



Waking  
*Sebastian*

MELINDA  
BARRON

# *Waking Sebastian*

**By Melinda Barron**

*Resplendence Publishing, LLC*  
<http://www.resplendencepublishing.com>

Resplendence Publishing, LLC  
P.O. Box 992  
Edgewater, Florida, 32132

Waking Sebastian  
Copyright © 2009, Melinda Barron  
Edited by Tiffany Mason  
Cover art by Rika Singh  
Electronic format ISBN: 978-1-60735-029-3

Warning: All rights reserved. The unauthorized reproduction or distribution of this copyrighted work is illegal. 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.

Electronic release: May, 2009

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and occurrences are a product of the author's imagination. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, places, or occurrences, is purely coincidental.

*Thanks to the usual suspects for their unending support and patience. Someday  
I'll get it right, thanks to you.*

*For Tea, who read the first draft and said, "Oh my." I hope you still say that.*

## ***Table of Contents***

<i>Prologue.....</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Chapter One.....</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>Chapter Two.....</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>Chapter Three .....</i>	<i>27</i>
<i>Chapter Four .....</i>	<i>34</i>
<i>Chapter Five .....</i>	<i>41</i>
<i>Chapter Six.....</i>	<i>44</i>
<i>Chapter Seven .....</i>	<i>47</i>
<i>Chapter Eight.....</i>	<i>51</i>
<i>Chapter Nine .....</i>	<i>58</i>
<i>Author's Note .....</i>	<i>66</i>
<i>About the Author .....</i>	<i>67</i>

## *Prologue*

*Florida, 1823*

Sebastian weaved through the trees, enjoying the feel of the crisp autumn air as it swept over his skin. It was a beautiful night, with a cool breeze blowing in from the ocean. He'd had a good dinner, enjoyed a nice game of cards with his father's "visitors", and drank a good bit of rum.

Only the feel of a soft woman beneath him would make it better. And he knew just the right one.

He neared the slave quarters and his cock hardened as he imagined Sarya under him, her legs locked around his hips as he filled her, pumping himself into her until they both screamed in pleasure.

Yes, it would definitely be a wonderful night.

"Sarya! Where are you?" She'd promised to meet him near the cove, where they always met. But she hadn't been there, and now he was being forced to look for her. He called out her name again and several coverings from nearby huts opened. He pointed at them. "Where is she?"

The flaps quietly falling back in place was the only answer he received. Sebastian snarled in anger. Damn her for making him wait. Was it not part of her job, part of her very existence, to please him? She'd never ignored her duties to him before. Sarya had always been more than willing to spread her thighs for him. He always made sure she climaxed, always made sure her pleasure was intense. Why would she hide from him?

"Sarya!" He threw back his head, his long blond hair streaming down his back as his arms flew out to his sides. He looked at the moon, the bright, full mass shining through the cloudless sky. "Where are you!"

"Do you want to wake everyone?"

Sebastian staggered, then pulled himself to his full height. He snorted out a laugh. "It's

not you I want, witch. Go away.”

“You are not welcome here. Leave us.”

Sebastian stumbled toward her, the alcohol making him ignore the rumors of the woman’s magic. “Do you think you can tell me what to do? I can have you whipped, or worse.” He stopped in front of her.

Her dark, intense gaze bore into him and he took a step back, a sliver of fear fighting its way into his system. He had heard what this tiny woman was capable of. Not that he believed in it.

Sebastian poked his finger into the woman’s breastbone. “You know where she is. You will take me to Sarya.”

The smile that lit the woman’s eyes made Sebastian’s skin crawl. He took a few steps backward, then leaned over, his head swimming. Perhaps he’d had a bit too much rum tonight. He should head back to the manor, find his bed and sleep off his drunkenness.

His mind said it was a good idea, but his cock disagreed. It pounded with the idea of Sarya’s beautiful body under his, of being inside her.

“Do you still wish to proceed?”

Sebastian frowned at her words. “Proceed?” What the hell was she talking about? Yes he wanted to *proceed*. He met with Sarya every night. It was no secret that she quenched his needs. Why should tonight be any different? “Where is Sarya?”

“You have a choice, young Sebastian. You may leave, or you may face your fate. It is in your hands.”

“My fate?” He pushed at the woman, his anger rising. “Are you threatening me?”

“Stay or go. It is your decision.”

Her calm words startled him. No slave would tell him what to do, no matter how composed she seemed in the face of his ire. “Take me to her.”

The sound of drums and chanting filled the air, but Sebastian paid it no mind. All that mattered was Sarya and their joining. When the witch turned and walked into the trees he fell into step behind her, his cock throbbing with the idea of finding Sarya and achieving relief.

Just a few more steps, he told himself. She would be there, ready for him.

He staggered into the clearing, his stomach feeling as if it would lurch. He saw the altar, the strange carving on a pedestal near it. Moonlight flooded the area, giving the stone a strange,

unearthly glow. When his father heard about this site he would be furious. He had forbidden the slaves to practice their religion. Obviously they had disregarded his orders. But that didn't matter now. Right now all he cared about was coupling with Sarya.

His beautiful slave stood near the altar, the slave named Nadim standing beside her, his arm around her shoulders. Sebastian felt a wave of possessiveness as he moved toward them, intent on pulling Sarya into the trees for a hot bout of lovemaking.

As he neared the altar his mind grew cloudy, he lurched to the side, his body hitting the heavy stone. Someone lifted him up and placed him on top of it. He focused on the flickering torchlight surrounding him, as the sounds of the drums grew louder. He closed his eyes and called out Sarya's name one more time as the world began to spin, and then all went black.



## *Chapter One*

*Hannah laid her head against Charles' shoulder and sighed. "My love, it is only a few more days until our wedding. Now that Captain Blaine is behind bars we will be able to live our lives in peace."*

*Charles' palm moved down to her breast and gently squeezed.*

*"Charles," Hannah gasped, pushing his hand away. "We are not yet wed. You shouldn't touch me thus."*

*"We are already wed in our hearts," Charles whispered in her ear, kissing the lobe gently. "Why must we wait? I want you so much, Hannah."*

*"Society dictates that I remain virginal until we are wed in the eyes of the church," Hannah answered. "You know this. How dare you take such liberties?"*

*"Oh come on," Charles answered. "You've left me with blue balls for the last seventy-five pages of the book. Have a heart."*

*Hannah clasped her hands over her ears. "Such vulgarities. And here I thought you were a gentleman. We must wait."*

*"Please? How about a blowjob? I won't come in your mouth, I promise. I can't wait until the wedding. That's going to take another thirty pages at least. By then my dick will shrivel up."*

*Hannah stood and wrapped her arms around her chest. "I'm sure I don't know what you mean. What, pray tell, is a blow job?"*

*Charles' eyes widened with hope.*

*"All you have to do is take my cock in your mouth and suck. I'll show you how. You'll love it as much as I do, I promise. Please, my love, I can't wait another thirty pages."*

*Hannah watched with anticipation as his fingers undid the stays on his trousers. She wanted to please Charles, she truly did. What harm could one of these blowjobs do? She would still be virginal, wouldn't she?*

*But she'd never even seen his manhood before. She closed her eyes and tried to still her*

*breathing.*

*Charles released his cock from his pants and sighed with pleasure.*

*“Look at me Hannah,” he whispered. “Open your eyes and see what I have for you.”*

*Hannah opened her eyes and gasped. Then she screamed and ran from the room.*

*“Shit!” Charles muttered. “Why the fuck did you create me if I can’t even get her to give me a fucking blow job? Son of a bitch! Is she going to lay there on our wedding night with her eyes screwed shut? Is this a romance novel or not? Damn it to hell!”*

*“Sorry Charles,” Michelle answered. “But my readers like soft sweet virgins who don’t give it up until their wedding night. You have to wait until the end of the book. Still we need some sex before then. Maybe we should start with a hand job in the dark. I could go back and rewrite a scene or two.”*

*“Just forget it,” Charles said as he began to stroke his cock. “But I’m not leaving this page with blue balls tonight. And this is your fault. You’d better fix it. And fix it quick.”*

*“Watch it, Charles,” Michelle warned. “I’m the writer here, not you. Piss me off and I’ll change my descriptions to give you a three-inch dick.”*

*Charles quickly snapped his mouth shut.*

*“Good. And don’t worry. I’ll make sure you get plenty of sex before the end of the book.”*

Michelle sighed, highlighting the text she’d just written. She hit the delete key, then ran her fingers through her long brown hair.

*Poor Charles. He’d been frustrated the whole manuscript. I made him too horny. Maybe I should go back and tone him down a bit.*

A soft breeze from the ocean filtered through the gauzy curtains. Rising from her chair, Michelle walked to the full-length windows and pushed the material aside.

Almost five in the morning with the Atlantic Ocean just steps away, and here she sat in front of a computer writing a sex scene that had gone horribly wrong.

Her sex scenes had never gone wrong in the past. Her characters always enjoyed a little heavy petting before the wedding. What was the problem this time? Was Charles too aggressive? Was Hannah too much of a prude?

Michelle pushed Charles and Hannah to the back of her mind and stepped out onto the balcony.

From her third-story perch, she could see the tops of palm trees and sand lit by soft moonlight. The ocean pounded against the beach and the smell of the sea tickled her nose.

A walk on the beach would clear her brain.

Returning inside, Michelle hunted in her still-packed suitcase for sandals and told Charles, who had resumed his presence in her head, to behave. He answered with a grunt and Michelle laughed.

“Don’t worry. I won’t give you a three-inch dick. And I’ll fix the problem. I promise. I just don’t know how yet.”

*“I know you’ll find a way,”* Charles answered with a grateful sigh.

Despite her assurances, she was still not sure his dick would not shrink by the next chapter. These characters were like all the other she’d written: they came to life in her mind, talking to her, telling her what should happen next. Except in this case, they were leading her down the wrong path and things weren’t turning out exactly as she’d planned.

Michelle ran down the steps that curved downward from her third floor balcony and followed the short path to the beach.

The cove was even more gorgeous up close. Her friend Kate’s new husband, Mark, had set up a beautiful beach area. When Michelle had arrived at Kate’s house earlier in the day, her explorations revealed a cabana with bathing suits of various sizes and large fluffy towels. A long wooden bench set a few feet back from the surf. Sitting next to the bench was a table with four chairs.

Kate had hit the big time, with a new husband rich enough to have his own private cove in Florida, and a beautiful old Victorian house to remodel. Michelle smiled as she thought of her friend. It was just like Kate to invite her to come for a visit, and then disappear before Michelle arrived.

*“Be back in a few days,”* the note had said. *“Make yourself at home. The housekeeper will get you anything you need. Kisses.”*

She’d been angry at first, but then realized she needed this time alone. She was working on a deadline, and if things turned around, she could finish the book and get it to her editor before Kate and Mark returned.

Michelle kicked off her shoes and waded into the ocean. The water felt cool as it washed over her travel swollen feet. The ocean called to her and she sighed in pleasure as the soft waves

lapped against her ankles and calves. The water provided a wonderful burst of delight that shot through her body, almost as if fingers massaged her skin. It was definitely better than sitting in front of a computer.

The best laid plans of mice and men...screw writing. So what if her deadline was in two weeks. Kate wouldn't be back for a few days and she'd have plenty of times to fix her problem with Charles and Hannah.

Once inside the cabana, she stripped and located a bathing suit that would fit her extra large body. Kate had all sizes, and it took just a few moments to locate a size eighteen. She shuddered as she examined the material. Nothing like a little bathing skirt to remind a woman she wasn't a size four.

A grin split her face as she threw the offending clothing over her shoulder. She was alone on a private beach. Skinny-dipping was in order, no matter what size she was. She grabbed a towel and headed into the cool night air.

The ocean breeze caressed her skin and her nipples peaked. This was a dream come true. Swimming naked in Atlantic at dawn. The only thing that would make it better would be a strapping male to use as a flotation device.

The cold, invigorating water wrapped around her ankles, her thighs and then her waist. When the waves hit her breasts, she sighed with pleasure and dove under the surface. The ocean water felt wanton, decadent against her bare skin.

Michelle bobbed in and out, heading just a little ways out into the cove, being careful not to go too far. She had no idea how deep this area was, or what sort of creatures she would run into.

When she put her feet down and didn't find purchase until her head was submerged, she moved her legs, treading water. The water caressed her breasts and she wished once more for a man by her side. Okay, not next to her, but between her thighs. They could have a nice long fuck in the Atlantic. Ocean sex would help feed her creative side. It might help her figure out a solution to Charles' problem. And it would feel oh so nice. The thought made her smile.

It was the first time in six months she'd wanted a man. Wanted sex for herself. Her breakup with Justin had been ugly and she knew that was part of the problem she was having with Charles and Hannah. She was projecting her ill will about Justin, and men in general, onto poor Hannah. And she'd made Charles a little too smug. A little too arrogant. He needed more

compassion. He should be more caring, more seductive.

Michelle ducked under the water and swam out a little farther. Then she turned and swam back toward shore. She shivered from the breeze as she made her way across the sand to the bench, covering it with a towel. She sat down and stretched out her legs and raised her face to the fading moonlight.

A huge sigh escaped her lips, and as was her custom, she started talking to her muse. In this case, Charles.

“Do you think I need to go back and rewrite chapter four? The first time you touch Hannah she needs to respond with pleasure, not suspicion. She should allow you to caress her neck, her breasts. Tweak her nipples gently.”

“Like this maybe?” The voice was low and Michelle sighed as large male hands stroked her neck and slid down to her breasts.

“Yes, like that. Damn, but this sea air has made you very real Charles. Keep going. Let’s get those juices flowing. Creative juices I mean.”

Low laughter filled the air. “And by tweak do you mean this?” Fingers stroked her nipples, gathering them in a strong grasp that gently squeezed. If swimming in the ocean produced this daydream, she had to come back. Often.

Michelle moaned and Charles joined her, his deep voice making her already aroused body quiver with need. His hands caressed her breasts and wetness began to flow between her thighs.

“Yes, just like that,” she whispered.

The muse’s hands continued to stroke her breasts. “What is the problem you’re trying to work out?”

Charles’ voice sounded deeper than it had earlier and Michelle frowned. His accent wasn’t as pronounced as it had been. He seemed more laid back. Maybe a little too laid back. She needed to work on that. The strong hands moved from her breasts to her shoulders and back again, the contact making her spine tingle.

