in his bower for the night, she'd wake up in the morning and have no remembrance of their growing attraction. But selfishly, it wasn't in him to wipe away the memories of their time together. He wanted her to remember.

On the night before she was to leave, he met her in the garden—as was their habit. He found her weeping, uncontrollably. He sat beside her and put his arm around her shoulders. "You and I both knew this time would come."

She simply nodded, unable to voice her sorrow.

"What would you have me do?" he softly asked.

"I wouldn't have missed knowing you for the world."

"Then let me love you one last time." He couldn't see the sadness in her gaze and not do something to stop it. He stood before her and shifted into Faery form.

She tilted her head when he lifted his hand and sprinkled a coloured Faery dust over her body that she hadn't ever seen before.

He waited until the dust took effect. "Forgive me. I'm breakin' my oath to you, I know. At the risk of sounding like a conceited oaf, I won't see you live life hurtin' for me and tryin' to compare every man you've met to a myth. We both know

we can't have each other. Lettin' you go on rememberin' isn't fair to you. It's not fair to whomever you meet. You'll eventually want to marry, and the children you'll someday want will need two parents who're devoted to one another. You deserve that."

Rory took her hand. She shook her head in a bemused fashion and followed him toward his bower.

"The energy surrounding my bower is drawn from the four elements of wind, fire, earth and water. Tomorrow morning, when the first light dissipates the Faery dust you're wearin', you'll remember me as only a man with whom you had a light fling. Nothing more."

Rory knelt on the soft Irish moss within his bower, turned his head toward his lone magic candle and willed it to light. Its gleam lit the shadows and created a glistening world in which they could lie.

Folding his wings back so he could lie on one side, he pulled her down beside him and gently began to stroke her already wet clit. Her aqua-coloured gaze no longer held an expression of sadness but was now tinged with lustful longing. To satisfy it, he moved over her body, quickly spread her thighs with his hands and passionately laved her clit until her hips rotated and undulated against the soft moss beneath her. Then, he moved over her body, stared down into her eyes and entered her as slowly as he could. He wanted every second to count. Long after she was gone and with another man, he'd remember. When she bore another man's children and grew old watching them come of age, he'd still be as he

was right now. Finally, she'd die and be buried in some place where he'd never be able to visit.

He heard her cry out his name when a multiple climax claimed her body. He felt her tighten and release around his cock as the ripples of satisfying ecstasy engulfed her, then him as well. He was still gazing at her when his release came, hard and long. He felt his wings shudder spasmodically and knew, like all of his kind, that ejaculation would cause small strands of colour to appear in the veins of his wings.

"It's no use fighting the magic of my bower," he softly told her. "It's been woven for centuries to cause the humans we lie with to forget and to leave as if they'd never been touched. Just let it happen, girl. Don't trouble yourself any longer. It's better this way." He paused before adding, "In these last days together, I didn't say all I might have. Our time was so short that it seemed more important for me to know you. As you drift into a safe, restful sleep, I'll tell you a little about my life. Though you won't remember my words, I want them said."

Shea began to tremble, but he held her closer and stroked her face with his fingertips. He planted a gentle kiss on her forehead then said all the things he ironically realized she'd never recall.

"I wish you could have met my parents and the rest of my family. It's very large indeed," he murmured and cuddled her close. "My kin live within their own Troops these days, but I know they would have loved seeing these amazingly lovely eyes of yours. They'd have also fancied your bright smile and the way you've held on to the stories of us as told by your

grandfather. In the years to come, maybe you could teach those legends to your own children. They'll be forever blessed for having heard them. Children should have Faery stories in their lives."

He nuzzled his cheek against hers. "Promise me you'll pass what you learned to your babies. Will you do that, Shea? Will you carry on what your grandfather started?"

Rory saw the tears of panic and frustration form in her eyes and watched as they spilled out the corners into her hairline. He dried the trails they made with the pads of his thumbs and tried not to show his own sadness at never seeing her after tomorrow. "I-I wish you could have seen Peg, Connell and the others as they really are. They only appeared older to you so you'd perceive them as simple, non-threatening innkeepers. To humankind, we can appear as any age we like. I was in a mood to show you the real me. They ... are a bit shy, I guess."

