

ELLORA'S CAVE PRESENTS

Wizard
OF *Time*

CIAR CULLEN



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Wizard of Time

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WIZARD OF TIME

Ciar Cullen

Dedication

Many thanks to the staff of Ellora's Cave, especially Helen Woodall. This little tale is dedicated to my generous reader and writer friends, especially Val, Danny, Chuck, and Laurie, who always support my quirkiness.

Chapter One

"Can you keep it down?"

Gideon hissed in response, sauntering away from Trevor, toward the woods.

"Stupid lizard," Trevor mumbled under his breath as he scanned the dark forest edge for Morgan.

"I heard that! Second-rate wizard," Gideon sniffed and gave Trevor the finger.

"Stop that! It's vulgar. Any other wizard would fry you if you gave him the finger!"

"Any other wizard would be able to turn me into a dragon! I would have stayed a human, you know, if I thought I'd have to live like this!"

"I'm doing my best. You really carry grudges, don't you, Gideon?" Trevor pushed back his long dark hair and cursed quietly. "What's happened to my powers? This is unbearable."

Gideon blew a raspberry and scurried into the forest.

Trevor saw a flash of black cape and moved quickly behind a tree. What was she doing now? He worked very hard not to laugh aloud as Morgan cursed when she hit her hand with the hammer and dropped the nail that was far too large for the job.

"Why doesn't she use magic?" he wondered, shaking his head, remembering how powerful Morgan had been, even as a girl.

Morgan tripped over a huge gnarled root and cursed as she hit the ground, fliers scattering in the light spring breeze. She tried to get up, but fell backward again as her skirt caught on a low bramble. She finally extricated herself, still cursing.

"Crummy tree!" She kicked at the trunk and then hopped around on one foot in pain.

“Oh, Morgan,” Trevor muttered. She was hopeless. And hopelessly lovely. Her cheeks were flushed with a tint of scarlet from her fury and exertions, her beautiful breasts nearly fell out of her dress as she fumbled around. Her white-gold locks covered her shoulders, having fallen out of the braids she usually wore. Trevor watched in amusement as Morgan searched the ground for her spectacles. She finally stood, tucked her glasses into her cleavage, straightened her dress and took a deep breath. Then she continued her mission, posting fliers on nearly every tree along the path into town. It took her three hours.

Trevor followed closely behind, tearing down every last one of them and shoving them into the deep pocket of his dark cloak. He had already burned hundreds of the blasted things. She just wasn't giving up. *Well, she'd have to give in eventually*, he thought.

Night after night Trevor had done his best to insinuate his energy into her heart, her brain, her body, pleading with his magic to work this one time. Because Trevor intended to be the only person Morgan could turn to in her hour of need and Trevor suspected that hour was at hand.

“Well, you're in trouble too, asshole,” Trevor groaned. What a trying, frustrating, painful, awful month. Grieving the loss of his mother, losing his talents, pathless, nearly powerless. Trying to keep tabs on his man-crazy twin sister. He had moved back into the house where he was born, where he lived until he was thirteen, thinking that it might not be such a terrible place to set up shop. And as Trevor expected, Castle Borough hadn't changed much in over a decade. *Dreadfully boring, like watching grass grow.*

Until he laid eyes on Morgan, for the first time in thirteen years. Trevor had been horrified to find himself still fiercely, utterly attracted to the voluptuous witch. In adolescent hormonal frenzy, he had found her beautiful, captivating and worthy of the most exciting fantasies. Nothing had changed, except Trevor now knew what it was to be with a woman. And he wanted Morgan in no uncertain terms.

Vengeance. It will be all the sweeter, tasting that gorgeous flesh, pushing yourself into her body and her heart. You'll enjoy this ride.

* * * * *

Morgan sat at her kitchen table, one swollen foot propped on a chair. She fought back the tears that always seemed to threaten to fall these days. Hopeless.

"I miss you." She spoke to no one in particular, thinking wistfully of better days, when her parents were alive, before her protégé ran off with King Artimer's fool.

Who do you really miss, Morgan? A man who never existed. A life that was never yours to begin with.

Morgan tried to shake off the longing from her most recent dream. Night after night she tossed and turned until her body burned and the sheets tangled around her ankles. She would wake just as her dream lover leaned in to kiss her, the scent of patchouli and apples filling the air. Had someone cast a horrible spell on her? No. It was loneliness, plain and simple.

"Face it." She brushed away a tear. "You're going to end up an insane old maid." Morgan pushed away the flickering memory of her last boyfriend. The jerk. The two-timing lying, controlling asshole. The manipulating son of a bitch.

And now this – the unkindest cut of all.

Morgan had lost her powers.

It had started subtly. One complaint a week. First Blackie, the smithy, furious that the baldness had returned.

"Forget it," he had screamed. "I'll spend my money on Regain! Snake oil saleswoman!"

"It *was* snake oil!" Morgan had pushed a gold coin into his hand and watched him storm down her cobbled path to the road. The following week, Samantha Knockerwood's hog turned back into her detestable mother-in-law. Gordy

Smatherwood's batting average dropped suddenly and the Knights lost the first four games of the season to the Dragons.

"King Artimer isn't going to be very pleased about this one, I can tell you," Gordy had poked at her. "The Dragons haven't beaten the Knights since Art became our sponsor."

"You mean since you began drinking my potion, you idiot!" Morgan stomped her foot in frustration.

"Whatever!"

"You're a lousy infielder! The whole village knows it!" Morgan yelled after him and slammed the door. But yelling was no use. Her reputation was at stake. She shuddered. In a few weeks she might be tied to a stake with flames licking at her legs. The villagers didn't burn witches – they burnt useless witches.

Morgan reread the wrinkled flier lying on the table. Why wasn't it working? Was there something in the wording? She had labored over it for hours.

"Sorceress needed immediately for thriving local business. Mature, independent self-starter with superior customer-service attitude. Two years' experience required. Competitive wages, room and board, health benefits. No familiars allowed on premises. Apply directly to Morgan Daemoniani, 2 Enchanting Way, Castle Borough."

Not a single response, not a bite, not an inquiry of any sort.

Morgan removed her glasses, rested her head on the table and sighed. One tear escaped its blue prison and fell onto the starched white linen tablecloth. She watched the wet spot expand slowly. *I'll lose the king's business. He'll call in the mortgage on the cottage and I'll be destitute.* Maybe if she pleaded with Art. After all, King Artimer was her cousin.

The light tap on the door jarred her momentarily from her misery and then sent her back into a tailspin of dread. *Another complaint.* Morgan stood and took a deep breath, steeled for the worst. She slowly opened the heavy round wooden door and peeked around the edge.

The fragrance of patchouli and apples assaulted her senses. But not nearly as much as the sight of the man. A man? Was he merely a man? No, she thought, he was surely an immortal.

“Yes?” Morgan realized that no sound had actually emanated from her mouth.

“Yes?” she tried again. “May I help you?” What was that feeling circling around her legs and climbing up her body, making her head swim and her skin go all crawly? Instant, mind-numbing lust. Gods, when had she felt such lust before? Had she?

The dark-cloaked man nonchalantly held out one of her fliers and Morgan snatched it from his hand, sure that she was about to be fined for illegal posting.

“There’s no number 1 Enchanting Way.” The man leaned against the porch fence and smirked. Tiny lines formed around his spectacular hazel eyes. He took a bite of an apple as he casually ran his free hand through the luxurious long dark brown hair that threatened to fall into his eyes.

“In fact, there doesn’t seem to be a 3 Enchanting Way, either.” He wiggled his brows, grinned and pushed away a bit of apple juice that had dripped down his chin. Morgan thought she might not be able to resist the urge to lean in and lick it off.

“Dork. Stop flirting with her and get busy. I told Misha I’d meet him at the ball park.”

“Your lizard speaks.” Morgan stepped back a few inches and studied the handsome creature nestled in the crook of his owner’s arm.

“Dragon. Gideon is a dragon,” the man corrected seriously.

“I really do think he’s a lizard. Green and sort of spiky right there.” Morgan held out a hand and Gideon hissed at her.

“Stop that, Gideon! Apologize this minute!”

“The witch insulted me.” The lizard buried his head in the crook of the man’s arm and began a low weeping. The man sighed deeply and caught Morgan’s eye, then nodded toward the creature a few times.

Morgan felt as if she were going insane. The most exquisite man alive was asking her to be kind to his pet lizard, who for some reason thought himself a dragon.

“Oh, oh, I see my mistake now!” she tried. The man nodded enthusiastically. “Yes, what a lovely dragon you have here, sir.”

“Fearsome!” the lizard insisted with a dramatic snuffle.

“Fearsome? Oh, oh, yes, I was just about to say that! I’m quite terrified. I surely hope you have control over your fearsome dragon, stranger.”

Gideon popped his head back out and the man grinned widely. His smile slammed through Morgan’s brain and body and she clutched onto the door for support. She didn’t dare look at the rest of him, sensing that she would faint if she did.

Pull it together, Morgan, find out what he wants and shut the door. He’s just a reminder of what you’ll never have. Because men who look like that are heartbreakers. And this one looked especially dangerous in that regard.

“Sir, I’m rather busy here.” She nodded over her shoulder to the pristine living room. He peeked beyond her and nodded seriously.

“Yes, I can see you’re quite busy, Mistress Daemoniani,” he ventured. “So I’ll get to the point. I’ll take your position. I assume it’s still open?” His question sounded more like a command.

“Pardon?” Morgan tilted her head and felt her brain freeze up.

“You’ve posted for an assistant. I have all the qualifications you specified and then some.” He smirked again.

“I specified a sorceress. You are...um, a man. I think.”

“You can’t tell I’m a man? Crikey.”

“No, sorry, that came out wrongly. I meant...oh, never mind that. I am not in need of a wizard – you’re a wizard, right? Oh and this is your dragon? Uh-huh. Yep.”

The man pressed his lips together and gave her a “don’t start on that again” look, indicating Gideon with a quick dart of his eyes.

“Right.” Morgan pointed to the ad. “See, right here it says I need a woman.”

Morgan took in a breath at the quick fury that temporarily flashed across his exquisite face.

“That’s discrimination. There are laws against that sort of thing, at least in Upper Territory. What can a woman do that I can’t? In fact, there might be a few things I can do that a woman can’t, have you thought of that?”

Morgan stared at the man’s hazel eyes for a moment and then for several moments more and couldn’t think of a single response. He lowered his head slightly and narrowed his eyes, staring at her from beneath dark brows. His gaze fell to her lips and then to her breasts. Morgan felt a chill and a whiff of magic.

And to her horror, she found herself blushing. *I don’t blush, I don’t embarrass and I’ll be damned if this...this hunk wizard will intimidate me.*

The man chucked his apple core into her garden and then quickly pushed past her into the living room.

“I think I’d like some coffee. You know how to make coffee, of course?”

“How dare you! I didn’t invite you in!” Morgan slammed the door behind her and stomped her foot in frustration.

“Nonsense. Everything about you is screaming for me to stay. And now I’m inside. So we may as well get down to business. I’d really like that coffee now.”

He removed his cloak, threw it on the sofa and settled into an overstuffed chair near the fire.

“Why don’t you make yourself at home? Take a nap? Call out for some pizza?”

He ran his hand through his hair and then examined his fingernails, ignoring her.

“Oh, all right. I’ll get your damned coffee. Then you and your dragon can leave me alone and get on with your day!”

Morgan hurried into the kitchen and went to work on preparing the best cup of coffee she could. *You don’t want to impress him, that’s not it. Just trying to show manners.*

She called out to him, "How do you like it?"

He drew the words out slowly. "Hot. I like it very, very hot. And strong. And sweet. And creamy." His voice was like syrup, coating her insides.

"Yes, that's how I like it too."

Hot. Strong. Sweet. Creamy. Hot. Strong. Sweet. Creamy. The words rolled around in her brain until she was panting, sweat beading on her brow, a picture of him naked and hot and strong and sweet and creamy pounding through her and starting a throbbing down low. *Well, at least you don't have a cock to betray your feelings. Get him out of your house.*

When she returned to the living room, he stretched and clasped his hands behind his neck, expanding his muscled chest and arms in dramatic fashion. Gideon was sound asleep in his lap, snoring rather loudly.

He propped his boot-clad feet on her linen tablecloth. Morgan was about to reprimand him but was sidetracked as he shifted his weight and she saw the muscles ripple beneath his tight leather pants. She let her gaze run up his body to take in the rest of him. The cups clattered on the tray as she set it on the table, hands shaking.

Morgan indicated the tray and he took a cup and lifted it to his lips, tasting the tiniest bit. He closed his eyes and moaned in pleasure, then took another sip.

"Simply incredible. Liquid ecstasy. Mmm. Hazelnut, isn't it? With a hint of vanilla?" He moaned again.

Morgan breathed a sigh of relief and then tried to cover it up with a cough.

"Now, sir. As I was saying, I appreciate your visit, but I really do need a witch."

He leaned forward and propped his chin on one hand.

"Morgan, it's me." His voice was almost a whisper.

"Sorry?"

"It's me. Trevor. Trevor Rains."

Morgan looked at the man in confusion for a moment and then laughed.

“I don’t know who you are, but you are not Trevor Rains.”

“No?” Trevor slowly unbuttoned his shirt and pulled away one side to reveal a small *fleur-de-lis* over his heart. Morgan worked hard to tear her gaze away from his smooth chest and nipple and a glimpse of ripped stomach. *Fleur-de-lis. Where have I seen that?*

“Morgan, do you remember the swimming hole we used to go to after school—the five of us? And the day you told me that only girls wore flowers, but that I had a flower on my chest so I must be a girl? Then you told Braxton to dunk me and he did.” A quick flicker of fury passed across his face. “Whatever happened to Braxton, by the way?”

Morgan let a tiny cry escape and reached out her hand as if to touch his chest. “Braxton dumped me six months ago. Ran off with Lilly Marsh after she inherited her father’s estate. Trevor?”

Trevor?

This man, this...this mage, dripping with energy that grabbed her by the belly. The boy she had kicked in the balls for his efforts. The boy who had followed her everywhere, had written a note to her every day, stood outside her door in the pouring rain, waiting to carry her books. The boy she had humiliated for a full year. Until he disappeared, rumored to have joined the Academy out of a crushed heart and embarrassment.

“Do I still look like a girl, Morgan?” His voice was dark, threatening and somehow, the sexiest voice Morgan had ever heard.

“What happened to you? Is it magic?” Morgan whispered in awe.

Trevor laughed darkly and drank more coffee, looking at her over the rim of his cup.

“I’ve heard that time heals all wounds. It seems to take care of other things as well. This really is about the best coffee I’ve ever had, Morgan. Honestly. Hot. Strong. Sweet. Creamy.”

