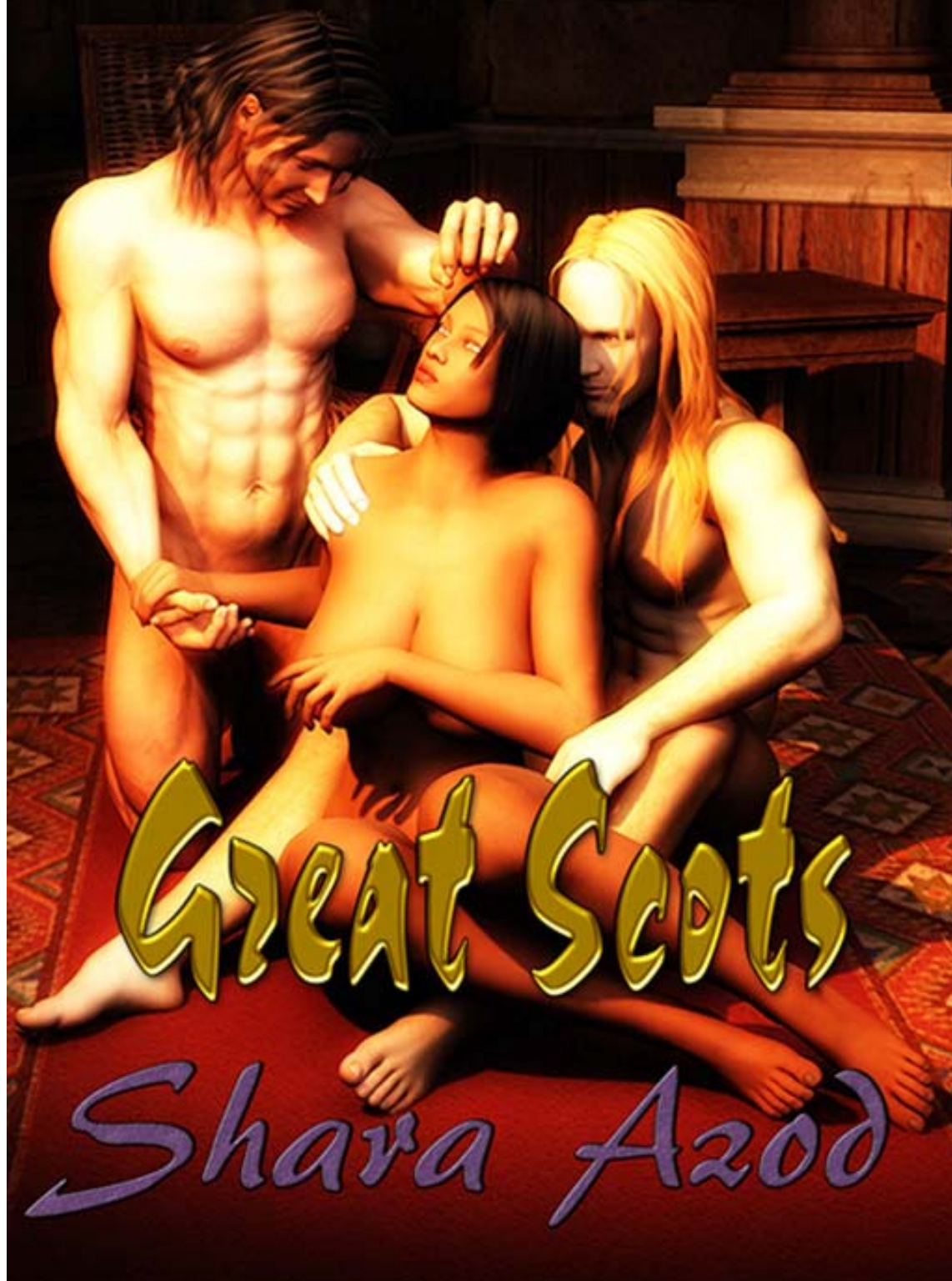


Changeling Press



# **Great Scots!**

## **Shara Azod**

**All rights reserved.  
Copyright ©2009 Shara Azod**

**WARNING: The unauthorized reproduction or distribution of this or any copyrighted work is illegal. File sharing is an International crime, prosecuted by the United States Department of Justice and the United States Border Patrol, Division of Cyber Crimes, in partnership with Interpol. Criminal copyright infringement, including infringement without monetary gain, is punishable by seizure of computers, up to 5 years in federal prison and a fine of \$250,000 per reported instance.**

**ISBN: 978-1-60521-301-9  
Formats Available:  
HTML, Adobe PDF,  
MobiPocket, Microsoft Reader**

**Publisher:  
Changeling Press LLC  
PO Box 1046  
Martinsburg, WV 25402-1046  
[www.ChangelingPress.com](http://www.ChangelingPress.com)**

**Editor: Chrissie Henderson  
Cover Artist: Marteeka Karland**

This e-book file contains sexually explicit scenes and adult language which some may find offensive and which is not appropriate for a young audience. Changeling Press E-Books are for sale to adults, only, as defined by the laws of the country in which you made your purchase. Please store your files wisely, where they cannot be accessed by under-aged readers.

## **Great Scots!**

### **Shara Azod**

Conaire fears for his sanity after being trapped on the Other Side for so many eons. All he wants is to get back to the human realm. So when the evil Fae Queen Elphame gives him a chance to escape, he takes it, completely unaware of the spell she casts as he steps through the ancient circle.

Seeing the spell and knowing it will not only bind Conaire, but his brother, MacKay, as well, to the first woman Conaire sleeps with, Scota takes matters into her own hands. She's found the perfect mate for her sons.

If only someone had warned Tasha. Now she finds herself bonded to not one but two arrogant Scots gods.

## Prologue

It was grossly unfair. And all because he refused to lie with that bitch of a Fae Queen, Elphame.

He was dying here in this paradise of gods; it was just too boring. He wanted to prove himself worthy of human devotion once more. Most of all, he wanted to taste the sweet essence of a human female.

Conaire couldn't stop the instant swelling of his cock as his mind wandered back to the delectable mortals he had known in his time on the human Earth. Ah, the feisty redheaded Fiona had him stroking his throbbing cock through his leather leggings. The black-haired, hot-tempered Lorna had him releasing his straining cock from its confines and stroking vigorously. Oh, aye, that was one lass every bit as peppery in bed as she was out of it. Closing his eyes tightly, Conaire ran through the very best of the lovers he had known.