He sadly smiled. "You see, once we reach our thirty-fifth year, we age much more slowly than humans. We actually live in a reality of eternal youth, the land of Tír na nÓg as some say." He lifted a thick portion of her hair and watched it fall around her shoulder in soft tendrils. "We've lived in this country and many others since time began. Always with humankind, yet always apart. And that's why you must go now, beautiful, beautiful Shea. You must journey back to the world of man and live as you were meant to."

She managed to grip his shoulders with her hands, then shook her head as if doing so could stop the remaining

memories from fleeing in the reality of his words. But there was nothing she could do. Sleep began to overtake her.

Rory glanced away briefly as the revelry of his people began. "That'll be the rest of my Troop celebratin' the end to our game." He paused, kissed her softly and stroked her hair back. "Just know that it wasn't a game for me, darlin'. It quit bein' that after our very first night together. And, in the centuries to come, I'll not take another woman to my bower for any sport. I meant no harm, but it's certain I've hurt you. Though you won't remember, the pain is in your heart right this moment. I'll remember the look of it in your eyes forever, and I won't see it inflicted on another. Not by my hand."

She fought to keep her eyes open.

"There, now ... just sleep. Leave this world of Faery dust and spirits. Go to your own where you belong."

One soft sob was all she could utter, then her eyes closed, and she fell into the blackness of a dreamless abyss.

Rory held her a long time. When the sun was almost up, he shape-shifted into human form and took her back to her room. Once there, he tucked her into bed and placed one last kiss on her full lips. "When you awaken, we'll just have been passin' lovers. No more, no less. You'll have your life back, and I'll keep a part of you in m' heart forever. I'll have to take a mate and hope to forget you. I can play the game no more!"

Rory backed out of the room, gazing longingly at the lovely young woman he'd come to care for.

When he turned in the doorway and saw Peg and Connell watching him with looks of compassion on their faces, he

swiftly strode passed them. He needed none of their pity. That was an emotion he could summon in abundance.

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Chapter Seven

Rory stood behind the rental car that Connell arranged to be delivered. The last of Shea's luggage was in the boot. It was late afternoon, and she was leaving. All he could do was pretend their relationship had been a temporary, sordid fling. Shea was oblivious to his sour mood, and he found her gaiety annoying. It wasn't her fault she didn't remember the way they used to be together. Still, he was irrationally pissed off because of it.

"Thanks for everything," she gleefully called out and waved at the two elderly innkeepers standing by the garden gate. When she turned to find Rory opening the door for her, she looped her hair behind one ear while digging into her purse for a tip. "Um, here. Take this." She handed him three one-hundred dollar bills. "Peg and Connell said you wouldn't take any money for your guide services, but just think of this as a gift. For other services rendered." She smiled at him and winked slyly.

Angered beyond control, Rory glared at her and clenched his hands into tight fists. "Keep your damned American money! I don't want it."

Shea stared at him for a moment. Then she shrugged, put the bills back in her purse and got in the car.

Rory was forced to stand there and watch her drive away, believing he was little more than a gigolo. To her, he was boy-toy she'd bedded and left behind.

"Why are you so angry, lad? You played the game the way you always have," Connell said as he walked toward Rory.

"No. He didn't just bed the woman as he should have," Peg countered. "He spent more time with her than any of the others. If I didn't know better, I'd swear Rory was sweet on pretty Shea."

Connell snorted in disdain. "Unheard of! Why, Rory knows what he's doin' and always has. He can shag any woman he wants and walk away with his heart intact."

Being spoken about as if he wasn't there made him angrier still. Rory stormed away, anxious to be by himself. The garden was crowded with those of his kind, readying themselves for a full moon party and splitting up the winnings of the bets made as to how long it had taken him to finally get Shea to his bower and screw her. The seedy nature of his deed seemed more so when the woman involved had just offered him what, to her, was probably a large sum of money for his services as she'd put it.