“Well, how about the fact that Hannah ran screaming from the room when she saw your cock? That’s a major problem.” Michelle relaxed against his probing hands. “There is no trust between you. I need to build trust. I need to change Hannah, but how?”

Hands continued to stroke her and laughter filled the air. “Perhaps she needs to be more

adventurous. Like a beautiful woman who would swim naked in the ocean, alone.”

“It was the call of the sea,” Michelle said. “And it’s a good thing a muse can be anything I want. Not many men think I’m beautiful.”

“You’re so very beautiful,” he murmured as his hands continued to caress her gently. “Your dark hair looks like silk. Your breasts are full and sweet. Your skin is soft like rose petals. And I’m sure your quim would fit perfectly around me. Perhaps if Charles saw this in Hannah, she would trust him enough to open for him as a flower opens for a bee. Will my beautiful flower open for me?”

A warning bell sounded in Michelle’s head. “Charles? Why do you talk about yourself as if you’re someone else?” This little muse session had taken a wrong turn somewhere. Michelle stiffened and started to rise but the gentle hands held her down.

He gathered her breasts in his palms and he massaged them gently, the caresses sending tingles of pleasure through Michelle’s body.

“I can smell the wetness from your quim.” His voice was low. “I know you want me inside you.”

Michelle shuddered and shook her head. “Charles? This is too real. Something’s wrong. I don’t think you’re Charles.” Yes, something was very off kilter here, but Michelle didn’t care. She felt no real danger. The only other people in the house were the caretakers, a husband and wife team. Michelle had already met the husband when he’d picked her up at the airport. He was in his sixties. These were not sixty-year-old hands that caressed her.

Her imagination was just running away tonight. She needed to relax, let it flow.

“Close your eyes. Don’t be afraid, little one. I won’t hurt you.”

“Where have I heard that before?”

“Close them. Trust me as you would have Hannah trust Charles.”

Michelle complied, wondering where this wonderful fantasy would take her next. Would it hurt if she imagined him fucking her? It had been so long since she’d been filled. Her pussy clinched as if to say, “Yes, I’ll take him. Bring it on!”

Michelle smiled as her dream rounded the bench and sat down next to her. She trembled when his hand danced across her stomach.

His fingers strayed down to her thigh, his caress light and sensual.

“Damn,” Michelle whispered. “How come I’ve never been able to conjure you up

before?”

The new muse applied gentle pressure and Michelle spread her thighs. She wanted this. Needed this. Even if it was only a fantasy.

Her groans deepened as his fingers moved inside her, his thumb finding her clit instantly. She bucked against him as his mouth found a nipple and sucked it in deeply. He nibbled, the pressure of his teeth sending bolts of lightning to her womb, spreading down to her clit.

“Oh my God, yes,” Michelle said hoarsely. “If I can get Charles to act like this, Hannah’s virginity doesn’t stand a chance past chapter five.”

The pressure on her clit increased and the muse raised his lips and gently bit her earlobe. Michelle could feel long hair tickling her stomach and breasts.

“Long hair, huh? What are you a pirate or something? This is the beach. My next book could be set here. A treasure hidden inside the house maybe? The heroine could team up with a gorgeous pirate to find it, but of course he’d expect payment, in the form of her lush body. Yeah, I like that idea.”

She opened her eyes, and stared into a pair of beautiful clear blue ones.

The muse’s fingers still worked on her clit, the pressure building as she ground herself against him. My God, it felt good.

“Who are you?” The words came out on a breath as Michelle fought to control the urge to scream, “Fuck me please.”

“Shush, little one,” he whispered, his lips feathering kisses up and down her cheek and neck. “Spend for me. I want to see it. Need to see it. Spend for me now.”

He bent his lips back to her breasts and then pinched her clit. The pressure from his strong fingers sent Michelle over the edge.

The rising sun burst across the beach, sending flickers of soft light across the sand. The morning rays flashed through her brain as her orgasm rocked her body. Her hips bucked against him as he continued to stroke her, his fingers spreading wetness through her pussy.

“Yes, yes, my sweet one, that’s it.” His voice caressed her ear as she soared.

When she finally settled back in her body, she watched with wonder as he raised his fingers to his lips and licked them. His groan of extreme pleasure filled the air.

“So good,” he whispered. “You taste so wonderful.”

He traced his fingers back down her stomach and caressed her wetness again.

When his fingers moved inside her, Michelle let out a sharp intake of breath. She had never had this real of a fantasy while writing a book. Was it the ocean? Or the beach? If it was, she was going to take up residence here. Build a little hut right next to the cabana.

“Does my new muse have a name?”

“My name is Sebastian,” he said as he lowered his lips to hers. His tongue probed her mouth as she moaned against his lips. “And I’ll be your muse as long as you like.”

He kissed her again and Michelle licked at his lips, welcoming his tongue into her mouth. When his lips and the strong feel of his hands disappeared, she cried out in frustration.

Michelle opened her eyes. Sebastian was gone. Her fantasy was over. But it had left her with a wonderful orgasm and a great new direction to restore the sexual tension in her book.

Michelle ran naked toward the house. She hurried up the stairs and looked at the clock. It was just after six-thirty, but she didn’t care. She’d been up all night anyway, and who needed sleep when their creative juices were flowing? Hannah and Charles would be happy tonight.



## *Chapter Two*

Mark's fax machine hummed as Michelle punched in her agent's number. She'd been trying all morning to get a signal on her laptop to send out her reworked pages, but had so far been unsuccessful. So it was time to resort to something she hadn't used in quite a while: the fax machine.

A smile had been permanently etched on her face all morning. She grinned as she remembered Sebastian's strong fingers, blue eyes and beautiful blond hair. So what if it was a fantasy. Sebastian had inspired some of the greatest writing she'd done in years.

She'd spent part of the morning designing a story around him, and he was quite the naughty little boy. Her body quivered at the memory of his fingers. A giggle escaped her lips as she imagined the look on Sandra's face when she read the revisions. Her agent would probably salivate all over them. Hannah was still a virgin, but both she and Charles were very satisfied. And Hannah hadn't run from the room screaming when she'd seen Charles' cock. As he held Hannah in his arms afterward, he'd tipped an imaginary hat to Michelle, who had winked back.

The fax machine spit out a successful report, and Michelle gathered her pages and returned them to her room. Time to search for food. She'd written until one in the afternoon, then took a little catnap. Now she was starving.

The house was huge and her bare feet padded quietly across the tiled floors. Occasional rugs cushioned her steps as she walked from room to room. Beautiful wicker furniture filled the spaces she passed through.

She stopped in the middle of what seemed to be a third living room and sniffed. The smell of freshly baked bread filled her senses. She followed the aroma to the back of the house where she found a small black woman pulling a pan from the oven.

"You're just in time," the woman said without looking back. She sat the bread pan on the oven. "It's best when it's warm."

"Hello."

“You are Michelle and I’m Marta,” the woman turned to Michelle and her smile lit her face. She held out her hand and Michelle took it, impressed by her firm grasp. The woman really was tiny. Michelle wondered if she was more than five feet tall and weighed ninety pounds. Still she looked very sturdy.

Marta swept her hand toward a table. “Help yourself to whatever you like while I slice the bread.”

A variety of fruit overflowed from a bowl. Michelle selected a fresh peach, sat down and took a bite. The juices dribbled down her chin and she groaned.

“Delicious.”

The older woman nodded her approval and placed several thick slabs of warm bread in front of Michelle. “The jam is fresh.” She indicated three jars on the table. “Or you can have butter if you prefer. Or both, like my Nicholas.”

Michelle reached for the strawberry jam. “Is Nicholas your husband? He picked me up at the airport last night.”

“I’m sorry I couldn’t go with him, but I had things to attend to. Do you have everything you need?”

Michelle took a healthy bite of bread and let her nod do the talking. When her mouth was empty, she said, “I’m sorry I missed breakfast, and lunch it seems.”

“You are not on a schedule here.” Marta placed a full glass of a dark liquid in front of her. “This is tea. I cook three meals a day: eight a.m., one p.m., and seven p.m. But if you miss one, you are welcome to anything in the kitchen. This is your home now.”

After her first piece of bread was gone, Michelle slathered a second one with what looked to be blackberry jam.

“Have you lived here long?” Michelle muttered the words around her food, thankful her mother wasn’t here to criticize her for her lack of manners.

“The main house was empty for many years before Mark bought it,” Marta said. “But my Nicholas and I have lived in our home for ages.”

Michelle looked out the large bay window to where Marta pointed after she placed a plate of cheese on the table. A smaller clapboard house was nestled amid the trees.

“If you need us at any time, you can find us there.”

Michelle swallowed a piece of cheese then asked, “When will Kate be back?”

“Not until next week.”

“Next week?” A second bite caught in Michelle’s throat and she coughed. “She said a few days. That’s more like seven or eight days. Today’s only Monday.”

Marta laughed. “Mark had unexpected business in London. He likes to have Kate with him. They are so in love.”

Irritation grew in Michelle for the first time that day. “True they are, but to invite someone to stay and then leave for that long? Kate’s always been impulsive, but this takes it to a new level.”

“Don’t be upset with her,” Marta said. “She said you needed a quiet place to finish your book. That you had a relationship that ended badly and would enjoy the quiet time.”

Damn Kate! How could her friend discuss her man problems with a total stranger?

“You are angry,” Marta said softly. “Please don’t be. Kate and I talk about a great deal.”

Michelle tried to tamp down her annoyance. Being alone here wasn’t that bad, but it wasn’t what she’d expected. Still, she had work to do, and it was hard to stay upset when you’d had a muse-induced orgasm that caused a rush of creative juices.

“Tell me about the house,” Michelle said in an effort to change the subject.

“Built in 1835 by Joseph Talburt.” Marta took a sip from her own glass of tea. “His family moved here from England where he ran a shipping firm. He tried to establish the business in Florida, but failed. His wife left him and he died penniless.”

Michelle scrunched up her nose. “Not a very pleasant story.”

“No, but it gets better,” Marta said. “The Maddox family bought the property soon after Talburt died. Benjamin Maddox tried to farm indigo, and had a little success with it. But he also had a shipping company that was very successful. The house stayed with his family until the 1930s when the last of Maddox family died. Mark and Kate bought it last year.”

“You said you have lived here for a while,” Michelle said. “Even when the house was empty?”

Marta was working with a knife and something Michelle couldn’t see on a cutting board. “A member of my family has served as a guardian of the house since the late 1800s.”

Michelle felt a chill run up her spine at the odd choice of words. “Guardian? What are you guarding against? Is the house haunted, possessed, cursed?”

A dark cloud passed over Marta’s face and Michelle felt a shimmer of doubt crawl

through her stomach. Her doubt quickly changed back to the irritation she'd felt earlier. What sort of situation had Kate left her in, exactly?

"We..." The ringing telephone interrupted the older woman, who ran across the floor and grabbed the receiver. Michelle almost had the feeling she was reaching for some sort of lifeline, to escape the question posed to her.

"Kate," Marta said, motioning toward Michelle. "How are things in London?"

There was a pause and Marta nodded. "Yes, she's right here."

Michelle took the phone from Marta who mouthed, "Dinner at seven." Then the older woman bolted out the back door. Michelle stared after her, a puzzled look on her face.

"Mick?" Kate's voice filled the kitchen and Michelle raised the receiver to her ear.

"Well if it isn't my absent hostess. Thanks for not being here, wench."

Kate laughed. "Oh please, you have two weeks until your deadline. By the time I get home, you'll be finished with your latest masterpiece and we can play on the beach. And I can introduce you to some of Mark's hunky friends."

"No fix-ups," Michelle growled. "I thought I made that perfectly clear."

"We're just planning a little party for Mark's birthday a week from Saturday night," Kate explained. "Some of his friends are gorgeous. Tall dark and handsome, just the way you like 'em."

Michelle thought about Sebastian; her tall muse who was light and handsome. She pictured his long blonde hair and beautiful blue eyes. She still didn't know how she'd created him. None of her heroes were blonde.

"Are you listening to me, or are you really that pissed?" Kate's voice had a tinge of doubt. "If you're mad, I'll fly home tomorrow."

"Don't be silly. I'll pretend that this huge house is mine. I'll eat all your food and drink all your booze. Got any porn I can watch while I suffer the nights by myself?"

*Well, not exactly by myself. Sebastian will be here.*

The thought brought a smile to her face.

Kate's laughter drifted over the lines. "Behave. I'm not giving you our porn stash. But I could always call Ducky. He's a friend of Mark's who lives up the road. He could keep you company at night."

Michelle joined in the merriment. "No thanks, I have to work. And I'm not sure I want to

dally with someone called Ducky.”

*Plus I have Sebastian, whom I plan on calling out again tonight.*

“His real name’s Josh,” Kate said. “And he’s kinda cute. Maybe you should give a blond a chance this time.” There was a lingering pause. “Fine, I’ll respect your wishes until the book is done. Then all bets are off. See you soon.”

The phone went dead and Michelle called out Kate’s name. Damn. She didn’t have a chance to ask about Marta’s reaction to her question earlier.

The idea that the house was haunted didn’t sit well with Michelle. Several of her books featured haunted houses, but that was fiction. The heroines had big strong heroes to protect them.

Michelle was spending her nights in this big house by herself. Ghosts and demons would not be welcome housemates. Perhaps she would just have to conjure up Sebastian to sleep with her at night and scare them all away for her. She imagined cuddling against his muscular chest as he caressed her hair, and other soft places.

It wouldn’t be hard to forget about ghosts while Sebastian stroked her to orgasm. She waited for Marta to come back but gave up after twenty minutes. She had several rewrites to finish, more sex to incorporate and three more chapters to write.

After she was done she would reward herself with another fantasy about Sebastian during a midnight swim. Then her muse could help her with tomorrow’s writing.

\* \* \* \*

When the rewrites were done and the first of her three final chapters outlined, Michelle went to the kitchen only to find it empty. She looked at the clock and shook her head. It was after eight and the sun was setting already.

A note from Nicholas said that he and Marta had gone to town and would be back late. Dinner was in the refrigerator.

