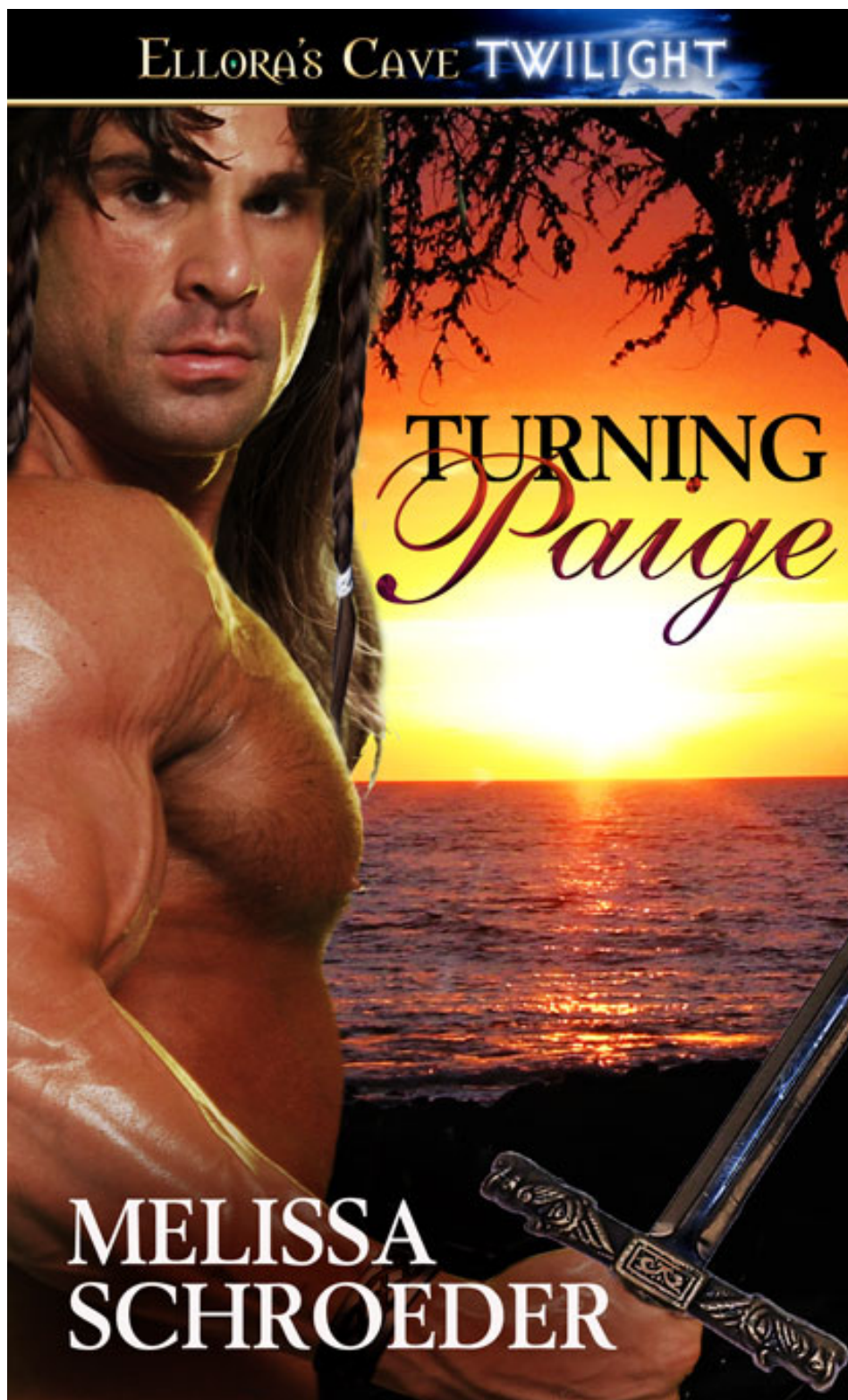


ELLORA'S CAVE TWILIGHT

TURNING
Paige

MELISSA
SCHROEDER



An Ellora's Cave Romantica Publication



www.ellorascave.com

Turning Paige

ISBN 9781419922091

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Turning Paige Copyright © 2009 Melissa Schroeder

Edited by Briana St. James

Cover art by Syneca

Electronic book Publication June 2009

The terms Romantica® and Quickies® are registered trademarks of Ellora's Cave Publishing.

With the exception of quotes used in reviews, this book may not be reproduced or used in whole or in part by any means existing without written permission from the publisher, Ellora's Cave Publishing, Inc.® 1056 Home Avenue, Akron OH 44310-3502.

Warning: The unauthorized reproduction or distribution of this copyrighted work is illegal. No part of this book may be scanned, uploaded or distributed via the Internet or any other means, electronic or print, without the publisher's permission. Criminal copyright infringement, including infringement without monetary gain, is investigated by the FBI and is punishable by up to 5 years in federal prison and a fine of \$250,000. (<http://www.fbi.gov/ipr/>). Please purchase only authorized electronic or print editions and do not participate in or encourage the electronic piracy of copyrighted material. Your support of the author's rights is appreciated.

This book is a work of fiction and any resemblance to persons, living or dead, or places, events or locales is purely coincidental. The characters are productions of the author's imagination and used fictitiously.

TURNING PAIGE

Melissa Schroeder

Dedication

To Briana St. James, whose patient edits made Paige and Seamus' story even better.

Trademarks Acknowledgement

The author acknowledges the trademarked status and trademark owners of the following wordmarks mentioned in this work of fiction:

Volkswagen Bug: Volkswagen Aktiengesellschaft

Prologue

From the time of Arthur and Camelot, she has traveled the world, dispensing her magical sweets. Her spells allow anyone who eats the confections to fulfill their hidden fantasies with the one they love. But if the recipients don't believe their love is returned, they are condemned to a life of knowing their lack of faith caused them to lose the one person they were destined to love.

The acrid smell of smoke and death surrounded Seamus as he walked through the battleground. The fighting had ceased, but the sound of agony filled the air. Bodies littered the grass that had once been green. Now the ground was red from the blood of the dead and dying. Aye, his men had won. But at what cost?

Weary from yet another battle, one that seemed to take more from both him and his warriors than it gave, Seamus stepped over dead boys and men. Even as he assessed the damage—the loss—Seamus planned for the next fight. It was his way, his work. Would it be days until the next battle? Hours? He fought back the despair that threatened to engulf him. He had no time for mourning.

Shaking his head, he found a huge stone to sit upon. Every muscle in his body ached. His eyes burned from too little sleep. Not only had he been through one of the worst battles of his life, the past several nights he'd been visited in his dreams by a redheaded temptress. In the midst of death, he could still remember her touch. She'd stolen his sleep. The dreams seemed to intensify when death surrounded him, something that disturbed him as much as it perplexed him. Every night was more erotic than the last, his body still recovering from each encounter when he woke. Seamus was convinced someone had put a sleeping spell on him. By stealing his sleep, she robbed him of any clear-headed thinking that would have helped them today. Maybe the battle would have been better fought if he'd been able to command better.

He'd lost good men today. Friends...brothers. He would use the pain of losing them to avenge them. He would foster it to plan for the next confrontation. It was his duty, his honor.

The sliding of metal against leather caught his attention almost a moment too late. He turned to find a hardened warrior, his face covered with blood, his eyes glazed. Adrenaline raced through Seamus, his body preparing for the fight. He jumped off the rock and turned but he wasn't quick enough. He felt the bite of the sword, his flesh tearing.

Sinking to the ground, he dropped his sword, then fell face down. His attacker fell beside him. He could hear the man's breath wheezing, the death rattle sounded and then silence. Burning streaks of pain shot down his arm from his shoulder where the warrior had cut him. His mind spun as he rolled over onto his back. He tried to find the words to call for help, even knowing there was not a soul to aid him.

Darkness crept at the edges of his consciousness. He drifted, his body feeling as if it had been lifted from the bloody ground. Nothing came to mind, nothing he regretted as his life played through his mind. Except...he would have like to have loved. One love, one soul mate.

Then came a breath against his ear, a promise whispered he could not quite hear and his world faded to black.

Chapter One

He slid his hand down her body, caressing her nipples, then he replaced his hand with his mouth. She felt his breath warm the tip at the moment before his teeth scraped against her skin. When he took the nipple into his mouth, Paige gasped, then moaned as she arched her back. Heat that had been winding through her flashed and burned hotter, drawing tension tighter.

Before she was satisfied, he moved away and he pressed his mouth against her damp skin, kissing a path down her stomach. He let his tongue slip over her bellybutton before he settled between her legs. Sliding his hands under her bottom, he lifted her to his mouth. Instead of a full assault with his mouth, he brushed his tongue along her slit. Hot liquid filled her cunt. He continued to tease, barely slipping his tongue between her lips. Pressure coiled in her stomach then slid to her sex. She thrashed her head from side to side, moaning, begging for relief as she clutched the silken strands of his hair in her hands.

She placed both of her feet on the bed, pushing up against his mouth at the same time his tongue touched her clit. Her world exploded into a million brilliant pieces as her orgasm flashed through her.

Paige Turner awoke, her body throbbing, her sheets soaked and her mind trying to remember the dream she'd just had. Closing her eyes, she tried to grasp anything from the vision, but nothing came.

With an irritated sigh, she opened her eyes, squinting against the sliver of sunlight that snuck through her blinds. This was starting to get ridiculous. Each day she woke up with the scent of primal male and the memory of hands against her skin. Her breasts even ached. But within minutes the details of the dream faded, frustrating her further.

Turning her head, she glanced at the clock and noticed that it wasn't even six a.m. Great. Not only was the dream irritating her, it was causing her to lose what little sleep she was getting. Which, thanks to her nighttime visions, hadn't been restful. Still, she

had less than an hour before the alarm would have jarred her awake anyway, so she might as well get out of bed. She knew from experience that she wouldn't get any more rest.

Tossing aside her sheets, Paige sat up and swung her legs over the side of her bed, causing her head to spin. Her body still throbbed. Standing might be difficult, she thought. Her legs trembled from the bone-melting orgasm. Real or imagined, her system continued to pulse with the aftershocks of it. Grabbing the cup of water she kept on her nightstand, she took a long gulp. The tepid water gave her little relief.

Once she was sure she could walk without falling, she stood and decided a nice hot shower would help ease out the kinks. As she undressed, she wondered why she might be having erotic dreams. She'd never been an overly sexual person. Not that she was a virgin, but at the ripe age of thirty-two, Paige was sure that all the talk about multiple orgasms with an actual man in the room was overblown.

In the past few weeks, she'd turned into some kind of sex maniac. Frustration and arousal intertwined to drive her insane. She knew she'd had an orgasm in the dream and there was an element of sexual relief when she woke. Heck, her legs were wet with her arousal. But it was if she hadn't really achieved a true release and her body still waited for her to complete the act.

She had no memories of the dreams, at least nothing solid. Just gauzy impressions of wanting, of desire, and the way her body felt when she awakened told her they were naughty. There was no way they weren't considering the way her heart tattooed against her breast each time she woke. The memory of hands gliding over her flesh made her skin tingle. Even as she tried to grasp at the thought, remember just whose hands they'd been, the feeling faded. It left her exhausted even after a good eight hours of sleep—which was a rarity lately.

With a sigh, she turned on the water. If she got a chance today, she would do some research. Maybe she was missing something in her diet. Minerals or perhaps a vitamin deficiency. As soon as she had a free moment she'd check.

Unfortunately, she knew it had nothing to do with her fiancé, Jeremy. After they'd announced their engagement three months earlier, their sex life had gone from unfulfilling to nonexistent. He'd claimed it had to do with the stress of his research for his new book, but she had other ideas—none of them nice. They'd never exactly burned up the sheets and lately it seemed difficult to even get a spark started.

Paige wasn't an overly sexual creature, but she did have *some* passion. All of it seemed to be wasted on Jeremy who tried to be proper even in bed. She'd suggested a few things, nothing over the top or illegal in Georgia. But he'd acted appalled, as if she suggested a threesome with the head librarian. So she wanted to try a new position every now and then or play with a blindfold, what was so wrong with that? Nothing, in her humble opinion. It was just the sign of a healthy sex drive that was getting faster by the day.

It'd gotten worse since the dreams started. She stopped for a second and thought. Paige wasn't so sure if it was the dreams that had started first or that her sex drive had revved up first. Either way, she was sure at some point that there was a definite possibility she would lose all control and jump his body.

She pushed all thoughts of sex, fiancés and other problems aside and stepped into the shower. But even as she lathered her hair, her thoughts turned back to her dreams and the fact she couldn't remember anything. It was decidedly odd because she usually remembered her dreams, or at least parts of them. These she couldn't seem to grasp anything.

Closing her eyes, she tried to pull the memories out from the shadows where they lurked, but nothing...nothing but an amazing pair of blue eyes. That was the one and only thing she could ever distinctly remember.

On her way into work, Paige stopped by The Sweet Shoppe to pick up the chocolate-covered peanuts her assistant Debbie loved. The tinkling of the little bell heralded her entrance and she smiled. The rush of scents—vanilla, cocoa and something

elusive, something she could never pin down—surrounded her and beckoned her inside.

Since the shop had opened a month earlier, it had become a favorite with locals and tourists alike. Savannah residents liked their food, especially when it was sweet. A couple milled around the fudge display in the tiny shop. Every time she passed the shop, Paige had tried to ignore the lure of chocolate. During her turbulent childhood, she'd used it to suppress the scary feelings of an unsettled home. Her resistance to the shop had lasted a day. To help herself, she bought sweets for other people and coveted the scent of chocolate. Sick, yes. But she didn't care.

"Ahhh, Miss Librarian. I see zat you have come again."

At the sound of the proprietress of The Sweet Shoppe, Paige turned and smiled. The woman stood a whole foot shorter than Paige. Her lined face split into a wondrous smile as she beckoned Paige closer. The jingle of bells sounded as she moved her hand.

"You come to shop for yourself?"

Paige chuckled. "No. Not hardly. It's my assistant's birthday. She loves your chocolate-covered peanuts."

She crossed her arms beneath her plentiful bosom and frowned at Paige. Even with her considerable height advantage, Paige felt like a little girl.

She pointed a finger at Paige's chest. "You never buy for you."

The remonstrance in her voice rang like a bell.

"You don't have my favorite and I only buy that. It's hard to find in the local shops. That way I can control my eating habits."

If possible, her frown deepened. "What is this favorite?"

"Irish whiskey truffles."

Her small black eyes studied Paige, as if trying to discern if she was telling a lie. Paige resisted the urge to shift her weight from one foot to the other. Then the older

woman's lips turned up at the corners, the wrinkles around her mouth deepening with the movement. She nodded.

"Ahh, yes. I should have seen zat."

Before Paige could ask her what she meant, the woman turned, the swirl of her full skirts tickling the top of Paige's feet. The sound of the small bells tinkled as she hurried away.

"How much you need of zis peanuts?"

"Excuse me, but we were here first," the young man from the couple Paige had seen earlier said.

The owner stopped and turned to face the couple. Her eyebrows drew down in a threatening manner and she frowned at them. "If you do not behave, you will not get any chocolate."

And with that she turned and went to retrieve Paige's peanuts. The man shot Paige a malevolent look, but they didn't leave. She tried smiling at him, but he just huffed and looked away. A moment later, the woman returned with a bag. It was then that Paige realized she hadn't told her how much she wanted. But as always, it was just the right amount.

After paying, Paige turned to leave, but the woman stopped. "Miss Librarian? You come back before closing at six pm. I will have zose whiskey truffles for you."

Paige opened her mouth to argue, but the woman turned to the couple and ignored her. Sighing, she left the shop. Maybe she would indulge a little. A few sweets never hurt anyone.

* * * * *

By three o'clock that afternoon, Paige had had enough. Her eyes were gritty, her patience wearing thin. She was sure her lack of sleep had a lot to do with her irritability but other factors were not helping. There didn't seem to be a library employee who hadn't asked her to take on one of their tasks. Usually, she didn't mind helping her co-

workers, but every one of them seemed to have lost the ability to think lately. She knew that in Savannah it was normal this time of year.

The first buds of spring were beginning to show around Savannah. It was gorgeous and invited everyone to run outside and play hooky. The fact that everyone seemed to think they had a right to celebrate and Paige would pick up the slack was getting under her skin.

As head of the reference department, she had a lot of work to do. Her student assistant hadn't shown up and Debbie, her part-time assistant, had a second job to go to. Paige's section looked like a bomb hit it. Books and magazines covered the tables. She glanced at the clock, then at the littered tables. If she could sneak out without anyone noticing, she could pop in on Jeremy.

But just as she turned to leave, Judy Franks, the head of the circulation department, stepped into her section.

"Paige."

She smiled. Paige knew that meant one thing. Judy wanted something. More than likely, she wanted Paige to fill in for her. Judy didn't smile at anyone who didn't outrank her — unless she wanted a favor. They'd been hired within a week of each other, both fresh from completing their Master's Degrees. Two people couldn't be more different. While Paige's dream was to one day head up a collection on Celtic works or oversee a rare books department, Judy was wrapped up in campus politics and moving up the ladder in the library. She didn't care who she screwed, literally and metaphorically.