“Please don’t say that again, Trevor, you’re giving me hives.”

He laughed freely this time, all the tiny lines coming to life again, his eyes sparkling. And Morgan fell in love for the first time in her life. Well, she thought, not love. But something close to it.

Gideon stretched and yawned and climbed up onto Trevor’s shoulder. “Trev, I’m tired. Take me home.”

“Thought you were playing ball today?” Trevor ran a long index finger along Gideon’s side, but he had already fallen back asleep. Morgan watched Trevor’s finger, decorated with a gold and emerald ring, delicately caress the lizard. She was mesmerized and shut her mouth quickly when she realized it was hanging open.

“Morgan? Are you all right?” He still wore a sly smile.

“No, no, I’m fine. I’m not quite sure what to...” She threw her hands up in despair. “Oh, honestly, Trevor, I’m not sure what to say. Welcome home?”

Trevor snorted and nodded. “Yes, no need to discuss old times, I suppose.”

Morgan nodded back. *Get him out of here. This man has something up his sleeve. Besides that strong arm.*

“Well, I have to get back to work, Trevor. Maybe we’ll run into one another sometime. I really am looking for an assistant. If you hear of someone, you’ll let me know?” Morgan tried not to look pathetic, but felt the tears threaten to take over again.

“I’m your new partner.”

“Nonsense.”

“I’m a practicing wizard, a very good one, in fact. I don’t have clients here—I haven’t set foot in this village since we were children. I help you, you help me. Why not try it, at least?”

She looked up quickly at what seemed like pleading in his voice. No, not this man. He wouldn’t have to ask for anything from anyone. Women must simply fall at his feet.

“Women must simply fall at your feet.” Morgan gasped at the realization she had spoken aloud. She squeezed her eyes shut, then opened one to see that devastating smile. “Damn.”

“You’re not falling, I see.”

“Trevor, I wish I could help, but I really need a woman.”

She lowered her voice. “You see, one of my clients is in regular need of...certain potions...”

“Love potions.” Trevor arched a brow.

“Sex potions. As you know only women brew those. I don’t need to slay armies or monsters or turn trees into worms and such...”

Trevor snorted. “Oh, that’s what I do all day.”

“You know what I mean. I need to brew potions—a lot of them. By the book. It’s a girl thing.”

“Nonsense. I’m a quick study. Teach me.” He looked from beneath his dark brows and she felt trapped.

Her one applicant. A man. A wizard with the power to fill her stomach with butterflies and turn her brain to jelly. Little scrawny Trevor Rains. The glorious man who sipped coffee and gazed at her with an expression she didn’t understand.

“What brought you back to Castle Borough, Trevor?”

“My mother. I buried her a week ago.” His expression was unreadable.

Morgan sighed and shook her head. A quick memory of white lace and the smell of apple pies flew by.

“Oh. I liked your mother.”

“I’m not sure she liked you.” His brief smile softened his words. “I’ll leave you now, Morgan. I can see you need time to think. You know the house. It hasn’t moved. Don’t make the wrong decision.”

Trevor rose and walked close to Morgan, examining her face closely. Then he tucked Gideon under his arm, grabbed his cloak and swept out the door before she could get another word out.

"Yes, I remember the house," she whispered.

"Help me, Trevor."

* * * * *

"Did you hear that?" Gideon asked.

"I did indeed." Trevor whistled as he made his way down the path toward home.
"She'll get all the help she needs."

I'll win her heart, take her business, ravish her body so she never forgets and then, when she's at my mercy, I'll let her know just what her teasing did to skinny little Trevor Rains. And she'll beg me for forgiveness. But she'll get none.

"She's very pretty, Trev. Just your type, I'd think."

"Hmm."

"And she was quite terrified by me, wasn't she?" Gideon ventured hopefully.

"Seemed near paralyzed with terror."

Gideon sighed in satisfaction.

Chapter Two

Morgan spent one of the worst weeks of her life alone, frightened and falling in lust with a man she had seen for fifteen minutes and who in all probability hated her guts. The complaints and returns had slowed to a trickle, but business had stopped completely.

She sat at her kitchen table and sorted through a pile of mostly junk mail. With a trembling hand, Morgan pulled out the purple envelope that had been hand-delivered—a royal missive. She held the envelope to her forehead, hoping to intuit the contents. Nothing. The simplest magic now eluded her. Morgan pulled her cloak around her against the chill of the May air.

“It’s cold.” Morgan wondered if perhaps she was getting sick from the stress. No, something was...off. The tulips looked a little worried and she thought she could hear some grumbling from the rest of her garden as well. She went to the window and watched in wonder as a few squirrels buried nuts, furtively glancing around to ensure their hiding places remained secret. In the late spring, when it should be warm. *This is simply weird.* She shut the kitchen window and sat back down at the table.

“I’m losing my mind,” she thought.

An unfamiliar voice slipped into her mind. “You need help, Morgan. Go to him.”

Morgan dismissed the voice as further proof of oncoming insanity. She broke open the royal seal and blew into the envelope, pretty sure what it contained. In fact, the young page delivering the note had told her in no uncertain terms that “King Artimer wants your ass at the castle immediately”.

Morgan spread the paper on her table and put on her glasses. Yep, there it was. “*Morgan, get your ass up to the castle immediately. Art.*”

Morgan felt the tension in her stomach climb to clutch at her heart. This was it. Curtains. Whatever that means. She brushed away a tear, grabbed her basket and left her cottage, desperately searching for a way to tell Trevor what was happening to her without putting her life into his hands. Because she was pretty sure that's where he wanted her. But why?

Morgan picked ripe apples along the road to town, to Trevor's house. A blustery day threw new tree buds to the ground like fat raindrops. Morgan felt increasingly uneasy as she watched more squirrels gather huge mouthfuls of leaves for nest building. She looked down at her basket—full of beautiful ripe apples. But the fall apples. She shuddered as understanding took hold. And she began running.

The seasons! The seasons were...moving the wrong way! She was losing her magic and the seasons were moving the wrong way!

"Trevor!" She was panting by the time she reached Trevor's house. She pounded on his door until her hand felt bruised. She heard a hiss and looked down.

Gideon stuck his head through the swinging pet door and looked up. "Hiiissss! Who goes there?"

"Gideon, let me in! Where's Trevor?"

"He's in the shower. Who goes there, I said?" Gideon looked like he'd tear up again.

Morgan sighed impatiently and stomped her foot. "Oh come on, Gideon! All right, then. Oh, please, don't hurt me, dragon! I come to ask a boon of your master, the great wizard. What must I do to get past you and gain entrance?"

"Give me some candy and I'll let you in."

"I don't have any candy. I thought dragons wanted coins and jewels and such. How about a nice crunchy apple?"

"I'll take those sparkly earrings you have on." Gideon raised the area of his face where an eyebrow would be if he were human.

Morgan heard Trevor's curse and watched Gideon frantically scratch the threshold as Trevor pulled him into the house by his back legs.

Trevor opened the door and Morgan rushed past him, heart racing. "Something's horribly, horribly wrong. The squirrels are burying nuts for the winter and the flowers are freezing and the fall apples are ripe...and everything seems to be preparing for winter instead of summer..."

Morgan looked at Trevor and dropped her basket. The apples rolled across the gleaming wooden floor. They seemed to be moving in slow motion.

"And?" Trevor smirked.

"You don't have very many clothes on."

His voice got syrupy again. "No, I don't. I just showered. Still a little wet and soapy." But he didn't bother drying off his glistening chest and stomach, his strong arms, the ridges of muscle that rimmed his hips, the trail of hair that started at his navel and pointed downwards. Morgan felt as if time had slowed to a crawl as she watched a drop of water fall from a strand of his long chestnut hair. It hit his chest, making a lazy path onto his nipple and down his stomach until it disappeared in that mysterious dark hair.

Morgan reached into her pocket and pulled out her glasses. "Oh. My. Stars." Wet white underwear. All the mysteries of the universe unfolding before her very eyes. He was magnificent and she felt the burning of moist heat threaten to make her squirm out of her clothes.

Trevor laughed at her expression and began rubbing a towel across his back.

Morgan flopped onto the damask couch and continued to stare.

"Why are you staring like that, Morgan? Surely you've seen a man before? Braxton? I'm no match for Braxton, is that it?"

"You're spectacular." Her words were barely audible, but she instantly wanted them back.

Trevor suddenly looked different. The smile faded and another expression took over, making his eyes darker and his jaw tighten. He bent his head forward and stared into her eyes as he rubbed the towel slowly on his chest and stomach. He slowly inched the towel down beneath the waistband of his shorts. Morgan felt her legs quiver and heat roll around in her stomach like a tornado, only to touch down at her core.

“What...what are you doing, Trevor?”

“I’m drying myself, Morgan. Want to help?” Trevor bit his lip and took in a quick breath as he brushed the towel against his hard shaft. Morgan felt the throbbing pick up in intensity, a steady pulse that made her squirm on the couch. Her nipples ached and her breasts seemed to have a mind of their own. As she moved and breathed deeply, they poked farther out of her dress until she was nearly topless. Trevor looked at them, caressing himself a little harder with the towel and Morgan squeezed her eyes shut, unable to take any more.

“Stop that! You’re a tease!” she hissed in reprimand.

“Not interested, then? All right, I’ll change.”

Trevor walked to his bedroom, but left the door open. Morgan watched as, back toward her, he stepped out of his wet underwear and finished toweling himself dry. He was glorious. Trevor looked over his shoulder briefly and Morgan flushed furiously, realizing she had brought her hand to her chest and was moving her fingers to her nipple. Trevor wrapped the towel around his waist and turned to face her. He leaned against the doorframe and whispered, “Go ahead.”

She shook her head, but didn’t move her hand away.

“That wasn’t a request. Like this.” He ran his palm across his chest and found his dark nipple, pinching it and twisting it with a grin. “Go ahead.” He moved a few steps toward her. His hazel eyes glimmered and shone like sparkling jewels.

Morgan barely realized what she was doing as she locked eyes with him. As if in a trance, she unlaced her bodice, which was barely necessary and exposed one full breast

to his examination. He clutched the furniture as he worked his way into the living room and back to the couch, where he sat close to her.

“You know you want to,” he whispered, biting his lower lip, then blowing gently on her breast.

She pinched her nipple and moaned lightly. His nearness and the smell of his soap and skin and maleness and magic pounded through her.

Kiss me, Trevor. Kiss all of me. You own me.

“Nice knockers!” Gideon snickered from the corner of the room.

Morgan sat up quickly and pulled her bodice closed. *You own me? No! Not again. This one can have anyone. And probably does, regularly.*

“You’re using magic on me, Trevor, I can feel it. Can’t you get laid without magic?”

Trevor groaned in frustration, sending Gideon a scathing look.

“Have it your own way, Morgan. But it’s not magic and we’re not finished.” He pulled the towel from around his waist and rubbed his hair dry, exposing his enormous erection. Morgan saw a glimmer of moisture on the swollen tip and closed her eyes, trying desperately to shut out the vision that she suspected would last her a lifetime.

She kept her eyes closed. “I have to get to the castle and you have to come with me. Art’s orders.”

“So I’m your new assistant?”

“Yes, my partner! Please put clothes on, Trevor, I can’t take this. I’ll explain on the way.”

“Someone’s screwing with time and you’ve lost your magic?”

“Yes, how did you know?” She glimpsed down and quickly shut her eyes again.

Trevor nodded and stood. “I came to the same conclusion today. It’s going to ruin all our lives if we can’t stop it.”

“Do you understand it?”

“Not yet.” He walked toward the bedroom and then stopped in his tracks and turned toward her.

“You do realize I’m quite serious? I rarely take ‘no’ for an answer these days, Morgan. I’m not a shy thirteen-year-old anymore.”

“That is, without a doubt, one of the biggest understatements I’ve ever heard.”

Trevor grinned and Morgan’s heart lurched. *Lust, yes indeed, it’s lust. And if you aren’t very, very careful, this man will break your heart, too.*

* * * * *

Gideon scurried back and forth along the road to the castle, jabbering excitedly the whole way. Morgan watched in amazement as the lizard *boinged* straight up in the air several times while yelling “Yippeeeee!”

“I’m sorry about this,” Trevor whispered. “He really, really likes the castle and we’ve never been invited inside.”

“Well, actually, I’m not sure Art expects a...dragon. He certainly isn’t expecting you—and he’s a little frightened of wizards. Now follow my lead when we speak to him, all right, Trevor?”

“Why would the king be afraid of wizards? Has he even met one?”

“No, I don’t think so. You’ll see what I mean. He’s afraid of a lot of things—clowns, heights, rabbits, women. But Art does pretty well with fierce enemies and giants, stuff like that.”

Trevor stopped walking and regarded Morgan with a smile. “You’re kidding, of course. He lives on the highest precipice in town and he’s afraid of heights? And women? Clowns, okay, I can see that, but women?”

“You’d better lose that derisive look when you meet him. Art won’t hesitate to have your head chopped off, you know.”

Trevor felt a tiny wave of something familiar, yet unfamiliar sweep through his system as Morgan looked at him. He groaned, pushing down the burning that started every time they made eye contact.

You'll enjoy taking advantage of her, Trevor. Stop feeling sorry for her—she deserves everything she gets. Revenge is sweet. Savor it.

"I'm a wizard, Morgan. I'm not going to let him chop off my head." Trevor rolled his eyes and squatted to let Gideon jump on his arm.

Morgan shook her head uncertainly, sighed and resumed the walk, pulling her cloak around her as a breeze picked up.

Gideon counted aloud as they took the Thousand Steps to the castle. In silent agreement, the trio took the traditional rest at five hundred, peering out at the Scenic Lookout over Castle Borough. Smoke curled in tiny loose spirals from hundreds of gray stone chimneys. The lazy Squoog River snaked its way through the forest and appeared here and there to make a green clearing glimmer with sunlight as it reflected off the water. And, in the distance, they could even see the barest outline of the low, ancient Zog Mountains.

Morgan sighed and pointed to the Zogs. "You're so lucky, Trevor. You got out of Castle Borough. What's it like? The Upper Territory? Are you going back soon?" She turned her wistful blue eyes to him and he snapped into a thousand little pieces.

"Trevor?"

"Yes, I'll leave eventually, I suppose. They'd like me to settle in at the Academy, teach and such."

He pulled himself away from her eyes and followed her gaze out over the town.

"Oh."

Trevor snuck a glance as Morgan looked down at the ground and kicked at a pebble.

"After we solve this mystery, get time back in order and such."

Morgan brightened up a bit. "Oh, well, that could take a while, right? And you just took the position as my assistant..."