He had casks and casks full of fine jewels. Like Leprechauns, Faeries had them hidden everywhere, and that was the source for funding his land purchases. All he had to do, like any of the fey world, was place the jewels in the sunlight, and they would revert to whatever currency he needed. The magic surrounding their appearance in this world would keep anyone receiving such funds from questioning their origins. With his powers, he could even construct identification to make him appear as anyone of any age he wished.

That some slim whip of a girl had actually offered him money for his sexual favours was maddening. But then, the girl involved was Shea Fitzpatrick. She was different and had been from the very beginning. Rory kept telling himself this was the way it was supposed to be, and that the entire situation was his own fault, that Shea was leaving with only bits and pieces of her memory, but his logical, internal explanation wasn't working very well.

He was beginning to wish, with all his heart, he'd taken a different route that day the Flynn brothers had been up to mischief. If he had, however, Shea might have ended up raped or worse. He abruptly stopped walking and considered that option was unspeakable.

Hearing the rowdiness of his compatriots and the music rising as the sun went down, Rory decided to take a long ride into the night. He needed a quiet place to think. Even his bower wouldn't know any privacy during such a celebration.

Grabbing his leather jacket from a coat rack near the front door, he made his way to his motorcycle. The peace and serenity of the old stone circle called to him. It was the same place he'd first taken Shea. For some reason, the circle seemed the appropriate place to reflect.

* * * *

Three days later, he was in no better mood. He visited the stone circle every day. It was on the fourth night of such a visit that Connell found him. Rory sensed the other Faery's presence long before he could actually see him. It wasn't a surprise when his long-time friend appeared in his true Faery

form—young as he really was, with long white hair streaming behind him and a toned, virile body to match. His crystal clear wings were almost invisible against the coming night sky.

Connell looked the lonely figure over and noted his dour expression. "What ails you, Rory? Peg and the rest of us are worried sick! You've hardly eaten a thing, and you're not sleeping in your bower."

"You'll have to find someone else to play the game from now on. I need to put my attention on buying more land as it becomes available. I hear the McAleese farm is comin' up for sale soon. We could use the woods to join up with other Troops."

Connell sighed. "I didn't come hear to discuss the local farmers and the sale of their land. I want to know what's wrong with you."

"Nothin'!" Rory blurted. "I just think it'd be more sportin' if one of the others took my place at the game. There are plenty of tourists to lure into the bower. Let someone else do it for a change. I'm sure there are free lads and lasses who'd love the chance at doin' a human."

"It's Shea, isn't it?"

Rory turned to his friend and looked him straight in the eyes. "She's gone, and that's an end to it."

"For her, maybe. But not for you, I'm bettin'."

"Let it alone, Connell..."

"No, I won't! You've been walkin' around like the Banshee was knockin' at your door. It's puttin' the rest of the Troop off. You're our leader, after all. We depend upon you to keep us safe," Connell insisted.

"I've never failed in that responsibility. That's the very reason why I should be payin' a great deal more attention to the acquisition of land where we can live without bein' watched."

Connell lifted a hand in supplication. "Will you come home tonight?"

"Aye, I'll be there. But someone else can go about sportin' with the tourists. I've had my fill."

Connell let out a slow breath. "A good lay with a woman, human or Faery, would get you out of this funk."

"Leave me alone, Connell."

"All I'm sayin' is..."

Rory rounded on him. "I know what you're bloody well sayin'! Just leave me alone and go about whatever diversion you wish. I'm done with lyin' around with strange women. It's high time I took myself a life mate. If a Troop comes along with a willing, available woman, I'll announce my intentions to settle down."

Connell felt his eyes go wide with surprise. "Are you actually tellin' me that Rory Finnegan, one of the wildest of all the Faeries in Ireland, is lookin' to take himself off the market?"

"Spread whatever rumour makes your damned heart dance, I'm tired of bein' alone. That havin' been said, I don't want to talk about it anymore. Is that clear?" he angrily finished and stalked off.

Connell ran his hands through his hair. "Don't have to bite my shaggin' head off, lad."