There was just something about human women. Something that excited him in ways goddesses never could. There was a soft vulnerability mixed with an edge of steel inherent in their species. Their responses were so open and honest, not merely the result of an illusion or part of a spell. And when they surrendered, they gave all that they were, holding nothing back from the men lucky enough to be lying between their silky thighs.

Conaire moaned aloud as he moved his fist faster. Unlike the cold goddesses he'd been forced to make do with over the centuries, normal women gave as much as they took. Their lovemaking was without artifice, wild and free. What he wouldn't give for one real response, to know that just the touch of his hand could excite a woman. To once again know the joy of rolling in the bed sheets for the sheer pleasure of flesh

meeting flesh. To enjoy fevered kisses and tongues entwined for no other reason than wanting to feel good.

Giving himself over to the memories of the past, Conaire manipulated his cock faster, desperately wishing he was buried in the soft flesh of a willing woman. Damn, he had to get back to the human realm before he went blind from the constant self-gratification sessions he endured here.

He grunted as he managed to finish himself off before losing his erection altogether. It was increasingly becoming a problem. He knew eventually he would lose his sex drive completely. It happened to so often here on the Other Side. There were only so many ancient Celtic deities and mythical creatures to go around. Maybe if they were allowed to mingle a little with the gods and goddesses from other places around the world, things would not have gotten so monotonous -- but no. Each group had to stick with its own. A silly rule if ever there was one, and just one more reason he needed to leave this place.

On Earth, a man could travel anywhere his feet, or a boat, could take him. There a god could mix it up with any creature that caught a virile god's eye.

"But you're not on Earth, Conaire, luv," a smooth, sexy voice purred beside him. "Nor will ye be goin' back verra soon. Not without help anyway."

Conaire stiffened at the sound of the soft sensual voice and the gentle rustling of flowing silk skirts. Elphame! The Fae Queen who had tricked him into walking willingly through the door separating the Other Side from the human world. She trapped him here for all time, centuries before the others had even considered retreating to the private sanctuary. In all the time he'd been here, never once had she been so bold as to show her traitorously beautiful face.

Waving his hand to clean and cover himself, he faced her head-on. Anything less would give her the advantage, and that was not something Conaire was willing to do.

"What do you want, Elphame?" Conaire stared directly into her violet eyes, which shimmered with a sheen of unshed tears. False tears from a mistress of deception. It made for a pretty effect, but he was the last person to fall for her clever

little deceptions. He had allowed Elphame to have the upper hand once, but never again. The centuries had taught him well. The exotically slanted eyes that seemed far too big for the ethereal pale, pointed face moved nothing inside him but contempt. "I will ask once more, Elphie, what has made ye sae bold as to step into my lair?"

Conaire didn't miss the instantaneous stiffening of her perfect little body, nor the slight narrowing of her eyes when he used the nickname. A brief lapse, but telling. The Fae had been amongst the most powerful of all the immortals once upon a time, but with the passage of time their powers had begun to wane as humans held them to be little more than myth or legend. Humans didn't always know what they were doing, or even who they were worshipping, but modern day pagans gave ancients such as Conaire power. After centuries of not using his powers, he had unlimited stores of power. Far more than the little Fae who stood here now. And she knew it. Unfortunately, he couldn't lift her spell. She had tricked him here with his own consent.

"Surely you have forgiven me my little joke, Great Conaire."

The voice was every bit as sweet and melodious as it had been so many years ago. It made his stomach turn. He had to force himself to remain perfectly still as she floated around him. The cloying scent of a myriad of flowers in full bloom that clung to her skin invaded his senses. He had to fight the urge to gag. "I'll ask once more. What do you want?" Not that it really mattered. All he wanted was to slap her stupid with the power within, but he held the fury in check. For now. No matter how badly he needed female attention, he would rather castrate himself than make do with her.

"I came to make amends. I can send you back."

Conaire felt his breath freeze in his lungs. Despite the moderate temperature of the room, sweat beaded on his brow. He could not dare to believe her. She spoke in riddles and lies. Believing her would not only be unwise, but unsafe. He could not -- nay -- would not, trust her. He would never allow himself to be vulnerable to her or any other god or goddess again.

Still... to go back. It wouldn't be as it once was. The world no longer believed or accepted the ancients. He couldn't live in the open as he once had, wielding his power for all to see and fear.

That really didn't matter. He belonged on Earth, not trapped here in the realm of gods. He didn't need adoration; he needed carnal contact to fuel his powers. Closeness without games or power plays. He needed to be touched for no other reason than it felt good to do so.

"If I were to agree, what would you want in return?" he asked as nonchalantly as he dared, carefully concealing the desperate hope underneath.

"Why, nothing, my dear Conaire," Elphame cooed, stretching her hands out in supplication. "I simply want to make amends."

He arched his brow and waited, holding his body still as stone. He wouldn't make the first move. He wouldn't allow her cold fingers contact with his suddenly overly hot skin. There was a catch. There had to be. If he allowed her to touch him now, she could cast a spell bewitching him.

Elphame shrugged and let her hands fall to her sides; her body trembled ever so slightly in frustration. Conaire had to bite back a laugh. Did she really think him so simple that he would allow her anywhere near him?

Sighing, the fairy queen waved her hands in the air, revealing an ancient stone circle on the floor. Stepping back, she motioned for him to enter.

According to ancient law, she could not curse him while he was in the circle. Perhaps he had judged her too harshly. But he didn't think so. Thousands of years might well have cooled her infamous temper. Perhaps she truly was contrite. He had chosen to create a stone fortress deep in the mountains, far away from all the others. He did not socialize or seek others out. Very few had dared to come here. Now here she was, offering the deepest desire of his heart. Dare he trust it?

The fairy queen hadn't moved. If she were anxious to get him to come forward, she showed no sign of it. Had she been overly cajoling, he would have known



immediately it was a trap. Instead, she stood patiently waiting for him to decide. After several painful minutes of contemplation, Conaire walked forward.

His eyes fixed on the now-glowing circle; his heart pounded anxiously. He heard the Fae mutter something under her breath, but dismissed it. Let her harp, he was returning to a world full of delights.