"Partner," Gideon corrected.

"Yes, partner."

They took in the view in silence for a while, watching an iridescent green dragon as he made slow lazy circles over the treetops. Gideon sighed.

Trevor took in a deep breath. "Morgan, do you remember our school trip to the castle?" *And how I tried to kiss you here when the others had gone on ahead, you standing right where you are now, daydreaming of the Upper Territory?*

"No, not much of it, really. Were you there?"

Her words pierced Trevor's chest like a hot poker and he felt his cheeks flare up in fury. If his powers were in order, sparks would be flying from his hands. He merely felt a tremor in each fingertip.

"You don't remember standing here next to me?" Trevor heard the bitterness in his own voice.

"Not really, Trevor." Morgan looked at him innocently.

"You don't remember when I moved very close to you like this?" Trevor moved sideways against the marble railing until his hip and shoulder touched hers. The contact ran through his body like lightning.

"No...I would...I would have remembered that, I think." She looked up at him, her gaze falling to his lips. He looked at hers. *She wants you to kiss her. How perfect! Look at it, written all over her stunning face.*

"And you don't remember when I tried to sneak a little kiss? Because that's all I wanted, Morgan. One lousy kiss."

"Oh, I think I'd remember that. But if you say so, I suppose it happened."

Trevor backed up a step. *She doesn't remember at all!* He backed up another step and nearly stumbled as he fell to the marble bench. His mind screamed in confusion. It was

impossible to have this many feelings at once, wasn't it? And then to have your cock throbbing and your heart aching in the midst of it all at the sight of her, the smell of her.

Gideon bounced up and down impatiently. "Come on, you two." He popped away from the lookout and made his way to the stairs.

"Five hundred and one!" he insisted, almost frantically.

Trevor nodded numbly and motioned to Morgan to resume their trek. His heart felt like mud and his legs as heavy as iron as he followed behind. *She doesn't even remember the day that changed your life. The day your heart broke, hardened to granite. The day you decided to leave your mother alone, break her heart as well and run off to the Academy.*

And you still want to kiss her, he thought in amazement.

"I'll have that kiss now, Morgan."

Trevor felt fierce and dark and dangerous and wondered if he was capable of forcing himself on her. The thought stunned him and he dismissed it quickly. *She's making you insane! She's using witchcraft!* He reached up and grabbed her hand, roughly pulling her back to the landing. She gasped as he laced her hair in his fist and pulled her head back sharply.

Morgan's dress fluttered around her as a warm breeze swept across the hillside. Birds began chirping in the pines and a shimmer of blue light swept up from the ground and circled the couple. Trevor felt a familiar pulse of power begin at his feet. Magic. It had been months since he had felt the strength of magic in his limbs, in his veins. Morgan shuddered as he brought his arm around her waist.

"What's happening?" Her eyes widened as she looked at his lips.

"I'm going to kiss you."

"I thought so. But what's happening to—"

Trevor put his finger over her mouth to shut her up and felt a tingle at the contact. He leaned in, only a few inches and Morgan laced his hair in her fingers. A second stir

of air warmed the hillside further. Trevor felt his knees begin shaking as he pushed closer and Morgan closed her eyes.

A woman's voice slipped into his brain. "You aren't a boy, Trevor. Take what you want."

Trevor pressed his lips lightly onto Morgan's. And felt the earth fall away from under his feet. Sweet, hot, strong. He took his time, pulling at her bottom lip, then her top lip. A nibble. A lick. Another nibble. A tentative probe of his tongue. Another, deeper probe.

Morgan moaned and it was all the encouragement he needed. He pulled her in tightly, plundering her mouth as she sighed and pressed her body against his, wrapping his long hair tighter around her fingers. Every nerve ending in Trevor's body lit up and sizzled.

Trevor pulled away for a second and looked into her eyes. "Morgan, look at me." His voice shook. *I don't remember ever kissing another woman.*

The voice returned. "You are not a boy. You are the Wizard of Time."

Trevor pushed her against a tree trunk and held her hands over her head as he devoured her mouth until she panted and squirmed. He pressed his fierce erection against her belly and she squealed at the touch.

"Don't tell me to stop, Morgan. I'll have you now."

He could barely breathe as he moved his lips along her white flesh, along her collarbone and back to her neck, to her ear and back to her lips.

"Whoa!" Gideon cried out in terror. He began crying and screaming and flopping around on his back.

Trevor turned in time to see the lizard sprout long wings. It lasted a moment only.

Gideon sobbed furiously and Trevor ran to him, scooping him up.

"Oh, my! Trevor, what happened?" Morgan ran over to examine the lizard.

"I think a spell that got corrupted began to work again."

Morgan opened her mouth to speak and Trevor shook his head in warning, mouthing the word “dragon”.

Morgan mouthed back a silent “Oh” and rubbed Gideon on the head. A cool breeze blew through and Trevor and Morgan both looked out over the trees, together sensing a shift in magic and time. The circling dragon swooped down and disappeared into the forest.

Trevor hugged Gideon close under his cloak and moved to the stairs. He spoke softly into his cloak. “Five hundred and one, five hundred and two!”

A muffled “five hundred and three” escaped from his cloak and Trevor breathed a sigh of relief.

If only his heart would stop threatening to pound out of his chest. Because he had tasted Morgan Daemoniani. And he knew that life would never be the same again. Nothing else existed for him but the need to have her mouth again. Have all of her. He walked the steps numbly, trying to focus on cheering Gideon on.

“Nine hundred eighty-five!” Gideon seemed back to his old self, now scampering on ahead of his slightly tired companions.

The spires and turrets of Galronmeer Castle appeared suddenly and all three visitors oohed and aahed. Gleaming white marble sparkled and shone like opals. Colorful banners flew from every turret. Archers leaned against battlement walls in shining armor.

“One thousand and one! Hey, that’s not right!” Gideon scratched his scaly head in confusion. “Maybe we should go down and start over?”

“Shush. You aren’t supposed to notice,” Morgan warned quietly and pointed to a sign that read, “There are definitely one thousand steps to the castle. Those caught arguing this FACT will be fined three gold orts.”

* * * * *

King Artimer paced with his hands behind his back, as kings are wont to do. Gideon jumped up and down trying to get the king's attention, but Art didn't seem to notice. Morgan made the introductions and Trevor and Gideon performed low sweeping bows, which seemed to please Art tremendously.

"You're not the Trevor we went to school with?" Art blew an errant blond curl out of his deep blue eyes.

"Yes, Sire, in fact I am. We both played for the Squirrels, although I spent most of the time on the bench. As I remember, you hit about five hundred?"

Art smiled and quickly strode to the mantel of the huge royal fireplace, where he picked up a miniscule trophy. He handed it to Trevor, who read the inscription aloud.

"Player of the Year, Castle Borough Squirrels. Wow, Sire, very nice. Sure, I remember now."

Trevor placed the trophy back in its spot of honor and turned to Morgan, stifling a laugh.

Morgan frowned at him and turned to the king. "Well, Art, you seemed pretty anxious to see me? Feeling okay, everything good at the castle?"

Anger slowly built and took shape on her handsome cousin's face.

"You know damned well that things aren't fine, Morgan! First I start getting complaints that my official sorceress is a hack, then the Knights lose several games straight—and hey, I just bought them new uniforms. And then...well..."

"It's okay, you can talk in front of Trevor. He's a wizard and my new partner."

Art paled a bit and eyed Trevor suspiciously. "I heard something about you taking off for the Academy, but I thought it was rubbish."

"Art...you were saying..." Morgan prompted.

Art flopped into his throne and ran his hand through his golden curls. He looked at Trevor again and nodded.

“Okay, you two.” They all turned when Gideon squealed in frustration. “You too, young man, over here, have a seat.” Art patted his lap and Gideon scurried up and stared up at the king in adoration.

“The potion, Morgan. The sex potion. It’s shit.”

“Hmm. Thought so. You see...”

“Sex potion!” Trevor laughed. “Why in heaven’s name would you need a sex potion?”

“It was to make Art irresistible to women.”

Morgan looked at him seriously.

“He looks pretty irresistible to me. I mean, to women. Oh, you know what I mean. And he’s the freaking king. What’s the problem?”

“He’s shy. He doesn’t really know how to approach women. I guess it’s some failure in his upbringing. Now Uncle Lars, his father, had the opposite problem.”

Art cleared his throat. “I’m sitting right here, Morgan. I can hear you. Look, Trevor, I can see with a glance you’re the type I hate. Women walk right up to you in taverns, right? Ask if they can buy you ale? Call you ‘big boy’ and names like that? Thought so. Me, I just clam up. I’m getting to the age where folks expect me to make an heir.”

“Sire, may I offer a suggestion?” Trevor arched a brow. “Why don’t you hold a royal ball and just announce that you’re looking for a wife. I’m fairly certain a lot of nice young women will show up. You won’t even have to come up with a pick-up line. ‘I’m King Art’ should do.”

Morgan put her hand on Trevor’s arm. “That’s not the problem, Trevor. It’s the next part...you know.” She wiggled her eyebrows.

“Hmm. A little trouble in the sack, Sire?”

Art sighed deeply. “Try to understand, this is a pretty big decision. It’s not like the olden days, when kings could just whore around as they liked. Have to be a good role model and all that jazz. So it has to be the perfect woman. I get a little, um, shy when I

start worrying about things like that. Seems to come up at the wrong moment, if you know what I mean.”

“You’re frightened of making the wrong choice. Like every man alive.”

“But I bet that doesn’t stop you from...you know.”

“Well, I’m not exactly in your position. Look, Sire, let me handle this.” Trevor smiled slyly.

“Wizard stuff?” Art looked nervous.

“No, no. I think I might have the right girl. Can I set you up? Maybe just coffee?”

Art smiled shyly. “Is she pretty? Nice? Not a witch, is she? No offense, Morgan.”

“Trust me on this one. Shall we say, Saturday, your place? Her name is Tessa. Looks, well, looks a little bit like me, except curvy and such.” Trevor kicked Morgan lightly in the shin when he heard her gasp.

“Okay, I’ll do it.” The king stood and grinned, then lost his smile quickly.

“There’s this other matter. The farmers are complaining that something’s screwy. The weather, the seasons?”

“It’s time, Sire. It’s moving backward.” Trevor looked serious and waited for Art to take it in.

Art looked up at the golden clock on the mantel.

“No, it doesn’t affect the clocks.”

“What the hell’s causing it, Trevor? This is no good, I tell you. It’s disconcerting.”

“It’s deadly. Because if time moves backward far enough...”

“Oh. But we’re moving forward, I mean, we’re not saying what we said a few minutes ago, you know? Hmm, this is a bit confusing.”

“Yes, I know it is. It doesn’t seem to be changing our time, but Nature’s time. The seasons, the weather, as you said. And magic. It’s down to a mere sizzle. A lot of the world is held together by magic and a lot of it is going to start falling apart pretty quickly.”

“Like what?”

“Well, for one, your castle was built around five hundred years ago by an ancestor of mine using magic. I’m not sure how strong the foundations are. And then there’s the Squoog. Remember how the High Council changed its course a few years back when it threatened to flood the town?”

“Crikey. Well, you’re the wizard, do something. And report back to me as soon as you’ve done whatever it is you’re going to do.” Art waved his hand in a dismissive gesture and Trevor looked at Morgan. She bowed and backed away from Art and Trevor did likewise. Gideon remained on Art’s lap.

“Gideon!” Trevor scolded. “We’re leaving.”

“Aww, come on, we just got here.”

“Run along, little dragon.” Art pushed him off his lap and patted him on the butt.

Trevor and Morgan looked at each other in amazement.

“Art, doesn’t Gideon look a bit small to be a dragon?” Morgan ventured.

The king studied the lizard carefully. “Not really. Seems a pretty good dragon to me.” Gideon grinned and wagged his long spiky tail as he joined Trevor and Morgan.

Art winked at Trevor, who grinned in appreciation.

“I like your cousin, Morgan. He hung with a different crowd in school, never got to know him. Maybe we can go out for a drink sometime.”

Chapter Three

The class looked up as Headmistress Loves peeked around the corner of the door. Jordan felt the familiar restlessness she constantly evoked in him. Evoked in every male at the Academy. She somehow managed to make her voluminous black robe look sexy. It was those eyes, he thought. Those green jewels. They just drilled through you, straight into your heart and soul, eventually terminating in your crotch until you wanted to scream in frustration.

“Professor Schrom, may I have a moment of your time?” Jordan nodded glumly as the whispers and giggles erupted like sputtering fireworks. The rumors flew through the Academy, he knew. Headmistress Loves and Professor Schrom. Doing the nasty in the teachers’ lounge, it was said. Quick trysts in the library under books starting with the letter “X”.

At times, Jordan had nearly begun believing the rumors himself, they were so pervasive. But the truth was, every night he would eat with the wretched young wizards and witches and then retire to his quarters to catch a bit of the ball game or even a bit of the Naughty Channel.

Because Jordan Schrom was a nerd. And Drussy Loves was a fox. And his only friend. And Jordan had a better chance of getting hit by lightning *again* than getting the headmistress into the sack.

“How’s the head?” Drussy looked concerned as they made their way down the wide hallway, past the trophy case and into her office. She sat behind her desk and Jordan sat across from her.

“Umm, better, I think. I’m not hearing fruit call my name anymore.”

“Well, that’s an improvement.” Drussy smiled and Jordan wanted to leap across the desk to press his hands around her lovely throat until she screamed for mercy. Drussy

had quickly pulled off her long robe to reveal an expanse of curvy flesh poking out of a nearly see-through pink blouse. Her short dark hair stood up in messy curls and spikes. Jordan fantasized about getting a good grip on that short hair to hold her head back while he ravaged her mouth.

“You really might want to give up that thunderstorm golf. I don’t quite understand why you’re the only one ever struck – maybe your powers are a little out of whack.”

Jordan rolled his eyes and crossed his arms petulantly.

“Well, never mind that. Jordy, I need to discuss something rather serious with you. A few things, actually.”

“Mmm?” *Take your clothes off and lie naked on this desk for me or I’ll fry you, Drussy. At least, I would if I hadn’t lost my magic.*

“I intercepted this...this missive. Last night. Mary Mischcan was climbing down the trellis of Amaryllis House and making a beeline across the field toward the wizards’ dormitory.”

“Well, I certainly don’t get involved in these matters, Drussy. Doesn’t Dr. Schneiderman deal with the students’ interpersonal issues?”

“Just read it, Jordy.”

Jordan opened the scroll and gasped.