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Chapter Eight

One year later

Shea typed out her final report for the day and blew out a huge sigh of relief. She got up from her desk, stretched and wondered what to do with her weekend. All her single coworkers were meeting at a bar tonight, but she never joined them as she once had. The stupidity of that scene was only surpassed by hers in ever joining in that fracas. The men she'd met all seemed fine ... at first. Then, something would happen to make her want to ditch the guy as quickly as possible.

Some of the men she'd met were obviously married, looking to cash in on a weekend rendezvous while the wife wasn't looking. Some were overpoweringly possessive, and some weren't masculine enough for her taste. Some only talked about work, while others only talked about sex. The more she moved around in the single scene, the more she hated it. Her world had become progressively less tolerable ever since she got back from Ireland. Something very important was missing in her life, and she was at a complete loss as to what it was.

She decided to go home, cuddle up with a bottle of Irish whiskey and look over the photos of her trip. Once there, she sipped her drink and ate a delivered pizza. At the same time, she gazed over the pictures and saw that some of then were blurred in places. It was as if half the photo had moved while

she was taking the shot. Finally, she grabbed the pictures up, put them back in their shoebox and went to bed early.

The next morning, Shea got up and went to the cemetery with a handful of flowers purchased from the corner florist.

As she sat and stared at her grandparent's headstones, tears filled her eyes. She swiped at them with one hand and began her pitiful litany to the only people who'd ever really loved her. "Grandpa Sean, Grandma Molly ... what's wrong with me? I feel like part of me is lost somewhere and I can't find it. I wish you were here, so you could tell me what to do."

She sat for some time longer, then decided that her Saturday would be spent alone in her apartment again. She hailed a cab outside the cemetery gate and had the driver drop her off at the corner drugstore so she could get aspirin for her aching head. It seemed that, along with missing part of her life, headaches were accompanying her actively these days.

As she walked out of the drugstore and stood at the corner, ready to cross the street, a motorcyclist pulled up to the red light right. The man was looking the other direction, but he was wearing a long leather coat and had very long dark hair.

For some stupidly inane reason, Shea left the safety of her curb and tapped the waiting biker on his shoulder. "Excuse me..."

The stranger turned his head in her direction, smiling.

Shea backed up when she saw missing and blackened teeth and the paunch of his rounded stomach. "S-sorry. I-I thought you were someone I knew."

The man kept grinning and looked her slowly over. "Never had the pleasure. But I can remedy that pretty damn quick!" he drawled.

Shea shook her head hastily and walked away. She could hear the man laughing as she picked up her pace, continuing her retreat from the embarrassing situation. When she got to the end of the block, she glanced back over her shoulder and saw the heavy-set motorcyclist riding off. That's a good damned way to get myself killed.

She shook her head in self-condemnation, and decided to walk around a nearby block just to make sure she wasn't followed. On a street parallel to where her apartment building was located, Shea had sufficiently calmed down that she could take in the ambience of the shop windows and their summer displays.

A gift shop employee was just placing some Irish dinnerware in a window, and Shea simply had to stop and watch. She recognised the shamrock patterns on the beautiful white china, and small memories of her time in Ireland seemed to pop into her head. As every previous time when she'd thought of Ireland, some part of her heart seemed missing. That was when the shop employee began to put out some small, ethereal Faeries to make the china display more whimsical.

Shea put her hands on the shop window and stared, transfixed by the sight of those little figurines. "They aren't

right," she whispered to herself. "They aren't tiny like that. Not really."

As soon as she uttered the words, she realized how idiotic they sounded, but the memory of those Faeries in the window wouldn't leave. All that evening and into the night, she kept thinking of them until she, dangerously, went out at four o'clock in the morning to take another look at the display.

She was standing there when a warm breeze blew down the street. It seemed she imagined a low voice calling her name, but it was tinged with a beguiling Irish brogue that made her heart ache. That was when she realized that one of the Faeries in the window would have looked more ridiculously appropriate if it were on a motorcycle. Its long black hair should have been blowing behind it like a banner.

"I have to go back," she whispered. "I have to go back."