Michelle wondered if the trip was scheduled or if it was an attempt by Marta to avoid Michelle’s questions. She really had freaked out when Michelle asked about the ‘guardianship’ of the house. It seemed such a strange word to use when discussing a house. She could think of any number of others: caretaker, custodian, curator. Well, she supposed she could think of anything that began with a C. She snorted out a laugh and opened the refrigerator, all thoughts of the wayward residents fleeing from her mind.

Her taste buds watered at the sight of a plate of peeled shrimp surrounding a bowl of

cocktail sauce. A bowl of salad filled with greens, oranges and almonds sat beside the seafood. A whole cheesecake topped by large strawberries sat on the lower shelf.

Michelle made a picnic on the screened-in back porch. She helped herself to a cold beer and started in on the shrimp. There was just enough of a breeze to cool things off a little. Funny how she hadn't noticed the heat this afternoon while she'd been writing. She'd been too focused on Charles and Hannah.

Now she glanced out at the palm trees and bushes, wondering what secrets they held. This was a manor house that had survived the years. Children from previous owners would have played there. Had they buried items that could be found now, giving clues to life in Florida in the 1800s? It might prove interesting to go out and do a walk-through, see if she could find something. Of course, looking for buried treasure would be intensive, and she didn't have time for that. She needed to work.

Thoughts of Hannah and Charles flittered through her mind as she ate all the salad and a good portion of the shrimp before pushing herself away from the table. Her mouth called for the cheesecake but her stomach rebelled. Best to wait for later, she knew. It would make a good midnight snack while she was clacking away at the keyboard.

The sound of the surf hitting the shore brought back memories of last night. She closed her eyes and saw Sebastian's large skilled hands. She shivered as she remembered him stroking her to orgasm.

A fantasy had never been that real. She'd always imagined her male hero as a muse while she was writing. This was the first time, however, that a new muse had pushed the current muse away. Never had one cause her to get herself off on a beach while she imagined looking into his clear blue eyes. For that matter, she'd never had a muse with blue eyes. Her heroes always had brown eyes. Just like Justin.

She shook her head. Justin and his brown eyes. Look where they'd landed her. Alone and making shrews out of her heroines.

Images of their last fight wafted through her mind. The one that stuck was the empty look in on his face when he told her she "wasn't fun anymore." Of course, days later she learned the phrase "not fun anymore" translated to "I'm fucking a skinny 22-year-old."

Michelle looked down at her heavy, 31-year-old body. When she and Justin had started dating, he'd assured her he didn't mind the extra weight.

“You’re voluptuous,” he’d said one night as he’d held her close. “It’s nice to have something to hold onto. I love your curvy butt and full boobs.”

Nine months later the blonde had appeared and her curves had turned into fat. Her self-esteem had plummeted and taken root in her work. Her agent had started to complain that her writing was now flat and lacking in sensuality.

“These may be sweet romances but you still need some excitement,” Sandra said one night. “The plot is good, but you need to rework a lot of this before I show it to the publisher.”

Michelle had tried and tried and tried but nothing had worked. Until last night, that is. Until her new creation had professed her beauty and his delight in her body.

Michelle cleared the table and then cut herself a healthy slice of cheesecake. She carried the treat to Mark’s office where she found papers from Sandra in the fax machine.

Sandra had drawn a big smiley face in the middle of the pages and scribbled, “Keep it up! Literally,” at the top of the page. Charles let out a laugh in the back of her mind and Hannah giggled, but Sebastian was nowhere to be seen, or heard.

Michelle finished her cheesecake and took the plate to the kitchen. She cleaned the plate, and then wiped down the counter before heading out the door. She followed the path to the beach. The towel she’d used the previous night was still on the bench.

Waves lapped against the shore and birds cawed in the trees.

“Sebastian?” The ocean roared in answer, but Sebastian did not materialize.

“This isn’t a part-time job you know,” Michelle said with a laugh. “I’m the boss. If you want your own book, you need to come when I call you.”

A giggle escaped her lips. “Are you pissed because you didn’t get to come last night? I’ll make it up to you, I promise. Now get out here and talk to me.”

The beach remained empty and Michelle frowned. She had work to do, and truthfully her memories of last night would fuel the next chapter. Inspiration for her creativity aside, it was her body that craved Sebastian. In her mind she knew he wasn’t real, but her nerve endings tingled as they remembered his touch.

The thought of him had provided an orgasm unlike any she’d had in the past. She might just have to make him a permanent muse. If she could ever get him to appear again.

\* \* \* \*

Michelle started cursing Sebastian around one a.m. She tried over and over to write the

scene were Hannah finally surrendered her virginity to her true love, but the words just weren't right.

Twice she took breaks and went to the beach to call for Sebastian's help, but the muse remained elusive.

Just after three a.m., she packed up her laptop, grabbed a blanket and walked down the path to the beach.

"Sebastian? Come out, come out wherever you are." Her singsong voice rang through the air. When no one answered, Michelle placed the laptop on the table, sat down and started to write.

*"If you let me, I could help,"* Charles said sullenly. *"I am the main character here, remember? He's not even in the book. Why don't you ask for my opinion on this delicate matter?"*

Michelle laughed softly. "I'm sorry Charles. Of course you have a say in this. Would you like to be on top, or on the bottom? Of course since this is Hannah's first time, maybe she should have the final say."

Charles chuckled. *"I've always preferred taking a woman from behind. I get in deeper that way. Would an audience be wrong at this point?"*

"If you're not going to give realistic input you can go away," Michelle said.

Charles gave a haughty laugh and disappeared. Michelle huffed before turning her attention back to the keyboard. Realistic! Who was she kidding? She was talking to a character in a book. And she'd had a muse-induced orgasm. Or had she? Had last night just been a dream? Or was there a flesh and blood man roaming the island, playing with the breasts and clits of every woman he found?

The kernel of doubt that had appeared and quickly disappeared last night reared its ugly head again. Something wasn't right. Her muses had never shown interest in her, only in her heroines.

But Sebastian couldn't be real. He had appeared out of nowhere. And disappeared just as quickly. But he'd been warm, solid and very male.

And that hair. That beautiful long hair. And those blue eyes. So unlike anything she'd given a character in the past.

Had she been feeling so sorry for herself last night that she'd allowed a total stranger to



play with her body, then rationalized it by thinking it was a fantasy?

*Son of a bitch!* Ducky. Isn't that what Kate said his name was? And what exactly had she said about him this morning? Just that he was a friend of Mark's and that she could call him to keep her company. Shit. When she got her hands on the jerk she'd throttle him.

*"If I could, I'd pat him on the back,"* Charles said with a laugh. *"Because of him my balls weren't blue at the end of chapter five."*

"Screw you, Charles," Michelle retorted. "Ducky didn't write that, I did. You should be thanking me, not him."

*"Yes but he stimulated your mood,"* Charles said. *"Lighten up. And if he comes back, lie down and let him—"*

Michelle screamed. "Keep out of it."

Charles chuckled and Michelle pulled the laptop closer to her. She began to pound out the love scene, hitting the keys so hard she wondered if she'd break one of them off.

When both Charles and Hannah were panting with pleasure, Michelle saved the file and closed down the computer.

She ran her fingers through her hair and exhaled loudly.

"Last night you were naked. I'd hoped I would find you that way again."

Sebastian was standing by the edge of the trees, wearing a pair of dark pants and an open white shirt—the same thing he'd been wearing last night. His hair hung down past his hips and she studied it, knowing most women would kill for a head of hair like that. By the look on his face, Michelle knew he was wondering how to handle the situation.

"Is this a big joke to you? Let's break in the new girl by sneaking up on her and pretending to be something you're not?"

"I pretended nothing," he said, his voice a soft caress. "In truth I thought you a mirage, or a new part of the curse."

"Last night I was beautiful and now I'm part of a curse? You bastard. Get the fuck out of here, now!"

Michelle pointed toward the trees, but Sebastian stood rooted to the ground.

"No one would ever think you a curse, little one. In truth I'd hoped you would be here so I could bury myself inside your tight little quim."

"You can forget the quim talk, buster. You're Ducky, Mark's friend. Did he call you? Is

this his idea of a joke? I know Kate would never do this no matter how much she thinks I need to get screwed. Just wait until I get my hands on Mark.”

Sebastian’s face clouded with confusion. “I don’t know of a Ducky. And I’ve never talked with Mark, or Kate, or anyone else at the house.”

“Really? Well, I can tell you’re not a mute. What’s the problem? They think you’re a jerk just like I do?”

Anger replaced confusion. “If by jerk you mean rude and arrogant, then yes, others have thought that of me in the past. But in truth, I don’t know what others think of me in this day and time. You’re the first person I’ve spoken with in years. One hundred and eighty six of them, to be exact.”

## *Chapter Three*

Anger mixed with fear flowed through Michelle's veins. Sebastian took a step toward her and she backed up, putting the table between them. "I take it back. You're not a jerk. You're a lunatic. Insane. Please, just go away."

The first rays of sunlight hit the beach and a look of intense sorrow crossed Sebastian's face. Michelle felt a pull on her heart. He was nuts, but he was in obvious distress. And she didn't think he was dangerous. He hadn't hurt her yesterday. On the contrary, he'd given her pleasure unlike anything she'd ever known.

His grief pushed away her anger. Something was wrong here. Very wrong. "Is there someone I could call? A friend, relative?" *The local psychiatric hospital?*

"I don't want you to be afraid of me. Please. It's been so long." Sebastian's voice was low.

Michelle moved back around the table and took a few tentative steps toward him. A look of utter joy replaced his sadness. If she didn't know better, she would think he was a child who had just received a Christmas gift.

"If you're not Ducky, then tell me who you are."

Sebastian frowned, and then moved closer to Michelle. "I told you my name. It hasn't changed."

"What's your last name?" If she knew that she could track down a relative. Maybe someone was looking for him. It was obvious he wasn't thrusting on all cylinders. She closed the gap and looked into his soft blue eyes. Was it fair that someone so gorgeous was a nutcase?

Her fear was gone. He wasn't going to hurt her, she could tell. He wanted nothing more than to talk. Well, to talk and to fuck. He'd made that emotion perfectly clear.

"Maddox," he whispered. His hand was gentle as he caressed her cheek and a sigh escaped Michelle's lips. His touch was like magic, and unlike anything she'd ever felt before. Huge blasts of pleasure shot through her as he stroked her. She wanted to wrap her arms around

his neck, to claim his lips and kiss him, deeply.

She leaned into his chest even as her brain warned her against what was happening. “I thought the Maddox family was all gone.”

He was kissing her now, his lips trailing across her forehead and down her nose, landing on her lips and claiming them in a possessive gesture that perfectly matched what she’d just thought. It was almost as if he could read her mind.

*Oh no, Michelle thought, I’m falling for the crazy person the family keeps in the attic.* That’s what Marta and her family are guarding. Shit. No, no this can’t be happening.

*Um, yes, yes. Lord I hope this is real.* Sebastian’s tongue pushed for entrance and Michelle opened her lips, sucking him into her, savoring the feel of his tongue as he swept inside.

Sebastian’s deep moan seemed to reverberate in her chest and when he pulled his lips away from hers, she felt as if he’s sucked her heart out as he’d left. “I can’t believe that you’re real. That you can see me. Hear me. Feel me.”

He pulled her closer and Michelle wound her arms around his broad shoulders. Her fingers caught in his beautiful hair and she gathered some of it in her hands.

“Let me take you to the house. Marta can help you I’m sure.” *Then we’ll find a professional who’ll cure you of the idea you haven’t talked to someone in one hundred and eighty six years.*

“Marta can’t help me,” Sebastian said. “No one can help me. They’ve all tried. They’ve all failed.”

He kissed her again, the feeling spreading down Michelle’s body until it settled in her “quim.” She giggled that the old-fashioned word had slipped into her brain. When Sebastian stepped back, the look of pain had returned. He looked toward the rising sun and tears filled the corners of his eyes.

“Please believe me when I say that I’m sorry. I want to stay with you, but I can’t.”

Michelle’s anger came back. She took a step away from him and put her hands on her hips. “Forget the cryptic cloak and dagger bull and tell me why not.” She knew she should be careful. If he really was mentally unstable, talking to him like this might not be a good idea. Of course neither was kissing him, or contemplating other ideas, like taking him inside her.

When he didn’t answer she waved a hand in his face, as if to snap him out of a stupor.

“Are you married?”

“No.” The answer was so soft she barely heard it. The first rays of morning sunshine hit the beach and Michelle turned toward it, smiling as the new day started. It was so gorgeous here, to see the sun begin its ascent high above the earth, to hear the soft chirp of birds and the rustle of leaves in the wind.

“Listen, Sebastian.” She turned back to him, not quite sure what she should say. “I’m a little freaked out by all this. I don’t usually allow men I don’t know to, um, pleasure me.”

“The pleasure was mine.” His smile made his face light up. “You were so beautiful as you climaxed. I would like to see it again.”

He took a step toward her and his body seemed to shimmer. Michelle’s eyes widened as he held out a hand. She could see straight through him. She stumbled backward, tripping on a rock and falling flat on her butt. Her impact jarred her and she shut her eyes. She heard Sebastian’s soft, “Forgive me,” and opened her eyes just in time to see him vanish. Her jaw dropped and she forgot about the pain in her backside.

“What the hell...? Get back here!” She jumped up and ran a circuit of the cove, inspecting all the trees for wires or mirrors, or better yet, for video cameras. If this was the kind of friends Mark had, she didn’t want to have anything to do with them. She had half a mind to take one of the cars in the garage and find this Ducky, tell him exactly what she thought of him and his jokes.

She’d fallen for it twice now. At least tonight she hadn’t been naked, and hadn’t let him get her off.

*“But you loved it, remember?”*

“Get the hell away from me, Charles. I swear, I will...”

*“He was real. Very real.”*

“Yeah?” She wheeled toward where the image of Charles wavered before her. “You think you’re real, too. But guess what? I created you; you’re make-believe.”

*“Am I?”* Charles gave her the smile that drove Hannah crazy. *“You don’t believe that. I’ve read interviews you’ve given where you say your characters are real to you.”*

Michelle buried her face in her hands, trying to get hold of her senses. Charles was right, of course. Her characters were real to her, were her friends. That’s why she enjoyed writing, and reading. It helped her to explore new worlds, to have new experiences.