Dear Professor Schrom,

I love you. I will die without you. I hate Headmistress Loves and hope she turns into a Borongo Hissing Frog so we can be together. You don’t love her and we both know it. I saw you wink at me in Alchemy 101. I’m ready to be your sex slave and I hope you are ready to be mine.

Sincerely,

Mary Mischcan

“Crikey.” A horrific image of the rotund cherub-faced freshman in dominatrix garb flashed before Jordan’s eyes. “Crikey,” he repeated.

“Mmm. Well, Jordy, I’m going to give you the benefit of the doubt here. Don’t imagine you’re ready to take Mary Mischcan on as a sex slave?”

He took off his wire-rimmed glasses and pinched the bridge of his nose. “I think I may have blinked at her a few times after I got new glasses. Could barely see for days.”

“I see. And the rest? You haven’t been telling the undergraduates that we are an item?”

Jordan noticed a bit of flush sweep up to Drussy’s cheeks. “Of course not! Why would I do that?”

“Oh, maybe because you want the boys to think you’re hot stuff or something? You aren’t seeing anyone that I know of?” She shuffled through some papers and Jordan caught her glance up quickly for his reaction.

What’s this? Trying to humiliate me? “You know damned well I’m not seeing anyone, Drussy. When would I have time? I go from classes to dinner to papers to…”

“Oh, well, one night I came to your room.” Drussy sorted furiously through files. “And I thought I heard sounds. Sex sounds. You know, moaning, groaning, screaming, a woman crying out ‘yes, yes, yes!’, that sort of thing.”

“Drussy!” Jordan shifted in his chair a bit to ease his growing discomfort. Her description, albeit somewhat clinical, was enough to make him rock-hard in an instant.

“Well?” She tapped her pencil impatiently on the desk and looked him in the eyes. There it was, that feeling, drilling into his soul. Jordan let his eyes drop to her full red lips, then farther down to her white breasts and back up to her huge green eyes.

“Screw you, Drussy. It was the Naughty Channel and you know it. I’m thirty years old and quite entitled to a little adult escapism if I like. There’s nothing in my contract—

“Was it the episode with the big blonde and the two men with the biguns? Both of them at once outside near the pool?”

“Yeeess. That one.” Jordan thought he heard fruit calling his name again, but no, it was Drussy turning his brain into jelly. “Well, I’m not sure, now that I think of it. There’s another one that might have sounded similar?” *Please, humor me, you witch.*

“Hmm. Oh, maybe it was on Wednesday, what do they call it?”

“Scarves and Gloves night.” Jordan leaned back and put his glasses back on, regarding her carefully. He was burning up, sweat beading on his forehead. He pulled off his robe and gathered his long blond hair in his hand. Drussy reached into her desk drawer, pulled out a rubber band and handed it to him. He looped his hair into a ponytail.

“Better?” she asked. He caught her darting glance to his chest and back up to his eyes. *No, you’re imagining that. Dork.*

Jordan nodded. “I don’t catch it on Wednesdays much. Coach wrestling on Wednesdays and we usually grab a pizza pretty late and watch the freshwater fishing report...” He trailed off, wondering exactly how pathetic that must sound to her.

“Oh, you should try to catch it if you can. I like Wednesdays the best. Last week, the guy with the really big one stripped down the woman with the huge ones, you know, the one with the long dark hair?” Jordan nodded numbly. “And he tied her to a bed like this,” she spread her arms and legs out, “and then he went to work on her, let me tell you. Woossss! Yes sir, she was feeling it, all squirming and crying out. And then he took off his clothes and pushed his thing into her face and well, she wrapped her lips around it and sucked for all she was worth. Then he let her free. Well, you get the idea. But that’s not the one you saw? Jordy? Are you okay?”

Jordan felt all the blood rush from his head and the room started wobbling a bit. His erection pushed so hard against his pants he was sure it was going to pop out and land on Drussy’s desk.

“I’m fine. What else did you need to discuss?” Jordan clenched his teeth and tried desperately to think about freshwater fishing.

“Oh, yes. Time. Magic. The problem.” She nodded seriously. “I may have a lead.”

Jordan tried to buck up. The entire Academy, including the High Council of Wizards, had labored day after day trying to learn what had wrinkled time and magic.

“Honestly?”

Drussy climbed on a little ladder to reach to the highest bookshelf in her office. “Hmm, it’s here somewhere.”

She wiggled her curvaceous ass back and forth a few times and leaned so far that Jordan caught a glimpse of black lace under the miniscule skirt. He squeezed his eyes shut and groaned.

“Oh, no, of course, it’s right there on the desk. How silly.” She sat back down and pushed a book across to Jordan.

“*The Wizard of Time. Wisdom and Prophecies*, by Dostranamus.” He leafed through the pages idly. “I don’t get it? This book mentions our problem?”

“I think so.” She nodded. “Jordan, remember Trevor Rains?”

“I’m not senile, Drussy. He only left the Academy a few months ago. Strongest wizard in decades. A little moody, but otherwise a good chap. And that dissertation was stellar, honestly. Wish he’d come back and teach, but I understand there was some family business...”

“Yes. His mother was ill. Had you ever seen Trevor naked, Jordy?”

“Excuse me?”

“I mean, were you ever in the position to see his chest?”

“I guess so, hmm, sure, showering after a ball game, stuff like that.”

“Did he have a tattoo?”

“Yeah, he did. That Borongo insignia, right here.” He pointed to his chest. “What do you call it? His family whatnot.”

“Crest. A *fleur-de-lis*?”

“That’s it. Always thought it looked a little fruity, but he was man enough to handle it. What’s this about?”

“Read the book, Jordy. I have to go teach Advanced Potions. I’ll catch up with you later.”

“All right. I probably won’t get to this until after dinner.”

“That’s okay. I’ll stop by your room. Say, nine or so. I think it’s dominatrix night on the Naughty Channel and I’m pretty sure you won’t want to watch that.” She smiled and swept out of the office.

Jordan banged his head on her desk a half-dozen or so times.

* * * * *

Drussy ran into Doris Schneiderman in the hallway and pulled her by the sleeve into an empty classroom. Doris snickered and then covered her mouth with her hand. “Vell? Schpill! Did you gets him gut? Vas he sweatink?”

“Yes, he was! How did you know? You are the best!” Drussy hugged the diminutive older witch.

“And? Did he agree to meet mit you?” Doris rubbed her hands together in glee.

“I’m going to his room tonight! Oh my stars, Doris, I’m terrified. Imagine, Jordan Schrom alone. He’s so dreamy – those eyes and those lips, that body! I thought I would die when he took his glasses off. You should have seen what he was wearing under his robe! One of those little shirts with no sleeves and I could see his chest and arms and ooooooooooh!” Drussy hopped up and down and started giggling uncontrollably as the women clutched hands.

“What have I gotten myself into, Doris? He doesn’t want me. He’ll think I’m an idiot if I make a pass at him. I don’t want to lose him as a friend. And what if he tells everyone?”

“Oh, puuleease. Now vat are you going to vear?” Doris surveyed Drussy seriously from head to toe.

“I hadn’t thought of that! Oh shit!”

“Calm down, calm down. In my experience, you’d be best to wear next to nothing, perhaps under your robe. You do have naughty things? You can borrow –”

“No, I have them. Doris, I don’t know about this...”

The older woman pushed a bottle into Drussy’s hands. Drussy looked at the label. “Black Magic. Isn’t that very strong?”

“Only use it if you think things are going badly. If you use too much, he might not be able to, vell, you know, get it up.”

“Oh, gosh. All right. I hadn’t heard of this before.”

“It’s the oldest trick in ze book.” Doris nodded seriously. “Here, look.” She pulled a small, dog-eared, leather-covered book from her pocket and opened to the very first page. “See?”

“How to Catch a Man with Alcohol,” Drussy read aloud. “Will it work?”

“Every time. Now remember everything I taught you, especially ze striptease—it’s a very important first step. And don’t forget ze tongue swirl.” Doris wagged a finger at her.

* * * * *

Jordan paced back and forth in his cage. It felt like a cage. Trapped. A book in one hand, a mug of ale in the other. Waiting for the dark mistress to torture him again. Shit.

Jordan was fairly certain that Drussy had been correct on several counts. Trevor Rains was the Wizard of Time. They were certainly doomed if they couldn’t track him down and knock some sense into him.

And she had been right that it was dominatrix night on the Naughty Channel. After a half minute of watching leather-clad flesh meet flesh, Jordan switched it off, unwilling to get heated up again with Drussy on her way to his room.

I’ll kill her. If she does one sexy thing, I’ll simply kill her and they’ll have to hang me.

The problem was, he thought, she didn't need to do anything except breathe. Because Drussy was sex personified. Well then, he'd just have to make sure she stopped breathing, because he couldn't take another day of it.

Because he was hopelessly in love with her and the pain of it was intolerable. It had become a matter of survival. If dorks deserve to survive.

By the time she knocked on the door, Jordan had almost convinced himself he hated her.

"What!" he snapped and pulled the door open, fury etched across his face.

"Jordan! What's wrong?"

Jordan looked at her and wanted to sob like a child. Nothing had changed. She was insanely compelling, his best friend, his only companion and the love of his life.

"Come on in," Jordan growled. He flopped into a chair and threw the book down on a table. "I have papers to grade, Drussy, so let's make this really quick. It's Rains. And we need to find him, fast. I think Andrea needs to get involved."

Drussy nodded and seemed to try to smile but it didn't quite work. "I guess so. Wanted to try to solve this without her, but you probably know best. History expert and all."

Jordan nodded. "Yes, that's me, expert of this, wizard of that. Power over everything and everyone. Brilliant, impossibly brilliant." He shocked himself with the bitter tone to his voice.

Drussy nodded uncertainly and set a bottle on the table next to the book. "Well, there's a little present."

Jordan looked at her, unsure of what was happening. Her hand was on the top button of her robe, but seemed frozen. Then he saw it.

A single tear wove a path down her cheek.

"I can't do this. You seem so angry." More tears followed until there was a flood down both cheeks, with melting makeup creating black stream banks.

“Do what?” Jordan was stunned. The headmistress, crying? Old Heart of Stone?

“What I planned to do.” Drussy unbuttoned her robe to reveal the body and clothing of a stripper. She threw her hands out in frustration. “I was going to try to seduce you and get you drunk so you would want me and we would have sex all night and you would tell me things and then we would be a couple and I could stop feeling so awful all the time because every time I see you I want to die it hurts so much because you’re just so gorgeous and I simply can’t stand one more day of it!” Drussy stomped her foot and her breasts jiggled.

The tears flowed more freely as she wagged a finger at Jordan. “You think you’re so special just because you’re so smart and nice and handsome and built and sexy and have those eyes and that hair.” She suddenly covered her face with both hands and sobbed uncontrollably. “And now I’ve made a complete ass of myself and you’ll tell everyone.”

Drussy wiped her eyes and cheeks with the sleeve of her robe and looked at Jordan.

Jordan knew his mouth was hanging open but didn’t seem to be able to control it.

He finally found the muscles to form words. “I’ve gone insane.”

Drussy sniffed a bit more and sat on the edge of a chair. “What?”

“I’ve gone completely mad. You’ve driven me quite insane. I’ve been in love with you for so long that I’m imagining things. I bet you aren’t even here. I’m imagining you’re here, aren’t I? Of course, look at you! Wearing black lace underwear and those spiky shoes and those things that hold up your stockings. Saying those things.”

“I don’t understand, Jordan. What did you say?”

“That you aren’t really here.”

“No, before that. You said that you were in love with me. Oh, I see how it is. I’ve gone insane. I’m imagining things. Maybe it’s this whole time-magic screw-up. Once we find Rains it will go away.”

They stared at each other in amazement for a few minutes.

“Crikey,” they both said at the same time.

They went back to staring. Jordan felt a hint of a smile start somewhere in his belly, work his way to his heart and pull at one side of his mouth.

Impossible.

Impossible? Hadn't he just taught the seniors about the difference between improbabilities and impossibilities? After all, this was only very, very unlikely.

“This is very, very unlikely, Drussy. That I'm not dreaming and that you actually came to my room because you want to have sex with me and you find me attractive.”

“Well, that's not quite what I said, Jordy. I think I said that I think you're gorgeous and I ache constantly for you and I can't stand it because it's tearing me up inside. More like that.”

They stared again and Jordan finally closed his eyes to take it in. And at the moment when he was about to chalk the whole business up to insanity again, a voice slid into his brain.

“You'll never have this moment again.”

Jordy recognized the Voice of Andrea when he heard it. And he knew that ninety-nine percent of the time, she was right on the money.

Chapter Four

Art paced on the landing and peeked down the stairs occasionally. He looked out wistfully over Castle Borough, wondering what it was like to live the life of one of his subjects, without the burdens of the crown.

He laughed lightly at himself. *You don't have any burdens, idiot.* In fact, life often got pretty dull at the palace, what with peace and plenty and all that rot. Worst thing going on was the Knights' losing streak.

The king bowed his head slightly as vendors, visitors and employees huffed and puffed their way up the Thousand Stairs. A few gave him a nasty glance and one actually asked him when he intended to install a lift.

"They've one over in Saint Crispins, you know? Only a few people fall out of the cart each month."

"Do you know who you address, lad?" Art looked as fierce as possible.

"I hope you fall off the cliff one day, Arty, honestly." His little brother wiped the sweat from his brow and resumed his climb.

The lunch hour rush thinned out and Art was left alone to wrestle with his emotions.

Fear. Excitement. Anxiety. Excitement. Fear.

His first blind date.

On the spur of the moment, he'd decided to meet her halfway, this Tessa Rains. Because there was no doubt Trevor had been talking about his sister, especially given the look on Morgan's face.

Art knew she was a witch, both literally and figuratively. Her reputation for bewitching men, as well as for chewing them up and spitting them out, was legendary.

At least that was the rumor in Saint Crispins, where she'd lived for several years. She'd been around the block. An unlikely candidate for queen.

Art wondered why he'd agreed to meet her. Curiosity? No, it had been that voice, poking and prodding around in his head, telling him it was the right thing to do. Didn't his mother call that the Voice of Andrea? She was reputed to live in the Upper Territory somewhere, watching out for clueless kings and confused wizards. Andrea was even known to help out a commoner now and then.

"Damn!"

The curse startled Art out of his musings and he looked up from the marble bench where he was sprawled out.

"Stupid stairs! Cheap stockings—my toe's gone right through. I mean, an elevator, an escalator even, although I'm not sure escalators can be that big. They have a bloody chair lift over in Saint Crispins, why not one of those?"

Tessa sat on the bench next to Art and pulled off her high-heeled boots. To his utter amazement and appreciation, she pushed her skirt up to mid-thigh and began unsnapping her stocking-holder-up thingys and rolling her stockings down off her long elegant legs.