That one thought haunted her all the way back to her apartment and into the next three weeks as she made travel plans.

* * * *

Rory stood in the garden while the rest of his Troop sang and danced within the confines of the pub. His life was one long, monotonous day after another. He'd seen several lovely Faery women with whom he might have mated, but he couldn't bring himself to speak the words asking for the union. His heart was elsewhere. Sadly, he let the one woman who'd captured his soul walk out of his life. He kept telling himself that there was no way he could have fallen in love with a human woman after only a couple of weeks. But in

love was exactly where he was. And once a Faery knew that emotion, nothing short of death would change his or her mind.

Peg, Connell and other members of the Troop had tried to convince him otherwise, but he wasn't daft enough to dispel what his heart felt. Logically—as he'd told himself a thousand times this past year—pursuing a human was pure folly. The times it had happened in the distant past were marked by misfortune for one party or the other. What could he do about pure fact? All he could think about was Shea's unusually coloured eyes, the way she laughed and how she had no one to love her.

He drew himself up sharply at that last thought. Surely by now, she'd found some man to make her happy. Shea was an exquisite woman. She could have any man she fancied and wouldn't even remember her time in Ireland at all. The magic of his bower had seen to that.

He ran a hand across his face and tried to put some mental distance between himself and what had happened all those months ago. The images, however, just wouldn't fade. He could still smell Shea's citrus scent. He could still feel the softness of her skin against his and the way she'd been so gentle with her loving. Even now, his body responded with the memory of her sweet hands on his back and shoulders.

"Shaggin' bloody damn!" he softly swore, knowing he'd have another night of masturbating ahead of him just to allay his body's response to a simple memory. And as the years went by, Shea would grow older while he would remain just as he was, aging very little, then not at all. One day, she

would leave this world altogether, but he'd still be behind to remember.

There had never been a woman like Shea in his life, and there never would be again. Of that, he was quite certain. Pitying himself and cursing the stupid game he'd played in luring Shea to the pub at all, Rory retreated to the privacy of his bower where he could jerk himself off and pretend the woman of his dreams was still in his arms.

* * * *

Shea gazed at the map the rental company had given her, but there was nothing on it about any Wailing Spirit Inn. When she'd asked about it in the nearby village, no one had ever heard of the place. She drove the same road she had before, but couldn't seem to get her bearings. After five hours of trying, she almost gave up and turned the car around. That was when she drove over a tiny hill that somehow seemed familiar. She stopped the car, got out and looked at the surrounding countryside.

"This is where the Flynn brothers found me. I remember it!" she muttered, then got back in and drove farther.
"Dammit, I remember ... Rory. I have to find Rory. Coming to this part of Ireland, close to his bower ... I remember."

She came to a lonely dirt road that was rutted and had long since seen better days, but remembered even the right turnoff. When she got to the end, however, there was only a thatch of grass, rock and an old picket fence surrounding the stone foundations of what might have once been a building. Without any doubt, she knew that was what remained of the

old inn. She got out of the car, put her hand over her heart as her grandfather had taught her as a child, and walked boldly forward.

"Hear me, Folk of the Wood, hear me and heed my call. I ask you to come forward and bid this mortal welcome! In peace I come. I honour your world."

For a long moment, Shea stood there. She began to feel foolish at having recited some old bit of tripe as her grandfather taught her, but she had to try. With every moment that passed, she was remembering more and more. After standing there a full half hour, she tried a different tactic.

"Rory! Rory, if you can hear me, please show yourself. I know I can't see your world unless one of you brings me into it. I'm outside. Please, let me in," she begged.

The sun was going down, and she had no place left to go. If nothing happened tonight, Shea vowed she'd stay right there, sleep in the car if necessary and try until hope was gone.

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Chapter Nine

"Shea!"

Not even bothering to change into human form, Rory ran towards the front of the cottage. The others of his Troop were as nude as he and stood, transfixed in shock by the voice of the woman calling to them. As he pushed his way through his people and towards the front door, he could see her standing just outside the gate.