Work was not only where they differed. Their personalities showed through in their clothing. Paige believed in quiet elegance, which she was sure most people would describe as conservative. Judy liked bright colors and trendy styles. The outfit she wore today was an example. Her black skirt was long but about a size too small, so it clung to every curve. Her shirt was fuchsia, again a size too small, and she'd left one button too

many undone. Looking at Judy, from her perfectly styled blonde hair to her enhanced breasts, Paige would have never known she was a librarian.

"I was wondering if you could fill in for me tonight." Judy's smile widened, showing off every one of her perfectly aligned teeth.

"Sorry, Judy. I have plans for tonight." That wasn't exactly true, but Paige took a chance she couldn't get struck by lightning in the library.

Judy crossed her arms beneath her breasts, causing them to almost spill over the neckline of the blouse. She frowned at Paige. "I have a date tonight and Mike has the flu."

Sighing, Paige fought off the urge to just walk away. "It's been a long day and there is no way I could last until nine tonight."

Her smile returned. "But you would only have to stay until seven."

"Then you should have time to meet your date."

Judy sighed and then placed her hands on her waist. "I need to go home and get ready. I know you wouldn't understand this, Paige, but I like to freshen up before my dates."

Irritation wound through her, finally settling in her stomach. Judy never really insulted Paige to her face, but she regularly made comments about her life as if they were fact. The worst thing was that Paige knew she was stuck. Judy would nag until Paige caved in and stayed. And if she didn't, it would be worse. Judy would complain or force one of the students to work and then the whole place would be in an uproar. Nothing would get done and the place would be a mess tomorrow morning. Whoever was working the weekend would spend most of it cleaning up.

"Okay, I'll do it if you'll cover for me for about fifteen minutes. I need a break."

Judy glanced around Paige's section and one perfectly sculpted eyebrow rose. "As long as you don't expect me to clean up."

No of course not. Cleaning would be beneath Judy. Paige gritted her teeth, but still smiled. "No problem, Judy. I'm just going to pop over to see Jeremy for a few minutes, and then I'll be back."

Knowing that Judy would try to find an excuse to back out immediately, Paige grabbed her coat then closed the door to her office. Without another word, she hurried out the front door of the library.

She drew in a deep breath of cool spring air and shivered. Even with the sun shining, there was a definite chill in the air. In Savannah, you never knew what you would get this time of year. Spring hadn't actually sprung yet, but Paige didn't really care. Even being out of the library for a few minutes would give her time to relax. Drawing in another deep breath, she felt the muscles in her neck loosen.

She ambled down the sidewalk to the history department. He was probably sitting at his desk doing research for his new book. That was actually how they had started dating. A year earlier, Jeremy had been a newly hired assistant professor in history when he asked her for help. Before Paige knew it, they were dating, and several months later, Jeremy, not Paige, had begun talking about getting married.

Sighing, she waited for a car to pass then crossed the street. She had to figure out why every time she began to think about their wedding she felt as if she would suffocate. It was the same overwhelming feeling she had when she spent time with her parents. Jeremy chalked it up to pre-wedding jitters. Paige hoped he was right.

As Paige reached the door, her mind turned back to her growing unease at work. There was something not right, something that was causing her to dread work. And that had never been the case for her. She'd grown up as one of the Savannah Turners. Although that didn't mean much to the outside world, in Savannah, old southern money meant everything.

So when she went out and got a part-time job the minute she turned sixteen, her mother had been appalled. Instead of making her debut and dating the quarterback, Paige had been more comfortable working in a bookstore. It was there she'd started her

love affair with Celtic mythology. There had been no doubt in her mind she wanted to work surrounded by books, even at that young age. It had been her way to escape her parents' many marital spats. And from the moment she'd started work at the college, Paige had loved it.

Lately, though, there were days work had become more of a chore. She dreaded the meetings, the constant fight for money to keep things current. Add in the nasty personalities, the constant bickering between departments and the fact that Paige seemed to take on more and more work each month from other departments, life at the library wasn't as much fun as it had been a year ago.

She'd had several job offers, as her knowledge of Celtic mythology was well-known. She'd turned them all down, knowing that they would interfere with her wedding. But the last one had come from a grant association that had a research job for her, which would pay her to research and live in Ireland. It had physically pained her to turn that one down last week, but she had made a commitment to Jeremy.

Her steps slowed as she wandered down the hall to Jeremy's office. Something whispered down her spine as she drew closer. The unpleasant feeling grew the closer she got to the door. Paige noticed it was opened a crack and she could hear Jeremy and a woman's voice.

"I told you why we can't do this on campus, Simone."

"But, Jeremy, your *librarian* will never know. Besides, it isn't like you said no." The sultry tone in the other woman's voice made it clear what they had been doing.

Paige heard the distinct noise of clothes rustling. She crept closer and peered through the door crack. Jeremy sat in his leather desk chair—the chair she'd bought him—and stared up at a curvy brunette. The woman stood in front of him, zipping up her skirt.

Her brain finally processed the fact she had just caught her fiancé schlepping one of his grad students.

Chapter Two

For a moment, Paige couldn't think. Her mind went completely blank. There was no doubt in her mind what had been going on. As Simone turned, she realized the woman was one of the graduate students assigned to Jeremy. Now Paige understood why the few times she'd talked to the woman, something had been off.

Paige continued to watch. As if she stared long enough, it wouldn't be true. A lump of pain rose in her throat as she stepped back.

"I was thinking of dropping by to ask Paige to look up some information on the new lead I had."

"You don't have to marry her just to get help with research."

"That's not why. But you wouldn't know since you're not a Southerner. Down here, names still mean a lot and being married to a Turner is a plus for me."

When she heard their footsteps approaching the doorway, she rushed to the side door of the building and out into the cool air. Her body and mind were numb. She walked to a bench and collapsed, ignoring the odd look she received from one of the groundskeepers who was picking up trash.

She didn't know how long she sat there staring out over the campus lawns. Several students passed, a professor or two. Jeremy was cheating on her. And not only that, he was using her. The knot that had settled in her stomach tightened. It wasn't that he couldn't be faithful that upset her. Okay, that did a little bit, considering the fact the one time she'd tried to be spontaneous and suggested they have sex in his office, he freaked.

No, it was the fact he was using her that upset her more. Paige had never had that many dates growing up. Always more comfortable with books than people, Paige had had a handful of relationships before college, all that had something to do with being with the "right" family. In college, she'd had more freedom and had drifted through a

few sweet affairs. But Jeremy...it just made her so angry. Growing up in an unsettled house as she had, Paige didn't handle anger well. So she didn't. Instead she closed her eyes and tried to think of something more pleasant.

The image of chocolate truffles filled with whiskey liquor materialized. She could almost taste the creamy chocolate.

She opened her eyes and jumped up from the bench. With purpose, she strode across the lawn, ignoring the "don't walk on the grass" signs for the first time since she'd started working on the campus. When a few professors smiled her way, she ignored them. The anger that she'd forced down would probably explode if she had to talk to one of them. As the automatic doors opened, the scent of musty paper filled her senses and calmed her nerves. There was nothing like the smell of a library.

Judy came bouncing around the corner from Paige's department.

"There you are. Where have you been? Jeremy was here looking for you."

I just bet he has. "I went for a walk." Paige brushed past her and went to her office, shutting the door behind her – and hopefully in Judy's face.

She began shutting down her computer and packing up her things. Her mind still whirled with the knowledge that Jeremy was cheating on her. And with a grad student. That thought alone made her sick. But she didn't want to think about it. She just wanted to leave – get as far away from there and her embarrassment as possible.

After flipping the lights off, she opened her office door and came face to face with Jeremy. Her mind went blank. She just couldn't think of anything to say to him now that he was in front of her.

He looked exactly the same as he did before she knew of his cheating. Brown hair, thinning a bit on the top, cut close to his head, not one strand out of place. As she met his gaze, she noticed a hint of worry in his gray eyes. The sorry thing was that she didn't know if he was worried about her or worried she might know.

"I've been looking everywhere for you." He reached out for her and she took a step back into her office.

His eyebrows drew down in confusion and concern. "Is there something wrong?"

She wanted to scream, *Yes, you bastard! You were fucking a grad student in your office just an hour ago!* But she didn't. She swallowed the need to vent her anger. That would cause a scene. Paige didn't cause scenes. They'd been too common in her childhood.

"No. Nothing's wrong, Jeremy."

He took another step toward her and she retreated again. Now he was frowning at her. "Why do you keep backing up?"

Truthfully, if he touched her, she didn't know what she would do. The hurt and embarrassment she'd felt was now dissolving as anger soared to new heights. She wasn't going to yell at him. But there were several sharp objects nearby that could kill or maim.

She smiled instead. It hurt deep down inside her heart, her soul, it hurt to smile, but she did it. "I'm not feeling well, Jeremy. I don't want you to catch anything."

As she expected, he took a step back. Jeremy was a complete hypochondriac. "Are you sure? I have some things I need to do and I wanted you to look up a few things about the potato famine."

Rage shimmered. She beat it back with a stick. She would not lose her cool and embarrass herself. "Sorry, Jeremy. But I think I'm running a fever."

He adjusted his wire-rimmed glasses as he studied her. "You don't look sick."

She coughed then stepped forward. Jeremy almost fell down trying to backpedal out of her office.

"I'm going home, take some medicine and go to bed."

She turned and locked her door then faced him again.

"I'll give you a call later."

"No." She cringed when she realized she'd almost shouted the word. Several students glanced in their direction. "No. Don't worry about it. I will be sleeping anyway."

Without waiting for another comment, she hurried past him, ignoring the strange looks from several workers and patrons. She thought she heard Judy saying something as she passed the front desk. Paige ignored it and just kept going. Her emotions were rocking back and forth and she didn't know how much longer she'd be able to hold on.

As she opened the front door, the rush of cool air was a shock to her heated skin. She drew in a deep breath and hurried down the steps to the staff parking area. Within moments she was pulling out of the parking lot and heading home.

Then the comments from the Sweet Shoppe lady came to mind. Whiskey truffles. Paige licked her lips. After cutting off a battered VW Bug, Paige took a left onto Liberty Street, pulling into a parking lot close to The Sweet Shoppe.

She found the shop filled with out-of-towners and college students. She pushed past a few of them to the front until she could find Madame.

"Miss Librarian!" Her eyes sparkled as she held up a white bag. "I see you remembered."

Paige took the bag and started to fish out her pocket book. "How much?"

"No, no. Zis is a gift from me to you. You are my best customer." Paige opened her mouth to argue, but the older woman shook her head. "Go. I'm too busy."

She turned from Paige and hurried to another customer. Too weary to fight, Paige decided she'd settle the tab later. When she stepped out of the shop, she realized it had started raining. Not having her umbrella, Paige stuffed the bag of chocolate in her coat and then dashed to her car. She was shivering by the time she started the engine. Pulling out in traffic, she decided that a night of chocolate and chick flicks would definitely put her back on track, help her figure out just what the hell to do.

* * * * *

Bundled up beneath her favorite quilt, Paige opened the bag of truffles. She inhaled the wonderful scent of chocolate. Lord, it had been a long time since she'd indulged.

The phone rang as she bit into her first truffle. She ignored it and the third message Judy left. She chewed the chocolate, enjoying the bite of whiskey liquor, the sweetness of the chocolate. As she swallowed, a rush of tingles swept down her spine. She shivered and pulled the quilt closer.

She nibbled another truffle, ignoring her reaction. Her mind was focused on her life. A job she was beginning to hate. A fiancé who apparently was not only using her for her family name, but also her research skills. The first thing she had done was pull off her engagement ring when she got home. Bastard. Because of Jeremy she was sitting alone on a Friday night, eating truffles, watching chick flicks.

Tears gathered in her eyes and spilled down her cheeks. She was a step away from buying eight cats. Sniffling, she picked out another truffle and tried to push away her maudlin thoughts. But try as she might, she couldn't. She just wanted to find happiness. Was that too much to ask for? Freaking Jeremy. It was his fault she was in this state of distress. If he were like the man who'd been visiting in her dreams, she'd not be alone on a Friday night. She'd be in bed, naked. She wanted him. Her dream man. He should be there with her.

She bit into her fourth truffle. Heat pooled into her belly, then radiated from there, warming her from the inside out. Her muscles began to relax, her mind wandering, her head spinning. Closing her eyes, she tried to think of something, grasp one thought, but she failed.

"I should have had lunch," she said. "Oh crap, I should have had breakfast. Ending to a perfect day. I get drunk on truffles."

She dropped the bag on the floor as her eyes drifted shut. Despair washed over her. She didn't want much. All she wanted was someone who wanted her for herself.

It was her last thought before her world faded to black.

Chapter Three

Seamus found her as he did every night—sleeping peacefully. This night, though, she was not in her bed, but it did not matter. She was his siren and he would always find her. He lifted her off the divan and into his arms. She curled against him, her head against his chest, over his heart. He laid her on the bed. After pulling her clothes from her body, he joined her on the bed. For a moment, he did nothing but hold her close, enjoying the feel of her skin next to his, their hearts beating in rhythm. But her soul called to him and he had to respond.

He moved his palm over her nipple. It pebbled at the slight touch and he groaned. This woman responded more readily to his touch than any woman before her. Unable to resist, he bent his head and touched his tongue to the tip. She moaned as she threaded her fingers through his hair. Molding her hands against his head she urged him closer. His staff hardened, lengthened, ached. Seamus surrendered to his need.

The moment he took the nipple into his mouth she arched. Sweet Jesu, the woman was delicious. There was a fire within her. It was tamed, hidden. Each night he returned, he reveled in causing the spark and building it into a raging inferno. It wasn't hard with the way she reacted to him.

He replaced his mouth with his hand as he moved to her other nipple. Her moans were growing and he knew from scent of her arousal that she was close. Too close. The moment she climaxed she would disappear, taking her warmth with her. Seamus wanted her to stay. He needed her beside him, under him.

Shaking himself free of her hold, he moved down her body, nipping at her soft skin. He settled himself between her legs and drew in a deep breath. His cock pulsed with need, one that would never be quenched. Even if he tried to fight her, he was helpless to resist. He brushed his fingers over the red hair, dewy with her arousal. Her legs moved

restlessly on the bed. He smiled. She might drive him insane, but he took satisfaction in her pleasure.

He allowed his hand to drift lower, barely touching her slit. It came away wet with her essence. She planted her feet on the bed and tried to lift herself against his hand.

“Impatience will not help, my love.”

Her frustrated growl brought a smile to his face. Seamus the Warrior did not want a meek woman. He needed a woman to match his strength and his dream love had more than enough.

“Please.”

He was helpless to resist her request. Sliding his hands beneath her ass, he lifted her. As it did every night, the moment he placed his mouth on her cunt, the taste of her exploded across his senses. Sweet and tangy, it wound through him, heating his blood from hot to boiling. His sac drew tighter, heavier. She spread her legs wider and pushed herself against his questing mouth. Hot, wet and so bloody unbelievable.

Sliding his tongue inside, he closed his eyes. Every particle of his being was concentrated on bringing her fulfillment. It was his duty, his quest. Her muscles quivered, her moans grew louder. The moment he took the hardened nub in his mouth, she screamed, her body convulsing. Even as the storm subsided, he pushed her over the edge again. Her fingers clenched in his hair as he lapped up her juices as if he were a starving kitten.

He opened his eyes and watched as her orgasm overtook her, waiting for the moment when he would lose her. But as she settled against the bed, her body seemingly boneless, he blinked. Every night before he’d disappeared the moment she’d found her pleasure. The witch took everything and left him aroused and frustrated. But this night was different.

Excitement raced through his veins even as his mind cautioned him about the treachery of witches. Still, he couldn’t resist moving up her body and sliding his cock into her tight passage. The moment he felt her muscles clamp tightly, he knew he was in

heaven. She'd never allowed him this privilege, leaving him in hell. He knew this had to be another ploy, another insane trick to drive him into madness. That knowledge couldn't stop him from pulling out of her and thrusting back in.

She opened her eyes and he watched her as he repeated the action. Her blue eyes shone with desire. She wrapped her legs around his waist. That small action drew him deeper into her wet core. In that moment, he lost what control he had.

Each time he entered her body, the pain and uncertainty of his hell slipped farther away. Euphoria replaced it as his body raced to the pinnacle, his mind concentrated on nothing but the mating union. Pulling himself up and resting his hands on the bed, his measured thrusts turned frantic. The thought that she could be tricking him, bringing him to the brink then throwing him back to purgatory unfilled didn't matter. Anything other than total satisfaction was unthinkable. She joined his rhythm and within moments she was coming apart again. Her muscles contracted around his cock, pulling him deeper into her cunt. His body reacted immediately. His balls drew tight and the next moment he groaned as he spilled his seed into her womb.

With that, every ounce of power drained from him. He collapsed on top of her, but had enough strength to roll, pulling her along with him. She settled against him with a soft sigh, her red hair draped over his chest. As he drifted back to sleep, he knew in that one moment he would never give up this one night of pleasure, even if it meant he lived in pain and in torment for eternity.

* * * * *

Paige came awake slowly. Her muscles were sore, but a good kind of sore, she thought. She didn't know why, but there was a particularly sated feeling to her body. As if she'd reached some kind of goal. As she shifted her weight, she came against something very hard...very hot. She frowned and opened her eyes.

An expanse of golden skin was the first thing she saw. Convinced she was still dreaming, Paige rubbed her eyes and blinked. Her vision cleared. No, that was certainly skin. Drawing in a deep breath, she raised her head.