“Charles?”

“Yes?”

She looked over at him. “May I try something?”

“Yes.”

Michelle walked to him slowly. When she was within inches she put out her hand, tried to touch his cheek. She was greeted with nothing but air and her heart rate shot up. “I can’t touch you.”

*“Of course not. I don’t have physical form. But Sebastian did, correct?”*

“Right.”

*“Something tells me you have a little mystery on your hands. I hope you’ll allow me to help as you solve it.”*

Yes, she definitely had a mystery to solve. She thought about asking Marta, but until she had a handle on it, she didn’t want to appear to be crazy. There were two ways to start. The first would be to introduce herself to Ducky, to see if he resembled Sebastian in any way. The second would be to find a library in town, do a little research on the Maddox family, and see what she could learn about Sebastian Maddox.

\* \* \* \*

She found the main branch of the St. Johns County Library on Ponce de Leon Boulevard. As she’d driven into St. Augustine, it hit her again how populated Florida was. Her home state of Texas was huge and you could drive for miles without coming across a city or town. It wasn’t that way here. The little section of land that Mark owned seemed so far away from civilization, it was, in fact, very close to downtown St. Augustine. And it hadn’t taken her long to find Ducky’s house before she’d headed into town.

He was also a rich young man who lived just east of Mark. The young, bikinied woman who’d answered the door told her Ducky was “in Miami,” and had been there for a week. “But you can come in and have a beer. We’re having a party tonight.”

Michelle had graciously declined before heading toward the library. The girl’s information could be taken two ways: one she was lying and Ducky was playing at being Sebastian, thereby punking her. Or two, Charles was right and Sebastian was real.

*“I’m always right.”* Charles’ voice had echoed in her mind and made her smile.

She parked in the city lot and walked to the library. A librarian told her where she could

find a book on St. Johns County history, and directed her to where she could request back issues of newspapers and magazines.

Michelle was thankful for the library skills her English teachers taught her as she quickly navigated the research area, finding several newspaper articles that focused on the history of the area and the local houses that had been around for a while.

Finding the Maddox name was easy, and when she did, she realized that Marta had left a little bit out when reciting the family history. The Maddox family had indeed tried, and failed, to start an indigo plantation. When that happened, they'd turned to shipping, but not in the way Michelle had thought.

The Maddox's used their private cove to offer sanctuary to pirates and smugglers as they made their way up and down the Florida coast. It had obviously proved quite lucrative since it had built them their beautiful home. After the Civil War, the family had turned to more legitimate pursuits, opening retail businesses in St. Augustine.

That business had closed down in the late 1930s when Richard Maddox, the last of the family, had passed away without leaving an heir. The house had been empty until Mark had purchased it five years ago. According to the article she'd read, it had taken quite a bit of renovation to shore up the building and clear out "unwanted visitors," in the forms of snakes and other crawly things.

Making a mental note to watch where she stepped outside, Michelle hit the copy button, then rewound the microfilm. She paid for her copies as she dropped the film off at the counter. A glance at her watch showed it was a little after three. She hadn't slept in quite a while and was tempted to go back to the house and hit the sheets.

But she needed to use the library's WiFi to contact Sandra. She retrieved her laptop from the car and found a nice spot inside to sit.

She sent an e-mail to Sandra, apologizing for the fact that her wireless connection didn't seem to be working at Mark's house and promising that she would try to get that problem corrected. Either that or she would contact Mark and ask if she could hook into his system.

It took no time to compose an email to Sandra, but she knew Sandra didn't baby-sit her account. Michelle would wait for an hour or so to see if she got a response. In the meantime, she'd do some surfing on the Maddox family.

After twenty minutes of less than nothing hits, she finally hit pay dirt. A paranormal

research site listed the Maddox house in St. Johns County as being haunted.

“Thanks for the heads up, Kate,” Michelle mumbled under her breath. Of course the only strange thing she’d seen at the house was Sebastian. Could he be the ghost? Somehow she doubted it. Ghosts didn’t kiss like Sebastian did.

She flipped through several pages until a hyperlink finally took her to the page dedicated to the house. The photo showed it in disrepair and Michelle’s eyebrows lifted. Mark had done quite a bit to the old place in the last five years.

There were a few paragraphs under the photo, telling the story of how Sebastian Maddox, son of plantation owner Benjamin Maddox, disappeared without a trace in 1823. Benjamin, reportedly rife with grief at his son’s loss, tortured the slaves, whom he blamed for the event. He told all who would listen that a local voodoo queen had used his son as a “sacrifice to their heathen god.”

Michelle’s blood ran cold as the story ended with Benjamin Maddox killing every slave he could get his hands on, but his son never reappeared. It is said, the article concluded, that Sebastian Maddox walks the plantation grounds to this day.

“Okay, what I need right now is a picture,” Michelle muttered. “If I were writing this story, I would have a photograph of Sebastian Maddox so the heroine could gasp and faint at the idea she’d kissed a ghost.”

*“They didn’t have cameras in 1823,”* Charles whispered in her ear.

“Of course not.” She flipped through several more pages on the site but found no more information. “But there could be a painting, a drawing, a silhouette...something!”

*“Are you one of those people who need physical proof to know something exists?”*

Charles’ voice sounded as if it were across the room now. *“I would think a person who wrote for a living would have a little more of an open mind.”*

“Shut up, Charles.” The man sitting next to Michelle peered over the top of his laptop at her. He frowned, then moved in his chair so that he was no longer facing her way. “Sorry, I’m just a little upset over something I’m reading.”

Her neighbor’s frown deepened before he gave her the true cold shoulder, turning so that his back was to her, his own laptop perched on the arm of his chair.

Michelle grimaced as she flipped through a few more pages. It was hard to focus on what she was reading when all she could think about was a man named Sebastian Maddox



disappearing in 1823.

If his father had been correct, and he had been a victim of voodoo, did that mean he was a—she swallowed hard as the word zombie pushed into her mind and grabbed hold.

She closed her eyes and could almost feel Sebastian's fingers on her clit, his mouth on her nipple. "No, zombies don't kiss and provide orgasms, or at least I hope they don't."

The man who had turned his back to her wheeled around and pierced Michelle with a cold stare. "You are in a library, young lady. I suggest you behave."

He grabbed his computer and stomped off, probably to report her to the librarians. Michelle couldn't stop thinking about zombies, the undead shell of a person that did the bidding of its master, a voodoo follower that had brought it back to life. Or at least that's what the movies always showed.

Truthfully, where real voodoo was concerned, Michelle had absolutely no idea how a zombie was made, or if it were even possible. But if they all looked like Sebastian, then she'd order up an army of them to take home with her: one for each day of the year.

Michelle held back a giggle, then clicked over to her email program. Sandra still hadn't responded, and that usually meant she wouldn't for a while. She closed down her laptop and gathered her things. A check of her watch showed it was almost six. That meant she would probably be facing the tail end of rush hour.

Still, maybe she could get home fairly quickly. But at the house she had no access to Internet.

As the idea of a team of sexy zombies serving her every whim still continued to fill her mind, she went back to her car and drove until she found a used bookstore. Inside, she asked the clerk for books on Florida history and voodoo. She left the store with six new purchases, the thrill of research running through her veins as she headed back toward Kate's house.

## *Chapter Four*

The table was set with laptop, lantern, books, and, just to be on the safe side, some garlic she'd found in the kitchen, a tree limb she'd whittled to a stake, and a crucifix taken from the hallway outside her door. She wasn't exactly sure what tools one needed to vanquish a zombie, and had found no information so far in the books she'd read.

Not that she'd had that much time. She'd arrived at the house just before seven to find an empty kitchen with a note from Marta saying that dinner was "keeping warm in the oven."

Michelle wasn't exactly sure what Marta was the guardian of, but she had a feeling it wasn't the meatloaf, carrots and potatoes she found wrapped in foil.

"It's almost as if she's avoiding me," Michelle had whispered to herself before she sat down alone and wolfed down the food as if it were the last thing she'd ever get to eat. Then she'd gone upstairs to take a nap. A natural night owl, she usually took naps in the afternoon, ensuring she would be refreshed and ready to write when the mood stuck her, usually around midnight.

But since she'd been in town she'd had to forgo her afternoon sleeping habit. She woke at one a.m., took a shower and dressed in a gauzy shirt that she tied at the waist, and a long skirt slit up both sides. She hit the books as soon as she was dressed, keeping a watch on the clock so she could make it to the cove around six, which was the time Sebastian usually showed up.

Now she stared at the items on the table. "Those are for vampires, moron. If you wrote about a heroine using garlic on a zombie, you'd think she was nuts."

Or would she? Michelle wasn't exactly sure. She still couldn't get her laptop to connect to any wireless system here and Mark's computer was password protected, so it was of absolutely no help. She picked up the first book and turned to the index, looking for the word garlic. When she didn't find it she turned to the second one, coming up with the same results.

After a fruitless search for ideas to fight a zombie she picked up the book the clerk had told her was the most accurate about voodoo and started to read. She soon found out that

zombies were dead people brought back to life to serve a voodoo master. Contrary to popular myth, the zombies were generally used as plantation workers.

Several historians had ideas that zombies were created by giving people drugs that would make them appear dead. After they had been buried, their new “masters” would come along and breathe new life into them, so to speak. In a superstitious people, Michelle supposed the “dead” would believe they had been resurrected. They would know nothing of the drugs given them.

She read other chapters on voodoo and its origins in Africa and the Caribbean. Voodoo was a religion, she knew, and like most things that the general public didn’t know a lot about it was feared. And like anything, religious or otherwise, if put in the wrong hands it could be used for evil purposes.

Michelle wondered if that was what had happened with Sebastian. Did he anger someone? If, as the article had reported, the slaves had used him as a sacrifice, there must be some reason they had selected him. That was one of the questions she intended to ask him when he made his appearance.

“My desk looked much like this.” She jumped at the sound of his voice, knocking over her chair and moving backward quickly.

“I didn’t hear you come up,” she said, knowing the words sounded lame.

He touched the books, his long fingers stroking the spines. “We had books, parchment, a quill and ink, and a candle.” She watched him pick up her electric lantern and examine it. “How things have changed. Where is the flame?”

“It’s, um, electric.” She took a step toward the desk. “You really are Sebastian Maddox, aren’t you?”

“Yes.” He set the lamp down. “Are you a voodoo witch?”

“No.” The disappointment on his face made her heart drop.

“I was praying you had come to release me.” He looked at the ocean, then turned a grin on her that she thought would make her clothes melt right off her body. “If you are not here for that, perhaps we can pass the hour in more pleasant pursuits. Will you undress for me?”

Michelle’s hands went to her buttons, her eyes locking onto his. His blue eyes smoldered as he watched her, and the smile on his face was about the sexiest thing she’d ever seen. It was almost as if she were in a trance, as if she had become the mindless zombie and he the master. When she realized what she was doing, she moved her fingers to her hair, combing through the

strands, but not before leaving enough buttons open to reveal her bra, and quite a lot of skin.

“What is this?” He put his fingers on her low-cut bra and tugged.

“It’s a bra—a sort of...modern corset.”

He traced a finger over the edge and Michelle shivered.

“You’re so soft.” He tugged on the bra and frowned. “How does it come off?”

“Stop!” She batted at his hand. “Listen, we need to talk. We can’t just...”

Sebastian put his hand behind her neck, pulling their lips together. She groaned as he slid his tongue into her mouth, licking at her until she thought she would die of pleasure. The kiss was extraordinary, producing a heady sensation that made her brain feel fuzzy.

“Sebastian,” she whispered against his mouth as he licked at her. “We need to discuss things. Please.” She pushed against his chest, praying his will was stronger than her own. Right now all she really wanted to do was throw him down to the ground, straddle him and ride him until the sun came up, which she knew would happen in just over thirty minutes. That still wouldn’t be enough time, she knew, to get her fill of him.

He took a step back and bowed. “I am sorry.” The pain on his face made her stomach clench. “I will leave.”

“No!” She grabbed at his arm. “That’s not what I meant. I want to know who you are, and how it’s possible that you’re here, right now. Why have I not seen you anywhere else? And how can you be here, at this spot at the exact same time three mornings in a row?”

The pained look on his face intensified, and she stroked his cheek. “Tell me.”

“It is part of the curse. For one hundred and eighty six years, I have come to this cove every morning to watch the sunrise. The voodoo priestess who bound me said it would teach me humility, to see what I had lost, to know I had one hour a day to enjoy life.

The ability to form words escaped Michelle as she processed what he had said. She replayed it in her mind, knowing it sounded impossible, but the proof of it stood in front of her. He wore dark breaches that looked as if he’d just put them on, but it was obvious they had been hand-sewn. His chest was bare, as were his feet. His blond hair streamed over his open shirt and down his chest and back.

“You’re a male sleeping beauty,” she said softly. “Except instead of a wicked step mother, there’s a voodoo priestess.”

“If you wish,” he winked at her and then licked his lips, “perhaps we should try the kiss

again, to see if it breaks the spell.”

Nervous laughter rocked her body and she hugged her arms around her waist. “I’m afraid if I kissed you we wouldn’t stop. I want some more answers first. Do you remember what happened?”

He shrugged. “I remember going to visit Sarya, the slave girl who was my lover. The witch led me to a clearing where they placed me on an altar. I was deep in my cups, and don’t remember much about that night.”

Sebastian stopped talking and looked back at the ocean. Michelle could almost feel the sting of his memories, and she stepped up next to him.

“Go on.”

“The next night I awoke here, in the cove. I screamed at the witch, told her I would have her whipped. Then she explained that I was selfish, a horrible man. She said Sarya wished to wed and I wouldn’t let her, that I thought only to keep her for myself.”

Michelle tried to tamp down the threads of jealousy she felt about Sarya. What should it matter now, anyway?

“Was it true?”

“Sarya belonged to me. She served me in my bed.”

Michelle formed a rebuttal in her mind, but he spoke before she could open her mouth. “I was wrong, though. The witch explained to me that Sarya loved Nadim. At first I was angry, saying I would have him sold, break them apart. But as the mornings passed, I realized how selfish I was.”

He ran his fingers through his hair, which spread out in the wind. “On the eighth morning I was prepared to tell them how wrong I had been. But no one came. Not the priestess. Not Sarya. No one, until you.”