Like a small pebble being thrown into a very still pond, Rory lifted one hand and allowed Shea to see the shimmering image of the inn as it reappeared. He wanted her to see the untended grass and weeds change into the lovely garden she'd once visited. Finally, he magically allowed the lights of the old building to illuminate as he ran out the front door. There she was, standing and staring. To him, she was as lovely a site as he'd ever beheld.

"May I come into your world ... again?" she asked softly.

He ran forward, just as she swung the gate open. Shea was caught up in his embrace and wrapped her arms around his strong tan neck to keep from tearing his striking wings.

"You came back! By all the shamrocks on this island, you came back!" Rory repeated, over and over again, while holding her against his body.

Shea held on tightly. "Be real. Please be real and not my imagination playing tricks. I couldn't take it if I'd gone crazy and made you up."

He finally lowered her to the ground. "You're not crazy. But it would have taken a miracle for you to remember me and this place." He nuzzled his cheek to hers and finally kissed her very hard.

Shea was aware of others approaching but didn't care. All she needed and wanted was right there in her arms. Nude, wings and all.

"How did she find her memory and her way back here?" Peg asked as she fluttered her red wings behind her and stood to her mate's side.

"I don't know," Connell replied in wonder.

Rory broke the hot kiss and stared down into her eyes. "You won't be leavin' this time, will you?"

Shea slowly shook her head. "I want to be with you. Whatever I have to do."

"You'd have to love me, lass."

"I should think that was obvious. I came thousands of miles to find you again, and I'm not letting you go," she firmly promised.

"Sure 'n I love you, Shea Fitzpatrick! I knew there was somethin' special about you from that first day. I think somewhere way back, you must have had a little fey in your soul, or you couldn't have made this journey."

"It's right that she's here," Connell spoke up. "She must have been meant to find her way again. I can count on one hand the times a human has done such a thing."

Shea finally acknowledged the rest of the ethereal Faeries standing in front of her. She barely recognised Peg and Connell, and stood a little in awe of the nude, regal group.

Wings of all colours fluttered in the wind. The rare beauty of their bodies and faces had her captivated and rooted to the spot. But she wasn't afraid.

"I-it's permitted for me to stay?" she breathlessly asked.

"Only if you become one of us," Rory told her while stroking her hair with one hand and her cheek with the other. "Any humans staying among us too long have met with very bad ends. But that won't happen to you, Shea. You won't be human much longer." He grabbed her hands and pulled her forward. "I'll make damned sure of that!"

Without hesitation, Shea laughingly followed him to his bower. When he turned and kissed her hard again, she was speechless with joy and excitement.

"When I heard your voice callin', I thought I'd lost my mind from wantin' you so badly," he gasped out.

She pressed her face to his chest and began to plant kisses against his firm, sparkling skin.

"The light will be down soon. There'll be a full moon. Tell me now to stop, Shea, or you'll be with me forever. Be sure, lass. Be very, very sure. Once my magic is invoked, it can't be halted," he solemnly told her.

All she could do was nod. Something in her expression must have convinced him, because he quickly pressed kisses into her shoulder and neck before moving a slight distance away again.

"You must do exactly as I say, without question. Do you understand?"

She quickly leaned forward and kissed him in response.

"This is a very dangerous thing I'm doin'. The magic to change a human is within us all, but I haven't ever had any personal experience to draw upon. No one in the Troop has ever done such a thing." He cupped her cheeks with his hands. "I'm told it can be frightening."

"I trust you."

"Sweet girl! I can see you do, but I wanted you to know there's some risk. If your heart isn't very sure about what you're about to undergo, you won't last the night. You'll die before the sun comes up, and that death will be excruciating." He saw a slight glimmer of fear in her gaze, but then he saw her gamely lift her chin.

"If you're trying to scare me ... it's working. But I can't leave you again, Rory! I can't. When my memories of you started coming back, I felt like shit for leaving. You should never have taken me to your bower without asking if I'd stay in the first place."

"I couldn't. Our laws are very clear. The only way to be one with us is to find your own way back here. And, by Merlin's balls, you did!"