Holy Mother of God! There was a man in her bed. A man she definitely didn't know. That was not a common occurrence for Paige, to say the least. Especially one so huge.

Slowly, she eased away and sat up. She swallowed the urge to scream. It clogged her throat as fear wound through her system. Her heart beat against her chest. The only thing keeping her from screaming was the fact that he was so huge. Lord knew what he would do if she woke him up that way.

What the hell had she done last night? Closing her eyes, she tried to remember but failed. She opened her eyes and studied her guest.

His hair entranced her. Darker than a moonless night, it reached halfway down his back and spilled across her pink sheets. Several small braids were entwined within the silken strands. His back was to her so she leaned over just a bit to see what his face looked like. She released a breath she didn't know she'd been holding.

His face was a study in strength and angles. High cheekbones, a strong jaw and a nose that looked as if it had been broken once or twice. His eyes were still closed but she assumed they were darker in color, gray or possibly brown. Impossibly long lashes matched the color of his hair.

He was, in a word, beautiful. And alarming. Just how the hell did he end up in her bed? Paige was positive she'd remember bringing a man to bed, especially one who looked like him. Considering she was lying here naked as the day she was born, it was a fair assumption that she had at least talked to him. She had to know him. He was in her bed and...she lifted the sheet and saw one firm butt cheek...as naked as she was.

She dropped the sheet and closed her eyes. A tingle ran down her spine and she opened her eyes and lifted the sheet again. Lordy, she'd never seen a man with such an

exquisite ass. Full, rounded... She curled her fingers into her hand to keep from reaching down to touch it.

"I promise you the front view is as nice as the back," he said, his voice mixed with amusement and a thick Irish brogue.

Heat crept up her neck and into her face. She released the sheet again and tried to remind herself that it was a man's mind that was important, not his body. Right now Paige couldn't remember why she thought that but she knew it was important.

He rolled over on his back. Now that he was animated, the beauty she'd witnessed before was more pronounced. Full and sensuous, his lips curved into a knowing smile. But she ignored it, and the dimples that framed his mouth. Instead, she found herself mesmerized by a pair of electric blue eyes. There was no hint of gray or green in them like she had in hers, but pure blue. She'd never seen anything so beautiful in her life.

Paige shook her head, trying to bring her senses back into order. His grin deepened and his gaze wandered to her breasts. It was then she remembered she was sitting on the bed, stark naked, with a man she didn't know.

She leapt off the bed with a squeal, grabbing her robe. Once she had it on—and the sash firmly tied—she faced him.

He'd pulled himself up, resting his weight on his elbow. The sheet with feminine rose designs entwined on them slid to his waist, revealing more skin. Paige's nipples hardened, her pulse leaped, her pussy dampened. She could see his sculpted abs and wondered if he moved just a little more, would the sheet dip a bit more.

"I have to say *your* back is as enchanting as your front."

She jerked her gaze to his. Mortified, her face flushed again.

"W-who are you?"

His gaze roamed possessively over her. From the look in his eyes, and the tenting of the sheet, it was as if he could see through the material of the robe.

"Doncha know, lass?"

She shook her head. "I have no idea who you are or what you are doing in my bed. All I remember is all that mess yesterday, then going to The Sweet Shoppe..." She gasped. "Holy Mother of God. The whiskey truffles." She hadn't eaten anything other than breakfast, and she had a low tolerance for alcohol. "Lord, I must have eaten them and then went out. The last thing I remember is the couch."

She opened her eyes to find him frowning at her. Could it really be possible that she'd gotten drunk from just truffles?

"You really don't know who I am?"

Oh, this was horrible. This was what happened to women when they were wound too tight and then let loose. They got wasted on truffles and picked up strange men. It was the only explanation she had. Unless she was having blackouts for some other reason. This man was better than the man she was engaged to, but waking up with a stranger just wasn't something Paige did on a regular basis.

His frown deepened, anger darkening his eyes. "I'll not have you denying me, woman. You should know me. Feel me in your very bones."

Okay, he was a little strange. He could be some crazy killer like Ted Bundy. She should be afraid and calling the police. For some reason, she couldn't stop looking at him. Apparently, him being beautiful stemmed her fear. A completely moronic reaction, but it was her reaction just the same.

"I'm not denying that we..." She made a motion toward her bed. "But I'm truly sorry, I don't remember you. I don't even know where I met you."

In short, angry movements, he thrust the sheet aside and practically leaped off the mattress. He stomped around the foot of the bed and approached her. Her gaze drew down his body and her pulse leaped.

Sweet Jesus, he was right. His front was just as wonderful. Sinewy muscles moved beneath golden skin as he rounded her bed and headed in her direction. A sculpted chest, washboard abs... Her gaze dipped lower. Her knees weakened. His erection thrust forward from a nest of dark hair. He seemed completely oblivious to his state of

arousal. But there was no way she could be. Every step he took heightened her fear and excitement, her body reacting more to the latter. Her breasts grew heavy, her mouth went dry.

He stopped within inches of her. The sensual musky scent of him surrounded her.

"Do you not remember me, your lover?" Grabbing her by the upper arms, urgently, but not roughly, he pulled her to him. "Do you not remember the feel of my mouth on yours? On every part of your body? I have tasted your essence, brought you to completion with my hands, my mouth...and you say you do not know me?"

She should have been frightened, but she wasn't. God help her, she was aroused. There was something about the way his accent laced through the words that captured her. Heat curled through her, warming her blood. Her nipples tightened, ached. Her pussy was already slick with her desires. He was so close she could feel his heat through her robe.

Not knowing his reaction to her answer, she couldn't answer. She was held mesmerized by the barely controlled hunger in his eyes. There was still anger, but now that he was closer, she could see the desire in them.

"I visit you every night. I come to you in the gloaming."

"You do not. I've never seen you before in my life."

His lips twisted into a cynical smile. "Maybe not, but you felt me. You called to me every night, whispered your need across the miles...years."

Okay. He was a nut. He was beautiful, sexy and aroused. But he was still a nut.

"Years?"

He nodded. "You called to me. Every night I would come, and until last night, I never gained satisfaction. But I would return every night, I could not refuse. Your satisfaction is my duty."

Definitely a mental patient. Men who looked like him didn't set out to please a woman who looked like her. Hell, they didn't set out to please anyone but themselves.

"W-who are you?"

"Seamus." He said it proudly, as if she would know who he was.

"And just what is it that you do when you are not here?"

"I'm fighting the infidels."

Really insane. "And who are these infidels?"

"Nordic." He released her and closed his eyes. When he opened them, confusion and irritation darkened them. "At least I think. The last I remember is a battle, an infidel caught me unawares. I remember the pain and then...nothing."

He paced away from her and she admired the way his muscles flexed as he walked. He might be crazy, but damn he was gorgeous. Maybe she'd been wrong to use a man's intelligence as a basis of a relationship. Look where it had gotten her with Jeremy.

"And where was this battle?"

He turned and paced back to her, stopping at the foot of her bed. The look he gave her told her he thought she was insane.

"Conn of a Hundred Battles had ordered my band to the northern provinces."

"The northern provinces of what?"

He tipped his head to the side and studied her. His hair spilled over his shoulder. Her gaze traveled down his chest to his abs. Standing where he was, the footboard of her sleigh bed blocked her view below that. Darnit.

When she looked at his face again, his smile had returned.

"Eirinn."

Ireland? The way he said it, and from his accent, he was from Ireland. From all her experience with the Irish, she knew the pride they held for their country. So either he really was from Ireland or he thought he was. Maybe he'd been hurt and didn't realize where he was. He said he was injured in a battle. Head injuries could really mess with a person's perceptions. It still didn't explain the most important question.

"What are you doing in my bedroom?"

His smile deepened. "I told ye that, lass. You called me."

"I don't even have your number." She sighed when he didn't respond. "And when did I do that?"

"Every night."

Paige threw her hands up in the air. "I don't even know you, don't know your number and don't remember meeting you, but I called you."

Before he could answer, her bedside phone rang. A look of alarm moved over his face as his gaze searched for the origin of the sound. Not sure what that meant, she leaned over and picked up the phone without checking caller id. And promptly regretted it when she heard Jeremy's voice.

"Darling, I thought I should check and see how you were feeling."

For a moment, she couldn't remember anything except finding him screwing a grad student on his desk. Well, not really catching, but close enough. And then she remembered she'd told him she was sick. She glanced at Seamus who was watching her intently.

She turned her back and lowered her voice. "I'm fine, Jeremy."

He sighed, his relief evident and she had a niggles of guilt for lying to him. Until he opened his mouth again.

"Good, because I really need that information." He said it as if she worked for him.

"Information?"

"I told you I needed your help with research, Paige. I'm at a very delicate crux, close to making a discovery." No, she was making the discovery. Jeremy couldn't research his way out of a paper bag. Anger built, but Paige, from years of practice, squashed it again.

"I really don't know if I will be able to help you today...or even tomorrow."

The fine hairs on her neck stirred and she knew without looking that Seamus stood behind her.

"Paige, I really need this done this weekend."

Before she could answer, the phone was jerked out of her hand. She turned to find Seamus studying it.

"Paige?"

He frowned at the receiver then held it to his ear. She could hear Jeremy's whiny voice asking for her. Seamus pulled the phone away from his ear, looked at it and then returned it.

"Who is Paige?" Seamus asked.

She heard another stream of words in Jeremy's voice again. Seamus' gaze slipped over her, starting at her head and then moving down over her body. She resisted the urge to try to straighten her appearance. From experience, she knew she was probably a mess, but she didn't want him to think she wanted to look nicer for him. The heat in his eyes told her she might as well have not been wearing her big terrycloth robe. Admiration shone in his eyes by the time his gaze returned to her face. A predatory smile curved his lips. A shiver raced down her spine, but not because she was cold.

"Ah, you mean my soul mate." He nodded. "She stands before me."

Another spate of words sounded from the receiver. Seamus moved it away from him but never took his gaze off her.

"What does fiancé mean?"

She cleared her throat before answering. "It means I'm engaged to be married."

"Married?"

"Yes. We are..." Her mind went blank as she tried to come up with something to explain it. "Betrothed, going to live together as man and wife."

His eyes widened. "You are to be married to this...this...voice?" His gaze turned shrewd. "Is he a god?"

She shook her head and reached for the phone. He used his considerable height to hold it over her head.

"Answer me."

"I am engaged at the moment, but..." How was she supposed to explain the man to whom she'd been promised had been cheating on her? It was so humiliating. She couldn't even keep a boring history professor like Jeremy satisfied.

Something she said registered with him apparently, because he nodded then said into the phone, "She is no longer yours. I have taken over my duties."

After making the pronouncement, he tossed the phone on the bed, where it bounced off the other side onto the floor. Before it crashed on the wooden floor, she could hear Jeremy's outraged voice asking questions. Plastic shattered and she knew it had broken the moment it hit because Jeremy's voice disappeared.

"That is settled." He made the comment as if he could decree law.

She shook her head. "Nothing is settled, Seamus." Didn't drunken one night stands just leave the next morning? Paige couldn't even let loose right. She found some nutjob who claimed to be her soul mate and wouldn't leave. Not that she could let him go in good conscience. There was a good chance he needed medical help.

"I don't know who you are or what you are doing in my bedroom. First things first, I am going to freshen up and hopefully you will dress and we can talk about this."

He opened his mouth to argue but then apparently thought better of it. "All right, lass. I'll find my trews. But there is one thing I request."

The color of his eyes deepened as he moved closer. Her heart knocked against her chest as she tried to catch her breath. Everything in her body clenched tight in anticipation...waiting for his touch.

"W-what?"

He slid his hand around her waist and pulled her closer. His body heat warmed her. The scent she somehow knew was uniquely Seamus surrounded her. It spoke to her soul, the very core of her being. "I need a taste of your nectar."

Without closing his eyes, he lowered his head, touching his lips to hers. Once, twice, he brushed his mouth against hers. Her eyes slid closed as his tongue stole inside sliding alongside hers. She moved her hands up over his shoulders, threading them through his silky hair. He moaned and pulled her closer, slanting his mouth over hers. She could feel his erection pulse against her. Her blood heated as pleasure stole through her. His hand slipped down her back then curved over her rear end, his fingers tracing the seam between her cheeks. Liquid heat filled her, dropped to her pussy.

And just like that, she wanted him. There was something so basic, so primal coursing through her that it screamed out to be satisfied. Somehow, she knew Seamus would be the only man who would be able to fulfill that need.

The next moment, he was pulling away. She opened her eyes and was amazed to find him frowning at her.

“You say you don’t know me, Paige. But you do.”

He spun on his heel and marched out of the room. For a second, she couldn’t move. Her body still pulsed with need. She shifted her weight from one foot to another and felt dampness on her thighs. The man had her more aroused than she had been in her life and just with a kiss. She lifted her hand to her mouth and slipped her fingers over her lips.

There was something there, something so familiar, but strange and frightening at the same time. In all her years she’d never had a man get her so hot so fast. It was almost as if he spoke to her on another level.

The prickle of tears threatened to spill as she tried to gain control of her emotions. It was probably the reaction every woman he kissed had. That should have comforted her, but the thought of him kissing other women bothered her. It was an idiotic reaction, but after a kiss like that, she could just imagine what he was like in bed.

Pushing those thoughts aside, she rushed to her bathroom. When she turned on the light, she gasped. There was a hickey on her neck, right above her collar bone. She pulled the fabric aside. A trail of love bites led down her chest, three more. Paige had

always been fair-skinned and easily bruised, but she'd never had a hickey before. When she met her gaze in the mirror, she stilled. Her hair was a wild mess around her shoulders, she had hickeys on her neck and there was a flush to her skin.

She looked like she'd had a night of amazing sex. Just her luck, she didn't remember it.

Chapter Four

Seamus prowled the rooms until he found his trews and shirt. As he dressed, he tried to rid himself of the anger. In all the nights he visited, he never thought she would deny him. Oh she knew they had made love. He could see it in her eyes, and even if she didn't admit to it, the love bites he'd given her would definitely show on her skin.

He slipped his shirt over his head and tried to come up with one reason why the woman would not know him. She should be able to feel him. He definitely knew her. Even without seeing her, he would know if she were close. Her body called to his. And the bloody woman had the nerve to act as if he were a madman.

He scrubbed his hands over his face, trying to make sense of what was happening. When he had ached for her every night, he had been certain, once she had accepted him, she would know him. Bloody woman.

Another type of ringing cut into his thoughts. It sounded similar to the one he'd heard earlier and he turned to go in search of the sound. He had a thing or two to tell this Jeremy.

He found a light blue contraption emitting the sound. Unlike the other one, this was attached to something. He picked it up and held it to his ear. When he realized the voice was coming from the other end, he turned it around.

"Paige? Paige? This is Judy, where are you?" It was a female voice that had a tinge of the same accent Paige had. It wasn't as lovely, more nasally and sharp.

"Paige is busy."

There was a moment of silence. "This isn't Jeremy, is it?"

"No. This is Seamus."

"Seamus?"

He nodded.

"I don't think I've met you." Her voice had warmed and had a hint of seduction curling through it. Normally he liked a bold woman. But for some reason, her flirtation left him cold.

"No, I have not met you."

"Are you a relative of Paige's? I know she gets into all that Celtic junk, but she never mentioned having actual relatives from Ireland."

"I am not a relative. I am her soul mate."

"Soul mate?"

Before he could say anything else, heat surged through his blood and then he heard a soft gasp. Seamus looked over his shoulder and stared at Paige. She was dressed now, wearing an emerald green blouse made of some type of soft fabric that made the hair laying about her shoulders seem even more brilliant. Streams of morning sun filled the room, bringing out the golden highlights threaded throughout her tresses. His gaze traveled down to her waist and beyond. She wore a pair of trews of some sort of stiff blue fabric. He'd never seen a woman dressed like this before. When he looked at her face again, it seemed all the blood had drained from it.

She rushed forward. "Who are you talking to? Is it Jeremy again?"

He turned as she approached, trying to find words. But momentarily he couldn't think of anything but this woman. He had waited so long and now she was here, in the bright light of the day. He needed to lay her down, slip between her soft thighs. As long as he lived, there was no way he would ever forget the feel of her cunt biting down hard on his cock, or how she looked as she gained pleasure. It bothered him that he needed her so, but he could not do a thing to stop the lust building. It overpowered him in a way he had not felt before.

Shaking his head, he tried to answer her question. "No, 'tis some woman."

She grabbed the thing out of his hand and he allowed it. He would allow anything for this woman. He would kill for her. He'd even give her the odd talking box.

"Judy? Yes, I'm fine." She glanced at him. A charming flush darkened her cheeks. "Seamus. Well, no, he isn't a relative. He's a...a...friend."

She pulled her bottom lip between her teeth. Oh merciful lord. He wanted her mouth on him. He wanted to slide his cock into her hot, wet mouth. His shaft throbbed.

"Jeremy? I wouldn't know what he thought about it and I don't really care." There was a spate of loud chatter from the contraption. "Listen, I'm a little busy. Was there another reason you called, Judy?" She paused and listened. "I know I said I would, but I wasn't feeling well and went home."