She snickered a bit when she looked up and saw his expression.

"What's wrong, big boy, never seen stockings before?" Tessa patted his cheek and Art felt himself flush furiously.

Say something, idiot. Anything at all.

Tessa leaned back and gazed out at the scenery. "Mmm. It is kind of pretty here. Think I came up on a school trip once. Can't quite remember though, was probably making out with some boy," she snorted.

Art could barely pull his eyes away from her legs to look at her huge hazel eyes, burgundy-painted lips, lustrous chestnut hair, see-through black mesh shirt not at all hiding a black lace bra and hand-sized perky breasts.

Tessa stretched out a bit and propped her feet on Art's lap. "If magic were working properly, I wouldn't have these aching feet. Would've flown. How about a foot rub? You look like you have pretty strong hands. Hmm, you look pretty strong all over, in fact." She grinned and Art's heart slammed against his chest. He tentatively grabbed one foot and started massaging it.

"Harder, no harder. Please, I have to have it harder. Oh, baby, yes, that's it."

Art imagined a number of scenarios as he rubbed Tessa's feet and stared at her legs. All of them involved her naked body and scented oils.

Tell her. Tell her now that you're the king, this is beneath you.

"What's your business at the palace, Ms....?"

"Rains. Tessa Rains. And before you ask, yes, the Tessa, sorceress of Saint Crispins, man-eater, dark witch, yada, yada, yada..."

Art wanted, needed desperately to run his hand up Tessa Rains' legs, rub her thighs and keep moving until he could die a happy king. He knew his erection was pushing against her calves and the woman had to feel it. *Why, you actually want her to feel it, don't you, slimebag?*

"This had better be some damned good coffee, that's all I can say," she sighed, pulling her legs away and sitting up.

"Coffee?"

"Yes, I'm invited for coffee, at least I thought so. My brother says that Morgan Daemoniani makes the best coffee in Castle Borough, but I suppose there's pretty good coffee at the palace?"

"Hmm, I suppose so." Tell her.

"Well, why the hell wouldn't you know? Don't drink coffee?" She tapped her foot a little impatiently and sat back down on the bench, very close to Art. Art felt himself begin to fall into her hazel eyes and the scent of vanilla wafted through his body and he felt faint as she leaned in, only a few inches from his face.

"Listen, big boy, you're awfully cute. I'm a sucker for big blue eyes and yours are very, very pretty. And that hair, do you know how many orts women spend to get their hair to curl like that? Makes you look kinda like an angel or something. I imagine you've the body to go with that face?" Art gasped as she ran her hand under his shirt and let it wander across his belly and chest. "Mmm, verra nice."

"Crikey, Tessa."

"You really should loosen up a little. Now how about if you carry my boots up the rest of the bloody stairs for me?"

"Sure." Art took in a deep breath. "But there's something you should know first."

"Well, Sire, with men, there usually is."

"Sire? Did you call me Sire?"

"Did I get it wrong? You prefer Majesty?"

He felt fear and excitement battle for mastery in his body and in his mind. Excitement started to win out, just by a nose.

"Umm, you can just call me Art."

"All right, Art. But get it straight, next date's not going to be at the palace. I can't afford to go through stockings like this."

Excitement won out.

* * * * *

Morgan walked the few miles to Trevor's house in breathless anxiety. Only a day had passed, but it seemed like an eternity since they agreed to begin their journey at dusk.

"You can do this, Morgan." She encouraged herself several times during the hike. "He's just a man. Just like any other man. Just a lot better-looking. And built. And my stars, his package... But he's just another man. Well, he's a wizard. And there's that kiss. And that smile. And the way he smells."

You're doomed. She knocked lightly at the door and Gideon scrambled out.

"Hi, Morgan. Got any candy?"

"As a matter of fact, I do." Morgan was quite pleased with herself for remembering to bring a sucker for the lizard.

"Yippee!" Gideon grabbed the huge striped sucker and unwrapped it quickly. "Hey, Morgan," Gideon mumbled as he licked, "has King Art asked for me? Have you heard from him?"

"Oh, I spoke with him today," she lied. "Um, yes, sure, in fact I'm positive he asked how his friend the dragon is."

Gideon disappeared into Trevor's house and Morgan could hear his shouts of glee from behind the door.

Morgan's heart caught in her throat when Trevor unlatched the door. He seemed taller, larger than life. Morgan opened her mouth to speak and gasped when he pulled her inside and pushed her against the door.

"Gideon. Leave." Trevor spat out the words and Gideon giggled and scrambled through the pet door, only to return to retrieve his sucker and leave again.

"Trevor, what...I don't understand? I thought we were leaving for the Upper Territory..."

"You talk too much, Morgan." Trevor pulled her in close and brought his lips to within inches of hers. "And you're late."

"I needed to wrap up some things at home and..."

"I don't like to be kept waiting. Is that understood?" Trevor arched a brow and Morgan nodded uncertainly. Her head was swimming and her heart pounded in her chest.

"You're behaving oddly, Trevor. Don't order me around. I took a lot of it with Braxton and I won't..." She felt her knees begin to give out as he brought his lips against her neck, nibbling and licking his way to her ear.

He leaned in and his hot breath set her skin on fire. "Morgan, stop it."

She tried to wiggle away from him but he clasped her hands and pinned them to the door.

"You're hurting me." Her voice rang false in her own ears. Trevor laughed darkly.

"Did you get that out of a book?" Trevor released her hands and pulled open her blouse, sending buttons flying across the living room. Morgan gasped and pushed at his chest. He laughed harder. "I'm supposed to believe this damsel in distress act?" He pulled open the lacings on her bustier and exposed her breasts.

"Trevor... I can't."

"What can't you do?" He rubbed his palm across her breast and Morgan clutched at his shoulders to stop from falling. Trevor brought his mouth down on her nipple and suckled hard and long until Morgan could no longer hear her own cries.

"That's how you'll suck me, Morgan. Understand?"

"I can't..."

Trevor pinched her nipple so hard it hurt and bit at her lip to shut her up.

"What can't you do?" he mumbled against her mouth. His lips were hot and sweet and syrupy and spicy and Morgan groaned his name as he pulled on her lips with his. Finally he plunged his tongue deep into her mouth and her arms fell limp at her sides.

Doomed. A tear rolled down her cheek as her heart broke, knowing she had lost a battle that had barely gotten started.

Trevor didn't ask why she cried. He licked the tear from her cheek and lavished her face, cheeks, forehead and eyelids with quick hot kisses. He picked her up and carried her to the bedroom, dumping her on the bed unceremoniously.

Morgan found the energy to lodge one last futile protest. "You're a bit old-fashioned in your approach, aren't you, Wizard? Why not hit me over the head and drag me by my hair?"

Trevor snickered. "That's the best insult you have, Witch? Take off your clothes." There was no mistaking the threat in his voice. Morgan froze, unable to believe how she was responding to his harshness. She ached and throbbed and her nipples felt as if they were on fire.

Trevor turned away and pulled the heavy drapes closed, leaving them in near darkness. Morgan heard a flare of a match and then saw shadows dance across Trevor's face as he lit a candle and then another and then a dozen, until the room shimmered and flickered.

The romantic touch surprised Morgan and she was ready to tease Trevor about it, but stopped on a gasp as he stripped off all of his clothes and stood before her.

Impossible. For a man to look like that. To want her, if only for a night.

Impossible? Well, improbable, certainly.

"I think I'm asleep. I've had this dream before, many times. You lean in to kiss me and then I wake up. And you smelled like you do now. Apples and patchouli."

Trevor smiled and ran his fingers through his hair, completely at ease with his body and the moment.

"That was me, Witch. You're not asleep. Now take off your damned clothes."

Morgan felt a smile creep to her mouth from someplace deep inside. A hidden place, where it was fine to want a man to give you orders, if only for one night. A place where the pain of the past and worries about the future didn't exist. A place that had hope. Hope that this man might actually want her, that she might be good enough.

* * * * *

Trevor saw it. The moment she let go, the moment she allowed herself to want him. It cut through his heart like a knife.

Why does it hurt? He tried to shake off the pain, not understanding how seeing a beautiful half-naked woman in his bed could evoke this feeling. Women had wanted

him before, wanted him desperately. And he had certainly obliged them. Morgan was just another such woman, only...

Only what, Trevor? It's simply that you've thought of this for so long. For half your life. Of course it feels different.

Trevor worked to keep his expression neutral as Morgan pulled off her dress, her bustier and finally, her little lace underwear. Lust pounded through him when he saw her mound of fuzzy golden curls. Morgan looked uncertain as she lay, fully exposed, waiting for him.

Go to her. She's yours. At least until you make her despise you.

Trevor squeezed his eyes tightly as thirteen years of anger, hurt and longing washed across him. Part of him wanted to throttle her, tell her how she wounded him, turned him harsh. And part of him wanted to get onto his knees and beg her to tell him that he was the only one.

"I've thought of this before, you know, Morgan." I've thought of it every day.

Trevor moved to her side and sat on the bed, without touching her.

"It's not right, Trevor. It's not right that you turned a childhood crush into something dark. Why didn't you move on? It's...unnatural."

Trevor eyed Morgan carefully, shocked that she understood so clearly, somehow knew his heart. He rubbed one finger against her jaw and watched as the candlelight danced along her gorgeous body.

"I'm a little unnatural, I suppose." He grimaced and ran his thumb along her bottom lip. "The things I want are unnatural."

"What do you want? What have you pictured, Wizard?" Trevor looked into her deep blue eyes and considered her question carefully. He ran his gaze down the length of her body and watched her stomach and breasts rise and fall with her fast breathing. *I've only wanted you to want me.* "You talk too much, Morgan."

"Tell me."

He snickered. "All this chatter has ruined my mood. Get dressed, go home." Trevor stood and moved slowly toward his clothes. And waited.

"Please, I want you. I've never felt like this in my life. I'm begging you."

At last. All he had wanted for years—that plea, from this woman. Her voice came from far away, as if in a dream. This was the moment when he had planned to refuse her. He had imagined it so many times, her pleading, his refusal.

Trevor was at her side in an instant, crawling onto the bed, grasping her head with both hands and kissing her slowly, trying to capture her very breath, her very soul. He stretched out fully and pressed as much of his body against her as he could, absorbing her warmth and the trifling bit of magic left in her. He groaned as Morgan shifted to brush his cock with her mound. A thrill rolled through his every cell and he bit back a moan, then let it escape as he began to lose control.

Trevor ran his hand along the side of Morgan's soft breast and down her waist to her hip, feeling her shiver. She imitated his caress and he moaned again, but never let his lips move away from hers. They stared into each other's eyes from inches away, exchanging labored breaths as Trevor explored her with one hand and she matched each touch with her own. Trevor licked at Morgan's lips and she flicked her tongue against his until the heat inside him was unbearable. His heart and cock ached in equal measure and the few inches between them began to shimmer with magic. And still he held back. Until her hand brushed down his stomach and tentatively probed the head of his cock.

Trevor cried out in ecstasy as Morgan began a slow circle of her thumb over the swollen head, spreading the drop of liquid that had escaped. He shuddered, bit at her lip and moaned.

Trevor opened his eyes and held her gaze again, keeping his lips against hers. Morgan ran her hand down his hard shaft and began a slow, steady rhythm. Trevor had never felt the likes of it. The tiny glimmers of magic grew steadily and began a quick path through his veins until his body was on fire.

"I'm dying." He whispered into Morgan's mouth and she captured his words with a wet kiss.

Morgan laughed lightly. "Not yet. But you will, Trevor."

He groaned as she gave him a peck on the lips and slid her body down along his, moving her mouth to his nipples, licking and sucking her way to his navel, running her tongue along the soft black hairs until she crouched on all fours, hovered over him.

"God help me," she sighed in pleasure as she held his huge shaft in her hand and brought her lips onto the head. She wrapped her lips around him and sucked and pressed and circled as she continued her long, steady strokes along the length.

Trevor held onto the headboard of the bed and arched up to meet her mouth, the world falling away in shimmering lights and floating globes of magic. With every ounce of self-control he had left, he pushed Morgan away and pulled her up into his embrace. Trevor rolled her onto her back and pushed her legs apart quickly.

She cried out when he plunged into her wet folds. Trevor thought for a moment he had hurt her, but her cry turned to a guttural purr as he slowly pulled back and pressed the tip against her.

"Trevor. Please don't stop. I'll die."

"Yes, but not yet." He smiled and pushed back in slowly, crying himself as he felt her warm velvet walls squeeze tightly to capture him. He tortured them both, pressing lightly, then firmly, then pulling out completely, then pushing in hard. They panted and cried together, kissing and arching.

It was the most agonizingly sweet experience of his life. Everything about her was burned into his memory, his soul. The feel of her, the smell of her, her kisses, her cries, the feel of her hands on his back. Hot and sweet and strong. Creamy white skin shimmering with light magic and sweet music. The pressure built in his heart and his cock until there was no pretending that he could go on and he let himself fall, backward, off a cliff, into oblivion. And as he thought he would hit the ground, he heard Morgan cry his name.

And then she whispered, ever so softly, "I love you, Wizard."

They lay together for an hour, not speaking, barely moving, except when he would caress her hair or run a finger along her arm.

This isn't how it was supposed to be. She should be crying, hating me, ranting at me.

Morgan finally propped herself up on one hand and brushed an errant strand of hair out of his eyes. She smiled lightly.

"Is that what you intended, Wizard?"

"No. I thought we would fuck all night, in every way imaginable." *Not make love. Not fall in love.*

"Oh." He heard the crushing disappointment in her voice. The time had come for his final victory. Trevor sighed.

Let her believe she hadn't been enough. And win.

Or tell her that she had etched her name on his soul for all eternity. And lose.

Morgan rolled away from him and sat up on the far side of the bed. She clutched at her dress and pulled it over her head. Trevor heard her light curses as she tried to fasten the layers without buttons.

She stood and he looked at her, grasping the torn dress across her chest with one hand. Morgan cried silently and Trevor felt her sobs in his stomach, crawling up to grab his heart. She turned to him and spoke quietly.

"I'll leave now, Wizard. Wizard of Time, is it? I heard a voice call out your name. You can go to the High Council without me. Maybe you can let go of the past now. It's a terrible feeling to be in love with someone who doesn't want you. I'm sorry if I hurt you when we were young."

"No, Morgan, it's not like that."

"It's just like that. Goodbye, Trevor. I hope I never lay eyes on you again."

She swept out of the room and he heard the cottage door slam a few moments later.

“Congratulations, Trevor, you did it,” he mumbled as he grabbed his clothes. “You hurt the most wonderful woman in the world and you did it on purpose. Your mother would be so very proud.”