His voice cracked and Michelle swore she saw tears in the corners of his eyes. “How is it you know how long it has been?”

“When I awaken the number appears in my mind, and then suddenly I am here. I watch the sunrise, I mourn the loss of my life, and then I sleep again.”

What he was saying was so surreal. And his obvious pain ripped into her, making her heart ache. “Sebastian...” Words failed her and she wrapped her arms around him, pulling him close. “How long...?”

“Until just after sunrise.” He stroked her cheek, then kissed her gently. “I have seen people in the cove from time to time, but no one has ever seen me. Not until you.”

He’d said that before, but the meaning of it didn’t hit her until now. His lips brushed against hers before dipping downward, kissing the swell of her breasts. “You mean no one else has seen you? Ever?” It was hard to concentrate while he was kissing her breasts, his tongue running over her skin.

“Never.” He pulled at the bra again. “Why does this not come off?”

Michelle giggled, then put her hands on either side of his head, lifting it so that their eyes were level. “It hooks in the back. But right now we need to discuss you, not my bra.”

“It seems such a cruel device, to contain your beautiful breasts so tightly.” He pushed her shirt off her shoulders and wrapped his arms around her. His fingers immediately found the ends of her bra and he tugged, trying to break them apart. “’Tis sewn shut.”

She laughed, snuggling closer. Her nipples were rock hard, the sensitive nubs rubbing against the satin of her bra. The idea that he wanted to touch her so badly made her body tingle with anticipation. They should be discussing the situation at hand, but how could she deny him if it had been one hundred and eighty six years?

Scratch that, it had just been two nights ago, really, when he’d brought her to orgasm. And what an orgasm it had been. The memory of the way her body quaked under his touch shot her desire higher. “Move your hands.”

He complied immediately and she undid her bra, letting it fall off her shoulders. He watched the material as it floated to the sand, then turned his gaze on her breasts, his mouth open in a perfect o before he licked his lips, and lowered his head.

Michelle gasped as he sucked in a nipple, his fingers working the other one as lightning bolts of pleasure shot down to her clit. He nibbled and licked until she gasped, pushing herself into him, trying to get him to take more of her. When she did that, he moved his mouth to her other breast, his hand sliding along her skin to torment the nipples his teeth and tongue had just pleased so well.

“Sebastian. Oh good Lord...you need... I...” He pulled at the shirt still tied at her waist, then let it drop. When his fingers found her waistband, his mouth left her breast.

“What is this?” He pulled on the material, his eyes widening as it expanded.

“Elastic.” She pushed the skirt over her hips and let it flutter to the ground.

“I think I like that,” he said, his gaze focused down. He knelt, his breathe hot on her thighs. Michelle thought she would come just from him looking at her, from the feel hot air on her body. “Your quim is almost bare.”

“Yeah, I’m too chicken to do a Brazilian. I shave.” She looked down to see him staring back at her.

“Shave your quim?”

She nodded, the whole situation taking on a “this is too weird” aspect. “We should sit so that— Oh dear Lord.”

Sebastian ran his tongue up her slit, his arms wrapped around her hips to hold her close. Michelle put her hands on his shoulders as his tongue traced the line of her pussy before pushing into her wetness.

Michelle didn’t even try to push him away as he feasted on her, his tongue darting in and out of her lips, running up and down her soft folds until her body quaked. Her legs felt like jelly and she was sure if it weren’t for his arms around her hips she would fall down and sink into the sand.

He drove her mad as he wiggled around, his tongue exploring every inch of her he could find except her clit, which ached for his attention. She wanted to pull his hair, direct him to the sensitive spot at the top of her mons.

Within seconds, though, she found out he needed no direction. His fingers separated her folds, two fingers pushing inside her as his free hand grasped her hip firmly. He pumped gently. When she rocked into his touch, his lips found her clit, sucking it into his mouth slowly then nibbling just enough to send her soaring.

Her body jerked against him as her orgasm hit, the feeling strong and urgent. “Sebastian!” She wrapped her fingers in his hair, grinding herself against him as he murmured his approval, his fingers sliding in and out as he continued to devour her.

A second orgasm slammed into her and then she stumbled forward, one hand hitting the sand as she fell, her body still reeling from the feeling of pleasure. She glanced back over her shoulder to where he’d knelt before her. He was gone. She turned her gaze toward the ocean to see soft rays of sunshine lighting its surface.

“No!” The scream ripped out of her, leaving her throat dry and rough. “Come back!” She repeated the words over and over as tears burned her eyes, falling down her cheeks to drift into

the sand. She buried her face in the crook of her arm and wept. An ache unlike anything she'd ever felt wrapped around her heart, squeezing.

She had to find some way to break Sebastian free of the curse. In a fairy tale all she would have to do was kiss him with the feeling of love that permeated her right now. And if she knew where he was she would try it.

The thought made her straighten. She may not know where his body was, but there was somebody who did. Marta. She'd said a member of her family had been a "guardian" here for years. While the words had puzzled her before they didn't now.

Marta had been avoiding her, but Michelle planned to end that right now. It was around seven. The woman should be in the kitchen, cooking breakfast. Michelle stood and headed for the house, leaving her books behind. Marta was going to answer her questions this morning if Michelle had to pull the words out of her.



## *Chapter Five*

Michelle was surprised to find Marta sitting at the kitchen table. There were two cups of coffee poured, one of them doctored with cream and sugar, just as Michelle liked it.

She took a step toward the table, stopping just inches away from the older woman. “Why didn’t you tell me?”

Marta took a sip from her cup, her gaze never leaving the screen door. “I knew you were the one, but I didn’t want to influence you. If I was right, you had to discover him on your own, and you did. The first night.”

Michelle sat down, ignoring her coffee. “Why are you keeping him prisoner. Release him.”

“I cannot.” The look of sorrow on Marta’s face matched the one Michelle had just seen on Sebastian’s. Somehow, Michelle knew that Marta would break the curse, if she could.

“Are you not a voodoo priestess?”

Marta nodded slowly, then took another sip. “The spell was performed long ago, and only the person who performed it can break it.”

Tears stung Michelle’s eyes. “Then there’s no hope?” As the words left her mouth she slapped her hand against the table. Marta didn’t move, didn’t even look her way. “There has to be something you can do.”

For a minute, Michelle thought Marta wouldn’t answer her. But then she sighed and finally looked at Michelle.

“Tarsa, the woman who placed the curse, was very powerful. When Sebastian’s father searched for his son, he had the plantation turned upside down. He caught wind of what had happened a few days after the binding. He captured and tortured slaves, killing several of them in an effort to find his son.”

Michelle could only imagine the grief the elder Maddox had gone through after his son disappeared. Still, killing people to get answers was not the solution to the problem.

“He killed her?”

Marta nodded. “Not immediately. But after several weeks, then yes, he did.”

Michelle reached for her cup, took a sip of the cooling liquid. “Why didn’t Tarsa release Sebastian and end what was happening?”

“According to legend, Tarsa only meant to teach Sebastian a lesson, about using people.”

“Yes, he told me about Sarya.”

The look of astonishment on Marta’s face made Michelle smile. “I wish I could speak with him. All these years I’ve tried to summon him, but it has not worked. And you walk in and…”

Michelle covered Marta’s hand with her own. “Finish your story.”

“Yes, of course. Tarsa bound Sebastian’s soul to a *bochio*, making it so that he was released for one hour a day, at sunrise.”

“A *bochio*?”

“A wooden carving. It was the precursor to voodoo dolls, if you like.” Marta got up and refilled her mug. She took Michelle’s cup, poured out the almost untouched coffee and refilled it before sitting back down. “*Bochios* are not evil, nor are voodoo dolls unless people use them that way. The carvings can be used for protection. In this case, it was used to protect Sebastian’s soul, as it has done for years.”

Michelle wanted to tell the woman that this wasn’t the time to go into a lecture about voodoo and religion. But Marta seemed to know that and continued talking without being pushed.

“She meant to unleash his spirit after Sarya and Nadim had a chance to run away together, but Mr. Maddox’s reaction caused a change in the plans. I think, personally, that she might have kept Sebastian’s spirit trapped in retaliation for the slaves who were killed. Then, before she could release him, she herself died.”

The weight around Michelle’s heart increased. “That means he’s stuck, right?”

“Possibly.” Marta cocked her head just slightly. “Over the years, my ancestors have tried to break the spell, to no avail. My great-grandmother, though, was very powerful. She couldn’t release him, but she did perform a ceremony that she felt altered the curse.”

“Did it work?”

Marta shook her head, then frowned. “We did not think so at the time. But now that you

can see him, I think it might have.”

Michelle’s hands shook. She grasped the mug, trying to keep them steady. “How exactly was the curse changed?”

“I think you know.”

Marta’s answer was soft, but it still sent chills up Michelle’s spine. “Holy crap, he really is a male sleeping beauty. And I’m his Princess Charming.”

## *Chapter Six*

The world stopped revolving, or at least it did for Michelle. She sat rock still in her chair, staring at her coffee cup. “Things don’t work this way, you know. I may write fables, but they’re fiction. Real life romance never works.”

Marta gave her a small smile, then blinked her eyes rapidly. Michelle figured she was giving herself time to compose a decent answer that refuted Michelle’s words. Before she could though, Michelle continued.

“Besides, I’ve kissed him, and he’s still cursed. He still disappeared this morning.”

*Right after he gave me the most fantastic orgasm I’ve had in ages.*

“That was lust,” Marta said. “You must kiss him with love on your lips.”

“People don’t fall in love at first sight. You have to get to know someone, and even then you don’t really know them.”

*Because they turn out to be like Justin, screw you one minute and then screw you again, in a totally different manner the next.*

“*Hannah and I fell in love at first sight.*” Her current muse’s voice was so full of conceit she wished he were real so she could smack him.

“Can it, Charles! Nobody invited you to this discussion.”

“Charles?” Marta looked around the room, her eyes wide in amazement. “Are you a spirit guide?”

Michelle put her head on the table. “No, I’m a writer who hears her characters’ voices sometimes. Ignore me.”

The room grew silent for a few moments, and then Marta pushed back her chair and walked to the stove. “You cannot tell me you didn’t feel something for Sebastian during the time you spent together.”

The sound of eggs cracking reached Michelle’s ears and her stomach growled. “Yes, I felt pity for him, for what he’d gone through.” Which was true. The fact that she’d felt extreme

lust didn't have to figure into the conversation. Except she'd already told Marta that she and Sebastian had kissed.

This dialogue was dangerous, and could lead places Michelle didn't want to go. An about face was needed right now. "Do you know where Sebastian's body is?"

"Yes." Marta worked at the stove and counter, her back to Michelle.

"Will you show me?"

"No." This time she turned to face her. "I am his guardian. I am entrusted to his care, and leading you there without your agreement to try and help him would be foolish on my part."

"I didn't say I wouldn't help." Michelle ogled the plate of food Marta put in front of her. Eggs, bacon and toast. It made her mouth water and she picked up her fork, eating faster than she should have. When she was partway through, she paused to take a sip of the juice Marta had given her. "Listen, falling in love isn't easy. And if you expect to have someone just pop in and save this guy, I think you're living a pipe dream."

Marta put her own plate down, then sat. She didn't touch any of her food, though. Instead she kept her gaze on Michelle. "Tell me, then, why you are the only one who has ever seen him? In one hundred and eighty six years, no one—not me, not any of my ancestors—has ever seen him. And we are his guardians. If there is not a bond between you, why did this happen?"

*"She is right you know..."* Charles' voice drifted off as Michelle held up her hand.

"I'm sorry, I simply don't believe I can fall in love with someone I just met. Maybe I'm only the catalyst to get the ball rolling. Maybe now that he's out of the dark, so to speak, you'll see him, too. Come to the cove in the morning."

Marta ran her fork through her eggs. "I've been to that cove many times, as a child and as an adult. I've never seen him. Not once. I've never felt an inkling of his spirit, or witnessed a glimmer of his presence. If I had not seen his sleeping body and the *bochio*, I would think him nothing more than a myth handed down from generation to generation."

Michelle wasn't quite sure what to say. She wanted to help Sebastian, she truly did. But she'd made a promise to herself to never fall in love again until she was one hundred percent certain it would last. Forever. Since she'd only known Sebastian for three hours, technically, she couldn't come to that conclusion. There was no telling what would happen if she did let herself go and then released him.

She stood quickly, glancing down at Marta. "I'm going to bed. I'll see you later this

afternoon.”

Michelle marched out of the room, hurrying so she didn’t have to answer any questions. But she didn’t have to worry about that. The woman remained silent, and Michelle was almost to her room before Charles spoke up again.

*“You are a fool, you know. You deny yourself happiness.”*

“How do you know?” She slammed into the room, noticing her empty desk. Her laptop and papers were still at the beach. She needed to go and get them, in case an afternoon rainstorm visited the area. “Stay here, Charles.”

She was almost to the beach before Charles sounded in her head again. *“Are you not the same woman who helped Hannah overcome her fear of my cock?”*

Everything was exactly where she left it, and she gathered it into a pile, stuffing the stack into the huge bag that was her constant companion. She put her laptop on top of the papers. “It’s not the same thing, Charles. Just leave it alone.”

*“It seems to me as if you are allowing Justin to control your life, even after he made it clear that he had no more interest in you.”*

Anger mixed with pain flowed through her. “You have no idea what you’re talking about.”

*“Don’t I? Look at it this way. I am your muse, yes, but I am not real. The things I think come from you. Somewhere down inside you have budding feelings for Sebastian. I am telling you to listen to those feelings. So in essence, you are telling yourself to listen.”*

“You know what, Charles. Right now I hate your guts. Get away from me.”

*“You hate the fact I’m right. The more you think about it the more you’ll realize that.”*

His laughter was deep.

“Charles?”

She waited for his murmured, “Yes?” before she said, “Go to hell.”

## *Chapter Seven*

Michelle tried to sleep, but every time she closed her eyes she could see Sebastian's face: the crooked tilt of his mouth when he smiled, and the look of pain in his deep blue eyes as he described coming to the cove for one hundred and eighty six years to watch the sunrise every morning.

She tried to imagine what that would be like, to return to the same area day after day, knowing nothing would ever change, and then suddenly having a woman notice you where no one else ever had. No wonder he'd been so eager to touch her the first night, and the second and third. Who could blame him?