*As you desire, so it shall be, a human lover will come to thee,  
With one drop of your semen, forever bound shall you be,  
Not even in death shall you be free.*

## Chapter One

Tasha brought her glass slowly to her lips, contemplating the dark liquid. How many did this make? Did it matter? Shrugging, she tilted her head back and let the rich brew slide down her throat. The first several glasses had been a tad bitter and a heck of a lot richer than any American beer. Sometime after the fourth or fifth glass, the bitterness had faded. Drinking wouldn't make her problem better, but she couldn't think of a damn thing to help her out of the mess she currently found herself.

At least the pub was warm and dry. Outside, flakes of snow fell silently to the ground, blanketing everything in a coat of pure white. She had enough money left for a hotel for maybe a week. More than that if she could find a decent smaller inn. One thing was for certain, she would have to check out of the four-star hotel she was supposed to have shared with Derrick.

"Let's go to Scotland for vacation, he says," she muttered under her breath, her head drooping because she just couldn't find the strength to sit upright anymore. "It'll be romantic. Yeah, for you and the whore you ran off with."

She could probably get over the fact her so-called boyfriend had run off with some woman he'd just met. It was the fact the asshole had taken her freaking passport, the return ticket to America, and most of her money with him that really hurt. God help him if she came across his lying, conniving ass again. She would personally castrate him. Especially after the local cops told her there was nothing they could do because she had given him her stuff. They were on vacation together. Getting dumped hadn't crossed her mind.

What the hell was she supposed to do now? She'd spent most of the day pleading with the jerkwads at the American embassy in London. The results were far from promising. They told her she had to make her way to London before anything

could be done, and even then, the chances of her being home anytime soon were slim to none. Not only did she not have enough money to make it to London, she couldn't legally work anywhere without a visa.

What had really galled her to no end was the way the snooty clerk treated her. First the woman had acted all surprised that she was an American in Scotland. The woman even had to nerve to ask her why she had decided to vacation there. A black woman couldn't vacation in Scotland all of a sudden? Was there some kind of restriction against such a thing? She'd had to restrain herself from punching the bubbly bimbo in the face. She was well and truly stuck. Damn Derrick Fuck-face to hell!

"Such a bonnie lass all alone. Why the long face, *hen*?"

Tasha's head snapped up. The irritable words "Leave me the hell alone" died on her lips as her bleary eyes focused on what had to be the most beautiful woman she'd ever seen. The woman was at least six feet tall with generous curves and not an extra ounce of fat. Her dark red hair fell in waves to her waist; her emerald eyes seemed to sparkle. Maybe it was a trick of the dim pub lights, but those eyes almost glowed, and her skin appeared to be dark gold.

She was dressed unlike anyone else in the small bar. Either she didn't realize it was snowing outside, or she was oblivious to the cold weather. The embroidered blood-red silk dress with spaghetti straps didn't quite reach her knees. She looked far too elegant and sophisticated for the small, run-down pub Tasha had chosen to sit and mope in peace and quiet.

The mysterious woman slid smoothly onto the bar stool beside her. Tasha cast furtive glances around the room. No one seemed to notice the woman, which was odd. In fact, people seemed to be looking everywhere else, almost as if they were purposely avoiding looking in their direction.

"What could be so bad that it has you drowning your sorrows in such a place?"

There was something about the woman's voice, smooth and comforting, that caused a fleeting memory of Tasha's mother to float through her head. She found herself wanting to crawl into the woman's lap and cry her heart out. It was the weirdest

thing. Tasha didn't talk to strangers easily. Life had taught her not to trust people. Yet, before she knew what was happening, she found herself pouring her heart out to this woman as if she was her best friend. Something about this woman inspired trust. And damn if it didn't feel good to just let it all out.

"Oh, you poor lass," the mysterious woman cooed, putting her arm around her. "You will need a place to stay until this can be all sorted out. You must come with me at once. All will be well."

Tasha found herself nodding at the soft, lilting voice. Maybe it was the accent, maybe it was living so long without letting anyone too close, but Tasha allowed the woman to lead her off the bar stool and out of the little pub.

Had she been sober, she might have stopped to wonder that despite the fact the snow fell in earnest, the chill of the night air that should have bit into her skin never came, or that the white flakes falling steadily from the sky never once landed on her or her companion. Maybe one fewer Alba Scots Pine Ale and she would have realized though they were walking, their feet weren't touching the ground, and they were moving far away from the lights of the Edinburgh night.

\* \* \*

Conaire stood inside the primordial circle of crumbling stone, wary to believe his own eyes. Although every one of his senses screamed in joy, a part of him found it hard to believe after so many years he was finally back. The North Atlantic raged before his eyes; he could taste the salt from the spray of the waves, hear their roar as they crashed against the rocks. The night sky above him was a dark gray; angry clouds poured snow mixed with rain from the heavens, the wind howled -- all of it to herald the return of an ancient. His legs gave out beneath him. Conaire sank to his knees and raised his face to the sky. His chest tightened as tears leaked unabashedly down his face. He was back. He was really back.

"Laird! Is it really ye? Have ye really returned?"

Turning his head he saw a wiry old man running from a stone cottage located on the perimeter of the beach. His long white hair flowed behind him in the raging wind as he scurried forth, stopping at the edge of the circle. Druid.

"Whom do ye seek?" Conaire let loose his godly voice, all layered and deadly. He was rather proud of himself for sliding right back into it after so long.

Though this land was his by right, Thor had made himself at home here far too long. Unlike most of his kind, Thor had not retired beyond the veil to the Nordic home of the gods. Valhalla held no interest for the god of thunder. If this was one of his priests, Conaire would banish him forever from this place. This was his island, his home. He would reclaim what was his.

"Lord Conaire the Great," the old man replied, sinking to his knees. "We have waited so long for your return. Generations have held fast to the promise that ye would once again offer us your protection. We have kept your castle clean and furnished, stocked with everything you could require. We had even picked a woman every five years for your needs. But the lady brought one for you, claiming you would return this very night! We placed her in your chamber, hoping..."

"What lady?" Conaire surged to his feet, his voicing cracking louder than the thunder overhead. If this was the trap Elphame had laid --

"The Lady Scot, my Laird. The Great Mother herself," the old man declared, making his small frame even tinier as he cringed in fear.