And you didn't even get a chance to pleasure her, to make her see how wonderful you can be. To show her you're good enough.

Gideon peeked around the door. “Trev?”

“Hmm?”

“What happened? She was crying. And it happened again.”

Trevor looked at Gideon distractedly.

“I said, it happened again. The spell. While the two of you were going at it.”

“Huh. Well, that's just a coincidence, Gid. Don't worry, I'm going to the High Council and we'll get this straightened out. I'll get you your wings yet.” He rubbed Gideon's head and then headed out the door.

“Coincidence, my ass,” Gideon muttered.

Chapter Five

Jordan opened his eyes after several minutes of absolute silence. “Drussy, I have a few questions. If any of them offend you, please accept my apologies.”

“Okay,” she muttered uncertainly, heart still pounding furiously in her chest. She didn’t know whether to cry or laugh or throw herself onto him.

“Firstly, I’m a little hungry. How would you feel about a pizza?”

“Sorry, what did you say? Pizza?”

“Mmm, pizza. It helps me think. And my stomach is growling, has been since your office, when you started messing with my brain.”

“Okay. Sure, pizza.”

“Then, how would you feel about hanging around a bit afterwards, maybe watching a movie? I mean, here, with me.” Jordan’s voice trailed off and Druscilla panicked, wondering if he was losing his nerve. *Please don’t undo this. I’m begging you.*

“That would be good. Like a date, kind of?”

Jordan looked up sharply. Druscilla caught her breath at the look on his face. Lust. Longing. Intense need. His blue eyes smoked with intensity and she thought she saw the smallest glimmer of magic on his skin. Perspiration broke out on his forehead and he pulled off his T-shirt, wiped his face with it and cast it over his shoulder. Druscilla couldn’t stop herself from staring. Dreamy. What a stupid word. *But it’s true, he’s dreamy.* Wrestling—it must be the wrestling, she thought. Or maybe the baseball, or the weightlifting. And he coached hockey, didn’t he? So that would explain the legs and the arms and the chest and... Druscilla realized he had caught her lusting. He was smiling. “Yes, like a date. Drussy, you know you’re staring at my body.”

"Sorry." She looked at the bookshelf and ran her hand along some of the leather spines, not able to read a word, her head swimming.

"So, pizza and a date, right? And then, well..."

"Go to him." The voice pounded through her head and she knew it was Andrea. Druscilla took in a deep breath and stood. She walked to the couch and Jordan looked up at her, then ran his eyes up and down the length of her body.

"Jordan, the pizza is going to have to wait."

And finally, for the first time in all the time she had known him, she saw it. Jordan Schrom grinned from ear to ear. And Druscilla knew that life was going to be just fine.

He stood and grabbed her hand and pulled her quickly into the bedroom. Jordan pulled her onto the bed and snapped his fingers. The room went to dusk. Druscilla shook in happiness. In fear. In anticipation. His panting breaths sent chills through her.

"Is this real, Jordy?"

"It had better be. Because this is how I want to spend every minute of the rest of my life."

Jordan snapped his fingers again and Druscilla found herself completely naked, lingerie whisked away into the air, leaving a trail of black mist.

"Your magic is working!"

"Who the fuck cares? Kiss me." Jordan climbed on top of her and kissed her as if his life depended upon it. Drussy cried and he wiped away her tears, kissed her cheeks, went back to her mouth. Jordan slowed time and took them to a sweeping palace of pools and flowers and blowing translucent curtains and silk sheets. They were outside in a warm, gentle breeze and all the world watched from far away as he kissed her over and over, whispering endearments that stunned her.

"I want all of you, Drussy. Every inch of you. Please tell me you want me."

"I didn't know it could be like this, Jordan."

He kissed her neck and she gasped for air, feeling as if her heart would explode. She couldn't stop the tears.

"Tell me something, Drussy. Say anything."

"You're so dreamy. Oh, that sounded so stupid. But you are."

"More. Please." He moved to her breasts and she cried out as his hot tongue circled her nipple. She pulled at his hair and arched toward the sky. His hair fell from its tie and cascaded onto her bare skin. Jordan moved his hand down her belly and moved his fingers through her wet folds, exploring, pinching, rubbing, sliding. He pushed his fingers inside, caressing the velvet softness of her and began circling his thumb on her swollen nub.

"I adore everything about you, Drussy. Say anything to me."

"Can't...talk...love..."

"What? Please, say it." He pulled his hand away and looked deeply into her eyes.

"Oh, please, don't stop," she moaned. "Oh, what the hell. Jordan Schrom, I'm in love with you. I don't remember a time when I wasn't. I love everything about you. And I can't remember now why I never told you."

He pulled back and stared at her, smile completely gone. Druscilla groaned. *Please, no, he has to want me. Andrea told me what to do!* Jordan nodded numbly and continued to stare. He grabbed her hand and kissed it, rubbed the back of it along his cheek.

"Jordan?" Druscilla watched a single tear fall down his cheek. Impossible.

"You'll...you...will you...would you consider..." He shook his head in dismay. Druscilla's heart soared.

"There's one more thing, Jordan. I really wish you'd ask me to marry you. Then life would be perfect."

They both heard her. "Time is precious. Use it wisely."

Jordan smiled and kissed her hand again and then took in a deep breath.

“Love you, Drussy. Let’s celebrate.” The world turned away to leave them in privacy.

Druscilla cried out as Jordan pushed into her suddenly. He moaned and time slowed to a crawl as he thrust into her in a slow, steady pace that drove them both insane. He didn’t waver from the pace, no matter how she tried to pull him in, urge him on. Jordan stared into her eyes, his burning with lust.

“Just like this. No slower, no faster. This is mine.”

Druscilla thought she would go insane, die of need. The pressure built in every cell and all of her clutched at his hard shaft, craving release. It built and built until she felt him throb and she knew that he would lose control. The fire that built between them set the sky ablaze with orange and red and purple. And when they cried out together, a huge chime sounded from very far away. And time stopped, for just a moment.

Jordan pulled Druscilla onto his chest and kissed her forehead. And then she rubbed her hand along his heart and squealed.

“What’s wrong?”

“Look!” She tapped on his chest and he squinted down. Over his heart shone a deep purple *fleur-de-lis*. “What does it mean? Oh, Jordan, maybe you’re the Wizard of Time.”

“Crikey.”

* * * * *

“This is really odd, Tessa. Not your typical first date.” King Art squirmed a bit, testing the ropes that bound him to the royal bedposts. *Well, I could break free if I wanted to. Of course I will eventually...just a trifle interested in what she’ll do. Then I’ll stop this nonsense.*

“It’s my typical first date, Sire.” Tessa snorted and stripped off her skirt and blouse. She had donned her boots again and was in the process of emptying the contents of a

huge handbag onto the bed next to his legs. Tessa pulled several interesting-looking accoutrements from the pile.

Art stared at her body, her dark nipples peeking through her gauze black bra, her slender hips, the dark tiny patch of hair clearly visible through transparent panties. He dragged his gaze away to examine the tools she spread out.

“What the hell are those?” Art sighed, knowing that no matter how hard he tried to feign disinterest, his huge erection betrayed him. Tessa seemed to enjoy the fact immensely, oohing and aahing several times at the sight of him. Art had to admit, her compliments were pleasant—“You’re the best-looking son of a bitch I’ve ever seen”, and “I want that cock as my personal plaything” and “Where have you been all my life, big boy?” were all things he hadn’t heard much of, what with being king and all. She had even occasionally touched herself in ways that nearly made him lose it completely, evidently simply to keep his interest. It had.

This is rather new and unexpected. I’m pretty sure I like it.

“I’m not sure what your brother would say about this, Tessa. I don’t think this is what he had in mind.”

“I’m fairly certain it’s exactly what he had in mind, Sire. Well, maybe not the details, I don’t share everything with him. But he did tell me in no uncertain terms to have coffee with you and then make sure you had a really good time. And that it would be good if you would fall for me. Trevor’s usually fairly perceptive about these things. He’s a powerful wizard, you know.”

“Hmm.” Art thought he might have a word with Trevor after this was over. Perhaps knighthood was in order, he mused. He looked at the gorgeous witch as she studied her tools seriously, stopping now and again to smile at him or plant an erotic kiss on his lips or chest or stomach.

When had a date for coffee turned into the Naughty Channel? Things had gone fairly normally for a while. A lovely long chat at a table set for two on an open-air landing with a romantic view of the entire kingdom. Tessa had gone on about her entire

life, her travels, her loves and losses, her family. Art had listened in rapt lustful attention, simply nodding or grunting in agreement now and then. He hadn't been able to pull himself away from those remarkable hazel eyes, which shone like jewels and sparkled when she laughed. Coffee had turned into dinner and the evening wore on magically.

That's right. It was the kiss. He had lost track of everything after that kiss. Tessa had stopped talking suddenly and pulled her chair close to his.

"You have the most beautiful hair, Sire. I really like those dimples. Gives you a kind of sexy angelic look." Her voice was slow and dark and like something from the Southern Territory. It went right to his crotch.

"Not quite sure I understand how an angel..." Art stopped cold when she threw her long hair over her shoulder and leaned in so her cleavage was a few inches away from his chin, her lips an inch away from his. She rubbed her thumb along his bottom lip and sighed.

"I wish you'd let me show you what a sexy angel you are." And she kissed him in a way that he had only seen on the Naughty Channel. Most of the kiss seemed to happen outside their mouths, he remembered in wonder. And about fifteen minutes later, he found himself spread-eagle on his own royal bedspread.

"All right, Art, let's get down to business. How do you like it?" Tessa ran her fingertips lightly along his hardened shaft and he hissed and squirmed.

"Well, that's a good start."

Tessa threw her head back and laughed. She stood and slowly pulled off her bra and then slid her panties down her long legs, stepping out of them in her high-heeled boots.

"Why do I get the impression you'd prefer to have your hands free?"

"No, I'm fine like this. At your mercy and whatnot, right? Is there some specific way I should act? Am I supposed to be terrified of you or something? Call you Mistress?"

"If you like." She smiled. "But this is for you, not for me."

"Oh, really? Well, then, why don't you get your damned hand back on my cock and give it a good pull, Mistress. Because I'm going to die if you don't touch me. And that wouldn't be good for the kingdom. No heir and such."

He smiled and saw the surprise on her face.

"Hmm. Trevor told you I'm an imbecile, didn't he? Oh. My. Stars." Art writhed and threw his head back as Tessa began magic caresses that hardened him like never before, took him to the brink very quickly. "You're very good at that."

"Mistress."

"Yes, sorry, Mistress. Keep it up, just like that. Oh." He cried out as she rubbed her palm over the wet head of his shaft. "Please, I mean."

"Damn, Sire. You have no interest in our game, do you?"

"I just want those hands on me. And that mouth. I want to touch those tits and that pussy. Is that clear enough?" He heard the command in his own voice and mentally shrugged. Well, it was a bit hard to change after a near lifetime of giving orders. This just wasn't going to fly. He pulled at his restraints, shattering the bedposts, then leaned down and untied his feet. Art looked at Tessa, who seemed rather shocked and somewhat ill at ease. Even frightened.

Why, she doesn't want anyone else to have control. Why is that?

"Now back to what you were doing." He growled and squeezed his eyes shut as she resumed her caresses. Art moaned in ecstasy. Hadn't magic disappeared? Surely this woman was magic.

"Now your mouth," he growled. She looked up quickly, eyes wide and uncertain.

"That was an order, young lady. Do you forget whose cock you fondle?" He laughed at his own joke and then cried out when she obliged, taking his head into her full lips and sucking like her very life depended upon it.

She was magic. Because he wasn't having any trouble in the sack at all, no sign of trouble, no doubt about what he wanted. Let her come after the throne, he thought.

Who cares? Let her produce an heir and present her case. Let her claim to be the one. She's just a witch, after all. Who's been around the block a few too many times. Who was absolutely perfect in every possible way.

A slow smile crept to his face. "Enough!" he hissed.

"Not good? Sire?" The poor woman looked so uncertain, so vulnerable, her sex toys fallen onto the floor, her siren boots falling off her legs, her cheeks flushed from her efforts.

Art didn't answer her, but rolled her onto her back and took her, body, mind and spirit. He started with her mouth, plundering like a starving animal let out of its cage. He licked her neck, pulled at her nipples and kneaded her breasts until her screams filled the bedroom, the wing, the entire castle.

Art slid her down to the edge of the bed and knelt before her. "This is one of the very few times I'll ever kneel. Don't forget it."

* * * * *

Tessa's world crumbled. With every stroke of his hot tongue, pluck of his warm full lips, push of his fingers, she unfolded, layers of tension and worry and planning falling away. The man was a god, she thought. A fucking god. A king, an angel. Why hadn't Trevor warned her that this man was no one's fool? Trevor had tricked her and on purpose! She propped herself on her elbows to be able to watch as Art looked into her eyes but kept his tongue moving, sliding, up and down and back and forth, harshly holding her thighs still.

Art stopped for a moment and smiled at her darkly. His lips were shiny from the sweet juices running from her. "I like this, Tessa. I like it very, very much." He resumed his torture and captured her nub in his lips, sucking and rubbing his tongue fiercely

across until Tessa was sure her body would go up in flames. Tessa cried and writhed and moaned as he went at her.

“Fuck me, Sire, I’m begging you!” She shocked herself with the plea. Her womb ached for him.

“That would be my great pleasure, darling.” Art pulled her farther down the bed and stood up. He lifted her ass into the air with one hand as he ran his other along the length of his cock. Tessa moaned at the coming storm, knowing it would be the ride of her life. It was.

The king pounded into her like a hammer, holding onto her ass to keep her at the perfect angle. She gasped when she felt him slide a finger in her ass as he kept his pounding rhythm into her pussy. He filled her completely and a wave started to build that she was sure would drown her. Sweat trickled down his chest and he closed his eyes and called her name with each thrust. It went on forever. Tessa exploded and fire swept up her body, lashing at her in wave after wave of pleasure. And still it went on.

Barely able to think or see, Tessa sighed when he turned her onto all fours and pushed into her again. The juices poured from her and she heard his panting and moaning grow to a frenzy. He slapped her ass and she gasped in shock at the sting and the pleasure it evoked. Art softened the blows with a caress and then grabbed her hips very tightly. Tessa had the fleeting thought that she would bear wonderful fingertip bruises for a few days from his grasp. His pounding intensified. Art leaned in and kissed her neck and whispered into her ear. “Tell me you like it like this, Mistress. Tell me who’s in charge now.”