Not that she was complaining. His touch had been magical, and she'd loved every second of it. Right up until the time the word *love* had spilled out of Marta's mouth.

She lay in bed now, staring up at the gathering of mosquito netting. It met in the center and moved outward, covering the entire bed, caging her in. *Much like Sebastian is caged in, only he can't leave his prison.* She recognized Charles' voice in her mind but she ignored it.

He didn't need to be giving her advice. She had created him, hadn't she? She's the one who thought for him. He didn't need to do the same for her.

"Maybe he does," she thought, sitting up in the center of the bed and looking out over the room. The sun was still up, which meant she'd gotten very little sleep. She needed to lie back down, try and drift off. She had work to do tonight, pages that needed to be written or Sandra would come after her, stand over her shoulder with a bat and make sure Michelle pounded out the words to get her story done in time to make her deadline.

She mulled over her options. She could sleep, she could write, or she could go on her own little treasure hunt, see if she could find Sebastian's lair. It couldn't be anywhere in the house, since Mark had totally redone it. He'd told her they'd gutted the place and started from scratch, adding new plumbing and electricity before putting up new walls and redoing rooms to add bathrooms and turn massive rooms into only slightly huge rooms.

“Kate, I wish you were here right now. I need someone to talk to.”

“*You have me,*” Charles said. He lounged at the end of the bed, his feet hanging over the edge, swinging back and forth to move the net. “*And as much as I sympathize with Sebastian’s plight, I must say my cock needs attention. I suggest you write.*”

“Your cock always needs attention, Charles. You’re the horniest hero I’ve created in quite some time.”

“*Thank you.*” The note of arrogance in his voice made her smile. “*Perhaps a hand job? I do love those when they’re done right, with her sweet hand putting just the right amount of pressure on my staff. And of course, I would return the favor. Hannah is so soft and willing now. She’s waiting patiently.*”

“I’m sure she is.” Michelle walked to her computer. It reawakened and she checked the time. A little after six. That meant she had a few more hours until the sun set. But she had no idea where to begin searching for Sebastian. Maybe she should try in the morning, when Sebastian disappeared. He had to walk to his lair, didn’t he? He couldn’t fly there, or just magically appear and reappear.

Of course she knew that he could, though, because that is exactly what he’d done—poofed in and out. But if he had to come to the cove every morning, his hiding place must be close by. Maybe it was underground, or located in some sort of...cave. Was there a cave near the cove?

Could be, but putting it that close to the shore could be dangerous if a hurricane visited the area. Unless the cave was magically protected. If a spell could hold a man captive for one hundred and eighty six years, surely it could defend against the elements, too.

Michelle tried to connect to the Internet and failed. She either had to go back to the library in St. Augustine tomorrow or she needed to go to Mark’s office and send Sandra a fax, let her know what was happening with the manuscript. In the meantime, she needed to work. She had less than two weeks to finish four chapters and get them polished enough for Sandra to send to her publisher, and hopefully sell.

She sat down then looked back at the bed. “All right Charles, time to go to work. Whip out your dick.”

“*With pleasure!*”

\* \* \* \*



Charles and Hannah were panting in perfect rhythm when Michelle saved her file and closed the lid on her laptop. It was a little after eleven, way too early for Sebastian to appear. Her eyes were tired, her body weary from lack of sleep, and from lack of food.

She hadn't eaten anything since breakfast that morning, staying in her room to work. She needed to fill her belly, and then go to the cove to talk with Sebastian.

In the kitchen, she found a plate of chicken and vegetables covered with foil in the refrigerator. After removing the thin aluminum, she put the dish in the microwave to heat then looked out the window.

Visions of a young blond boy frolicking in the yard ran through her mind as she stared out over the grounds. She saw him climbing the trees, chasing frogs and playing tag with a young girl in a long, white dress. Michelle could swear they were real, but she knew they weren't. She wondered if somehow Marta had planted them for her to see, to make her feel closer to Sebastian.

It had to be hard to be a guardian to what was, essentially, a lost cause. For almost two hundred years all those before her had failed. And now victory seemed to be a hand, if only Michelle would cooperate. Planting memories would increase her empathy, and perhaps make her feel things for the tragic figure in front of her.

Of course they weren't really necessary. Michelle already felt something. She just didn't want to fall in love. She'd done that with Justin, thinking it was forever. And then he'd dumped her, leaving her alone and crying. She'd barely recovered from that. Why should she open her heart again? What's worse why should she open her heart to a man who—essentially—did not exist?

*"Tell yourself that all you want,"* Charles said as the microwave dinged. *"He is real."*

*"Shouldn't you be upstairs, basking in the afterglow of the glorious orgasm I just provided you?"*

*"You provided me? I beg to differ."* He sat down in a chair, propping his booted feet on the table. *"I was the one who said we should do the—"*

*"Enough!"* Michelle put her plate on the table. *"I'm eating now, and don't care to relive your sexual glory."*

Charles chuckled, then linked his hands across his chest. *"You know, I have been thinking."*

Michelle cut into her chicken. “You’ve been thinking? Without me?”

Her muse ignored her question. “*You helped Hannah to work through her fears about sex, yet you are perfectly happy to lock yourself away from the idea you could find happiness. Why is that?*”

“Don’t you dare sit there and analyze me, Charles.”

“*Why not? You refuse to do it for yourself.*”

Michelle took her mostly untouched plate and put it in the sink. She gathered up a few oranges and bananas, found several bottles of soda in the fridge, and turned to Charles. “I’m leaving, and if you follow me the threat of a three-inch dick becomes reality. Understand?”

“*Keep running, then. My large penis and I will stay right here.*”

Michelle made her way to the beach, trying, and failing, to be angry with Charles. Because really, as he’d pointed out earlier, Charles was just her own subconscious mind spouting ideas that she was afraid to put forth.

She stared out at the ocean as she thought about what Charles had said. She helped her characters work through their problems with each book she wrote, yet she was willing to let herself wallow in sorrow, to let a chance for happiness slide by just because Justin had dumped all over her.

If she did that, Justin would win. It was an old cliché, but it was true. She needed to see if she had feelings for Sebastian, but how did you do that when you only have an hour each day? Of course, she’d already spent three hours with him, and had one fantastic orgasm after another.

But love wasn’t based on sex alone. You had to get to know someone. And how could that happen in just one hour a day?

Michelle lay down, closing her eyes and focusing on Sebastian. *Can you hear me? Is there any part of you that can feel me near you right now?*

She got no answer, no tingle, no deep voice carried across the wind to caress her neck, no feeling of longing in her body.

*Great*, she thought to herself. *If I had to put myself in the middle of a fairy tale, why did I have to be the one rescuing someone? I have no clue how to go about it. What the hell do I do now?*

## *Chapter Eight*

“Hey, wake up!”

There was a heavy push on her shoulder and Michelle groaned softly. “What?”

“I said wake up. I’m hungry, what’s for dinner?”

She sat up, trying to remember where she was. She’d gone to sleep in the cove, waiting for Sebastian to show up. But now she was in her house, the one she’d shared with Justin, the one she’d put on the market before leaving for Florida since it was filled with too many memories of the man towering over her at this very moment.

She stared up at Justin and her mouth went dry. “What are you doing here? What am I doing here?”

“We live here, remember? What’s. For. Dinner?” He enunciated each word, his gaze still locked on her face.

“Dinner?” His groan of disgust when she didn’t answer made her want to slap him.

He chuckled, and not in a joking manner. “I know you know what food is. Let’s face it, your knowledge is hard to miss. You said dinner would be ready soon and that was over an hour ago. And now I come in here and find you sleeping? What have you been doing for the last hour?”

“Trying to figure out a way to wake Sebastian by falling in love with him.”

He snorted again, then headed for the door. “Figures. Leave me starving while you dally with a romance novel hero. I’m ordering pizza.”

She could hear his steps as he went downstairs and she looked around the room, a feeling of horror settling in the pit of her stomach. Had it all been a dream? It wasn’t unusual for her to dream up plots for her books, but the last few days had seemed so real, and Sebastian had provided her with fantastic orgasms. That part was strange. She never had sex with her muses. They were only interested in the heroines.

“Sebastian?” No answer came and Michelle swallowed hard. “Charles?”

Panic gripped her stomach as Justin's voice tailed up the stairs, giving directions to their house to the deliveryman. "Extra cheese," she heard him say. "And I'm starved. Get it here quick and you get ten bucks extra."

Michelle stood and glanced around. She was in her office, the desk littered with research books and notes, the walls full of cover flats from her books. She'd been sleeping on the daybed that she kept for just that purpose, since she kept odd hours, something that had always bothered Justin.

She stopped in the doorway and sniffed. The smell of stale cigarette smoke hit her nose. She and Justin had often fought about that habit, and he'd quit right before they'd broken up. But it did not seem to have lasted. Unless...unless it was all a dream and they hadn't broken up. Maybe she hadn't gone to Florida.

The stairs seemed steep as she walked down them, turning toward the living room when she hit the bottom.

Justin sat in a chair, rummaging through her purse. "What are you doing?"

"Money for the pizza guy," he said. "You got a lot of crap in here, you know. Hey, get me a beer, will ya?"

"Get it yourself," she said, grabbing her purse out of his hands. "And stay out of my stuff."

The incredulous look on his face made her smile. He obviously hadn't been expecting that. "Excuse me? I seem to remember the deal we made when I agreed to take you back."

Her smile faded and icy fingers of fear tightened around her nerve endings, making her hands tingle with pain. "What deal?"

"The one where we got married and you paid for everything, remember?"

She backed away from Justin, her hands in the air. "Now I know this is a nightmare. I would never agree to something so stupid."

"Stupid? I'm the best thing you could get. I'm the only man who would put up with you."

"Now it's my turn to say, *excuse me*? You're the one who left me, remember? What's the matter, did your skinny little girlfriend dump you?"

The anger on his face told her she'd hit the nail on the head. She threw back her head and laughed. "Get out, Justin. I wouldn't take you back if my life depended on it."

"No?" He stood and pulled her purse from her hands, letting it drop to the floor. "Did you

miss the part where I said we were married? Husband and wife? Until death do us part?"

The fear Michelle had felt earlier increased. What if this wasn't a dream? What if he was telling her the truth?

The doorbell rang and he thrust some bills at her. "Go get the pizza."

"Get it yourself." She slapped his hand away and the money fell to the floor.

Rage passed over his face and he lifted his hand as if to strike her. Several things happened at once. The front door burst open, the sound of splintering wood filling the air.

A large man pushed himself between her and Justin, the sound of a fist hitting flesh echoed through the room and then Justin was on the ground.

Sebastian turned to her. He wore tight leggings and a chain mail shirt, and had a sword in his hand. Michelle's eyes widened as she stared at him.

"What is happening?"

"You said you wanted me to rescue you." He wrapped an arm around her waist, drawing her close to him. He captured her lower lip between his sucking on it gently. "You taste so wonderful."

"So do you." She laughed and threw back her head as he licked her chin, working his way down her neck. "But why are you dressed like that, and why are you carrying a sword?"

"In case I have to slay a dragon," he said, his look turning serious. "I would do anything for you, Michelle."

He kissed her again, his tongue stroking her lower lip before slipping inside her, filling her as pleasure wrapped around her heart, then seeped inside and sealed her as his forever.

"You have given me the most wondrous gift," he whispered into her ear. "Not since I was bound have I been able to dream, to see anything but the cove and the sunrise."

"How is this is happening?"

"You're both nuts, that's how." Justin's voice intruded on them and Sebastian stepped in front of her, his sword at the ready.

"May I?"

"No!" Michelle stepped in front of him. "I may hate him, but no bloodshed."

"Very well," Sebastian replied. "Leave now, or I will feed you to the dragon."

"What dragon?" Justin said, putting his arms across his chest.

Michelle stared at the apparition that appeared behind Justin. She tried to speak, but no

words came, so she just pointed at the large, scaly monster that stood patiently looking at Justin's back.

Justin followed her gaze, screamed like a little girl, and ran off, the dragon in hot pursuit.

"I like this dream," Michelle laughed.

"As do I." Sebastian dropped the sword and pulled her into his arms, kissing her fiercely. He moved his hands to hold her head still, the pressure hard and forceful, and one of the most gratifying things Michelle had ever felt. He was claiming her, putting his mark on her, and she loved every second of it.

"I want to see the sunshine," he said, putting his forehead against her and stroking his hands up and down her back. "I want to smell the flowers and taste wine."

"Can you do that?" She put her hands on his hips, pulling him close to her. His hard cock pressed against her belly and she groaned. "For that matter, how is this happening?"

"I don't care," Sebastian replied. "All I know is that you are in my arms, and that makes everything perfect."

Michelle felt as if she would melt on the spot. She kissed him tenderly, then took his hand and led him toward the back door, throwing it open wide. She watched as he took in the garden she had so lovingly tended for years, the one that made it hard to put the house up for sale.

"It's magnificent." He ran across the deck, pulling her behind him. She let go of his hand as he roamed from flower to flower, bending over to inhale deeply, a look of childish wonder increasing with each sniff. At one point, he held out his arms as if in supplication, lifting his face up to the sun.

Michelle fought back tears as she watched him, grateful to Marta for letting this happen, for she knew the older woman was responsible. He stood there for a few long moments, and then he went to the rose bush he pulled a few flowers free. He carefully picked off the thorns before heading back to her, offering them as he got down on one knee.

"For my lady."

"Thank you, kind sir." She lifted the roses to her nose and then batted her eyes at him. "You are a true gentleman."

"If I am, it has taken me one hundred and eighty six years to achieve that milestone." He waved his hand and a blanket appeared on the ground near the rose bushes. At the same time

there was a voice from the open back door.

“Did someone order a pizza?”

\* \* \* \*

Sebastian leaned toward the round object in front of him and sniffed. The smell was heavenly, a mixture of things he couldn't quite place. The only thing that smelled better was Michelle. He savored the strawberry scent that clung to her hair, and the aroma of her skin was like sweet pomegranates. He wanted to make love to her on this blanket, in the middle of this garden, but he didn't want to do seem as if that was the only thing he wanted.