Scot? His mother knew of his return? As Great Mother of Scotland, Scot came and went from the Other Side as she wished. She reigned supreme. Was she the reason Elphame had finally freed him from his prison? He knew she loved him, despite their strained relationship. Only a few had permission to visit him, his mother amongst them. Still, it was unlike her to provide him with a woman. "Rise," he told the little man still crouched at the edge of the circle. "Show me this woman."

"Of course, Laird Conaire." The little man rose to his feet with an agility that belied his obvious years. "This way."

\* \* \*

Tasha was dreaming. She'd obviously had one too many glasses of Scottish ale and had blissfully passed out on the bar back at the little dingy pub. That was the only explanation for her to be sprawled out, naked as the day she was born, in a silk-covered bed big enough for at least ten full-grown men. It would also explain the massive Viking standing beside that bed looking down at her as if he wanted to eat her alive.

Her gaze wandered over his bare torso. Talk about a six-pack! The man had to be pushing seven feet tall, with light reddish-blond hair falling to his shoulders. He wore some kind of suede pants molded to the most delicious thighs it had ever been her pleasure to behold. And his eyes! Silvery-blue, staring with great interest at all she had to offer. Although she had sworn off men for good just eight hours ago, she felt a telltale wetness gathering between her legs.

Yep, this was definitely a dream. For one thing, she'd dated Hispanics, Asians, and Native American men, but she'd never strayed to pure vanilla before. Not that she had anything against white men, she'd just never experienced them. She simply couldn't recall a white man, no matter how fine, making her this hot before -- and just by looking at him, to boot. Tasha was the kind of girl who needed a lot of coaxing and foreplay. Yet here she was all ready to jump some strange white guy. Oh, well, it was just a dream, right?

"Hi," Tasha offered by way of breaking the ice. Her dreams didn't usually include introductions, but what the hell. She was willing to roll with it.

"What manner of woman are ye, lass?" came the unexpected reply.

It was because she was in Scotland. Had to be. There was no other excuse for the question to tickle her rather than piss her off. Plus that deep voice laced with the accent was incredibly sexy. "I'm American," she explained with a hell of a lot more patience than she would have had if she'd been awake. "African-American."

"Ah, the Colonies." He nodded as if he were making perfect sense. "That explains it."

Like there were no black people in Scotland. There weren't a lot, but still, this was the twenty-first century. Being a dream man, maybe he was from another time. Yeah, she liked that. Her very own Highland warrior-type dude.

"I was here long before any Highlander, lass," the man told her as he climbed on the bed toward her. "And I promise you this is no dream."

Tasha closed her eyes as his hands caressed her cheeks, moving down to her throat, then to the valley in between her breasts. Never had a man's touch set her on fire as quickly as this Viking.

"I'm nae a Viking, lass." He cupped her breast and pinched the nipple. "You'll nae call me one again."

She didn't recall calling him anything, at least not aloud. She would have informed him of that, but his mouth covered her other breast at that moment, biting painfully down on her nipple, and then lapping the pain away with his tongue. Her mind blanked, making her unable to concentrate on anything other than what he was doing to her. Her breathing grew labored as he moved to the other breast, lavishing equal attention on it before he raised his head and smiled down at her. "Conaire," he told her.

"What?"

"My name, lass. It's Conaire."

Were names really necessary in a dream like this? "Um, my name is... Uh..." Damn it! What the heck was her name? She knew it a minute ago, she was sure of it.

"Your name is Tasha. Tasha Marie Washington." Of course he would know. This was a dream, after all. An excellent one so far. "I told you, lass, this is nae dream."

Once again, he gave her no chance to reply. His lips captured hers, his tongue demanding entrance. Tasha didn't even consider not accepting his tongue inside. Never had a kiss tasted so sweet, robbing her of what little sense she had left. The man was lethal. She was on fire, arching against his body, desperate to get closer. She submitted without a qualm as his hands fisted in her hair, forcing her head back to allow him deeper access.

"You taste so verra guid, lass." The Viking moaned as he finally let her come up for air. No, not a Viking. Not a Highlander. What the hell was he?

"Tonight, I'm just Conaire. Your lover." Even as he spoke, his hands slipped down between her legs.

"That's nice." Tasha sighed. Had he asked, she couldn't honestly tell him if she said it because of his declaration, or the wonderful feeling of his thick finger rubbing along the seam of her pussy.

"Say it, luv." Conaire dipped his finger deep inside her drenched pussy as his thumb rubbed softly against her engorged clit.

"Say what?" Tasha gasped. She would say just about anything he wanted her to say, just as long as he didn't stop touching her. Oh, Lord, she was so close!

"My name, lass. Say my name."

"Connor!" Tasha moaned, lifting her hips to try to force him deeper.

"Nae, lass. It's Conaire."

"Con-Air!" She gasped again as the tremors from her release began.

"Close enough."

Tasha squealed when he dipped his head in between her legs. This had to be the best damn dream ever. The man was consuming her pussy like it was a seven-course meal and he hadn't eaten in days. She wasn't the most experienced woman in the world, but she'd had a couple of rather good lovers who knew what they were doing when they went down on a woman. They had been nothing close to him. Her dream lover licked her clit lovingly before thrusting his tongue deep inside her, then moving back up to her clit again. Just when she thought she would surely come, he eased off, using his fingers to stimulate softly, but not enough give her the orgasm she wanted so badly.

"Please, please." Tasha thrashed her head back and forth. She was losing her mind. His big, masterful hands were everywhere all at once -- tweaking her tender, rock-hard nipples, prodding her greedy pussy, soothing her heated skin. She swore



right then and there to drink more Scottish ale if it was going to give her dreams like this.

"I told ye, lass," the massive Scotsman said, rising to kneel between her spread-eagled thighs to plunge all the way in with one fluid stroke. "I am nae dream."

Tasha screamed, every nerve in her body awake and tingling. She climaxed on the first lunge, her pussy convulsing around his large cock. She'd meant to stop him when he'd undressed and she'd first caught a glimpse of the angry reddish-purple shaft standing proudly between his legs, but he hadn't given her much of a chance. Now she felt stretched to full capacity. She couldn't believe he had managed to fit it all inside her, much less in one fell swoop.

A slight tingle of awareness flashed through her. Never had a dream felt so very real. Never had her body felt so alive, so awash in sensation. She pushed the thought to the back her mind. She didn't want to believe it. The last thing she wanted to do was even consider the possibility she was in bed with some strange Scot who was plowing away like a man possessed.