He stepped closer as the sound from the other woman rose. Paige looked up at him as he allowed his body to brush against hers. She licked her lips. Blood pounded, his body warmed and he was helpless to deny the need coursing through him. He wanted her, beneath him, on top of him, he didn't care how. He needed to feel her skin against his, hear her moan his name.

He bent his head and nibbled on her neck. Paige drew in a shuddering breath and shivered. The small movement sent his desire for her into overdrive. She might deny knowing him, but her body could not.

"Ahhh, Judy, I can't talk right now."

Pride filled him as he listened to her breathing increase. He stepped behind her and slid his hands around her waist and pulled her against him. She took another deep breath and settled against him. The scent of lilies mixed with the unique scent of Paige filled his senses. He flexed his hips, allowing her to feel his erection against her backside. As he closed his eyes, the image of taking her this way, bent before him on all fours, under his control, caused a drop of cum to wet the head of his cock. Easing his hands up her body, he stopped when he reached her breasts. The moment he brushed his hand over her nipples, they hardened. Sweet Jesu. He needed her. His blood sang

through him as heat spiraled out of control. Lust beyond any he ever felt poured into his veins.

“Oh, Judy, just let it go.” With that comment she clicked off the phone, dropped it on the floor and leaned her head against his shoulder. “Seamus.”

The sound of his name on her lips sent fire racing over his nerve endings. Like all those other nights before, his brain shut out everything but this woman. He didn’t understand it. Never before had a woman touched him so deeply as this one had. Just one request from her and he was her slave. Her needs became his. Her wishes, his to fulfill.

Her hands slipped up over his shoulders. He shuddered at her soft touch. She threaded her fingers through his hair and pulled his face to hers. Turning her head, she kissed him. The moment their mouths touched, she opened hers allowing him to steal inside. It only took a moment, a taste of her, and he was out of control.

Abruptly, he pulled away and spun her to face him. Something ached deep inside of him at the sight of her swollen lips and flushed skin. Desire darkened her eyes, vibrated in the air between them. Every time he was near her, his need rose, fire raged within him. Closing his eyes, he drew in a deep breath. The musky scent of her feminine lust surrounded him. When he opened his eyes, he found Paige staring up through her lashes at him. The small gesture was filled with equal parts innocence and seduction. His breath tangled in his throat, his heart almost stuttered to a stop. The woman was more lethal than she knew.

He grabbed her by the hips and pulled her body against his. Not able to wait, he devoured her mouth as he lifted her. He groaned when she wrapped her legs around his waist. Through the layers of fabric, he could feel her heat. Oh lord, he needed her. He wanted to touch her skin, feel her heart beat as one with his.

He sank to his knees, almost falling over on top of her. There was no way he would ever get enough of this woman. She was as necessary as the air to breathe. Her mouth moved to his, her tongue tangling with his as her kisses became desperate. He broke

away and grabbed the bottom of her shirt. Without hesitation, he pulled it off and looked down at her.

Batting away her hands as she reached for him, he brushed the back of his fingers against one and then the other nipple. The sweetest of berries against the softest of skin. No woman had lured him the way this woman had. If she knew how much power she held over him, she could destroy him.

Not able to fight the need, he took one turgid tip into his mouth. Even as he suckled at her breast, his hands were working at the waist of her treads. Their hands bumped together and she moved to help him. Easing off her, he pulled his hands away from her. He threw her clothes behind him but before they hit the floor her hands were on his clothes, clawing at the fabric.

Between the two of them, he was naked in seconds and pushing her back down to the ground. His hands shook as he pushed her legs wider, opening her to him. The hair of her cunt was almost as bright as the hair on her head. It was wet with her passion. He had to fight off the urge to take her in his mouth. He wanted to taste her dew, draw her desire into his mouth and savor her. There was no way he would last long enough to pleasure her with his mouth.

Sliding his hands beneath her ass, he positioned her and pushed into her in one fast, hard thrust. Wet warmth surrounded his penis, pulsing against him, pulling him deeper. He closed his eyes and concentrated on the joy of having her muscles clamped around him, of being one with her. He needed that connection, that feeling that told him that they were of one heart.

He withdrew and then pushed back in. Paige moaned his name. The throaty sound of his name on her lips shivered over him, spoke to his soul. Triumph blazed through him. The sweet sound pushed her farther as he drove into her again. She planted her feet firmly on the ground and met him thrust for thrust.

He dipped his head and took her mouth in a rough kiss as he felt her muscles contract against his cock. Her body quivered with her release, spurring his.

He exploded, his mind going blank to everything but the pleasure he felt coursing through his body, her name on his lips as he pumped his seed into her.

Moments later, Paige shifted her weight beneath Seamus. He mumbled something in Gaelic that she couldn't quite make out and then rolled to her side. Instead of moving away from her though, he pulled her closer. The moment he settled her body against his, he sighed and his breathing evened.

Paige couldn't grasp what she had just done. This was completely out of character for her. She never had sex with strangers, beautiful or otherwise, and she definitely didn't do it unprotected. The man thought her his soul mate. He was a nut who apparently thought his one duty was to keep her sexually satisfied.

Okay, that part of it wasn't that bad. It was wonderful actually. She knew it was probably completely insane to sleep with a man who might be suffering from severe mental problems. But for the life of her, she couldn't condemn herself because nothing had ever felt so right.

"I wish you would stop thinking." His voice was a low rumble and it made her stomach flip-flop.

"What do you mean?"

"Lass, your mind is working and I can hear the humming. I need some rest."

She didn't say anything as she digested that comment.

"Och, there you go, thinking again." He lifted himself up and rested his weight on his elbow. "Lass, you worry too much."

It was a common complaint from people she knew and especially her parents. Because it struck a nerve, her voice turned sharp. "Oh do you think so?"

He sighed, the sound filled with exasperation. "You do not understand what is happening, what has happened, so you think you must puzzle out the pieces."

She hated the fact that she barely knew the man but he seemed to be able to read her personality. "I like everything to have its place."

"Yes. Everything does have its place." Something passed over his face, something close to lonely despair, but it was gone so fast she thought she imagined it. It was replaced by a sexy smile that made her toes curl. "I know exactly where you belong, Paige."

"Really?" Was that her voice? It sounded all throaty, seductive.

Without a word, he stood then pulled her to her feet and scooped her up in his arms. "Aye, I have a place for you, lass."

Even as she tried to control her libido, her body ignored her. It responded immediately to the sound of his voice, the feel of his arms beneath her body. He, of course, headed to her bedroom, tossing her on the bed. Following her down, he covered her body with his.

"Seamus, this has got to stop. See, you may not realize it, but this is just not normal."

"You can deny anything you want, Paige, but you want me. You need me as much as I need you. It is something neither of us can control."

She closed her eyes and hummed as he moved his cock against her pussy. Oh this was really, really bad. Her body responded like a well-tuned instrument made especially for him. He nibbled at the tender skin just below her jaw as he moved to her side and allowed his hands to drift over her body. As his fingers slid against her skin, reasoning slipped away. Pure and simple lust replaced it.

Her body was begging for the hard fast lovemaking as before, but Seamus wasn't listening. Slowly, he began to love her, but kept the tempo slow and steady. As his hand cupped her between her legs, he took her earlobe into his mouth. She wiggled against his hand and he chuckled.

“Nay, lass, we take it slow this time. I’ve been waiting for this for eternity.” His breath was hot against her skin. “I’ll apologize for going so fast earlier, but I would rather make it up to you in other ways.”

His words shimmered through her as he moved his mouth over her skin. She felt the warm moist lick of his tongue against her nipple, then the scrape of his teeth. Warm blood heated as another gush of liquid filled her sex. As he drew her nipple between his teeth, his finger slipped between her folds. He murmured as he moved to her other nipple.

Pressure gathered in her stomach, coiling tighter. Seamus continued moving his finger, just barely brushing her clit. Tension grew tighter as he added another finger. He lifted his head from her breast. She opened her eyes to find him smiling down at her. Again, there was something completely predatory about the look in his eyes, in his smile. It spoke to something in her, something primal that she couldn’t quite control.

“Seamus.”

“That plea is music to my ears, love.”

He moved to cover her body with his. But instead of covering her, he slid down her body and positioned his body between her legs. Leaning closer, he smiled up at her.

“Ahh, lass, you smell like heaven. I know as soon as I am inside of you, that is where I will be. But I want you begging, I want you to be beyond any reasonable thought.”

The instant his mouth touched her, she was lost. Everything dissolved as his tongue slid inside, teasing her clit, pulling her closer to the edge. He licked, sucked and drove her relatively insane. Before she could jump, take the leap her body pleaded for, he would move back. Over and over he drove her to the brink until she was lost in the madness, not able to think of anything but attaining her goal.

“Please, Seamus.”

He groaned, the sound as if it had been torn from his soul. Placing a hand on each of her thighs, he pushed them farther apart and began working on her in earnest. A moment later, her body was coming apart at the seams as her orgasm tore through her.

Holy Mother of God.

Even as her body still jolted with her release he was moving up her body and pushing into her. His moves were not measured, but frantic. She had just come down from one release but as he worked his cock in and out of her, she felt the tension building for another. He bent and took her mouth in a desperate kiss. She could taste herself on his lips. The next instant, he groaned against her as he came, pushing her over into a free fall. Her world burst into a hundred million shimmering pieces as she gave herself over to pleasure.

Seamus bit into the meal Paige had made for him and wondered at the taste of it. She'd smeared bread with a brown paste. Sweet, nutty, the flavor pleased him. He watched her from where he sat at the table. She was perched on a stool of some sort, looking over some papers bound together.

"You should eat."

She looked up at him, her eyes unfocused for just a second or two. The moment he had her attention, his body responded. His blood heated, his staff stood at attention. Damn, what was it about her? He knew without a doubt that he was meant to be hers and she his. But why, he dinna understand.

"I'm eating," she said as she motioned toward her bread. Hers was half the size of his and she'd taken three bites out of it. She was already slight in stature. He knew she was healthy. There was a glow to her skin, a shine to that straight, silky hair that was undeniable. But she would need her strength.

"You need more than that."

She frowned, lifted the bread and took another bite before returning her attention to her work. He did not like it. Not any more than he liked being in a situation he did not

understand. There were things about her house that irritated and fascinated him at the same time. After their last bout of lovemaking, she asked him all kinds of questions. Where he was from, about his life. Then she slapped together some food and buried her nose in a book. He did not like sharing her attention. Especially with an inanimate object. This was not supposed to be this way. She was supposed to focus completely on him, his wants and needs.

“Seamus, did you say Conn of a Hundred Battles earlier?”

“Yes. He is our king. I fought alongside him and he gave me a position in his army.” He didn’t even try to hide his pride. For someone who had started out with no family, no home, he had come very far.

“Hmmm.”

“What?”

She lifted her gaze and looked at him. “Conn of a Hundred Battles lived almost eighteen hundred years ago. If that is true, then you, my warrior, are a very old man.”

He frowned at her. “No. I was just in a battle with the man. We had lost quite a few men, but we were victorious.”

She set the bound papers on the table and slipped off the stool. “Seamus, that is impossible. We live in the twenty-first century.” She sighed. “Listen, why don’t you watch some TV and I’ll do some research on the web. I might be able to find something that can help us.”

Seamus mulled that over for a few moments. Half of the time he had no idea what she was talking about but he could tell none of this was good. Whatever web she referred to, he knew she was still having trouble accepting him. And what the bloody hell did she mean by the twenty-first century? He pushed aside the panic clawing at his throat. Everything was different and strange in this world.

He wanted to argue with her. To tell her that he was Seamus, her soul mate, her lover. But before he could, there was banging against her door. As she walked toward

the sound, Seamus was on his feet, moving behind her. She stood on her tiptoes and peered through a metal object on the door.

"Just what I needed," she said as she unbolted the locks. When she opened the door, a man stood on the other side.

"Paige? What on earth is going on?"

He recognized the voice. The man who thought Paige belonged to him.

"Jeremy. I'm a little busy right now."

The other man's gaze moved over Paige then caught sight of Seamus. His eyes narrowed and he puffed out his chest like a rooster.

"I take it this is the Seamus I talked to."

Paige started and then glanced over her shoulder. From the surprised look in her eyes, she hadn't known he'd followed her to the door. She returned her attention to this Jeremy. Seamus felt his patience slipping away from him. Without another thought, he stepped in front of Paige.

"Yes, I am Seamus. You are no longer wanted here."

Jeremy, who was much smaller in stature and definitely no match for Seamus, stepped forward. Seamus took a little pity on the man. He had lost Paige and that was a prize Seamus knew he would fight to the death to keep.

"I have a right to know what you are doing here with her."

"Excuse me?" yelled Paige but both of the men ignored her.

"I understand, Jeremy. But she is mine and you have lost her. She was never really yours to begin with."

Seamus stepped back and slammed the door in the other man's outraged face.

Chapter Five

"Seamus!" Paige shouted. She was trying not to laugh at the expression that had been on Jeremy's face the moment the door shut. If she had had a camera, she would have loved to preserve it. Still, she couldn't leave the man standing outside her door. Okay, she could, but it would bother her. Besides, if she could break it off now, tell him that they weren't getting married, it would save her some time.

"What is so wrong, lass?" Seamus was looking at her as if she were crazy. A bubble of laughter threatened to escape but she fought it down. It figured the man who thought he was her soul mate was now looking as if she needed mental therapy.

The banging started again. "You can't just slam a door in someone's face."

He crossed his arms and gave her a mulish frown. "I'm thinking I just did that."

"Well, I don't want to get thrown out of my apartment for making a disturbance."

She stepped around him and opened the door. Jeremy's usually pale face was flush with anger, his eyes bulging in the most unattractive way.

"Paige, what in the hell is going on?" He shot a wary glance at Seamus but stepped over the threshold all the same. "I call here and this man answers the phone and then he slams the door in my face when I show up."

She closed the door then said, "Seamus, could you please leave us alone?"

"No."

She rolled her eyes, knowing he would see this as some kind of battle he needed to fight. "Seamus, I need to talk to Jeremy and I would rather do it here and not have to leave."

His jaw flexed and for several seconds, strained silence filled the room. Finally, he nodded and she let loose a breath she didn't know she'd been holding. "But with one word from you, I will return."

She agreed and he stomped back to the bedroom, but he didn't shut the door. Turning, she faced Jeremy. Some of the flush had receded, but he was still angry. She could tell by the way he frowned at her.

"Paige, who is that guy?"

She shrugged. "Seamus."

"*Seamus*? That is all you can say to me? We are engaged to be married and I call you this morning to check on your health and find out some man is at your apartment."

More likely he wanted to make sure she would do his research, but she let that go. As she studied Jeremy, Paige began to wonder what she had seen in him. They did share a love of Irish history, and before now she'd never thought herself attracted to bulging muscles. Jeremy was slim, but not skinny. More of a swimmer's streamlined body, except she did notice in the last few months he'd put on some weight. The intelligence in his eyes didn't seem as pronounced for some reason. Probably because of the anger she'd witnessed earlier. Until this day, Jeremy had never raised his voice in her presence. And that was what was wrong with them. The fact that in all the time they had been together their relationship seemed to just float along without a bump in the road showed there was really nothing between them.

"Jeremy, I want to call off our wedding."

"Call off our wedding?"

"Yes."

"Because of Seamus?"

"No. I have other reasons." And she really didn't want to confront that problem. She didn't want to hear the denials. She'd heard them most her life from her father. "I just decided we didn't suit."

"We didn't suit?" His voice rose and a little drop of spittle became wedged in the corner of his mouth. This was a most unattractive side of him. "Paige, I don't understand."

"Well, I think that we have different goals in life."

"No. No, listen, darling." He reached out and pulled her closer. "We wanted to make tenure."

Anger swelled, a familiar knot formed in her stomach. She'd never really noticed that all their goals had been for his career—not until this moment. The past few months were coming back to her in glaring clarity and she realized that Jeremy had not once listened to her wants and desires. She had avoided it until now, apparently subconsciously trying to convince herself that her needs were somehow less than his. But she wanted this confrontation to be over with and not be as painful as she worried it would be.

"I know this might be a surprise for you, Jeremy, but my goal in life is not for you to make tenure."

His eyes softened. "No. No, I know that. But once I make tenure, things will settle down."

His fingers were now caressing her through her shirt. She shivered. The touch she had yearned for now left her cold and slightly repulsed.

"It doesn't matter. I'm still calling the wedding off. Mom and Dad will understand. The only thing we will lose is the deposit on the reception room. No biggie."

"No biggie?"

His eyes hardened as his fingers dug into her arms.

"Jeremy, that hurts."

"I don't give a damn."

"You might not, but my friend might."

He paused and looked over her shoulder. Releasing her, he stepped back. His face screwed up into an ugly mask of anger.

"I am not going to let this go, Paige. Just because you meet some stud and you think you're in love doesn't mean I am going to let you go."

"Paige?" Seamus' voice drifted down the hall. "Are you all right?"

"Yes."

Jeremy shot a dirty look down the hall then met her gaze. "This isn't the last of this, Paige."

He turned on his heel and left, slamming the door behind him. For a few moments, Paige just stared. Jeremy's behavior had bothered her before. He had a tendency to whine, nag and generally cajole her into doing favors for him. But she'd never heard him threaten anyone. Especially not her.

She shivered as she remembered the cold look in his eyes as he tried to intimidate her. He meant to do something, what, she had no idea. Jeremy wasn't the kind of man who would confront her and he was too lazy to physically do anything to her. But he did have plans, she'd bet her life on it.