“Sire!” She screamed out as he pushed even deeper and harder and she felt him stiffen and groan for all the world to hear. Her pussy clenched down on his throbbing cock and they rocked together into the darkness, where they died little private deaths. Finally, they fell onto one another in sweaty bliss.

Art pulled her into his arms, rocking her gently as she cooed and sighed. He sighed as well.

"I'd like to see you again, Tessa, if you'd be interested in dating?" His voice was firm and polite. Tessa propped herself up and looked into his impossibly blue eyes. She felt ache in her heart and wondered uncomfortably what the feeling was.

"Dating, Sire?"

"I think you'd better call me Art, at least when we're alone." He smiled and the ache grew more urgent and troubling.

"All right."

"How about dinner tomorrow night? Maybe have a drink in town? Haven't been out much recently."

"Okay."

"Good, that's settled then. Let's get some sleep." And to Tessa's amazement, the king pulled her tightly into his arms and closed his eyes. Within moments, he was sound asleep. She stared at the golden ceiling for hours, wondering how this angelic-looking man had turned her life upside down in the space of an hour. All the years of honing her sexual skills cast aside with an order from the king.

Art, he wants to be called. I'm dating the king. And I'm pretty sure I like it a lot.

Tessa finally fell asleep when the first glimmer of daylight crept into the room and exhaustion won out over confusion.

Chapter Six

"I'm not going in there." Gideon looked at Trevor nervously and shook his head with conviction.

Trevor looked up at the imposing gray monstrosity that had served as the High Council's meeting lodge for thousands of years. Gargoyles frolicked about on the windowsills and a few fairies waved from a high parapet. Trevor waved back uncertainly, a little uneasy around fairies. They always seemed to be up to something.

"We have to go in there, idiot."

"Look at the sign! 'Leave your dragons at the door.' They might fry me!"

"Oh," Trevor sighed. "Look, Gid, the High Council understands the seriousness of this situation and I'm sure they'll make allowances in this case. After all, you're my partner."

"Hmm. I thought Morgan was your partner." Gideon looked up slyly.

"Do not start that again. It's over."

"Well, I liked her very much. She's pretty and she gives me candy. And I think you're an ass for hurting her." Gideon sniffed and turned away.

"She hurt me too, you know!"

"Crikey, Trevor, that was thirteen years ago! I was two years old! You're a grown man! What the hell is wrong with you? Let it go." Gideon hissed in frustration and Trevor backed up a step, never having heard such intensity from the lizard, even when he was a human.

I can't let go. It hurts worse than ever. She's all I think about. That night. I had her in my arms. I'm sick, I must be. Mentally deranged. Some kind of obsessive disorder.

“You, Wizard, get your ass in here. Now!” A tall, gorgeous, middle-aged redhead stood at the door of the lodge and scowled at Trevor. He recognized her voice immediately and nodded.

“Yes, Andrea.”

“And bring your darling dragon with you. But leave the sword and the attitude outside, please.”

Trevor nodded again and placed his short sword in the pile of various weapons near the door. Andrea handed him a sword-check ticket and motioned him inside.

The feel of magic, the smell of patchouli and incense, the glimmer of a thousand candles, pillars and statues and glowing colorful orbs and crystals everywhere—all of it assaulted Trevor at once and he let out an involuntary gasp. Gideon scurried up his leg and settled in the crook of his arm, shaking.

“Crikey.”

Trevor nodded in agreement. They were an imposing bunch. Ten men and two women, of varying ages. And even though magic was sick, they were awe-inspiring, glowing, glowering. The building pulsed with the energy they created together. What were they like when magic and time were well?

Trevor fell to one knee. Andrea pulled him up impatiently and pushed him in front of the raised dais where the council sat, all members staring at him icily, except for one.

“Hey, Trev.” Jordan Schrom smiled warmly.

“Hey, Jordy. I mean Professor Schrom. I didn’t know you had a council seat now?”

“First day. Drussy, too.”

“Oh, hello, Headmistress. You’re looking well.” He looked at Jordy and Drussy and saw a quick flash of naked heat flickering between them. So, it was true after all—the headmistress and Professor Schrom.

“And if Jordy doesn’t mind me saying so, you’re looking hot as usual, Trevor.” Drussy fluffed up her hair a bit and adjusted her blouse. She turned to Jordan and winked. He growled and placed a quick kiss on her cheek.

Andrea made a *tsking* noise at the pair. She turned to Trevor and indicated a low chair in front of the assembly, then took her position on the dais. *Well*, Trevor thought, *what the hell did I do?*

“What the hell did I do?” he ventured. The Council members eyed one another seriously and the Grandmaster coughed subtly. His white beard quivered as he spoke and rubbed his rheumy gray eyes.

“Trevor Rains, my name is Frank.” His voice crackled.

“Yes, Grandmaster Frank, I know.”

“Right, right, good then. Andrea tells me we have some unfinished business before I turn the floor over to the others.” Frank looked intensely at Gideon, who began crying.

The old man pointed a crooked finger accusingly. “Explain that.”

“Huh? Gideon, you mean? He’s my dragon.”

“He was your finest pupil at the middle school. Don’t remember anything in the student teachers’ manual about turning the pupils into lizards. Is there anything like that in the manual, council?”

The group replied in unison, “No, Grandmaster Frank.”

Trevor hugged Gideon closely. He spoke in a low voice and the entire Council leaned in to hear him.

“Gideon was a brilliant student, a genius really. And a bit hyperactive. After his parents died when the ship *At-or...*” Trevor broke off to pet Gideon, who turned his face into the wizard’s cloak to avoid the stares of the Council. “Shortly after they died, I found him in the laboratory one night, looking up spells for self-murder.”

The Council gasped in unison and leaned in farther.

"I talked to him for hours, but nothing would change his mind. All he wanted was to be a dragon. The wish dominated his entire life and without the powers to change himself, he felt life wasn't worth living. Gideon promised his parents that he wouldn't let anyone change him...but then, of course, after they died..."

Gideon shook with sobs.

"Well, he promised not to try to hurt himself if I changed him. I needed a dragon anyway, what with leaving the Academy, trying to set up shop myself. And I was going to change him, except something went wrong."

Grandmaster Frank pulled at his beard. "I've heard you're about as powerful as they come, Rains. What the hell went wrong? It's a simple enough spell."

"I'm not sure. I was telling him what life was like for me at his age, how a girl had broken my heart, my father had died suddenly and I ran off to the Academy...you know, trying to make him feel better. In any case, I was preparing for the transformation and this is as far as it got." Trevor nodded toward Gideon. "I did everything I could to fix it, but then had to rush off to Castle Borough...my mother was dying..."

"Yes, yes, I see now." Grandmaster Frank waved him off and turned to Jordan. "It's all part of the same problem, don't you think?"

Jordan nodded. He handed a leather-bound book to the Grandmaster.

"Trevor, this book contains the writings of the great prophet Dostranamus. We believe it foretells our current troubles with time and magic. Magic is working a little better now that Professor Schrom here understands his role."

Trevor looked at Jordy, who shrugged shyly. "Evidently I'm in charge of magic." He lowered his voice. "The Wizard of Magic, or something. But it doesn't work very well without Time moving the right way."

Trevor shook his head in confusion. "The Wizard of Magic? What the hell does that mean, Professor?"

Jordan shrugged. Grandmaster Frank opened the book and ran his finger along one page. Finally, in a croaking voice, he read.

“When the moon is in the Seventh House and Jupiter aligns with Mars —”

“No, Grandmaster.” Andrea hurried over and turned the page for him.

“Oh, quite so. Here it is, ‘and in the seventh hour of the seventh day of the seventh month of the seventh year of the seventh decade of the seventh age’...” Frank broke off and looked up. “That would be about three weeks ago. Blah, blah, blah, yada, yada, yes, okay. ‘The Twelve Essential Wizards will falter. Reason, Peace, Plenty, Sound, Light, Movement, Intuition, Determination, Honor and Humor remain unblemished. The Wizard of Magic and the Wizard of Time falter and all the world falters with them. The beast known as self-doubt devours The Wizard of Magic. The beast known as bitterness devours The Wizard of Time.’” Frank looked up. But it was Andrea who approached him.

Trevor’s skin crawled, for he knew what the Mistress of Intuition was going to say. He was the cause of all of their woes. What had Morgan said? That she heard someone call out his name, call him the Wizard of Time?

“When one wizard finally passes, his powers pass to another, although not through blood. We now understand that since old Woody died, Jordan Schrom controls magic. He seems to have struggled recently with some emotional issues and come to some fairly healthy decisions about his life.” Andrea nodded her head regally in approval. “So magic should be in good shape. It is not, however. Why do you think that is, Mr. Rains?” Andrea pursed her lips and Trevor felt his blood turn to ice water.

“Maybe it’s not me, Mistress. Perhaps it’s Tony over there...or...”

“Tony is the Wizard of Humor, as well you know. I am Intuition. Spencer is Plenty. Need I go on? Perhaps you would like to show the Council your chest, Mr. Rains.”

Trevor looked at Andrea with despair.

“No? Then let me read on.” She grabbed the book from Frank. “Look for the Lily Flower, which marks those destined for great power, for good or ill, those who will

decide the fate of the universe." Andrea pulled aside her collar to reveal the tip of a tattoo on her chest.

"I always thought it was our family crest. I thought Mum was joking when she said I was born with it..." Trevor felt his knees go wobbly. Somehow he was going to destroy the universe. And he was responsible for Gideon being a lizard. That somehow was the worst part, failing Gideon.

"Again, Mr. Rains, I ask you, why have you let the 'beast known as bitterness' poison the Wizard of Time? Have you not listened to me? My voice, through the years, screaming at you to freaking let it go!"

Trevor covered his face with his hands and felt the truth in her words, the bitterness raging through his veins. He had spent his adult life using women, throwing them away, punishing them for not being Morgan. Obsessed with vengeance. Bitter, poisoned, twisted. Pain clenched his gut and he held back tears.

"No, Trevor. Not just the girl. Think. The day you decided to run off, leave your mother. Think, Trevor."

Trevor tried to shut out her words, but Andrea could never be silenced. Ignored, but not silenced. The day came flooding back and he was thirteen again. Furious. Morgan had humiliated him and all he wanted in the whole world was to talk to his father.

No. Da?

"I wanted my father. But he was gone."

Andrea nodded, a gentler look on her face. "Indeed, gone. Gone forever." She walked to Trevor and knelt beside him. "You were grieving, lad. Or at least, you should have been. But instead..."

"I left. My mother and Tessa. And I blamed Morgan for all my pain."

"Sometimes our aim is not true. Unfortunately, for our world, you must be whole. And somehow, in the last month, you have grown in bitterness."

“When I went back to Castle Borough and saw her. It brought it all back. And I...” He pushed his hand through his hair. “I exacted my revenge.”

“But it didn’t help, did it?” Andrea put her hand on Trevor’s shoulder and he felt warmth pulse through his veins. “Come here, Trevor.” She pulled at his arm and he stood.

Andrea leaned in closely and whispered softly into his ear. “Something’s wrong at Castle Borough! The king and Tessa, they’re in danger! And Morgan, she’ll die if I don’t reach her. Even if Time moves forward, Magic is already damaged and the castle will crumble and the river will change course.”

Trevor turned to Andrea in horror. He clutched at her arms and shook his head.

“They will die,” she whispered.

“Die? My sister? The king?”

Morgan? NO! I love her, please don't let this happen. I'll die without her. Oh, God, I've loved her my whole life. Please help me.

“I have to go. I have to go to them. Please, all of you, help me!” He turned to the Council and each looked at him in pity.

Andrea smiled softly. “We cannot help you, Trevor. You are in charge of Time and Magic will not work without you. We are useless without Magic.”

“But I love her!”

“I thought you wanted her to feel pain?”

“Andrea, you can shut the hell up now, I get it, okay?” Trevor ran out the door of the lodge, wondering how he could reach Castle Borough in less than two days’ time. It was too late, he thought. How many would die because of him? *You stupid selfish son of a bitch!*

“Aaargghh.” Gideon dropped onto the stairs of the lodge, writhing in agony. Trevor watched in helpless amazement as the lizard grew in size and changed shape, sprouting wings that grew and turned iridescent, shimmering in the sunshine. Light

suffused the area around Gideon until Trevor couldn't look directly at him without hurting his eyes.

And when Gideon was nearly as huge as the lodge, the light dissipated.

And the world's most beautiful being looked down upon Trevor Rains and smiled, one huge golden tear slipping from his gorgeous luminescent eye.

"Hey, look at me! Yippee!" Gideon grinned and blew a huge curl of fire and smoke from his nostrils. "Cool!"

Trevor smiled at Gideon. "If I could have had one wish before I die, Gid, this would be it."

"Nah. But thanks for saying so. You'd have another wish. The same one you've had since I met you. Still have a chance, Trev."

"It's too late. I can't get there."

Gideon arched a brow and snorted, a bit of fire slipping out and nearly singeing Trevor's hair. "Oops, sorry." He lowered one massive shining blue wing and looked at Trevor.

"I've been waiting a long time for this, Trevor. Climb aboard the Gideon express."

* * * * *

Morgan studied her image again. She had to admit the dress flattered her, a gossamer-thin white sheath, hugging her pale skin. She unbraided her hair and let it flow around her shoulders. Morgan snapped her fingers, finishing her preparations with jewelry and a touch of makeup. Dressed to kill, she thought. Dinner at the palace, the promise of a glamorous evening. Magic was behaving and Morgan wondered for the hundredth time if Trevor had brought about the healing. And for the hundredth time, she pushed the thought away lest it bring on the crushing pain that brought tears to her eyes instantly.

Enough. He doesn't deserve your tears. You'll enjoy this evening if it kills you.

“Living well is the sweetest revenge, living well is the sweetest revenge,” she repeated aloud. A light tap on the door made her heart jump.

But it was only Gordon Smatherwood. *How long will you wait for him to come to you?*

“Hey, Gordy.” Morgan noticed the bulky young man eyeing her body. He looked up sheepishly.

“How’d the game go?” Morgan smiled and Gordon relaxed a hair. His uniform was filthy, a sure sign he had slid into one of his signature infield saves.

“The Knights won, Morgan. I...I’ve never played better. I’m sorry, I owe you an apology. Guess your potion’s working again.”

“That’s okay, don’t worry about it. Things were really messed up there for a while. I’m glad you won. Goodnight, Gordon.” Morgan closed the door before he could get another word out. In truth, the tears were threatening to fall again and she couldn’t bear anyone seeing her in this state.

Morgan took a deep breath, threw her cloak over her arm in case the lovely spring evening turned chilly and opened the door.

“You’re all right,” Trevor whispered.