"Oh, lass..." Conaire groaned, feeling her incredibly tight pussy clamping down on his cock. He couldn't recall ever feeling this good, this right. "Ye almost feel as guid as ye taste."

A better-tasting woman he could not recall. She tasted so delicious he could stay between her thighs all day. He was drowning in this woman, and he couldn't have cared less. She was a wee little thing, but all round and soft, the way a woman should be. Her rich, dark skin was such a startling contrast to his; it was quite a turn on.

He didn't want to stop, though he could feel his orgasm hovering. Hell, he didn't think he could stop. Not with the way her hips moved in time with his pistoning thrusts. Not with the way her little hands clawed his back and shoulders, urging him on. Not with the way those immaculately shaped chocolate-colored legs wrapped around him.

"Oh, my God!" his lover screamed, her body seizing once again.

Her pussy clamped down, milking him even as he fought to stop his own climax. “Shyte!” Conaire yelled as his climax crashed over him with the force of a tidal wave.

Lights danced behind his closed eyelids as they came together. Conaire felt part of his immortal essence slipping from his body into hers. He tried to stop it, to call it back, but couldn’t control it. As his eyes snapped open, he saw her body glowing with his power as she absorbed a part of him. Her deep brown eyes were wide in wonder as she stared up at him in shock. The entire bed started to tremble as if being shaken by an unseen giant hand.

He struggled to stem the flow of his power. In the back of his mind he heard the curse he had been too beguiled to hear, as desperate as he was to return to Earth.

*As you desire, so it shall be, a human lover will come to thee,  
With one drop of your semen, forever bound shall you be,  
Not even in death shall you be free.*

## Chapter Two

"Ah, you liked your present, I see."

Conaire opened his eyes to a calm, bright daybreak. No sign of last night's storm was evident in the crisp morning air. The human, Tasha, was snuggled against his chest, and his mother stood over them, gazing down upon him as if he were an infant.

Mother. Damn her. "No." He removed the tangle of arms around his chest and waist. "You could've asked. I'd like to have chosen my own mate."

In radiant glory that only a Mother Goddess could pull off, his mother beamed, proud, flawless, and full of herself. She shrugged her narrow shoulders, opening her arms for a hug. Like hell. She waited patiently, smiling that same damn smile she gave to everyone she bowled over with her power. Not him. Not this time. With a sweep over his body, he clothed his lower half to stave off the chilly air. He stared into her deep green eyes. "Fine, Conaire. Fine," she said with a wistful smile. "I heard it on the wind that the Fae bitch cursed you. Really, one would think you would learn to pay more attention. I couldn't very well let you become tied to just anyone, so I picked someone for you. She's a gift."

"No, she's my mate -- for all time. All time. She's a human."

"Thought you liked humans. You seem to prefer them."

"For enjoyment! As one who enjoys a guid beefsteak or a fine wine."

"And do you not want to enjoy those things for eternity? Or do you plan to starve as well as be stubborn and bullheaded?" she snapped, a flush staining her cheeks. "Honestly, after all I went through to bring you home someone decent, this is the gratitude you give me?"

He sighed. "Nae, I'm grateful, Mother." Gratitude notwithstanding, he didn't want the human tied to him for eternity. The curse had been plain. Their lives were well and truly intertwined. Her life. His life. One. It could not be this way.

"Then, be happy, Conaire," his mother suggested with a soft pat on his cheek. "A fine girl, human, yes, beautiful, kind, and full of life. You will like her, cherish her and spend forever in love."

"Nae, I dunno know who she is!" At this declaration, the object stirred and woke.

She stretched and stifled a yawn. With short cropped hair tousled, eyes full of sleep and confusion, she glanced from him to his mother and then back again. "You, I remember from last night. Not bad." She pointed at him. Moving the pointed finger from him to his mother, she added, "And you, you drugged me or something to bring me here. I ought to kick your ass. You're lucky I don't feel like it right now."

Conaire turned to his mother's abashed expression with his eyebrow raised. "Kind, did you say?"

"Don't act like I'm not here," Tasha ordered, further confirming his suspicion she knew nothing about the fickle nature of gods and goddesses. She yanked the blankets over her nude body, but her attitude remained. "Why is there a woman in here?"

"Tasha, lass, this is my mother," he explained, frustration boiling in his chest. How could he explain his ways to a human female? In the past, the humans had known of his power, of his godhood, and accepted those without doubt or suspicion. Tasha hailed from this new time, and these mortals lacked knowledge of the ancients. They had turned their backs on the ancient ways of the gods.

"Your mother?" He nodded. The question burned bright across her countenance. *Why?*

"Don't be afraid. My mother was visiting and thought me to be alone --that you would be gone by now." He watched Tasha's expression carefully to see if she had begun to believe him. "An unexpected surprise."

"Yes, an unexpected surprise," his mother chimed in. "Forgive me. I must be going. We shall talk again, son." In a wink, she vanished, leaving only a shimmering gold brilliance for a few seconds.

"What the hell?" Tasha leapt from the bed. "What, wait, I'm still dreaming. Right. Dreaming. Right. Get back in the bed. Wake up and be back in my own bed."

"What are ye goin' on about? You all right, lass?"

"Not listening. Going to sleep now. Hoping to wake up."

Just what he thought. Fear and total doubt. She thought him a dream. No, she believed the entire thing to be the musings of her imagination -- their lovemaking, their mating union, as accidental as it had been.

He stood watching her wrestle with going back to sleep. Witnessed it fail, and then waited patiently for her to acknowledge the reality. She rolled onto her back, opening her eyes. "I'm still here."

"Yes." He didn't know if she spoke to him or not, but he wanted to remind her of his presence without startling her. Mated. Joined. He didn't want this anymore than she did. He gazed down at her and felt nothing except a deep longing to pin her beneath him and kiss those delectable lips.

She rose up on her elbows. "I slept with you."

"Yes."

"Your mother was here, in your bedroom."

"Yes."

"This is too freaky," she said at last, tossing off the thin sheet and searching for her clothes with an urgency that signaled her continued frustration. "I'm going home."

Freaky? What did that mean? She couldn't go, could she? The curse said she was mated to him, but that didn't mean she had to stay with him. Fine, if she wanted to leave -- fine. Oh, who was he kidding? The thought of her being out of his sight had his skin crawling. He could feel a gnawing ache in his gut, contemplating her out there without his protection. She wasn't going anywhere.