Seamus' hands slid around her waist and pulled her against him. He dropped a kiss on the top of her head and then rested his cheek there.

"I take it that Jeremy is not happy."

"No."

"I can hardly blame him. But 'tis his fault."

She turned in his arms and looked up at him. "Why is that?"

"If he had been showing you proper care you would not have wished for me."

She frowned. "Hmmm. So, you think you are here because I wished for you?"

He nodded as he bent down to nip at her lips. Instantly, her body reacted at that slight touch. It was madness. She pushed away from him.

"No. No, we need to figure out where you came from." *Before I lose my mind and decide to keep you.* That thought, more so than her response to him, had her panicking. She took a deep breath and said, "Why don't I show you the television and I can get some work done."

After she'd introduced Seamus to the television, she stood back to observe his reaction. She watched him play with remote control, seemingly entranced with the technology. It was if he had never seen it before she introduced it to him. It gave her pause as he punched buttons and a look of surprise passed over his face when the channel changed. If he was acting, he was doing a pretty good job.

Would some kind of physical or emotional trauma cause him to take on another personality? She had heard of that happening, but she never realized that a person could be so completely entrenched in the character.

He kept flipping through the channels until he arrived at one that was louder than the others. He winced.

"Here," she said taking the remote out of his hand. "Press the one that says VOL." After she demonstrated it, he took it back and began to once again looking through the channels. Then he stood and approached the TV.

"Are they in the box?" his voice filled with awe as if discovering something completely amazing.

She choked back the laugh that tickled her throat. Paige didn't want Seamus to think she was laughing at him.

"No. The pictures, or video, are taken elsewhere and transmitted to the TV."

He frowned, worry etching his features. If he was acting, he deserved an Oscar for the performance. Paige had heard of cases where people with head traumas took on different personalities to protect themselves from memories.

Seamus continued to stare at her, so she offered him her most reassuring smile. "It is a machine...an apparatus that captures pictures and sends them to you."

He still looked confused, but he reached for the remote and took it from her. She waited for him to say something else, but he concentrated on playing with the buttons on the remote.

"Do you need anything?" she asked.

"No." He did not take his attention away from the screen so Paige figured he would be okay for awhile.

After cleaning up and remembering—thank goodness—to take her birth control pill, Paige called a college friend who worked at the Savannah PD. Fiona answered her cell phone on the second ring.

"White speaking." Her friend's husky, southern voice hadn't changed a bit.

"Fiona, this is Paige Turner."

"Paige? Well, how are you doing? Can you hold on a sec?"

"Yes."

It sounded like she cupped a hand over the phone, but Paige could still hear the sound of rustling sheets and the rumble of a male voice. As she waited, Paige sat down on her bed, trying to calm her nerves.

A moment later, Fiona was back.

"What can I do for you, Paige?"

"It seems I have found a man."

Fiona chuckled. "I've been telling you that was exactly what you needed. I take it this is not about the fiancé."

Ever since Paige had been engaged, she noticed that many of her acquaintances referred to him as if he were an object.

"No. And there is no longer a fiancé."

There was a beat of silence. "That's good. I never liked Jerry."

"Jeremy."

"So, who is this other man?"

"His name is Seamus and he claims to be from the past."

Another moment of silence then Fiona sighed. "Jesus, woman, you sure know how to pick them. Where did you find him?"

"Well..." Paige's mind tried to come up with a reasonable explanation. One that didn't sound so bad.

"Paige? Don't try to lie, I'll know."

Paige fiddled with the lace ruffle on the edge of her comforter. "I'm really not sure."

"You don't know where you found him?"

She sighed. "No."

"Are you sure this is Paige Turner?"

"That's not funny, Fiona."

"No, but the woman I know would never bring home a man not knowing where he came from."

"I wish I had brought him home." She sighed. "Last night, I'd come home from a bad day at work and ate a whole bag of whiskey truffles. I hadn't had much to eat all day. The last thing I remember was getting dizzy and passing out on the couch."

"And then what?"

"I woke up and there was a god in my bed."

"And this is a problem because?"

"Because he thinks he is from the second century. He keeps talking about one of the kings and he claims to be a warrior."

Fiona sighed. "Leave it to you. When you let loose, you really let loose. Okay, give me a good description of the man and I will do some searching."

"About six feet tall, long black hair, blue eyes. He wears the oddest of clothes, more like historical clothing of the period. I get the idea that he may have had a head injury at some point."

She could hear the keys to Fiona's keyboard click.

"I want you to be very careful around this man the next time you see him." Paige didn't say anything and Fiona sighed again. "He's in your apartment. I should have known. You always did pick up strays. I'm not sure I like that, Paige. Why don't you drop him off at a hospital? If he's not dangerous, there is a good chance he's a mental patient."

The thought of dumping Seamus at a hospital and walking away made her stomach clench. Paige couldn't bring herself to leave him. He'd seemed so confused when he'd encountered any kind of electronic device. The idea of leaving him in the ER with all those machines...she shivered. She didn't even want to think what would happen if they hooked him up to a device. It would be easier if she eased him into dealing with what he considered unfamiliar.

"No. I can't do it, Fiona. And I know he isn't dangerous."

"Oh, Paige, you wouldn't know dangerous if a nuclear warhead landed in the middle of your apartment."

"There is no way Seamus would hurt me, Fiona."

Fiona snorted. "I want you to check in with me on a regular basis."

"No problem."

After a few more warnings from Fiona, Paige finally hung up. There had to be something wrong with her. Yesterday, she would have sworn if she woke in bed with a strange man, no matter how gorgeous, she would have shown him the door. Instead, she'd made love to him twice and was worried that if he crooked his finger at her, she would obey his command without a thought. It was a bit embarrassing.

There was something there between the two of them. She couldn't seem to explain it even to herself. All logical thought fled when he touched her. The connection between them was on some level that she couldn't comprehend. It was if it was essential to her survival. Even thinking about it made her body hum. She shook her head and chastised herself for getting off track and daydreaming. She had work to get done if she was going to help Seamus.

Paige pulled herself out of her thoughts and went to work on her own research. Maybe at some point he'd found a historical anecdote that he fed on for his fantasy. If she could find information that maybe her Seamus found, it might help her discover his true identity. An hour or so later, Paige found the bit of information she'd been looking for. She was lucky that one of her loves was Celtic lore. She'd bookmarked so many sites, she basically just sorted through her list. This one featured lore and legends, stories passed down through the generations. It recounted many of the battles during Conn's reign as King of Ireland during the second century.

Conn of Hundred Battles was justly named. The man had gained respect through his skills on the battlefield. He'd had a legion of very dedicated men. As she went through the listing of names, her heart almost dropped to her feet when she saw the name Seamus. A common enough name. But she figured she would work through any reference to that name in the time period. She clicked the link and began to read. Seamus apparently was fostered by Conn at an early age, having lost both of his parents. The description of him fit. As a child, he'd been rumored to be tall for his age, with black hair and blue eyes. He'd won favor by saving one of Conn's sons in a particularly nasty battle. Several months later, they were faced with more intruders.

What had Seamus called them? Infidels. She sighed and read on.

At one particular battle, Seamus the Warrior took charge of a battalion of men and took over the intruders. Many men were lost, including several related to Conn, but by all accounts, Seamus survived the battle. Then it is told he was caught unaware and injured. There has never been a true account of it, but it is said that his body disappeared from the battlefield and he was never heard from again.

She stared unseeingly at the computer screen, her mind trying to figure out just what she had read. He had disappeared never to be seen again? People always disappeared in the heat of the battle, bodies to never be found.

Seamus could have easily found this information himself. Or could she actually have a second century Celtic Warrior roaming around her apartment?

Chapter Six

"Paige?"

She jumped at the sound of his voice and glanced to the doorway. "Hey, Seamus." She'd tried to make her voice sound welcoming, but somehow the tone sounded false. Probably because it was.

"What is wrong?"

She swallowed the tangle of emotions that seemed to have lodged somewhere between her heart and her throat.

"Oh nothing, just..."

She didn't know what to say. Was it possible that the man had traveled through the years to her? After all, what about the way he dressed? She shook her head. There was no way that could have happened. After all, his speech was English, even with an Irish accent, and definitely not a different language.

Could he have known this information and somehow taken on the persona? Was she thinking he did come from the past because somehow that was better than being insane?

He approached her, his brow wrinkled with worry. "Paige, love, what is wrong?"

"Nothing, really, I just came across some information about a Seamus from the time you talked of." She motioned toward her computer and he followed her direction.

He studied her screen as if he'd never seen anything like it before. Just like the telephone and the TV before, he seemed surprised by the technology.

"What does it say?"

"It says that Seamus was a valued warrior to Conn. That he led a battalion of men, that he was injured."

He spun away, as if the story was too much to bear. Without turning around, he asked, "What happened?"

"It says there was a bloody battle and a lot of men were killed."

He sighed, the sound so filled with pain and weariness. "Aye. There was always a battle. Always much loss."

She waited to see if he would continue but when he didn't she said, "Seamus. It says that you were injured and then never seen again."

He glanced over his shoulder at her. "I told you, I remember being injured and then nothing. The next thing I know, I am being tortured by a woman who calls me to her. And once she bestows my wish, she denies me."

Again, she shook her head. It couldn't be. She loved myths and legends but this was real life. Things like this didn't happen to her, to anyone for that matter. Her mind could not seem to work. It stalled, unable to compute the fantastic things she'd discovered. If she accepted his story, accepted him for who he claimed to be, everything she believed would be shattered.

He turned his head away and sighed. The sound was lonely, and again, filled with pain. She knew what it felt to be out of place. Crazy or not, Seamus was lonely. Maybe that was what pushed him over the edge. And something in her stirred. Something so gentle but at the same so deep it frightened her. They might not have much in common, but there was this one thing. She'd spent most of her life filling the empty spaces, trying to make up for being the only child of two people who couldn't really stand each other or have time for her while they battled.

She rose from her seat and approached him. Raising a hand, she hesitated once then placed it on his shoulder. Even through his shirt she could feel the heat of him.

He turned his head and glanced at her. His gaze hardened.

"Don't pity me, woman."

His voice was harsh, almost threatening, but she could detect an underlying emotion. Something close to fear. That intrigued her more than his beauty. It made him more human, vulnerable. His eyebrows drew down as his frown deepened. With a disgusted huff, he turned around and tried to shake off her hand. Paige wouldn't have it.

Keeping her hand on his shoulder, she moved in front of him. He wouldn't meet her gaze, just kept staring at some point over her shoulder.

"I don't pity you, Seamus."

He snorted and she fought the urge to laugh at the sound. "I can tell what that look in a woman's eye means. She pities him."

Crossing his arms over his massive chest, he continued to avoid making eye contact. His words had been clipped, angry. Then it hit her. Men didn't like to accept they could be vulnerable. Something in their psyche just wouldn't allow it.

She stepped closer, closed her eyes and inhaled the masculine scent that was unique to Seamus. Every time she was close to him, her head spun. It was if she lost complete control of her body. Some other force seemed to have taken hold directing her actions. It should scare the hell out of her, but for some reason it didn't. With the very heat of him warming her, she could care less about propriety, about doing what was logical.

When she opened her eyes, he was looking down at her. He was no longer frowning, but there was a wary look in his eyes.

"I don't pity you, Seamus. That would be hard to do. You achieved much in your life."

Well, in the life he assumed. Oh who was she kidding here? She didn't want it to be assumed. A little part of her hoped, prayed that what he was saying was true. For a woman who had always seen herself as a realist, it was scary to even think about the fantasy Seamus lived in. But part of her, deep down, wanted it to be true, yearned for it to be something she could experience. She was sick of being lonely even when she was with another person. With Seamus, she realized she never felt alone.

The line between myths and reality was blurring. And for once in her life, Paige didn't want to face cold reality. She wanted to jump headlong into the fantasy.

"I just understand what you are talking about. I've been there." She swallowed as the old feelings rose from the depths of her soul. "I've been lonely."

He searched her eyes as if trying to discern if she were lying. "You think I am lonely?"

She sighed then offered up a small smile. "I can sense it, Seamus."

His lips curved. "You can feel it, Paige?"

She knew what he was asking and it was completely wrong of her to agree. She researched legends, but she didn't particularly believe in them. Her mind told her that it was wrong, that ethically she was skating on thin ice. If she played along with him, she was allowing a sick man in need of help to live in his fantasy world.

Running her fingers through her hair, she tried to sort it out. There was a part of her, the romantic soul part of her that wanted to believe in the fantasy. There was this man, this gorgeous, delicious man who wanted her to believe and she wanted to. She liked this world he'd created in his mind, and sadly, it was the nicest thing that had happened to her ever.

But she knew better. Dreams didn't come true and when they did, they weren't this perfect. Rationally, she knew that Seamus wasn't a warrior and he wasn't her soul mate. And she knew it was extremely unethical for her to play along knowing that he wasn't who he thought he was, especially since she suspected he'd had some kind of trauma. She would help him avoid reality even longer.

Fortunately, her mind was no longer calling the shots. Her body, and perhaps heart, had taken control and had her pushing into Seamus' fantasy. It scared the hell out of her, no doubt, but nothing in her life had felt so right.

She placed her other hand on his shoulder. Standing up on her tiptoes, she leaned closer. Without closing her eyes, she brushed her lips against his. A shudder lanced

through him but he kept his arms locked over his chest. His eyes darkened, his breathing deepened.

“Come on, Seamus. Let me in,” she whispered against his lips. When he continued to hold himself still, she slid her hands over his shoulders to the base of his neck. “Can you feel it, love? Everything logical tells me not to surrender, but I can’t help it. You don’t speak to my mind, Seamus. You speak to my heart...my soul.”

Another shudder rippled through him. He hesitated once but then with an anguished groan, he slipped his hands around her, pulling her against his chest. She threaded her fingers through his hair, closed her eyes and pressed her palms against the back of his head. Opening her mouth, she thrust her tongue into his mouth and sighed. Oh lord, he tasted so sweet. There was nothing on Earth that tasted like him. It was as if he’d been made just for her.

Seamus groaned again. The sound was one of complete surrender. A thrill of heat raced along her nerve endings as she took complete control of the kiss. She moved her hands to cup her face, deepening the kiss. Somewhere, one of them moaned again. So steeped in him, she had no idea who it was. Trying not to break the kiss, she urged him backward to her bed. He stopped when the backs of his knees hit the bed.

Paige moved away from him, licking her lips. She could taste him there. She opened her eyes and her knees went weak when she saw the heat in his gaze. It gave her such a jolt of power that she was dizzy. She’d never been able to cause that type of reaction from any man.

Slipping her hands up his chest, then settling them against his shoulders, she smiled up at him, then pushed him. He fell back onto the bed with a laugh. The jubilant sound shot straight to her blood. He wanted her, she could tell that from the bulge in his pants. It was the fact she could arouse him and ease his worries, make him happy, that spoke to her heart.

She stepped closer and ran her hands up his inner thighs. The corded muscles beneath the homespun stiff fabric contracted. She smiled to herself as she continued to

edge her hands farther up his thighs, just glancing over his erection as she headed to her destination. She slipped her fingers beneath the fabric of his pants and touched the tip of her finger to the wide head of his penis. A drop of pre-cum wet her finger.

She pulled her hand from his pants and then lifted her finger to her mouth. When she looked up at him, she almost passed out from the potent desire she saw blazing in his eyes. Touching her tongue to her finger, she licked the drop off and hummed as the salty sweet taste of him filled her mouth. His nostrils flared but he continued to watch her, as if daring her to push him further. She climbed to her feet and undressed, enjoying the way his gaze followed her every move. He curled his fingers into the quilt on her bed, his knuckles turning white.

Totally nude, she slid her hands from her waist up to her breasts. He watched as she stroked her thumbs over her nipples. They hardened further and Paige took delight at the flush that crept into his cheeks as he took several deep breaths.

“You know, before today I’d never thought of myself as a particularly sensual person.”

Paige was surprised by the husky tenor of her voice though she shouldn’t have been considering the way her heart was beating against her chest. He grunted but didn’t take his attention from her hands.

Cupping a breast, still teasing the nipple, she slipped her other hands down her torso to her pussy. She never moved her own gaze from his face. In the short time she’d known Seamus, he’d been able to mask feelings. Confronted with fear, though, he’d tried to close down. It hadn’t worked because she’d seen right through it, down to the inner core of the man. Something was bothering him and it just might be the pain of loneliness.

The wet heat of her pussy warmed her hand. His gaze traveled the path her hand had. His jaw clenched. He flexed his fingers.

"Ahhh." She closed her eyes as she spread her feet farther apart. Slipping a finger between her folds she shuddered as it touched her hardened clit. Her muscles clamped around her finger. "Is this the way it feels when you slide inside me, Seamus?"

Another grunt, but she paid no heed. Heat wound through her. Knowing she was edging closer to an orgasm, she stopped. When she moved her hands to her side, she opened her eyes and was pleased to see the look of total and utter lust in his eyes. She wasn't a prude, but she'd never been able to express herself with a man.

Maybe it was because Seamus was her fantasy man, someone who wouldn't judge her and find her lacking. Or maybe it was because in all the world there would never be a man who made her feel the things he did. They didn't know each other, but there was an underlying basic instinct that drew her to him.