She gripped his hands very tightly. "So ... let's do it. Let's just get it over with."

As certain as she seemed, he was that afraid. One last regret, any niggling doubt, could cause her death. By morning, she'd be one of the fey or lying at his feet as a mass of lifeless flesh.

He summoned every bit of magic that was his to command. "Take your clothes off, darlin'. Then take my hands again."

She nodded and began to do as he asked. "You won't take my memory away as before? Tell me that won't happen, Rory."

He shook his head in denial. "The bower's magic in that respect has been broken. You've beaten it." As he watched her undress, it took every bit of physical control he had not to take her beneath him and thrust into her. His cock was jutting from his body like a pump handle, but he had to tamp down the urge to love her. For the moment, his energy was necessary to change her. That was where his focus must lie. Rory could see the raw desire in her eyes. He held her at arm's distance when she would have caressed him. "Once the change has begun, I'll take you. I promise, lass. Right now, you must close your eyes and keep them tightly shut until I tell you to open them."

She took a deep, cleansing breath and did as he asked.

Rory approached her from behind. He slid his hands around her narrow waist and couldn't help nudging her tight little backside with his erection. Concentrating hard, he dredged the words to change her from his distant memory. "From earth I summon the power of growth."

Shea was pulled to her knees, but Rory went to the ground with her.

"From air, I summon the power of flight," he continued.

The warm wind turned suddenly chilly and Shea leaned back against Rory to absorb some of his heat. Still, she kept her eyes closed as he'd commanded.

"From water, I summon longevity. From fire, I summon the powers of past and present magic," Rory commanded and

saw a flame shoot up from the wick of his eternal candle. Its light would dispel the darkness as it had the night he'd first brought Shea into his bower. He brought his wings forward and around her. As he did so, Rory ducked his head until his right cheek lay next to her left one.

"From the elements, I summon the magic to change this human into a being of light and power. In doing so, I make her mine and take her as my mate." The last part of the incantation wasn't necessary, but he wanted them joined even as Shea's transformation took place.

When she screamed in agony, Rory knew his magic was in full effect. He could do no more than hold her tightly and wait. As very old tradition dictated, he stroked her body to ease the pain of the transformation. He had only tradition to go by and no experience at all.

"I-I have to take you, darlin'. It's been too long," he admitted.

She simply nodded and pressed one hand between her thighs to guide him into her.

Rory drove forward and found himself tightly encased in her hot, wet pussy. He cried out long and hard. The silken sheath was tightening and strengthening. Soon Shea would possess the same supernatural, sexual stamina as all Faery women. Her sweet body already had an aura around it, and he could see a faint glow on her skin. The sparkling Faery glamour that would come to her would coat his penis and his body, even as his own dust covered hers. They would be mixed, blended and joined.

He grabbed her hips to hold her writhing form still. Like a stallion in a field, he covered her and his wings spread out over the both of them as the elements' powers played out. The Earth held them bound to the ground, and the coming rain would soak their skin and hasten the appearance of their unearthly glow. The rising wind would summon new wings from deep within her bones, and the light of the candle would endow her with the same magic all Faeries could claim. She would be eternally young and beautiful ... if she were true in her love and could survive the night.

Shea dug her hands into the soft earth beneath her. She thrust and took Rory more fully into her body.

Covering her clit with his fingers, Rory could feel the wet curls between her thighs. With his other hand, he grasped one of her breasts and gently squeezed. Shea threw her head back and cried out as an intense orgasm took her. In a few moments, his own shouts of climax tore through the air and partially rose above the sound of the howling wind.

Shea slid all the way to the ground and screamed. "Take me again. Please, Rory! It hurts when you're not in me."

Rory concentrated, summoning the power of his race. Within a few moments, he was able to jerk himself to erection again and slide back into Shea's welcoming body. He made slow circular motions, undulating and pushing forward as he lay on her. His wings still spread over them, sheltering Shea from most of the winds and coming rain.

He put his hands around her body, sat up and pulled her onto his lap. She was impaled there, with her back against his chest. She dropped her head back against one shoulder and

pulled at her own nipples to try and quell the fierce change in her body as Rory watched. "Does that make it better, love?"