"Where exactly am I anyway?" She yanked on her slacks, buttoning them hurriedly.

"How much of last night do you remember, lass?" He stepped in front of the open bedroom door to bar her escape.

She shrugged into her shirt. "Not much. Was at a bar, having a drink."

"And?"

"And a woman sat by me, your mother. Everything else is kind of fuzzy." Her hand paused over her sneaker as she struggled to think. "I think the beer I was drinking before she showed up was dark green and... and... well, that's it. I remember meeting you, here, and us, you know, but the rest is blank."

"Blank."

"Yeah, blank. As in, I don't remember. Okay?"

That confirmed it. Tasha had been brought to him magically drugged. Nothing surprising in that. Leave it to Scots to take the path of least resistance. All standard methods for giving a god a gift, so why did he feel certain more existed? Yes, he normally selected his own human lovers. And he'd never lost control of his power as he had with this Tasha. Why had he given his seed to her? Her? An ordinary human?

"So, can you move your ass?" she barked, forcing him to pull back to the situation at hand. "You're blocking the door. And can you tell me where the hell I am so I can get a cab?"

"There's no need for a cab," he retorted, smoothly gliding back to take control. No mortal cab could approach his home. "I'll have you taken home."

"I got it."

"No, I insist."

She hesitated a bit, and then shook her head. "I'm calling a cab, taking the Tube, or walking, but I'm not staying here with you."

"Fine, lass." He rotated to the right, and watched her stalk from the bedroom, down the hallway, to disappear around a corner. The sassy woman wouldn't make it

out the doorway of his home before finding herself right back at his doorstep. He sighed. More work for him. Explanations would be exhausting.

Taking his time, he followed her steps, ticking off the time until she ran back inside. He held the door open and stepped out into the inner courtyard. Not so quiet whispers and grumbling met his ears for a few moments before Tasha appeared.

"Where in the fuck am I, and why the hell can't I find a way away from this monstrosity of a castle?" She really was quite adorable all pissy like that. She wasn't really flushed with anger; her skin was far too dark to be. Conaire could literally feel the heat waves caused by her anger battering at him. She was tapping her little foot, her cropped hair swirling around her face, brown eyes blazing. "Are you going to answer me or stand there grinning like a jackass?"

"Laird! Laird! Do ye want me tae take the woman back to the mainland?" The druid from last night came running out of the castle, shrugging into a thick coat to protect himself from the biting ocean breeze.

Conaire's island was located at the very tip of Scotland. It was bitterly cold at the best of times, freezing at the worst. That kept most humans away. Tasha had yet to even notice she was standing there in a thin sweater and slacks. She didn't feel the cold. She was changing and she didn't even realize.

The druid did, and gasped in shock at the faint glow surrounding Conaire's brand-new mate. Somehow, the prospect didn't irk him quite as much as it had only moments before. "The lady isn't going anywhere," Conaire replied imperiously, sweeping Tasha up and tossing her over his shoulder.

"Put me down!" Tasha tried to pummel his back with her fists, but the damned man had one hell of a back. It was huge with sculpted muscles. Plus he landed one heavy smack on her ass, stopping her mid snit. It burned. The sting blossomed into a mini inferno, spreading throughout her body and settling right between her thighs. Moisture began to pool as need grew. Well, that was unexpected.

"Keep it up, lass, and yer'll find a cock in your puss 'fore you can blink."

Keep what up? He couldn't possibly know his manhandling turned her on, could he?

*Aye, lass, I can and I do.* The words sounded right inside her mind.

Every muscle in her body tensed. Why could she hear his voice in her head? First she woke up from the most erotic dream ever, only to find it was no dream, in some strange inn that turned out to be a freaking castle, when she had just been drowning her sorrows in foreign -- okay, make that domestic ale -- in a second-rate pub.

Second, she'd witnessed the sexy redheaded woman, who had talked to her in said pub and claimed to be the mother of a dude who couldn't possibly be young enough to be redhead's son, disappear, just poof and she's gone. Third, there was no way to get away from this monstrosity made of stone. Tasha had walked in a straight freaking line and wound up right back at the door she'd run out of. And now the Highlander dude was inside her head?

She was out of plausible explanations. She had stepped into the Twilight Zone. Tasha took one full second to consider her options. She had none, so she did the only thing she could think to do. Gathering in as much air as her poor lungs could hold, she screeched at the top of her lungs. Not one particular word or statement, just a full-throated scream that would have done any horror flick proud.

She didn't stop screaming when that massive hand landed on her backside a few times. She ignored the burn, ignored the desire it kindled, and kept right on screaming until she found herself unceremoniously dumped on the mammoth bed she'd just vacated.

"Sweet merciful gods, please gonnae -- please stop yer yelling!"

Tasha's mouth hung open, but sound was no longer pouring forth. Eyes round, she stared at the man... no, not a man, the thing in front of her. His voice had boomed painfully loud through the room, rattling the windows. It had been as if someone had tuned a stereo bass to maximum. Her ears should have been bleeding. It seemed as if the sound of the ocean outside had ceased at his bellow. What in hell had she managed to fall into?



“That was just rude.” She sniffed, allowing herself a moment of self-pity. For once in her life, she had taken in the chaos surrounding her and did what she had always wanted to do. Yell at it. Rage against the fates that had brought her here. And he had ruined it with that roar of his. He’d stolen her thunder from right under her. “I have a right to have a breakdown, you know. You aren’t human, that woman calling herself your mother for damn sure isn’t human. I can’t run away. I have every right to have myself a good scream. And you ruin it. That was an asshole move. Now, if you would be so kind as to take your pretty ass off somewhere, I do believe I’m going to have myself a good old-fashioned sulk.”

## Chapter Three

Conaire blinked at his mate, trying to understand her diatribe. The words were so close together, it took a minute for them to seep through his baffled brain and settle so he could make heads or tails out of them. When they did, he blinked again, this time at her audacity. This woman had stated point blank he wasn't human, acknowledged his power, and then called him rude. Not only rude, but an asshole to boot. Then she waved him away like a lackey to fetch her some food. She had actually used her hand, not looking at him, as if he were nothing more than a manservant.