It was insane. It was wonderful. She reached for the bottom of his shirt and yanked it off him, tossing it behind her. Holy Mother of God, the man had a chest. It was sculpted, but not in the weight training way. She wasn't sure how she knew, but he'd attained his shape from hard physical labor. Skimming her fingers over his skin, she marveled at the shape, the texture. When she touched his nipples, he drew in a deep breath.

"Beautiful."

He shook his head and she looked down at him. "Not beautiful, lass."

She nodded. "Yes, Seamus. There is such a thing as male beauty. But I think...there is something that tells me that your beauty is not just physical."

His eyes softened and his lips curved. Leaning down, she placed a kiss on his mouth, but didn't linger. Instead, she moved her mouth over his jaw down his neck, licking his skin as she went. She enjoyed the taste of his skin as she continued her descent. She paused once to lick each nipple. When he shivered and groaned, she felt the jolt of heat shoot straight for her cunt.

She settled on her knees between his legs. Untying his pants, she then tugged on the fabric. His erection sprang free into her waiting hands. Paige was sure she'd never seen anything quite as beautiful.

Wrapping her hand around the base of it, she slid it up his hardened cock. It pulsed against her hand and she repeated the action several times. Impossibly, it grew larger. Unable to resist the chance to taste him, she leaned forward and took his shaft in her mouth.

"Paige."

Her name was half-reprimand and half-plea. Again, it was another signal of his surrender. Slipping her hand beneath, she cupped his balls, squeezing as she continued moving her mouth over his cock. He threaded his fingers through her hair, then settled his hands on her head. His murmurs became a mixture of modern English and ancient Gaelic as they grew in volume. Before she was ready, he was pulling her up from her knees and onto the bed. Positioning her on her stomach, he grabbed two pillows and stuffed them beneath her pelvis.

She turned to look at him over her shoulder. He jerked his pants off and threw them behind him in a violent motion. Completely nude, he climbed on the bed and situated himself between her outstretched legs. He was breathing heavily, his body fairly quivering with unrelieved lust. The only thought she had was that she was the cause of that. She was the person who'd driven him to the edge.

He smoothed his hands over her ass, his fingers dancing along her skin. Already unbearably aroused, she groaned and dropped her head back to the bed. He continued moving his hands over her, slipping one between her legs and stroking her pussy. One finger slid along her slit and she almost came there and then. Another gush of liquid filled her pussy. As the tension built, it settled between her legs. Paige wiggled, trying to relieve the pressure.

“Oh love, you are hot, aren’t ye?” His voice skimmed over her senses, into her blood, into her soul. He pushed one finger into her. “Wet and hot. Ahh, darlin’, I can’t wait to feel those muscles on my staff.”

As he moved his finger, she mimicked his rhythm. Just as she felt ready to jump headlong into her orgasm, he pulled his hand away.

“Seamus!”

“Nay, my love. I want to be inside you when you come.”

He took hold of her hips and moved closer, sliding his cock against her rear end. She shivered, ready to beg but he saved her from that by pulling her hips higher and pushing his shaft into her slowly.

Sweet Jesu, the woman fit him as tight as fist. Her tiny muscles clasped onto his cock, pulling him deeper into her hot, wet core. In small increments, he would push forward, then move back. He kept that pattern, pushing ever so slightly farther each time. By the time he entered her completely, she was bucking against him, begging for relief.

His control snapped and his moves became frantic, thrusting into her over and over. She moaned his name as the sound of skin against skin filled the room. Reaching around her with one hand, he slid his palm to her cunt, pressing his thumb against her clit. The tension that he’d carefully pulled tighter and tighter now broke free. She shattered, her body convulsing with her orgasm as she shouted his name. Even as she was still quivering with her release, he continued to move his hand against her, pushing her up and over the edge again as she hurtled into another orgasm. This time he joined her, shouting her name as she did his.

Chapter Seven

Completely drained from their last bout of lovemaking, Seamus and Paige lingered in bed. For a time they nodded off, but Seamus woke before Paige and watched her. He'd never been this mesmerized by a woman. She snuggled closer, moving this way and that until she found the spot she wanted. Then she sighed and drifted deeper into sleep.

What was it about this woman, with her strange home and contraptions, that so held him in her spell? She was beautiful, there was no doubt of that, but there were many beautiful women, some even more beautiful than this one. Even with her long, straight red hair, delicate features and crystal blue eyes, he could probably find several women who outshined her physical beauty.

Was it her inner love? She seemed to know exactly what he needed. No other woman, save his mother, had seemed to care for him this way. He knew she wasn't ready to accept him or what they were together. But the connection was there. He could feel it in his blood.

She would just have to accept him. Seamus knew he had to figure out a plan to get her to understand. At the thought of not achieving that goal, panic filled his chest, tightening around the vicinity of his heart. It left him breathless but he vigilantly fought it back. If he didn't know better, he would think it fear. But that was insane. Seamus the Warrior didn't fear anything. He was legendary for his cool head and strong use of the blade. Not once did he hesitate to wade into the thick of the battle and do his share of the work. He fought the feeling, taking deep breaths, bringing down his heart rate. As soon as the sensation passed, he inhaled deeply once more and felt all the muscles in his back relax.

Paige shifted closer and mumbled, turning over and presenting him with her back. He'd never seen skin so pure. He traced her spine with one of his fingers, starting at the base of her neck down to the small of her back. She shivered and moved closer, snuggling her rear against his cock. Already half aroused, he went to full mast in the space of a heartbeat.

What was it? Damn, the woman apparently just had to breathe. Questions vanished as she wiggled her ass again and he groaned. A muffled giggle sounded from the pillow, raising his suspicions.

"Paige?"

The sound grew louder. Seamus moved slightly back and Paige rolled over onto her back. She no longer tried to hide the fact that she was laughing at him and her mood was contagious. He wasn't sure he'd ever heard a sound so beautiful as her laughing. It was full bodied, and besides, she'd moved from under the sheet to present him with an unobstructed view of her breasts.

Normally, Seamus liked a woman with generous curves, but that seemed not to matter now. Her skin was so delicate, he could see the veins beneath her skin, adding to the deceptive idea that she was somehow delicate. Her nipples were pert, the color of raspberries and, he knew from experience, just as sweet. Seamus licked his lips thinking just how many times he'd tasted them in his dreams. His mouth watered, his shaft twitched.

He had been sure when he had finally taken her, he would be able to quench his need. That the gnawing he had felt in his stomach, the unbearable lust would diminish. Instead, it grew. He felt the connection grow, and with it his unease. He didn't want to need anyone, it made him vulnerable. Seamus did the only thing he knew would wipe away his fear and bind her even more tightly to him.

She was still laughing when he bent to take one of those nipples into his mouth, his tongue circling her areola. Her giggle melted into a moan of appreciation. He moved to

her other breast, his hand caressing the one he'd just abandoned. "Seamus." The dreamy quality of her voice sent another wave of heat surging through his blood.

"Aye, lass. 'Tis Seamus."

He kissed his way down her body, taking pleasure in the taste of her skin. It was more dewy sweet than the fresh-picked peach. He drew the flat of his tongue over her bellybutton, and smiled when she moaned loudly as she slipped her fingers through his hair. She tried to urge him back up her body but he shook free of her hold, moving to the treasure he most wanted.

As he settled between her legs, he drew in a deep breath, enjoying the sweet, musky scent of her passion. Licking the inside of her thigh, he drew out the anticipation dancing through his blood, causing her to moan his name even louder. His mouth watered with the anticipation. It took every bit of his control not to rush the pleasure. He slipped his hands beneath her ass, massaging and squeezing her flesh as he touched his tongue just above her woman's hair.

"Seamus, I swear by all that is holy, if you don't—"

He cut off the rest of the sentence by lowering his head. He touched his mouth to her pussy and devoured. Her legs moved restlessly against the bed. Moving one hand up and over her mound, he pulled her skin to reveal her hardened nubbin. With great pleasure, he pressed his thumb. Paige quivered, her hands moving to his head again urging him on.

As he tunneled his tongue into her core, he savored the taste of her essence as he drove her up and over into an orgasm. But it wasn't enough. He needed more. He needed her to understand that he controlled her body...and her heart.

He continued the assault, taking her hardened nub between his lips, sucking and licking, pushing her to another release before she had completely recovered from the one before. Now, though, he could no longer hold out. He quickly moved up her body, sliding into her heated core.

He rose to his knees, lifting her hips, driving himself into her over and over. Her muscles clung, pulled, teased him each time he pushed himself into her hot, wet passage. With each stroke he drove Paige closer to the edge again. It was if he were possessed, that some other power controlled him. He had to make her accept that she was his. To allow herself to be owned, to be one with him.

Shifting his hips, he stroked her deeper, pushed her higher. He knew she was close to another release, but he didn't want to let it happen just yet. If she came, he knew he would and he wanted this to last longer, to last forever. Sweat rolled down his temple. It dripped into his eyes, but he ignored the sting. All that mattered was this woman and her pleasure.

But all that was lost when she opened her eyes. "Seamus."

This time her voice was not demanding. It was filled with a warm tenderness that wrapped around his heart. The sound of it spurred him on. Soon he was a madman, his movements out of control and he plunged into her faster, deeper. Moments later, her eyes went vague with passion, closing as she hurtled over the edge again, her inner muscles clamping down on his shaft, pulling his own release from him.

With her name on his lips, he exploded, his fingers digging into her flesh and he pumped into her twice more. His own orgasm seemed to go on forever, his seed pouring from him into her. Seamus did not want it to end. He wanted—needed—this connection.

But soon his arms were shaking from his efforts. Drained, he slipped his hands from her hips and collapsed on top of her. His heart still smacked against his chest and the scent of their passion filled the air. He had never felt so alive in his entire life. Not even surviving battle, defeating the infidels...nothing had made him so glad that he was alive. She shifted beneath him and he groaned, moving to her side and pulling her against him.

"Sorry, lass. Didn't mean to crush you."

She sighed and curled against him. “No problem. After that performance, you could do anything you want to me.”

As her hand settled on his chest, just over his heart, Seamus tried to fight the disappointment that swelled. There was no reason for feeling as if he’d missed something in their lovemaking. He’d not only gained his own satisfaction, but helped her to hers twice. But no, there was something missing. She’d not given him the words of surrender. It had been close, but not exactly what he had expected. Seamus knew she had yet to accept their fate. But she would, he could feel her resistance softening and then she would commit to him.

As she let out a delicate snore, he smiled and closed his eyes. Everything would be fine and work itself out. He was sure of it.

* * * * *

Paige parked her car in a designated staff spot and glanced at Seamus. It had been a little over twenty-four hours since she’d first awakened to find him in her bed and she still wasn’t sure what to do with him. Well, she knew what she would like to do with him, but it couldn’t last.

Yes, there were indications that the man was who he said he was, but not enough to change the mind of someone sensible like her. All of it just pointed to the fact that he could have found the information himself and somehow adopted it as his own history. He’d been looking out the window, asking questions since they’d gotten in the car. It was as if he’d adopted the life of this Seamus and forgotten everything else.

She’d taken a chance bringing him with her, but she’d gotten a call from Judy about an emergency. Knowing that Judy would just keep calling until she came, Paige had succumbed. Although she was worried that she’d open him to scrutiny, Paige decided it was more important that she keep an eye on him. At her apartment, he’d be left to his own devices and there was a good chance he’d electrocute himself with her toaster oven.

"So what is this place?" he asked, breaking the silence.

"This is where I work. It's a library."

"Library?"

He turned toward her and she saw the confusion in his eyes. Maybe something about their surroundings jolted his memory. She'd worried that maybe she should take him to the ER, but ruled against it until after Fiona could get him info. Now she wasn't sure if she did make the right decision. He might just remember his real name and life. She'd heard that sometimes that could be traumatic for the person. Her stomach flip-flopped at the thought. She told herself it was worrying about his well-being, not the fact she was worried about him leaving her.

It was bad enough that last night he'd scared the hell out of her in bed. It wasn't that she was actually afraid of him, but of what he made her feel. She had more passion for a man she knew for less than forty-eight hours than she did for her fiancé. Ex-fiancé. It was insane. Paige didn't take leaps of faith, but there was something there, something she felt for him. She'd tried to tell herself it was the great sex. Amazing sex. But she knew better.

Paige had a strict sense of right and wrong, and she knew without a doubt she would not have kept sleeping with Seamus if there hadn't been something more there. Sex was great, but it went beyond that. She would have never taken advantage of him because he was good in bed. Paige did feel guilty for not being completely honest, but her heart kept trying to change her mind.

She shook her head and remembered his question.

"Yes. This is where we keep important documents."

He didn't say anything, just turned to open the door. She scrambled to follow him, pushing the remote lock on her key chain as she hurried around the front end of the car. Seamus paused at the bottom of the stairs that lead up to the front entrance and turned to face her.

"This is very different from my home. But...there is an energy I feel, something that connects me to this spot."

She smiled at him. "Savannah has been my home most of my life, but I don't think I would choose to live anywhere else. Except maybe Ireland."

His eyes narrowed and she felt pinned by his attention. "You have been to Ireland?"

She nodded. "Several times. My family on both sides has a connection to Ireland."

He seemed to relax and motioned for her to walk in front of him. The two of them walked side-by-side up the stairs. Several students took double looks at them as they passed, but Paige thought it had more to do with his size than his clothes. Yes, they were a little...different looking, but the truth was it was a liberal arts campus and strange clothing didn't gain strange looks. But six-foot muscled men with hair that reached half way down his back...that wasn't something you saw every day.

They reached the top of the stairs and Seamus stepped aside to allow her to walk before him. The door opened automatically and Seamus paused before following her through the doorway. He watched the door as he walked through, as if making sure it wasn't going to close on him.

As soon as they passed the foyer and walked into the main circulation area, Judy noticed them. She gave Paige a worried frown and then her eyes widened when she noticed Seamus. She skirted around the counter and approached them.

"Thank goodness you made it." She was talking to Paige but her attention kept straying to Seamus.

"Seamus, this is Judy. Judy, Seamus."

Seamus nodded in acknowledgment, but crossed his arms over his chest and said nothing.

Judy smiled at him, apparently forgetting Paige was there for an emergency. Paige, irritated that the woman had inched closer to Seamus, snapped her fingers in front of the other woman's face.

"Oh sorry." She tossed Seamus a smile then turned back to Paige. "Old Lady Edwards showed up with some nerd from IT. They've been in your office for two hours."

"Edwards?" The head librarian actually spent more time away from the library playing campus politics than running the library. Denise Fuller, the assistant, actually ran everything and got a lot less pay for the trouble. "What is she doing in there?"

Judy grabbed her by the elbow and pulled her along. "At first I didn't know, but I will tell you I was suspicious. You know Jeremy is one of her favorite up-and-coming professors, and I figured that if she had something on you, he would bear the brunt of that."

Paige shook her head. "I broke off our engagement yesterday."

"Why did you do that?"

"We just didn't suit."

She didn't want to tell Judy about his affair with the student. It was too humiliating. Paige felt Seamus shift closer to her. And just like that, her heart skipped a beat. Judy's gaze drifted to Seamus and then back to Paige. Then Judy smiled.

"Oh I think I can understand."

Paige threw up her hands and walked around Seamus. She didn't need these problems. She had a ton of work to get to Monday morning and she had to figure what to do with Seamus while she was at work. She glanced over her shoulder at him. There was no way she could bring him there. He was too much of a distraction for her.

When she approached her department, she was surprised to find Jeremy having a whispered conference with Edwards. They didn't notice her, so she felt free to study them. Shannon Edwards was not a tall woman. And unfortunately for her, she was

heading to the area of being as wide as she was tall. As usual, she'd pulled her hair back into a tight bun. Her face was free of cosmetics and the clothes she wore looked like she'd just pulled them out of the hamper. But that was completely normal for her.

Thirty years in the Georgia University system, she'd cut her teeth at Valdosta State and had always dabbled in campus politics. Many people admired her intelligence, but Paige thought it paled compared to her pettiness. She'd given her life to her job, which many women did, but Paige knew the older woman had not been happy about taking a job at a small liberal arts college in Savannah. She'd thought she was made for bigger things.

Jeremy looked the same, receding hairline and all. Today he dressed in a pair of relaxed trousers and a dress shirt, left open at the top button. He leaned down to listen to Shannon and Paige caught the look of rapt attention on the other woman's face and almost laughed. Knowing her luck, Jeremy had slept with Shannon Edwards also. Paige didn't even want to picture the two of them going at it on his desk. It was humiliating that he did it with a student. With Shannon, that was just disgusting.

She cleared her throat and the two of them jumped apart as if guilty. *Well*, thought Paige, *if the shoe fits*.

"Paige," Jeremy said. "I had no idea you would be in today. I thought you said you wouldn't be."

She glanced at Shannon and then returned her attention to Jeremy. "What are you two doing in my office? And where is my computer?"

"It is university property. We can do what we want." Shannon's voice, husky from years of smoking, was sharper than normal. A few students turned, apparently sensing there was trouble brewing.

Paige shook her head. "No, you can't. Not with my computer. That's policy."

The fine hairs on her neck stirred, telling her that Seamus was near. He stepped beside her. Paige looked at him out of the corner of her eye and sighed. From his fierce frown, Seamus was ready for battle. She didn't need that.