Despite their activities during the last few sunrises, he wasn't sure exactly how she felt. The idea of hurting her, as he'd done with Sarya, and eventually his family, was something that he couldn't handle. If they made love, he wanted her to be the aggressor.

“Tell me what this is again.”

“Pizza. It's Italian, baked crust with tomato sauce and cheese. This one has pepperoni, mushrooms, black olives, green pepper and sausage on it.” She pulled a triangle of the pie out, then turned it so the skinny part was near her mouth. When she took it inside her mouth he thought he would climax. Never had eating looked so sexy.

“Try one,” she said as she chewed. “It's delicious.”

He looked down at it again. He hadn't eaten anything in so long. Truthfully he hadn't missed it. The witch's spell had frozen his body, essentially. Food was not something he'd desired since the binding. Until now.

Sebastian mimicked her actions, sliding the warm food into his mouth. Smells and tastes assaulted his senses as he bit and chewed, and then rolled his eyes in delight. He'd never tasted anything like this in his life. It was at spicy, yet the cheese was creamy, giving it a texture that he wanted to indulge in again. He took another bite, chewing quickly.

“Do you live here?”

“Yes, I do, or I did.” She looked around the garden and he could see sadness in her eyes.

“The man, is he your husband?”

“No.” She put down her pizza. “We broke up a few months ago. I suppose in keeping with my ‘request’ you had to rescue me from someone, and he's the only really bad guy I know.”

“What did he do?” Sebastian finished off his slice of pizza and picked up another. He examined it carefully before biting off a huge hunk. It truly was delicious.

“He used me.” Her words were so low it was almost hard to hear her, but the look on her face told the whole story. “I thought he loved me. I was wrong.”

“It is the way I treated people that caused me to be cursed,” he said. “Perhaps we should hunt for Tarsa, have her teach him a lesson. I know it worked for me.”

“Tarsa’s dead.” She cleared her throat and a glass of water appeared in her hand.

He watched her throat muscles work, fighting the urge to lean over and kiss her neck as she drank.

“I kinda like this dream, all you have to do is wish for something and there it is. Anyway, your father had her killed, when he found out she’d hurt you.”

Sadness crossed over him and he put his pizza down. “I am sorry to hear that. She was right in trying to show me the evil of my ways. I did not love Sarya, only desired her body. One person cannot own another in that way. I know that now.”

Sebastian watched her face, knew she was struggling to form words to reply. She took several deep breaths before blurting out her response quickly. “Marta says we can break the curse with the kiss of true love. She says it’s why you can see me, because we’re destined to love each other. I guess we just have to work it all out. I know I’m not as skinny as Sarya probably was, but I think...”

She yelped when he tackled her, crushing his lips down onto hers. It took him a few seconds to realize their clothing had disappeared.

Her skin was soft and warm under him as he stroked her sides, his fingers trailing up to her breasts, finding hardened little nubs that seemed to pulse he gently stroked them.

“So beautiful,” he whispered. “If being cursed meant I have to wait one hundred and eighty six years to feel you under me I’d do it a thousand times more.”

He kissed her again, then moved his thumb to her cheeks, wiping away the tears that flowed from her eyes. “I want to be inside you. May I love you?”

Michelle nodded, and his desire increased as she nibbled on her lower lip. His cock throbbed as she spread her thighs and he settled between them. He was cradled in her warmth, her supple skin caressing him as he lifted up on his elbows.

“Take me, Sebastian. Make me yours.”

He thrust into her tenderly, her sinuous flesh welcoming him, grabbing at him as if to urge him to move deeper inside her. He took her slowly, although every part of him urged him to



be quick, to thrust harder and find completion.

But he did not want it to end. When he climaxed would the dream end? His heart broke at the idea, but he would try not to think of that now. The only thing he needed to concentrate on was the beautiful woman who gazed up at him, her eyes full of tenderness and wonder.

He moved slowly, stopping when he knew she'd taken every inch of him. He pulsed inside her and their gazes locked. He felt as if he could see into her soul, see the very essence of her being. Never had someone touched him so, and he wanted to stay inside her forever, to hold her in his arms and keep her safe from any dragon that needed slaying, like the person they'd encountered inside.

Their loving was slow and they stroked each other's bodies with sweet caresses that made them both shiver. He kissed her as he moved his hips, and when he could feel the sensation of climax, he flipped them, pulling her on top of him in one quick, easy movement.

She put her hands on his chest and rode him at leisurely pace, keeping him right on the edge, prolonging the most perfect act of love he'd ever felt. His fingers trailed down her stomach, parted the wet folds of her quim. He found her hardened nub easily and stroked it, one hand on her hip, encouraging her to move faster.

His beautiful Michelle followed his suggestion, increasing her pace, taking him in and out faster and faster. When her breath came in short, hard gasps he gently tweaked her nub, felt her contract around him as her orgasm spread.

"Sebastian!"

Her passion sent him over the edge. She clasped him tightly, wrapping her legs and arms around him, keeping her close to her body. He pumped his hips, felt his seed leave his body and find a new home inside her. He also felt a tingling that he knew meant the dream was at an end. He didn't want it to end. He wanted to take her again and again, feel her around him. He wanted to sit in the sunshine and eat pizza and smell the flowers.

Tears filled his eyes and he fought to hold them back. When he traced one as it disappeared into his hair, he knew he'd failed.

"We'll find a way," she said, her voice trembling. "Or I will dream with you the rest of my life."

He nodded as the tingling intensified, and then suddenly everything went black.

## *Chapter Nine*

“Sebastian, don’t leave me.” She lifted her head from the bench. The sun was high in the sky and Marta stood near the edge of the ocean, looking out. Michelle stood quickly and ran to her, her head spinning. “Why didn’t you wake me! Did he come?”

The small woman turned a grin to her. “To be crude, I could ask you the same question.”

Michelle’s face heated as she thought about Sebastian’s touch, his hands on her breasts, the feel of his hardness inside her. “Marta.” The dam burst and Michelle buried her head in her hands, her shoulders heaving as she sobbed.

Marta wrapped her arms around her and held her close. For as small as she was, the hug seemed to encompass all of her. It made her feel safe, and combated the fear that had taken hold of her belly at the idea of never being able to free Sebastian.

“I kissed him, in true love. Why is he not here?”

“You kissed an image of him.”

“No. It was real, I felt him.” Even as Marta shook her head Michelle nodded. “It was real!”

“Yes, you were together, but it was his soul, not his physical form. As Princess Charming, you have to kiss him in his lair, where he sleeps.”

Michelle looked around, her eyes studying each tree, wondering if it concealed a path that led to Sebastian’s home. “Let’s go now. Right now.”

“We cannot. The cave cannot be opened during the day, only at night.” Marta stroked her arm. “I have been talking with my sisters, and they are coming tonight. They are strong, and we will combine our power to help you achieve your goal. It will work.”

Fear gripped Michelle’s heart even as hope tried to push through. “What if it doesn’t?”

“It will. Think positively, Michelle.” The older woman smiled at her. “I saw him, you know.”

Michelle shivered and hugged herself close. “What?”

“This morning, I came to the cove to cast the spell for your dream and I saw him standing over you, stroking your hair as you slept. The look of love on his face was potent. He grows stronger the more time you spend with him. That will help in the morning.”

Michelle wanted to believe that all it would take was one kiss. But there was a skeptical part of her that fought to push the idea aside. She loved Sebastian; she knew that now. It was obviously a love that was fated, one that she wrote about day after day but had failed to see when placed right in front of her. Didn't it always work that way?

But she saw it now. If it was taken away from her, she wasn't sure she would be able to live on her own.

The two of them silently walked back to the house together.

When they neared the entrance, Marta put her hand on Michelle's arm. “I'm not sure what will happen tonight. The spell could happen easily, or it could be hard. Tarsa was very strong, and the fact that none of my ancestors have been able to break the curse says a lot. You need to rest, be prepared for anything.”

Michelle agreed, then went up to her third floor room. She found Charles lounging on the edge of the bed, a bored look on his face. “Sorry, I've been a little busy.”

He nodded and didn't chastise her.

“You want to play?” He perked up and she laughed. “We're getting close to the end, and I don't think I'll be able to sleep today. Maybe we just need to do a marathon session and finish the book. What do you say?”

*“Well, to paraphrase what you asked the other day, I'm hard and ready.”*

“You're always hard, Charles. That's one of your better qualities.”

After taking a quick shower and changing into loose clothing, Michelle sat down at the computer. Her fingers went to work immediately. Charles prodded at her mind even as memories of having Sebastian inside her tugged at her heart.

It may have been a dream but the loving was real. Her body was sore, pleasantly so, and she hoped that backed up what Marta had said, that Sebastian grew stronger each time they were together. Buoyed by her new feelings, her fingers flew over the keyboard. Charles and Hannah enjoyed two rousing bouts of sex and several more tender scenes, ending the book with the announcement that Hannah was expecting their first child.

When she looked over at Charles, he had tears of joy streaking down his face. “*Thank*

*you, sweet Michelle. I wish all the happiness in the world for you and your Sebastian.*” He disappeared and Michelle hugged herself even as her own tears fell.

“I hope you’re right, Charles. There is nothing I want more right now.” She glanced at the clock to see it was just after eight. She tried unsuccessfully to connect to the Internet. Since she still hadn’t heard from Kate and Mark, she knew she couldn’t get onto his system. There were too many pages to fax, and Sandra wouldn’t appreciate the huge mound of paper that would likely result.

That meant Michelle would have to take a trip to the library again tomorrow, hook into their WiFi and send Sandra the file. She knew she should read it over once more, but her eyes were tired, and she needed to rest before sunrise.

She tossed and turned at first, but soon found herself relaxing. Sebastian greeted her as sleep overtook her. He pulled her to her feet and kissed her gently, then expertly undid her buttons and hooks, leaving her naked before him.

Michelle grasped his hardened cock in her hand, pumping it as he kissed her. “If I’d known you would be here, I would have slept all day,” she said as the kiss broke.

“So beautiful,” he murmured as he leaned over and captured a nipple, sucking it in hard.

She arched into him, his cock still firmly encased in her hand. She stroked him tenderly, savoring the feel of his hardness, reveling in the deep groans that escaped his lips as she squeezed him, sliding up and over the head and back down.

“Take me, Sebastian. Please, take me hard and fast.”

He pushed her back onto the bed, grabbing her legs and flipping her onto her stomach. Then he grasped her hips and pulled her into a kneeling position. He was behind her in seconds, claiming her in a primitive fashion that made her shiver with delight.

He pumped into her hard and fast, his cock stroking in and out, making her body quiver in bliss. Michelle clawed at the sheets as he rode her, the sensations centering in her womb before bursting out and spreading to each part of her body. She screamed over and over, bucking into him, relishing the fullness he provided, never ever wanting to let him go.

“More! More!” Her wanton words made her shiver.

He laughed and licked her neck, and she knew he felt exactly the same way she did. It was a love written in the stars.

The slapping of flesh competed with their groans and filled the room. When he stopped

and said, “Michelle, my love,” she felt him pulse inside her, felt the warmth of his seed filling her.

They tumbled onto their sides and he held her close in his arms. His grip was tight, and as sleep wrapped itself around her, she felt him slip away. It didn’t make her sad, though. If anything, the dream proved to her that the event taking place later would work, and she and Sebastian would be together, forever.

\* \* \* \*

The two women standing with Marta in the cove were not what Michelle expected. Marta was so small, barely over five feet. These women were tall, close to six foot. Their skin was a dark chocolate color, much darker than Marta’s. Michelle wondered if Marta had meant they were sisters by blood, or by the fact they were all powerful. Then she decided it didn’t matter. Lots of people were close that weren’t family, just look at her and Kate.

She’d thought about calling her friend this afternoon, then decided to wait until it was all over. Somehow she didn’t think Kate knew about Sebastian. Her friend would have told her about him before she left.

“This is Sierra, and Meloa.” Marta’s voice was soft. “They will help guide Sebastian’s spirit back into his body.”

“I’m nervous,” Michelle said. “So is he, I could feel it tonight while we were making love.”

“What?” Sierra took a step toward her. “You made love with him tonight?”

“Yes, he came to me in my dream.” Michelle winked. “Thanks to Marta.”

“Not tonight,” Marta said. “The spell was only for sunrise yesterday.”

“Then you are strong, sister,” Sierra said. “That means we may succeed where our ancestors have failed. Especially since we have Sebastian’s true love here.”

Warmth seeped into Michelle with her words. It was true, she knew, but hearing it from another person made her feel wonderful. Still, her nerves were on edge with what was about to happen.

“What do I have to do?”

“Just kiss him,” Marta said. “We’ll do the rest.”

“Let’s do it, then.”

They took off toward the ocean, veering off into the trees, following the coastline.

Michelle sought to gauge the distance, trying not to pat herself on the back about being right about his home being near the cove where he appeared each morning. In front of her, the three ladies talked softly, their heads together.

She wondered what sort of ceremony they had planned, and if she would get a glimpse into the voodoo religion, or if she would be too busy kissing Sebastian to notice what they were doing.

Marta veered inland after a few minutes, then stopped in front of a bush. She waved her hand and the bush disappeared. Michelle stared at it in wonder as the ladies hurried inside, and she followed them.

The entrance was narrow and just tall enough for her to walk upright. In front of her, she saw the two taller ladies bending over. When they stood and moved aside, soft light flooded the shaft. She moved into a round room and her breath caught.

Sebastian lay in the center of the room on top of an altar. Sitting next to him was a wooden carving, which featured a likeness of his face, and a lock of long, blond hair. His chest didn't seem to be moving and she hurried forward, only to have Marta grab her arm.

"Not yet. We have to time it just right."

Michelle took a fortifying breath. "What do I do?"

"Sebastian's soul leaves the *bochio* an hour before sunrise, and comes back just afterward. We want to catch it as it's coming back."

"But he'll look for me there. He'll think I've deserted him." She started for the door but Marta stopped her again.

"No, he knows you're here. The two of you are linked. We will start our part at the right moment, and when we tell you, you will kiss him."

A small nod was all she could manage for a response. Her heart pounded in her chest, the feeling almost painful. What if this didn't work? What if Tarsa's spell was too strong, even after all these years?