"Woman, dae ye ken who Ah am?" Stupid question. Of course she didn't know who he was. Still, she had no respect for his godhood. If they were going to be stuck together for all time, she would do well to respect...

"Didn't understand a word you just said." She still wasn't looking at him; her hand went up in yet another dismissive wave. "But I understand I'm still hungry."

"I said..."

"I really am not interested. Go. Get me something to eat before I decide to start screaming again."

The little human refused to look in his direction; her lip was sticking out, her arms crossed over her chest. Conaire wanted to frown, get mad, or at least work himself into a good old-fashioned godlike fury. But instead, he was standing there grinning like a loon. She really was quite magnificent.

Shaking his head, he went off to find the kitchens. Only when he found himself standing in the large space did he realize he didn't know the first thing about it. The place looked nothing like the kitchens he remembered. He didn't know where to begin. There were three people staring at him with mouths agape, souring his mood even further.

What the hell was he doing in the kitchens? He was a god. He could conjure whatever he liked. Apparently the druid order in charge of seeing to his comfort had not been trained enough to know they never questioned a god. He could feel their questions beating against his skull. The impudence! He had been gone far too long. "Your goddess requires food!" he bellowed rather than admit his mistake. "See it to it. Whatever Colonials eat."

"Colonials, my Laird?" It was the same man who had greeted him at the circle and outside just a few minutes ago. "Goddess? The Great Mother has returned?"

He was going to have to teach this druid a thing or two. No doubt he was the high priest of his order, but a mere mortal never questioned a god. Except for his Tasha. Odd, thinking of her as his seemed as natural as breathing. "What's yer name, druid?" Conaire lowered his voice to a dangerous growl.

The druid got the message, swallowing convulsively. "It... it... Angus, my... Laird."

"If ye daur question me again, Ah will turn ye intae an elk an' feed ye tae a snake. Noo see tae it yer goddess gits somethin' tae eat, an' it'd better be hot!" His brogue was thick when he was angry. Tasha might not understand him very well. He would have to concentrate on toning it down.

"Yes, my Laird." The druid (Angus, was it?) pulled himself together. As chastisements went, Conaire's had been gentle; no doubt Angus considered himself lucky. "But yer brother has already ordered food for all three of you."

Brother? He had no – "MacKay!"

\* \* \*

Tasha put her head between her knees, gulping in air in an attempt to stop from hyperventilating. "This just cannot be real," she whispered, almost afraid that if she spoke too loudly the brash, reddish-blond-haired man who had her in a constant state of arousal would reappear. "Someone slipped something into my drink, kidnapped and drugged me. Maybe to be sold into sexual slavery."

She was working herself into an all-consuming panic when a booming laugh cut her sorrowful words off before she could really work up a head of steam. Her head snapped up. That wasn't the Highlander. She didn't know how she knew, but with certainty she knew that whoever was in the impossibly large room with her was someone she had yet to encounter.

She was right. Standing at the end of the bed, his booted foot on the railing, was a stunningly beautiful man with jet-black hair flowing down his back. Oh my, but they did make them gorgeous in this strange-ass country, didn't they? His emerald eyes regarded her with unrestrained mirth. She would have been pissed if another wave of arousal, so intense it made her stomach clench painfully, hadn't hit. What the hell had they given her?

"Who the hell are you, and what the hell is so funny?" She'd had about enough of weird crap she couldn't control. "What the hell have you people done to me? Where the hell am I? And someone had better take my ass back to the pub so I can..." Do what? Contemplate how I'll soon be living on the streets in a foreign country?

"I'm MacKay, yer other mate," the mysterious man informed her in a voice not quite as thickly accented as the Highlander. "And what do you mean you'll be living on the street? Surely my bonehead brother has informed you of your new life and powers?"

Tasha could only stare. Brother? He looked nothing like her Highlander. Wait, no. Not hers. The man who had fucked her last night. Sexed her good and right, but just sex. Anyway, this guy looked nothing like him. And mate? Dogs mated. Humans got married, then divorced, then remarried. She was soooo not in the market for that.

"Ah, I see Conaire has screwed this up as well." The man sighed and plopped himself down on the bed right next to her. And he was close. It occurred to her she should probably scoot over or something, but she found she didn't want to move. His natural body heat felt nice.

"Conaire didn't screw anything up!" Why the hell she was defending the big brute she had no idea, but damn it, this dude couldn't just appear in Conaire's bedroom talking smack. It was rude!

"Of course not, sweets." MacKay hit her with a devilish grin. "My brother has no doubt informed you of what he is, who I am, and what you are becoming."

Tasha's head hurt. This was just too much. These people were certifiable. She was certifiable. The world had tipped on its axis. "Go away," she moaned, sinking into the oh-so-soft pillows and burying her head. "I so can't deal with you right now."

He didn't move. That would be too easy. No, he just shifted his body, his very fine body, so he was lying by her side. Without so much as a mother-may-I, he began to kiss her neck, his arm wrapping around her.

Man, she was such a ho! Not only didn't she tell him to stop, she moved into his embrace, allowing the slow burn he was igniting to build. She even turned, staring up into those deep green pools and allowed his lips to descend on hers --

"MacKay!"

Tasha blinked as two hundred-plus pounds of Highlander fury actually dove right for the black-haired devil who had almost had her disrobing and begging to be ridden to Kingdom Come. She didn't have time to scream or even react before the two men collided, rolling on the shiny wood floor. Odd, but instead of being horribly upset by the clashing of beautifully sculpted muscle, Tasha was more concerned for the floor. It looked so nice; it would be a shame to mar the smooth, gleaming surface.

"She's mine, ye thievin' son of a motherless goat!" Conaire roared, aiming his fist in the general direction of MacKay's face. He missed. His fist smashed into the nice floor instead. Tasha winced at the hole made in the surface. Son of a bitch! She'd known something bad would happen to that magnificent floor.

"Ye dumb goat's ass! Whoever ye mate, I mate also." MacKay smashed his knee into the Highlander's gut. "Or hae ye forgotten, ye addle-brained twit?"

Conaire managed to connect to the jaw, and then deliver a knee of his own. Unfortunately, MacKay's responding punch also smashed right through the floor. Then

a foot, Tasha didn't know whose, did the same. It was just too much. They might have issues, but that was no reason to take it out on something that had nothing to do with it.