When she looked back at Jeremy and Shannon, both of them seemed mesmerized by Seamus. Well, why not? He drew the eye of all the women and some of the men. Strength and beauty in one delectable package. Shannon shook her head, as if coming out of a daze, and her beady little black gaze passed over Paige. She shivered from the coldness in the woman's eyes.

"When there is a chance that the employee is doing something illegal, all those rights are waived."

"I'm sorry, Paige." Jeremy's voice was filled with regret. "I had to tell them. My conscience was bothering me."

She frowned. "Had to tell them what?"

He gave her a sympathetic look. "That you were stealing works from the rare collection and selling them."

Chapter Eight

For a second, Paige couldn't think straight. Her mind tried to grasp hold of what they were telling her. But somehow her brain refused to grant her request.

"That I was doing what?"

She'd raised her voice, attracting even more attention.

"You know it's true, Paige."

She shook her head but before she could defend herself, Judy practically jumped in front of her.

"There is no way Paige Turner would steal from this library. There is no way to get those books out of this place."

"That is for the police to determine," Shannon said as she motioned to the man sitting at Paige's desk. He'd been working until she'd talked and now he watched, his search forgotten for the moment.

"I don't care what the police come up with. Paige did not steal. Good lord, she actually works overtime even though we don't get paid for it. She is usually one of the first people here in the morning, she was usually here all weekend long. I don't know anyone more dedicated to her job than Paige, except for Denise."

The nasty implication that Denise worked harder than Shannon hit the other workers who'd gathered. Everyone knew what went on in the library, although tenure and politics made it hard to do anything about it.

A rush of warmth filled her at Judy's defense.

"Judy. Thank you. I always thought you thought I was an idiot."

Judy shot her a sheepish smile. "You're not stupid, just a pushover." She leaned closer. "You know you really should do something about that."

Paige struggled not to laugh. Considering the seriousness of the situation, it probably wasn't a good idea. She turned back to the dynamic duo.

"What proof do you have?"

"Dr. Newman has told us of a private conversation." She didn't make eye contact with Paige. That had to be a first for Shannon who liked to hit people head on and roll right over them. Then it hit her that she doubted Jeremy's story.

"Hearsay?"

"Don't worry. Your computer has been removed. They'll find some kind of proof on it. And when they do, you'll be fired and prosecuted."

The woman didn't sound very sure of herself. Before she could ask what kind of evidence they thought to find, Seamus stepped forward, his anger radiating off him in waves.

"You do not threaten Paige." The snarl in his voice was unmistakable.

"Seamus."

She placed her hand on his arm and he looked at her. The banked fire she saw in his eyes hit her like a two-by-four. It sent a surge of heat racing through her blood and gave her a strange sense of self-confidence.

"I can handle this." He opened his mouth to argue but she stopped him by squeezing his arm. "I'll let you handle it if I can't."

He hesitated then nodded, stepping back.

It was as if everyone had forgotten about Seamus until that point. But now they were staring at him.

"Nothing your lover says is going to help you, Paige." Jeremy said with a sneer. "Only you would pick a man who looked like a reject from a Celtic faire."

She looked at the man she'd thought to share her life with. The humiliation of two days before was a memory. In its place was white-hot anger. Anger that she had always gone along rather than fight. That her whole life she made excuses for her loved ones'

behavior and when she couldn't do that, she would pretend nothing had happened. Knowing what was behind this attack, she decided that enough was enough.

"Shannon, I would think twice about associating yourself with Jeremy."

One eyebrow rose and Shannon's nostrils flared. It wasn't an attractive picture.

"Why would you say that?"

She crossed her arms beneath her breasts and smiled thinly. "Well, Friday I caught him screwing one of his grad students on his desk. I wouldn't trust a professor who would diddle the students."

"That is a lie!" Jeremy screamed the denial.

"No it isn't. But I guess we could ask Simone."

Someone cleared a throat and she turned to find Dr. Wilson, the president of the college, standing in the front of the crowd.

"Shannon, apparently you've been busy. I hope you aren't falsely accusing Paige of doing something illegal. If you have proof, I will listen, but from what I am hearing, you should be very sure before making such charges. Especially in public."

He gave the gathered crowd a knowing look. Paige looked back at Shannon to find the woman's face had lost all color. The implications could be disastrous. It was clear to Paige that she had not thought this through, and Paige knew when push came to shove, Jeremy would let her fall. Shannon wasn't stupid by any means, but this was definitely a stupid move. She had to know a falsely accused employee with a good lawyer could make the staff at the university miserable.

"Dr. Wilson." Jeremy's voice actually squeaked. "W-what are you doing here?"

Paige did laugh then. From the fear in his voice, Jeremy probably had wet his pants.

"Seems a few people who work here were a little upset by what was going on. Someone insisted that I come by."

Paige looked at the staff that had gathered around the little scene. Warmth filled her heart and she smiled. "Thanks, y'all."

Dennis, one of the student helpers, said, "We knew you wouldn't do anything, Ms. Turner. You love that collection. You would never try to sell it off for profit. Besides, you don't need the money." His face flushed red and then he tossed Jeremy a menacing stare.

Paige looked at Seamus who stood by, taking in the scene as if he were watching a play. She saw the way his hands flexed as if he were dying to hit someone. She looked in his eyes and at that moment she realized she'd fallen in love with the man. In less than two days, she fallen for a man who claimed to be from the second century, was built like a god and called her his soul mate. All her problems seemed trivial now that she had this man here to support her decision. Support was the one thing she never had in her life. Heck, he may be a little crazy, but she loved him. From the moment she awakened to find him in her bed, he'd accepted the fact that he was for her. He didn't judge, he accepted. Just that small action gave her the confidence to face Dr. Wilson.

"Sir, if there are things missing I would suggestion you look closely at Jeremy, who has worked on my computer before. Also know that Jeremy has money problems, since he hasn't paid off his student loans from his undergraduate work and he apparently thinks the stock market is a gambling hall."

"Why you lying bitch!" Jeremy's scream silenced the crowd.

She whirled around and in a flash, Seamus was in front of her. "This is *my* job."

Before she could react, Seamus punched Jeremy. Her ex-fiancé crumbled, collapsing to the floor, knocked out cold.

He looked over her shoulder at her, pride, defiance and wariness filling his gaze. She didn't even try hiding her smile. "Well done, Seamus. I think I'm ready to go."

He nodded, taking her arm and leading her out through the crowd.

"Paige, I'm sorry for this scene. I have no idea what those two cooked up, but no one in their right mind would think you would steal."

She glanced around at the people whom she worked with and thought about the last year. Every day had gotten worse. Her irritation at the job had caused her more

than one migraine. When she returned her gaze to Dr. Wilson, she was still smiling. This time the smile was because she knew she had the courage to take the step she wanted to.

"Thank you, Dr. Wilson. I appreciate it. But I have to resign."

"Paige..."

"No, sir, it has nothing to do with this." She motioned behind her. "I haven't been happy here for a while and now I know I never will be if I stay here."

With that, she shot Judy a wink and walked arm and arm out the door with Seamus. She was so excited, felt so powerful she wanted to shout it to the heavens.

"I think I would like to go home and take a long bubble bath. Indulging sounds right." She practically danced down the stairs. She had plans to make. She would have to call back the head of the grant association and tell him she would take the job in Ireland. It was what she wanted, what she needed. She had been avoiding it because it was scary, the unknown, but she knew this was the right job for her, the right thing for her future and she didn't want to wait any longer. She didn't know what would become of her and Seamus, but she knew at this moment, he was the only one person she wanted to share the glory of her triumph with.

* * * * *

Seamus took a drink of water and frowned. He'd been brooding since Paige had taken herself off for her bubble bath. She'd invited him, but he had turned her down. The impotent anger roiling through him made him lousy company.

The one punch he'd gotten in hadn't done a lot of good. He wanted to take the man apart, piece by piece. The bastard had tried to hurt Seamus' soul mate, and Paige wouldn't let him do anything about it. She wanted to handle it. Fight her own battle.

Rage and irritation, and something close to hurt, had his stomach turning over. If a woman wouldn't depend on him to defend her, what did that mean? He knew she was having problems accepting him, accepting their union. What if she never accepted what

they had? What did that mean for him? Dread sank into his bones, chilling him from the inside out. Apparently her acceptance was more important to him than he had thought.

The new phone, as Paige called it, rang and he did as she had said and didn't answer. After a few rings, the contraption beside it made some clicking sounds, and then a woman's voice filled the room.

"Paige, are you there? I looked up Seamus and I can't find a thing on the man. I even went into the FBI serial killer database and couldn't find anyone even remotely close to his description. What you should do, if you won't bring him here, is to get hold of a doctor and find out what is wrong. I'll talk to you later. Bye."

Seamus' heart fell to his stomach. She'd never believed him. He didn't understand most of what the message had said, but he knew it couldn't be good. She talked of killers and doctors...whatever that was.

His soul mate thought him a crazy murderer.

Just then, Paige walked into the room wearing a white robe. She looked pink, clean and relaxed. The moment she saw him, though, her smile faded and her muscles tensed.

"What's wrong, Seamus?" The concern in her voice should have made him feel better but it didn't. Knowing she had doubted him, thought him insane, hurt, and he used that pain. Turning it to disdain and anger, he looked at her, his lip curling.

"You think I am touched."

She opened her mouth then closed it.

"You can't deny it, can you?" He fairly spat out the words, trying to hide the way his heart was aching. Men did not bother with these feelings, this kind of pain. He could endure the agony of a physical wound far better than he could deal with this.

"Seamus, I called her Saturday morning. I forgot. But I wanted to make sure there was no one looking for you."

He laughed, but there was no happiness in the sound. "You want me to believe that?"

"Yes."

Anger shot his blood from hot to boiling. The woman was lying even now. "You refuse to believe."

Tears filled her eyes, spilled down her cheeks. "I do believe! I do, Seamus."

The agony in her voice filled the air between them, but he could not believe. He could not believe anything she told him, not now.

He couldn't stand to look at her. Panic set in and he knew he had to get out of there. Away from her.

He turned to leave, thinking they had said enough.

"Seamus. I love you."

He stopped and closed his eyes. There was a part of him that wanted to believe. He wanted to turn around and take her into the bedroom and make her prove her love. But he knew now the woman didn't need him, didn't trust in what was between them.

He opened his eyes and glanced over his shoulder. "Isn't it a shame you waited until I was disgusted with you."

The hurt he saw in her eyes ripped his heart to shreds but he refused to accept it. He turned away and walked out the door, shutting it behind him with a definite click. By the time he'd reached the street, a downpour had started. He walked through it. He had little choice. His mind tried to fight his emotions. The woman didn't understand, didn't believe and she never would. She had failed him. And when she thought he would leave, finally she said she loved him.

The rain was cold against his skin as the wind blew. His hair slapped against his face. He wanted out of this world. Out of this mess. There was no such thing as love, as soul mates. The woman had rejected him and he was happy. He would live without her.

A particularly sharp north wind hit him, causing the rain to slash directly into his face. He closed his eyes when the drops stung them. Because he wasn't watching where

he was going, he tripped over something and flew forward. He landed against the hard gray ground, his head smacking against the stone. A sharp pain radiated from his temple and then his world faded into nothing.

Chapter Nine

Seamus shook his head to clear it. It was still spinning and pounding. When he opened his eyes, he almost shouted when he found a woman not three inches from his face, studying him.

“Oh good. You are finally awake,” she said. Her voice was low, melodic.

She straightened away from him and smiled. Pleasure washed over him as the brilliance of her happiness mesmerized him. She was tall, with long pale blonde hair and green eyes.

“Aine, stop that.”

He’d not realized anyone else was in the room with them. He turned his head and was again stunned to find another tall beauty, this one with warmer features and a more rounded body, watching him.

He scrambled to sit up and looked back at the first woman. She had crossed her arms and was now pouting.

“Stop what?” she asked. He noticed the lyrical sound of her voice had diminished.

“Stop smiling at him. You can’t keep him.”

“Excuse me.”

Both women looked at him and again he was held mesmerized. One, apparently called Aine, was a vision of cool beauty. The type of woman a man liked to unwrap to find the heat beneath the icy exterior. The other was warm, caring, almost maternal. This one would love a man, heart, body and soul, and he would be damn glad of it.

“Dana?”

She smiled, but apparently not with the potency that Aine did. “You are a sharp one, Seamus.”

"Oh lord." He looked around as his mind began shifting through the details, trying to figure out what the hell had happened. He had been laying on a rock in the middle of what appeared to be a rich forest. He'd heard of these women, every good Celt knew the goddesses. Especially the mother goddess, Dana.

"I don't see how you think this is any of your business," Aine said, ignoring the interchange between Seamus and Dana.

Dana sighed and turned her attention to Aine. When she spoke, the warmth had seeped from her voice. This was mother in full discipline mode. "You have no right to him, Aine. He is a mortal. He has done no extraordinary feats. You cannot keep him."

Aine stomped her foot and folded her arms over her chest. "I have a right to him."

"No, you do not. Lust for his father does not allow you this privilege. You are lucky you did not get in more trouble over the spell."

"I just wanted him to be happy."

"Does he look happy? He looks confused, but I have a feeling he's not happy, Aine." She looked over at him. "Are you?"

His memory was reconstructing the last few days. He remembered loving Paige, the fight, the disappointment. A sharp pain squeezed his heart as despair washed over him. He shook his head.

"But I could make him happy. She did not love him. She did not deserve him." The other goddess' voice had risen in anger. "He told her he loved her and she didn't return his admiration."

"I did not."

Both goddesses turned to look at him. Aine's eyes widened in amazement but the gentle amusement he saw in Dana's eyes irritated him more.

"You did not tell her of your love?" Aine asked, her voice now lowered to a whisper.

"I told her she was my soul mate."

"You love the woman." Aine didn't ask, she announced.

"No. She is my soul mate, the woman who makes me complete. It is what was right and good. But there is no such thing as love, not for a warrior."

Aine said something beneath her breath that sounded like a curse and he hopped up from the rock, hoping she hadn't directed it toward him. He glanced at Dana and again she was laughing at him.

"Seamus, you are just like your father." She looked over at Aine who looked dejected now. "Do you remember how Fergus avoided admitting his love until it was almost too late? My, those two were a joy to watch."

"You knew my parents?"

The harshness of his tone caused Dana to raise one eyebrow. "Of course. We are goddesses." She said it in the same tone one would use with a simpleton. "You seem to have your father's own stubborn nature."

"Warriors don't love."

"Really? Is that why you walked the streets in pouring rain cursing the woman?"

He didn't think that question deserved an answer. Stalking away, he tried to think of a way to get out of this mess. How had everything fallen apart so fast?

"You don't love her? Then I think that you won't mind if Aine here strikes her down. She does have that power."

He spun around and charged Dana, who didn't flinch when he stopped within inches of her.

"You touch my woman and I will hunt you down. I will be the bane of your existence."

The threat in his voice could not be disputed. Seamus was still angry with Paige, but he was more angry with the situation. Battles were easy. Size up your opponent, find his weakness and attack that weakness. The fact that he couldn't do that to Dana left him feeling impotent again. It was his duty to honor and revere her, not to mention

protect her. It irritated him beyond rational thought that he couldn't act on the impulse to attack. He curled his hands into fists.

Dana's nostrils flared and anger darkened her eyes. It reached out to him and slammed him to the ground. He hit hard, almost knocking the air out of his lungs.

"You do not threaten me, Seamus. I don't care if I am righting a wrong, I am still Dana."

He nodded as he stood, his head still whirling from the anger she'd thrown at him.

"Now, what I can tell you is that Aine fell in lust with your father."

"It was love," protested Aine.

Dana glanced in her direction then turned her attention back to Seamus. "She was in lust and almost ruined his life over it. Thankfully, everything was righted, but Aine never forgot her embarrassment and coveted Fergus's only son, which of course is you. When you were injured, she didn't think, which is of no surprise to me, and granted your wish."

He looked at the goddess who was now smiling sheepishly at him. "I could not have your father, but I loved him." Dana snorted, but Aine ignored her. "So I watched you and granted much prosperity to you and your father."

"But you failed, Seamus. You were to find your love, your soul mate, and become one with her." The reprimand in Dana's voice irritated him.

"I did become one with my soul mate."

"Sex? I am not talking about what you do in bed, Seamus."

Heat crept up his neck and into his face. The tone she was now using reminded him of the same one his mother used when he was in trouble. It was as if his mother had caught him in the act.

"Yes, I know what happened. Aine couldn't bear to watch, but I did. And when she told you she loved you, you said nothing. You didn't acknowledge it, and worse, you

hurled it back into her face, telling her you did not believe in her declaration. You walked away and left her. Proving to her she was unwanted, unworthy."

"She didn't need me. She fought her own battle and refused me my right to protect her."

"No, she fought her battle with you by her side. And she allowed you to defend her when it was warranted. Until yesterday, Paige had never spoken up. She'd never stood up for herself. She did that because of you. But you ruined it by not loving her enough to allow her to be who she is. Accepting her for who she is. Do you want a weak woman? Do you think that would make your life easy?"

Aine gasped. "Oh Seamus, your father would be ashamed."

He ignored the goddess' comment. Pain twisted inside his heart. Did Paige believe he didn't want her? Need her?