Morgan felt her blood turn cold at the sight of him. He ran his gaze down her body and then looked into her eyes.

Morgan heard his thought drift onto the breeze. He thought she was beautiful. Stunning was the word he used. She snorted a bit at the irony. Her powers were back, Trevor thought she was stunning and her heart was in a million pieces.

“Go away, Trevor. Have the decency to leave me alone. You practically stalked me when we were kids. Do the right thing now.”

Oh, Trevor, hold me, kiss me, don’t leave, I’m begging you.

“I can’t go away. I need you.”

Morgan didn’t answer, terrified that the hope trickling into her brain would be crushed instantly. It was.

“The castle, Art, is in mortal danger.” Trevor ran his hand through his hair in despair. “It’s my fault. I need your help, Morgan, your powers.”

“Magic is working, Trevor. No one is in danger. What are you talking about?”

“No, the damage is done, the castle will crumble and the river will change course and all of Castle Borough is in danger. And Tessa is missing!”

“She’s with Art. Has been for the last four days.”

Morgan managed a brief smile. “They’re kind of cute together, strolling through town, tavern-hopping, sneaking kisses at ball games when they think no one is looking. Your plan worked.”

“Crikey. It did?”

Morgan nodded. “Now calm down, Trevor, I assure you, magic is fine. There’s no damage to the castle’s foundations, the Squoog is flowing the same way it has for years. Hey, the Knights won today’s game. You’ve been misinformed.”

“But Andrea’s never wrong. She said that you were in danger, that you would die. I...I thought you might die. And Tessa and Art.”

“Oh, I’ve known Andrea to lie. Why, she once told me to try going red with some blonde highlights and let me tell you that was one of the worst mistakes I’ve ever made. I looked like a pink skunk for weeks.”

“Why would she lie to me? Scare me like that?” Trevor looked at Morgan and sighed. “Oh. I see.”

Morgan shrugged and pulled the door closed behind her. Out of the corner of her eye she saw Trevor reach out to grab her arm, but she ignored the gesture. And then she stopped cold on the path. He was huge and blue and for a moment blended into misty hovering over the field near her house. Then he moved slightly and the setting sun set his scales shimmering. He smiled and blew a little puff of fire.

Morgan laughed and clapped and ran to Gideon. She looked up at the beast and then fell to one knee and bowed her head. "Great one, I am your servant. Please do not harm me."

Gideon giggled a bit. "Morgan, it's me! Gideon!"

"Yes, I know. I'm so happy, Gideon, I can't tell you how happy I am for you." Morgan's tears flowed freely and she rubbed Gideon's wing tip.

"Thanks! Got any candy?"

Morgan laughed. "Sure!" She snapped her fingers and produced an enormous mound of candy. Gideon sighed in satisfaction and began to sort through the pile with his snout.

Then she felt Trevor close behind her, very close. "Morgan, can I talk to you for a minute?" His breath set her nerve endings on fire and she felt the pain start around her heart at the mere sound of his voice.

"Sorry, running off to a dinner date. Bye, Gid." Morgan clenched her jaw and took a deep breath. *Get away from him now. Do not let him in. Because he's broken your heart once. And men never change.*

She snapped her fingers. When she opened her eyes, she stood on the great stairwell of the palace. Morgan looked out at Castle Borough for a moment, brushing away the tears. *You did the right thing. You did the right thing.*

In the distance, she saw a massive blue dragon dip and swirl over the treetops, playing with the last rays of the setting sun. Morgan smiled. At least someone was happy tonight.

Morgan returned hours later, tired and lonely. Art's party had been lovely enough, with several handsome male suitors at her beck and call. And she couldn't have been less interested in any of them, watching the clock for the best moment to slip away. She gasped when she saw the envelope tacked to her door with Trevor's short sword. Morgan's hand shook as she struggled to pull out the sword. She finally dislodged it and threw it on the ground, clutching onto the envelope. She hurried inside and sat at

the table, spreading the note out flat. *Nothing he says can change what he did. Nothing.* She pulled on her glasses and bit at her lip in fear and excitement.

Dear Morgan,

Nothing I say will change what I did. I intended to hurt you. You are an exquisite woman in every way a woman can be exquisite. You don't deserve what I did to you. I will remember our one night together for the rest of my life. Funny, I guess we're right back where we started. Me in love with you, wanting to do anything to prove I'm worthy.

But now I'm a man and it's a little late to try to carry your books or ask you to the prom. I don't know if you have it in your heart to forgive me, but I'd strongly advise you to try for your own sake. I've learned that lesson the hard way. Gideon says hi. We're leaving for the Academy, so I'll say goodbye here. I love you.

Trevor

Morgan ran her hand across the page and then clutched it to her chest. She whispered aloud, "I love you, Trevor. I forgive you." And she put her head on the table and sobbed.

"Phew, that's good!"

Morgan stood quickly, knocking the chair onto the floor. She spun around. Trevor sat on the couch, one arm stretched across the back.

Her heart pounded in her chest and she wiped her tears away quickly. "You son of a bitch, what are you doing here?"

"That doesn't sound much like forgiveness."

She balled up his letter and threw it at him. It bounced off his chest and he laughed. He threw it back at her and it bounced off her chest. She picked it up and went to throw it again. His brow was arched in amusement.

"This is mature." He grinned and his eyes lit up and the lines appeared around his full lips. Morgan squeezed her eyes closed.

"Leave now."

“Nuh-uh.”

“Uh-huh.”

“Nope. Tried. Packed up, ready to go, shut up the house. Couldn’t do it. Can’t go without you. Not going anywhere.”

“Well, you can’t stay here!”

“No, I’ve picked out a place. Well, created it—a castle of our own. And I put it near a cave so Gideon could have a proper spot of his own. He is my dragon, you know.”

“What the hell are you babbling on about? Get the hell out of my house!”

To Morgan’s utter amazement, Trevor stood, walked to her and fell to one knee. He removed his emerald ring and took her hand.

“You’ll be needing this.” Trevor slipped the ring onto her index finger.

“I said, get out of my house! Can’t you hear? Why are you ignoring me?”

“Oh, darling, I’m not ignoring you tonight. Have no fear.” His smile was sweet but his voice was loaded with intensity.

Trevor stood and looked at Morgan carefully. He glowed slightly and she could feel the heat radiate from his hands. Yes, he was a powerful wizard. And the most exquisite man in the world. And if her mind wasn’t playing tricks on her, he was proposing marriage. He snorted and Morgan realized he had probed her thoughts.

“You really think I’m exquisite, Morgan?”

Morgan nodded slowly. His smile broadened.

“And you’re in love with me?”

She nodded again.

Trevor squeezed his eyes shut and Morgan saw him shiver slightly. A mist of blue light circled him. A single tear fell down his cheek. He kept his eyes closed.

“And you’ll marry me, stay with me forever?”

Morgan felt his magic circle her feet and swirl up her legs, heating up her body as it moved higher. He enveloped her. Powerless. She never had a chance.

“If this is some kind of trick, Trevor, I’ll die. I won’t survive another night like the last one.”

“Come here, darling.” He pulled her in close and she sighed at the feel of him, the smell of him. “I swear on all that is holy to me, on my father’s honor, on my word as a High Council member... On my life, Morgan, on my life. I love you. I always have, as you’ll remember. I never stopped loving you. I don’t want to spend one more day without you by my side.”

Trevor brushed his lips gently on hers and Morgan wrapped her arms around his neck.

“It can’t be. This isn’t real.”

He smiled and held her tightly. “Hang on, we’re going home.”

Chapter Seven

Morgan felt the pulse and shimmer of the floor and clutched desperately onto Trevor as he brought his mouth more firmly onto hers. She floated in his arms, head spinning from his kiss, from the taste of him, his hot tongue exploring her mind and body.

Her feet touched down lightly and she opened her eyes. Trevor was glowing, pale skin glistening in the moonlight, dark hair shimmering and blowing gently around him, hazel eyes glittering with gold and silver.

“You’re a god, Trevor.”

“Just a wizard.” He smiled and motioned at their surroundings. The full moon dimly highlighted the entrance to a dark cave, where Gideon was curled up, tail twitching in a dragon’s dream. Near the cave was a bridge shrouded in mist. A narrow stone staircase wound up from the far side into the pines. And high above, Morgan saw the outline of a grand, dark castle.

“It’s a bit moody, Trevor.”

“Hmm. Wizard stuff. Thought I’d better do it by the book.”

Trevor scooped her into his arms and carried her across the bridge and up the stairs. She never took her eyes off his.

Faceless guards in black-hooded cloaks stood like statues, paired across the entrance to the castle, huge spears crossed to block the way.

As Trevor approached, they stood at attention and uncrossed their weapons.

“They aren’t alive, are they?” Morgan asked nervously.

“Well, that’s a tough call.” Trevor snickered and set her down in the huge entranceway. Gleaming gray and silver, a gothic masterpiece, nooks and crannies

embedded with statues and sconces and frightening paintings. A huge clock ticked loudly from the top of the grand staircase.

"Too dark? You can add some nice womanly touches if you like." Trevor looked a bit nervous and Morgan sighed. It was far too dark, she thought. Curtains here and there, some flowers – tomorrow would be time enough. Tonight was far too important.

"It's perfect. You're perfect."

Trevor loosened his cape and let it fall to the floor as he took her hand and led her up the staircase into the grand bedroom, which was lit with a hundred candles. A heavily draped canopied bed was strewn with blood-red rose petals.

"I'm still a little unnatural, Morgan. A little obsessive, perhaps."

Morgan's heart beat wildly. The Wizard of Time, in all his glory. He was dark, exciting. And all the pain he had endured had made him a trifle quirky. She loved it. *But will I be enough?*

He read her thoughts. "I was wondering the same. Will I be enough, Morgan? Because I only want to satisfy you."

No, he wants more. What is it? Trevor's eyes burned as he stripped off his shirt, pulled off his boots, unlaced his pants. He hesitated briefly. And Morgan heard it, the thought pounding through him, that he couldn't help let escape, couldn't bear to say aloud.

"Control me?" she whispered. "Is that what you want?"

"I'm sorry. I don't want you to lose respect for me... I'll never hurt you..."

"Oh!" Morgan felt a wash of fire in her core, moisture pour from her, heat crawl up her skin. *I would do anything you ask. What do you want?*

"Aloud, Morgan. Ask me."

"What do you want me to do?"

"Agree. Trust me. But understand something. I have my powers now. I can become anything, anyone. I can last all night. Understand?"

"I'm not powerless, Trevor. Understand?" A sly smile swept to her eyes and he grinned.

"Then let the games begin." He swept his hand across Morgan's figure and she felt herself thrown back onto the bed, heard and felt the snap of leg irons and hand irons.

"You can't be serious."

"Not one more word. Understood? Or I'll make certain you cannot speak. Tonight we practice."

Morgan nodded and squirmed on the bed as the moisture flowed from her. She saw Trevor's huge erection pushing against his pants, the dark look in his eyes. The room grew darker as some of the candles flickered out. Trevor leaned in and tugged at her nipple with his teeth through her gossamer dress. She moaned as the electricity of his hot lips burnt into her. He moved to her mouth and she tried to capture his but he teased her with a light kiss and slid his mouth down her neck. Trevor grabbed the fabric of her dress and tore through it with one hand, exposing her white flesh to his gaze.

"Wet yet, my dear?" She moaned and nodded.

"Let's see." He slid down the bed and pushed her thighs aside and ripped the thin fabric of her panties. "Ah, beauty, I've dreamed of feasting on you. Night after night of tasting you."

Trevor knelt and lapped at her folds and she cried out his name. The throbbing intensified tenfold as he licked side to side and pushed his fingers inside her pussy. Morgan arched up and bit her lip to keep from speaking.

"Good girl. You've earned your first treat."

Trevor swept his hand across his own face and a man appeared. Trevor's very likeness. No, it was Trevor. He leaned in and kissed her warmly, then moved to her breast and suckled as his twin continued to lick at her folds.

"How?"

“Tsk. No talking. We don’t want him to go away do we?” He snickered. “It’s me, Morgan. Remember, I’m the Wizard of Time. Split a few moments here, twist a few seconds there and it’s easy to be in more than one place. See?” He gestured to a third Trevor, who kissed her on the lips briefly and smiled, then went to work on her other breast. It was impossible torture. In an instant, Morgan screamed out as the waves of pleasure pounded through her as never before.

“Mmm, liked that, did we?” All three Trevors laughed.

“Isn’t she beautiful? Who wants to go first?”

The realization stunned her. The possibilities. She loved them all, because they were the same man.

“Do you all feel...the same?”

Trevor laughed again and stepped out of his pants, exposing a throbbing huge cock, dripping in anticipation. And so it repeated twice. *By all that is holy.* Morgan closed her eyes and waited for the erotic onslaught. Trevor climbed onto the bed, lifted her ass and plunged into her in one thrust. Pure light pounded through her body and she screamed with the fullness of him as he pushed and pulled and groaned with her. And one kissed her lips to capture her scream and one kissed her breast. And Trevor pounded into her, crying out her name as he stiffened and then released his hot essence. He pulled out and spilled more hot liquid onto her stomach and slid his body against her slick skin.

Morgan was crying, lost, spinning out of control when she felt the ritual repeated, a huge shaft pushing inside, prodding side to side this time, searching for all the hot secret places. Trevor leaned in and whispered “I love you” again and again as his partners pleased her. After the third coupling, Morgan begged for mercy.

“A rest, Trevor. I’ll die. You are too huge. All of you.”

Trevor laughed and became one again and waved her shackles away. He pulled her up into his arms and caressed her hair and whispered his love.

“You will still marry me, Morgan?”

“Hell yes, I’ll marry you.” Trevor laughed again and Morgan joined him.

“You know, honey,” Trevor whispered, “I can make more than one of you, too?”

“Oh, really?” She giggled. “Well, how about something to eat, a nice cup of coffee and we’ll see about that?”

“Deal.” They kissed and laughed and ate and talked the night away, forgetting all about new erotic adventures, too busy telling one another about their lives. After all, they hadn’t really seen much of each other since they were thirteen.

About the Author

Ciar Cullen grew up in Baltimore, Maryland—Charm City—and has lived a charmed life. She worked for a decade as an archaeologist, summering on digs in Greece. Ciar has a strong interest in history of all periods. She worked for years in academic nonfiction publishing and is currently a bureaucrat at a prominent college. Ciar took up writing in 2004 to scratch an itch brought on by years of reading fantasy and romance fiction. She submitted her first book on a whim and hasn't turned back. Her favorite authors are Terry Pratchett, Mark Twain, and Roger Zelazny. Ciar lives in New Jersey with her wonderful husband and magical cat.

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

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