She nodded, then ran her left hand down between her thighs where they were joined.

He was raw with need. Rory could smell the musk of her, and it drove him crazy with desire. Thrusting up and down like a piston, he kept at her until she squealed in delight again. Then the rain began to pour over them. As it did, the flame of his candle simply went higher, magically ignoring the rain that fell. The wind blew harder, and the earth seemed to hold them steady.

Now, the agony was such that even Rory's caresses and lovemaking made no difference. Shea writhed on the ground and bucked upward as her bones in her back seemed to break and mend again. Rory held her as she convulsed, over and over.

There were no words to soothe her, and no touch could drive away that kind of torture. It was much worse than he'd been told, or the memories of those who'd seen a human change into one of their own kind had dimmed with the passage of time. He tried to keep most of the rain off her by sheltering her with his body and his large expanse of wings. But they were both soaked in minutes, and the cold wind did nothing to comfort Shea's distress. Finally, she slipped into unconsciousness as he lifted her into his embrace.

Rory could only hold her as the elements finally ran their course. The stars came back out as the clouds drifted away. The flame of his candle flickered back to a normal height, the wind abated, and there was welcoming warmth back in the

air. He was finally able to lift Shea up from the proximity of the clutching earth, against his chest.

He held her there until almost dawn. There was no more change than the glow of her sparkling skin. If that was the only effect, her love hadn't been enough. The change had to be complete, or she wouldn't survive the first rays of sunlight. Rory pushed back his wet hair and hovered over her as they lay in a soft growth of ferns.

"Come on, girl. You can do this. If you can face down three men, you can make this change. I know you love me. I know it," he urged.

Suddenly Rory pulled back. He knew his mouth was agape, but he simply couldn't control his utter amazement and happiness. Shea lay back in the ferns and slowly rolled to her stomach. Once there, the most gorgeous set of aqua-coloured wings began to unfold from her back. They were tinged with a silver glow, and the veins sparkled with a green light. Her hair lengthened, and her glowing skin finished its incandescent transformation. When she glanced back over her shoulder and smiled, he knew forever was just a breath away.

"Is it over?" she softly asked.

He carefully pulled her to her feet. "It is. You're one with us now."

She leaned against him, trying to find her balance. "This is really something very special." She paused and smiled up at him, then corrected herself. "No ... something Faery special! I'll be with you forever. And I'll never regret it. I love you, Rory."

"I love *you*, Shea." He stared at the wings over her shoulders.

As the sun came up and moved higher in the sky, Rory held his new mate next to him and let her sleep off the effects of such a dramatic change. He couldn't wait for the night to come again, so they could roam the countryside together as Faeries were meant to. And they'd make love until, with passing time, the cries of their Faery babies sounded from the depths of his bower. As nature had prevented her from conceiving in a Faery-human relationship, nature would now aid her in having ethereal babies with one of her own kind.

As he cuddled her closer, she kissed his chest in her sleep, and the edges of her full lips curled up ever so slightly. He could almost swear she knew what he was thinking, even in her dreams.

"Now, that's what I've been waitin' to see again—that smile of yours, sweet Shea! It's the only thing that matters ... in all the world." He kissed her hair. "It's real magic."

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C.S. Chatterly (aka Candace Sams) was a police officer for eleven years, worked on an ambulance for eight years as a crew chief and is now an author. She graduated from Texas A&M University with a BS in Agriculture, then worked as a police officer with the State of Texas. Part of her law enforcement career was with the San Diego Police Department. She also taught for the San Diego County Sheriff's Department and with a law enforcement agency in Alabama.

She is the senior woman on the US Kung Fu Team. The Chinese Martial Arts Confederation awarded her the Medal of Putien and the Statue of Tao. Candace is the holder of several international martial arts titles, and is now an award-winning author of fantasy fiction. She writes erotica under the pen name, C.S. Chatterly. Her hobbies include weight lifting, gardening, and looking after a family of pets who've adopted her. She and her husband, Lee, have been married for over two decades.

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