Michelle couldn't stand the idea of Sebastian being trapped inside this cave for eternity. She crossed to him slowly, putting her hand on his arm. His skin was warm, and when she looked at his chest, she could see the faint rise and fall, indicating that his heart was indeed, beating.

His eyes were closed, a peaceful expression on his face. His hair hung down over the

altar, hitting the ground. She picked a piece of it up and twirled it in her fingers. "Soon, my love. We have to believe it will work." She gasped softly and focused her gaze on his face. She could swear his eyes fluttered when she talked.

Could he hear her? Was he really somewhere deep inside there, languishing, worrying as much as she was that their bid to free him would be unsuccessful?

"It will work," she whispered into his ear. "I love you." This time it was unmistakable. His eyelids fluttered, as if he was in REM sleep. Could he see her here, beside him? Or was he reliving the wonderful times they'd joined together in their dreams?

The room grew warmer, and Michelle realized for the first time the ladies behind her were chanting softly. She turned to see them in a circle, their hands joined together, head bowed. When Marta's soft, "Now, Michelle," sounded in her head, Michelle didn't hesitate.

She lowered her lips to Sebastian's, stopping just before they joined. "Wake for me, my prince."

And then she kissed him, moving her lips gently around his, nibbling on his lower lip, never breaking contact. His chest rose and fell more quickly as the chanting increased and she pushed down more, sliding her tongue into his warm, moist mouth. His hand moved, coming up to cup her neck, pulling her closer to him.

"Michelle." And then suddenly, his hand dropped back to the stone, falling as if it were lifeless.

"No!" She turned to Marta. "Do something!"

"Kiss him again," Sierra yelled as they tightened the circle.

Michelle climbed onto the altar, straddling Sebastian's body and claiming his lips again. She kissed him deeper, and yet his hand still didn't move. After a few moments, she reared back, lifting her face to the ceiling of the face much as Sebastian had lifted his to the sun during her dream.

"Damn you, Tarsa! Let him go. I love him!"

The ground shook and Michelle grasped the edges of the altar to keep from tumbling to the ground. She gasped as the form of a tiny black woman materialized in front of her. The three women who had been chanting stopped and the cave grew eerily silent.

Michelle knew who this was. The voodoo priestess eyed her, then looked down to where Sebastian lay.

“Please,” she whispered. “I love him and he loves me. Surely you’ve seen that.”

The woman frowned, and then the edges of her mouth drew up into a smile. She turned her gaze to the *bochio*. It vibrated, and then burst into pieces, splinters of wood scattering through the air and down to the floor of the cave.

Below her Sebastian gasped, his body arching up into hers. His eyes flew open and he clasped her hips tightly. For several long seconds, he labored for breath, and then looked into her eyes, his chest still heaving.

“Michelle?”

“Yes.” She held her breath, afraid that in waking life he would not be as pleased with her as he had been in his dreams.

When he clasped her face in his hands and claimed her lips tears filled her eyes. He kissed her deeply, holding her close to him as he seemed to steal her breath. When he came up for air, he pulled her forehead down to his own and whispered, “I love you.”

“I love you, too.” She tried to stand, but he held her close, moving them both until he was in a sitting position. He stroked her back, then glanced over at the group of three, who were looking over his shoulder to where Tarsa stood.

He glanced back at the voodoo priestess and Michelle was afraid he would be angry, scream at her or push Michelle off and attack the woman. Instead he inclined his head and said, “Thank you.”

Tarsa bowed deeply, then she disappeared.

“You’re free to go now,” Marta said. “Go into the sunlight.”

Michelle stood and offered Sebastian her hand. He took it carefully, moving slowly as he swung his legs over the table. Michelle glanced back at Marta in question.

The guardian smiled at her. “He will be fine. The magic has kept his body fit, and his guardians have cared for him. Don’t expect too much the first night. I could be wrong, but...”

“She can be on top,” Sebastian said.

She turned to see his wicked grin and her knees almost buckled. Her clit tightened at the memory of his mouth and fingers bringing her exquisite pleasure, something he obviously remembered, too. “Just like in our dream.”

He stood and pulled Michelle into his embrace. She wrapped her arms around him, holding him close as his lips came down on hers.



“Sebastian, come into the sun with me.”

“Only if you promise never to leave me,” he replied, kissing her again, moving to drop little kisses on each side of her mouth. “Because I promise to love you forever, my Princess Charming.”

“Then you have a deal.” She took his hand and led him to the entrance.

The three ladies had already gone outside and were waiting for them, standing just outside the cave. Sebastian hugged each of them, kissing their foreheads and professing his eternal gratitude.

“Thank Michelle,” Marta said. “She’s the real catalyst in all this. If it weren’t for her love, it never would have worked.”

Sebastian turned to her with a grin on his face. “Oh I shall thank her, a thousand times over, in a thousand different ways.”

Michelle blushed and put her head against his bare chest. “I warn you, Sebastian, I’m a romance writer. Any of your thousand ways could be featured in one of my books. And I think books have changed quite a bit in the last one hundred and eighty six years.”

“I’m not worried.” He looked at the sun, then down at her. “Something tells me I have the best teacher for all things. Can we start my lessons now?”

“Most definitely.” She turned toward where Marta had been, only to find the ladies gone. “Are you tired?”

“No, but I want to go to bed. Let us go to the house so I can love you as more than a dream.”

She started to run, but he pulled her back into his arms for one more kiss. “Walk slowly sweet Michelle, let us savor ever step, every flower, every grain of sand. We have the rest of our lives to love each other, and I intend to enjoy every second I spend with you, and inside you.”

They wrapped their arms around each other’s waists and headed into the rising sun, the warmth of its rays adding to the glow that already lit their faces.

## *Author's Note*

The idea for Waking Sebastian came to me long before I'd published my first book. I was attending the Romantic Times Convention in Daytona Beach, taking classes from Judi McCoy about writing and publishing. One night after a party, I went to the beach, which was steps away from the hotel.

Since I've always lived in a land-locked area, the idea I could take off my shoes and wade into the ocean at midnight fascinated me and that's exactly what I did, letting the sand wrap around my toes and the water lick my calves. That evening I had the most fascinating dream about a man named Sebastian who came out of the ocean to greet me.

He and I got along swimmingly, so to speak, and the next evening, after classes and gatherings, I went back to the beach, this time armed with my laptop, and I put down the beginnings of the story you've just read.

I wanted this tale to be a short and sweet telling of a couple who were fated to be together, who love each other and bond instantly, an idea that has always fascinated me.

The other part of this story that I loved was Charles. He represents, for me, my muses, whom I talk to and see while I'm writing. Charles was funny, and he pushed and prodded me as I wrote this, almost as much as Sebastian did. It's too bad Sebastian is real and Charles is fictional, or there could have been a ménage going on here. Of course, maybe I shouldn't give them any ideas...

Happy reading!  
Mel

## ***About the Author***

Melinda Barron loves to explore Egyptian tombs and temples, discover Mayan ruins, play in castles towers, and explore new cities and countries. She generally does it all from the comfort of her home by opening a book.

Melinda loves to lose herself between the pages of a book. The only thing she loves more is creating stories from the wonderful heroes and heroines that haunt her dreams and crowd her head. She believes love is for everyone, not just those who are a size 2. Her books are full of magic, suspense and love, in all sorts of shapes and sizes.

Mel currently lives in the Texas Panhandle, with two cats, and a file stuffed with new ideas to keep her typing fingers busy, and your heart engaged.

*Something WICKED this way comes...*

***Resplendence Publishing presents  
WICKED — Fairytales, Fables and Folklore for Adults.***

***Red: A Seduction Tale by Maddie James***

Garnet Boudreaux is going home. Not back to her nice little apartment in New York City, but to her childhood home in the bayou. She doesn't want to go, and isn't certain what will be waiting for her when she arrives. But standing there in the voodoo shop on Bourbon Street, in the middle of one helluva party, she's told by Madame Madeleine Dupuis that she has no choice. She presses two pouches into Garnet's hands, wraps a red cape around her, and tells her she must go—and go now—to see to her grandmother.

Max LeBlanc spies the lovely red-head across the street and knows in a heartbeat she is the one. A rougarou always knows when he's met his mate. Some may call him a lycanthrope, a werewolf if you will, but in Cajun bayou lands he's known simply as The Rougarou. He'd waited several hundred years for this moment, and for her. There is nothing left for him to do, but mark her and claim her as his mate. Soon.

***Fiery Ember by Celia Kyle***

Ember Ellason is a darned good secretary. True, she'd like to be more, but since her father's passing, her stepmother has taken over as CEO of Ellason Advertising, and Clementine Ellason feels Ember is only good enough to fetch coffee...barely. But when Clementine and her horrid daughters fail to show up for the meeting with the biggest client they could ever land, Ember saves the day by impersonating her stepmother.

Paul Ashe needs a new ad campaign and he's found the perfect company with the perfect proposal in Ellason Advertising. Too bad his body is a little too interested in the voluptuous CEO with her fiery red hair and blazing green eyes. Then he can't seem to find the elusive woman after their first intimate tryst, and is left with only a pair of panties to remember her by.

Will this Cinderella tale end in happily ever after? Or will Ember be separated from her panties—and her prince—for ever more?

***Sins of the Father by Janet Eaves***

Aurora was born to wealth and privilege but was spirited away as an infant to a place of safety after viscous threats to her life. Raised with an alias, and practically a prisoner of the three little

old ladies who raised her, Aurora, at twenty, feels like Sleeping Beauty, just waiting for her life to start.

When she meets a gorgeous “struggling” artist, she seizes the opportunity to take her life into her own hands and have a little fun. But once she ends up in his hands, the evil that has hunted for her all her life, finds her, and seeks to destroy her.

Find Melinda Barron's *Desires of the Lamp Tales* at  
[www.ResplendencePublishing.com](http://www.ResplendencePublishing.com)

### ***Wish Me Up, Rub Me Down***

With no love life to speak of, BBW Anya Bartholomew lives only for her job. This dedication has paid off. As a successful advertising agent, she has risen in the ranks of her firm to be the top moneymaker.

But at the insistence of her two best friends, who claim she needs a break from work, Anya takes a weekend vacation to the small town of Pleasant, Maine. While shopping at an antique shop, she rubs a lamp that looks as if it could belong to Aladdin himself.

Things will never be the same.

Back at work on Monday morning, Anya finds that her boss has given her a new account...for a lamp factory. However, her clients—two very handsome, very sexy men—are more than what they seem.

They're pleasure Djinn. And they have come to fulfill five of Anya's most secret sexual wishes.

### ***Aliya Baban and the Cave of Pleasure***

Advertising agent Aliya Baban is beautiful with a capital B. Unfortunately, she's also a witch with a capital B. In her twenty-eight years of life, she's managed to offend almost every woman she has ever met.

But she doesn't care, really. That's just the way life is.

When her boss tells her to get the *Cave of Pleasure* account, or else get a new job, Aliya takes her party invitation—and the strange lamp she's received—and attends the nightclub's grand opening, ready to do battle for her livelihood.

Matuse is more than just the owner of the *Cave of Pleasure*...he's a pleasure djinni. And Aliya has rubbed his lamp. For the next thirty days, she belongs to him. Though he intends to bring intense pleasure to her body, it's also his job to make sure his "she-devil" changes her wicked ways.

Will Matuse be able to help Aliya overcome her painful past? Or will Aliya fail to make the five heartfelt apologies she needs to make to the five women she has hurt the most.

## ***To Rub, Honor and Obey***

Moreen McGee is a perfect example of how poor decisions made in youthful rebellion can haunt someone for life. Now on probation for ten years, she serves her court-ordered community service at a center for troubled teens, in the hopes of stopping other kids from taking the wrong path.

But when one of her young charges pickpockets a wallet from her high school nemesis, Aliya Baban, Moreen decides to put the illicit skills she learned as a teenager to good use...by breaking into Aliya's apartment to return the stolen wallet, thus keeping the kid who stole it out of trouble and out of jail.

However, once she's in the opulent Manhattan flat, Moreen can't resist the urge to take one small token from the woman she still blames for her own downfall—an old, neglected oil lamp that she's sure Aliya will never miss.

Moreen accidentally summons a gorgeous demon-turned-pleasure djinni named Paran...and he's not too thrilled with the theft of his property. Moreen has rubbed his lamp, the contract is sealed. For the next thirty days, she belongs to him. And Paran intends to use this time to help his little felon learn some very important lessons, including the true meaning of the words *honor* and *obey*.

***Siren's Song: A Siren's Sisters Anthology* by Jade Buchanan, Melinda Barron, and Midnyte Dupree**

*Poseidon's half-mortal daughters, Iaha, Adara, and Aella, are irresistible to most men, but each has yet to meet her match...until now. They are being drawn to the sea, and to four very different men, by forces outside of their control. Will the Siren's be able to uncover long-buried secrets and claim their birthrights?*

Iaha is searching for an adventure. When she runs into underwater archaeologist, Shedd Collins, she is instantly drawn into his search for the lost civilization of Yumani. Despite her attraction, she isn't sure she wants to reveal her heritage to him. But Iaha isn't the only one who has been less than honest; Shedd Collins is no ordinary man.

Adara is searching for a new beginning. With her life in shambles and desperate for sanctuary, she answers the call of the sea. But instead of finding insight and solutions to her problems, she is thrust into a hurricane and winds up stuck in a swimming pool. The pool's owner, Jack, is a man with more than a few skeletons in his closet. Will he save Adara or will he destroy her?

Aella is searching for strength. When the seals under her care start to die, Aella needs all the help she can get. She asks two mermen, Damon and Pythias, for their assistance but they have secrets about themselves they aren't willing to share, and their help could come at a very high price. Can Aella trust Damon and Pythias? Or will misplaced trust leave her under their spell, and in their control?



**Find Resplendence titles at the following retailers:**

***Resplendence Publishing***

[www.ResplendencePublishing.com](http://www.ResplendencePublishing.com)

***Amazon***

[www.Amazon.com](http://www.Amazon.com)

***Target***

[www.Target.com](http://www.Target.com)

***Fictionwise***

[www.Fictionwise.com](http://www.Fictionwise.com)

***All Romance E-books***

[www.AllRomanceEbooks.com](http://www.AllRomanceEbooks.com)

***Mobipocket***

[www.Mobipocket.com](http://www.Mobipocket.com)