"Aine, would you shut up?" Golden fire lightened Dana's eyes as she looked at him. This was the Mother Goddess in full anger. "Do you want the woman? Or would you rather float through time, never becoming a whole man again? Can you tell me you could be a whole man without this woman?"

He thought of Paige's smile, her love, her warm heart. He had dreamed of her for years, but he would give his life to live the last few days over and over. Dreams would never live up to the reality of Paige. She was in his heart...in his soul. Truth smacked him square between the eyes so hard he almost fell over.

"I love her." He barely whispered the words as he tried to come to terms with what he had done. His actions in that last moment, before he had run like a coward and left her, horrified him. "I love her." This time he said it at a near shout.

"Amazing, the *mortal* finally admits the truth. If you would like to return, you must relinquish your right to immortality, to drifting from time to time. That is all you must do and I will return you."

He didn't hesitate. He would never survive without Paige by his side. "Yes."

She approached him, taking his face in his hands. The gentleness in her eyes soothed his panic. "Please, Seamus, as they now say in your world, don't screw up this second chance."

She smiled and the warmth of it comforted him. It was the last thought he had before his world faded to black again.

* * * * *

Paige gathered up the last of her personal belongings and looked around the office to see if there were any others she forgot. She couldn't believe that she had spent so much time confined in the small room.

"I can't believe you won't take their apology and the job."

She glanced up to find Judy standing in the doorway. It was odd to think that just a few days ago, Paige and Judy could not stand each other. But after a long night over drinks, they had found out that Shannon had played them against each other. In fact, Shannon had reassured Judy the only reason Paige had her job was because of her family. Judy had admitted to being completely passive aggressive, so she had taken advantage of Paige—it was the only way she knew how to act out.

Paige grinned at Judy. Today she was dressed in brilliant green for St Patrick's Day. It was so bright, Paige blinked to ease the pain in her eyes.

"If I had, you wouldn't have gotten the promotion."

Judy smiled. "That's true."

On Monday morning Shannon Edwards had resigned and Denise had taken her place. That had left a position for assistant open and Dr. Wilson had offered it to Paige.

"Besides, it wasn't what I wanted. I wanted to move on. I didn't want to run a library, never did."

"But you're going to move to Ireland? I mean, Paige, you don't know anyone there. I bet your parents freaked out when you said you were moving."

When she told her parents, she'd been amazed at their acceptance of her decision. It seemed that she'd made two more people happy when she cancelled her engagement, and then quit her job.

Paige shrugged. "I'm an adult and it's what I want."

"What about Seamus?"

The pain of his rejection still jolted her. Granted, it had only been a few days, but Paige knew that it wouldn't heal. You have only one soul mate and she'd lost hers.

"He's no longer in the picture." She was proud of the fact she didn't start crying again. "We...it just didn't work out."

Judy sighed. "I can't believe that."

Paige smiled at her and Judy chuckled. "Did you hear that Jeremy is going to lose his position at the end of this semester?"

"No, I hadn't heard that. Shame."

"No, not really. I think fooling around with students wouldn't have mattered much, except that he was advising her, so that is a big no-no. And, well, screwing the granddaughter of one of the most powerful members of the Board of Regents for the college doesn't help either."

Paige's eyes widened. "Oh my God. You have got to be kidding me."

"Nope. And you know what working at the university is like. As soon as you outed him, the whole campus knew within three hours. Besides, the man was lucky you helped him. There is no way he'll finish that book on the potato famine without your work."

The bubble of laughter that exploded drew some attention from the few students who decided to skip the parade. But the humor soon faded as a sob escaped. She covered her face with her hands trying to ward off the roller coaster of emotions she'd been on for the last several days.

Judy rushed forward and slipped one arm over Paige's shoulders. "Oh sweetie, you are better off without the bastard. He was a second-rate professor."

Paige wiped the tears off her face and sniffled a bit. "I'm not upset over Jeremy. Good lord, give me more credit than that." She reached into her box of personal items and pulled out a box of tissue. "It's Seamus. And the worst part of it was it is all my fault. I didn't believe."

Judy was silent for a moment and patted her shoulder. "Didn't believe in what?"

"In us. In the whole soul mate thing." She threw her hands up, irritated that she couldn't explain it. "It was all a misunderstanding but just like a man, the jackass yelled at me and left. And he's out there all by himself. He has no idea where he is."

When Judy didn't say anything and her hand stilled on Paige's shoulder, Paige looked at her. Inwardly she cringed at the sympathetic look on Judy's face. Paige was sure she sounded like an idiot.

Sighing she threw the tissue in the trash and picked up her box. "But I have a lot to keep me busy. I am waiting for my passport and visa to be finalized. Then I'm off."

Judy smiled. "That's true, and the good lord knows you'll be falling over all kinds of Irishmen there. Perhaps they'll help you forget Seamus. They can be very charming."

"That's true. But really, there's only one Seamus."

* * * * *

As Paige hurried up the walk to her apartment, a fat drop of rain hit her nose. Well, there was one thing she could count on—her rotten luck. She started running and made it just in time to miss the worst of the rain.

Since she had her head down she didn't see anything in front of her. She came up against something hard and immobile and practically bounced back off it. For a couple of seconds she thought she'd lose her balance. Strong, warm hands wrapped around her upper arms. Without looking up, she knew it was Seamus.

When she finally met his gaze, she sighed. She couldn't help it. Just as the first time she'd found him naked in her bed, his beauty made her blood heat, her mind go blank, and her heart flip-flop. Damn, there was something wrong with her. This man rejected her, caused her more pain than she'd ever been through, but she still wanted him.

"Sorry about that, love." He offered her a warm smile, but she thought there was a hint of wariness in it. "I've been waiting for you and, well, I stepped out not realizing you didn't see me."

She could not speak, could not seem to form words. Fear held her hostage as she waited for him to say something anything. Would he disappear from her life again if she said the wrong thing?

"Paige? Would you like to go inside?" His voice was gentle as if he was afraid he would spook her.

She nodded. He released her arms and allowed her to walk past him. He stopped her and took the box out her arms. She smiled. As he followed her up the stairs to her apartment, her nerves stretched thin. She didn't want to mess this up and Seamus had the unnerving ability to appear and disappear.

She unlocked her door and then held it open as he walked inside. He set the box on her dinette table, then turned to face her. She closed the door but held onto the knob and just stared at him. Good lord, he was just as gorgeous.

He was dressed in a pair of jeans, loafers and a buttoned-down shirt the same electric blue as his eyes. His hair was just as long, but there were no longer any braids. He studied the boxes scattered around her apartment. When he returned his attention to her, her heart skipped a beat.

"It looks like you are packing things up."

So, he was going to play it casual? Fine. She swallowed then said, "Yes, I'm moving."

He crossed his arms over his chest and frowned. "When did you decide this?"

"Recently." If he could be noncommittal and arrogant, she could too. She'd worry about being mature later.

"And where are you going?" His words were clipped, his demeanor confrontational. That irritated her more. What right did he have showing up and demanding answers?

"I'm moving to Ireland. What do you want, Seamus?"

His gaze roamed down her body and then back up. "You."

She shook her head.

He uncrossed his arms and stepped forward, stopping just inches from her. "I'll not be having you deny me, woman."

Irritation morphed into anger so quickly, she didn't stop to think. She just reached out and smacked him on the shoulder.

"You have no right to me. You gave up that right when you fled, like a coward."

An angry flush darkened his cheeks, his nostrils flared and he growled. It was the only way to describe the sound. She would have been scared if she had not been so mesmerized. Her body responded to the aggression, to the sheer alpha male behavior. While her mind tried to reject his actions, her body was already humming with arousal and heat danced over flesh.

"I am not a coward."

All that hurt male pride almost had her reaching out to ease his pain, but she caught herself in time. Paige didn't want to play the doormat.

"Really, you could have fooled me. I say I love you and you run away." The last word came out almost as a sob and she inwardly cursed herself for showing her weakness. A warrior like Seamus would use it to his advantage.

Proving her point, his gaze softened and he reached for her. She stepped back shaking her head. If he touched her at the moment, she knew she would fall apart. The only thing she had left was pride.

He continued stalking her until she found her back against the door. Panic lanced through her as he crowded her, his body touching hers.

"Back off." She said the words through clenched teeth.

"No."

"No?" Her voice sharpened.

He slid his hands down her arms and encircled her wrists with his fingers. Paige couldn't stop the shiver that passed over her or the way her nipples tightened. She would never break free of the pain if she didn't fight own response to him.

"No. I can't back off, darlin'."

"Won't." She fought the press of tears behind her eyes.

He shook his head and raised both of her arms over her head. Leaning close, he nuzzled her neck. She drew in a deep breath and her head spun from the clean masculine scent of him, so unique to Seamus. There wasn't an aphrodisiac in the world that was better than the scent of him.

She felt his lips move against her skin when he spoke next. "Can't. You are the only thing in my life that matters. Everything else is worthless without you."

"Don't." It was a simple word, but her breathing hitched on the word.

He raised his head to look at her and the look of sadness that passed over his face was almost her undoing. Her resistance started to melt, except...what if it were pity? That she couldn't take. It would kill her to have a man out of pity. She never wanted to settle for less than love. Not again.

"Ahh, lass. I was an ass."

She tried to laugh, but it came out as a sob instead. He released her wrists and cupped her face with his hands. Paige closed her eyes, trying to fight the tears that gathered in her eyes. The calluses on his hands felt wonderful against her skin. He rubbed his thumbs over her jaw then brushed his lips over hers.

Seamus murmured something she couldn't hear, but it had the rhythm of ancient Gaelic. Despite her best efforts, a tear escaped and he licked it from her face.

"Paige, without you I am lost. Your soul completes mine."

She opened her eyes and the clear, honest light in his eyes sparked hope. But she couldn't allow herself to believe, allow herself to be fooled again. This time it would crush her.

"How do I know you won't leave again? I couldn't find you, Seamus."

The whine in her voice was pathetic, but she didn't care. The hours, days, nights of worry about him, about where he had gone, had taken their toll on her. Adding to everything else, she had just made a major life-changing decision and she was close to the breaking point.

He held her jaw firmly and looked her in the eye, his gaze never straying. "I'll never leave you. I love you. I should have believed in you."

She shook her head. "No. You're not the only one at fault. You told me the truth from the beginning, but I refused to believe it. I refused to believe in us. But by the time I did, it was too late."

"Ahh, love, it's not too late." His voice deepened, the sound of it sending a rush of heat along her nerve endings.

Joy flashed through her even as the tears now freely flowed down her face. He wiped them away tenderly and bent to touch his lips to hers. All of the turmoil of the last week exploded. Fear, loneliness and finally love combined as the kiss turned ravenous. His mouth devoured hers, his tongue swiping in aggressively taking control. His hands slid from her face, down her torso just brushing the outside of her breasts and then slipped behind her, finally cupping her rear end.

He lifted her off the floor and she wrapped her legs around his waist. The length of his erection pressed against the juncture of her thighs. She flexed, her hips rubbing against him. Hot and hard, his penis pulsed against her, telling her that he was as close to losing it as she was. She wanted him inside of her now. He groaned, the sound so

needy that icy hot excitement shot through her blood. To be needed on this primal level—the same need she had for him—made her feel...complete.

With considerable effort, and bumping into a stack of boxes twice, he maneuvered them into the bedroom. He met the bed in three giant steps, tumbling them both down on top of it.

Pulling away, he frantically clawed at the buttons on her shirt. She did the same with his and the two of them bumped arms more than once. After the third or fourth time, Seamus growled, knocking her hands out of the way. Grabbing the shirt, he pulled it apart, the buttons popping off, then bouncing off his chest. They scattered on the floor, the sound of them clattering going unnoticed by both of them.

Paige knew she should probably be appalled. But this was Seamus. No one in her whole life made her feel as he did. White hot excitement poured through her veins. No man had ever wanted her with such urgency. She looked at him and was surprised to see the shocked expression on his face.

"I'm sorry, lass. It's that..." He seemed to be at a loss for words and it took her a moment to figure out why. Seamus came from a time where women were put up on pedestals—at least by honorable men. He would see his actions as dishonoring her. Paige wanted no shame between the two of them, not over silly things like this.

She laughed, reached up and grabbed his shirt, giving it the same treatment. His eyes widened, his face went blank. Then, his lips twitched, curved and finally he joined in the laughter.

"I didn't feel like waiting, Seamus." Her serious delivery caused him to laugh louder. He was still chuckling by the time he stripped them out of their clothes. Needing to take control, wanting to show him how much he meant to her, she pushed him over and straddled him. She could feel the dampness in her sex so she knew he could. Knowing that, she slid against him pulling a groan from him.

"I've been too long without you, lass." He moved to grab her hips and she knew he intended to take charge.

She shook her head and slapped his hands away. He frowned and opened his mouth. To stop his objections, she flexed her hips, moving her pussy lips over his penis. With great satisfaction, she watched his mouth snap shut and his eyes close in pleasure. Paige shivered as he moved with her, his shaft brushing against her clit.

Leaning forward, she settled her weight on her elbows on either side of his head. Seamus opened his eyes, the desire and love she felt shining back at her from the depths of his blue gaze. She touched her mouth to his, keeping her eyes opened. Once, twice, three times she brushed her lips over his. The temptation to taste, to plunder, took over. Closing her eyes, she dove into the kiss, enjoying the taste of him, of the feeling of coming home.

She slipped down, kissing a path from his mouth to his chin, then down his neck. Good lord, the man smelled better than whiskey truffles. As she moved down his chest, she felt his fingers dance over the flesh of her buttocks. This time she allowed it because she sensed he would not interfere—at least not yet. She licked one nipple, grazing the tip of it with her teeth, just as he had done to her. She continued her journey down, until she reached his magnificent cock.

Settling on her knees between his legs, she wrapped her fingers around his shaft, barely able to encompass the width. She glanced up at him and smiled at his intense study. She knew Seamus expected her to take him in her mouth, so she leaned forward and licked the inside of each thigh. The muscles in his legs tensed the moment before she moved her tongue over his sac.

With nibbles and licks she did her best to drive him insane. She worked her way to his cock, giving it the same treatment, devouring him as if he was the most delicious treat. Of course, to her, he was. Glancing up at him, she noticed the stern almost angry look on his face, but she ignored it. With a small smile, she slipped the tip of his penis into her mouth and indulged.

She licked, hummed, enjoyed. His fingers slipped through her hair and then molded to the back of her head. Soon, he was controlling the depth and speed of his strokes. She allowed it, enjoying the taste of him, the power she had over him.

It wasn't long before strong fingers wrapped around her upper arms and pulled her up on top of him. She didn't need any more foreplay. Dampness coated her pussy lips – wet the tops of her thighs. Once again, she straddled him, this time slowly sinking down on his cock. She kept the pace slow to tease him. She gazed at him, her excitement rising as she watched the predatory gleam darken his eyes. Every muscle in his body tightened, the tension heightening between them. She lifted her hands to her breasts, teasing the nipples. That apparently was the last straw.

Seamus growled as he sat up, took her face between his powerful hands and pulled her down to him in a wet, carnal, possessive kiss. With easy movements, he rolled over, reversing their positions. He pulled himself up to his hands, resting them on either side of her head.

“So, you like to tease?” Even in his teasing tone, there was a hint of darker emotion, of something more than just passion.

She looked up at him as she felt tears prick the backs of her eyes again – this time for joy. The warmth of love filled her as she tilted her hips, taking him deeper, and slipped her hands up to his shoulders. She smiled up at him, seeing the same love she felt, the same soul deep connection reflecting back.

“I dare to do just about anything these days.”

“Do you now?”

She nodded. “With you, I’ll try anything.”

He laughed and swooped down for another wet kiss. Rising to his knees, he took her hips into his hands, and began to thrust, fast, deep. Everything in her tightened, pulled. Sliding one hand to her sex, he teased her clit, keeping up the same rhythm. Moments later, she was flying over the edge and shattering into a million pieces.

But he was not done. It only took a few flicks of his finger to her clit and she was building again, the same excitement threading through her veins, gathering to break free. With one last powerful surge, he pushed her again, joining her this time as he shouted her name.

Moments later, he collapsed, then rolled over, pulling her against him. She realized that this was the most relaxed she had felt...well, since he left. With that came the fear she had felt when he left, the mind numbing panic it had sent her in looking for him.

"You're not going to disappear on me, Seamus, are you? I don't think I could go through that again."

"Love, there is no one, nothing, that could keep me from you."

She smiled, leaned up, kissed him. "Good, because I'd hate to have to hunt you down and drag you back."

He laughed and hugged her close. "Never again."

As they drifted off to sleep, she snuggled closer. *Life is pretty good*, she thought drowsily. No, strike that. Life was spectacular. She had a job she was sure to love in the country she really adored and her own legend to live out her days with. Her own wicked warrior.

She smiled and then drifted to sleep, her heart beating in rhythm with his.

About the Author

Melissa welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and e-mail address on her author bio page at www.ellorascave.com.

Tell Us What You Think

We appreciate hearing reader opinions about our books. You can e-mail us at Comments@EllorasCave.com.

Also by Melissa Schroeder

Hunting Mila

Seducing the Saint



Discover for yourself why readers can't get enough of the multiple award-winning publisher Ellora's Cave. Whether you prefer e-books or paperbacks, be sure to visit EC on the web at www.ellorascave.com for an erotic reading experience that will leave you breathless.

WWW.ELLORASCAVE.COM