"Stop it right now!" The sound of her voice surprised even her. The two men stopped in a tangle of arms and legs, both of them bruised and bleeding from minor cuts, but Tasha merely shoved them out of the way with her foot. Bending down, she ran her hand over one of the ugly holes in the floor. Her hand started to burn slightly and then glow. Before her very eyes, the holes closed and the floor was like new. Tasha didn't move, didn't dare breathe. She had just fixed a hole in the floor. How was such a thing even possible?

Shock must have shown all over her face because Conaire made a move toward her. "Tasha, luv --"

"Don't!" She held out her hand, her formerly glowing palm aimed directly at the -- the -- things in a tangled heap a few short feet from her. "Stay away from me, you freaks! I don't know what the hell you've done to me, but I will rip you apart with my bare hands if you come anywhere near me." Gathering herself, she stood slowly and walked out of the room.

\* \* \*

"Well, you screwed the pooch on that one." MacKay glared at his brother as they slowly disentangled themselves.

"Me? Yer the one barging in here like a ragin' maniac."

"Ye great oaf, I was called!" MacKay was fast approaching the end of his patience.

"By whom? I damn sure didnae call ye and Tasha didnae know of yer cursed existence until ye popped yer idiot self in here!" Conaire shot back.

MacKay stared at the god who was his brother. They weren't brothers by birth, praise be to the saints, but rather by circumstance. A very painful, life-altering circumstance that MacKay couldn't believe Conaire had forgotten despite his many years trapped in exile. They shared a soul -- what affected one, affected the other.

MacKay had felt each miserable year Conaire had spent trapped in another realm. He had experienced the loneliness, the hopelessness and the anger.

As soon as Conaire had mated with the lovely Tasha, MacKay had felt the immediate pull. Conaire had not just mated himself to the human woman; he had mated both of them. Everything about her had called out to MacKay. He couldn't have stayed away even if he'd really wanted to. And he didn't want to.

As soon as he'd seen her, MacKay felt more than relief Conaire hadn't managed to get himself bonded to one of his usual doxies. MacKay was elated. Tasha was beautiful, feisty, and damned funny. His heart leapt in his chest when he observed the brave, gorgeous woman trying to come to grips with the things happening around her. Humans weren't used to the supernatural anymore. The old ways forgotten, mortals just didn't mingle with gods, elves, the Fae, or any other creature relegated to myth in these modern days. All things considered, Tasha had taken this situation quite well. MacKay was damned proud of her, even if Conaire was too much of a buffoon to see it.

"Yer an arse." MacKay let his full brogue free for just a second. "Did you forget we share the same soul, idiot?" MacKay could tell from the slow dawning of understanding across Conaire's face that he had forgotten.

"Ye mean that ye are... But... Both of us?" MacKay knew Conaire wasn't nearly as slow as he was appearing to be at the moment, so he didn't say anything, allowing the other god to think over all the implications. "I had nae considered that." Conaire sighed, sitting heavily on the bed. "She was having a hell of a time as it was. Now I have to explain this?"

MacKay was relieved that at least now Conaire was thinking about their mate. His brother really wasn't as brash and heartless as he seemed, nor was he as arrogant as most gods. It was just that he was a wee bit hotheaded.

"I should go find her and explain." Conaire merely looked toward the door Tasha had disappeared through, not attempting to move.

"I'll do it." MacKay sighed. "We need to get to know each other anyway."

“Bring her back.” Conaire looked suddenly vulnerable. MacKay couldn’t remember ever seeing him that way. “I-I need to apologize for -- everything.”

MacKay nodded, understanding that small admission had been hard. He would bring her back to the big warm bed. But not before he, too, bonded with his mate on his own.



## Chapter Four

Tasha sat on some rocks not far from the castle path overlooking the stormy sea. She knew from recent experience if she tried to go too far she would somehow wind up right back at the castle. While the last thing she wanted was to be alone with her jumbled thoughts, she couldn't stay in that room with those two nonhumans another second. She wasn't the type of woman who lied to herself. Something strange was definitely happening to her, and they were the cause. Well, Conaire, her Highlander, was the cause. MacKay had just shown up. Whatever it was, she wasn't too sure she could deal with it.

"Oh, you poor dear." The sudden appearance didn't even cause Tasha to bat an eyelash this time. Seemed she was getting used to it. The woman standing near her was definitely not human. Although she was tall and willowy, that white-blond hair coupled with violet eyes and light bluish glitter look to her skin gave her away. That and the pointed ears.

"I am not in the mood, so go away." Tasha turned away from the vision of loveliness. The chick was up to no good. Her aura screamed it.

"But I'm here to help you," the creature answered in a sweet voice. A way too sweet voice. Yep, this bitch was trouble.

Rising slowly to her feet, Tasha turned and faced the creature woman, hands on her hips and in full Black American Princess mode. "Look, you aren't here to help me, so save your breath. A beautiful creature suddenly shows up and offers to help me? No, not falling for it, so take your pixie, elf, whatever the hell you are, ass on and leave me the hell alone."

Tasha was surprised when the female took two big steps backward. She wasn't the least bit shocked to see all that sweetness give way to fury. The female's hair started to fly all around as those violet eyes started to glow.

"Tasha! Come to me!"

She had to admit she was more than a little relieved to see MacKay making a beeline for her. Some force warned her, some inexplicable thing told her to *block*. So she threw up a mental block as hard as she could when a bolt of purple light shot her way. The impact forced her back, but MacKay was suddenly there to catch her. The light hadn't gotten her, but she knew as sure as she was black it would have killed her had she not thrown up that block.

"You were lucky this time, human." The female thingie hissed. "I shall forgive you. One day soon, you will need me." With that, she disappeared into the mist.

"What the fuck was that?" Tasha croaked, trying to right herself.

MacKay wasn't having it. He pulled her closer into his embrace, holding her tightly. "That was Elphame, Queen of the Fae," he murmured, kissing the side of her face. "You have tangled with the ultimate of bitches and come out none the worse for wear."

The female had been a bitch all right. And Tasha hadn't done a damn thing to her. "Why was she here?" Tasha wasn't sure she wanted to hear the answer.

"Apparently she was trying to trick you into something." That Tasha had already figured. "She was the one who trapped Conaire on the Other Side for centuries."

"Trapped Conaire where? When? How did he get free?" Great, more complicated stuff to wrap her mind around. Tasha was beyond questioning the weirdness at this point.

"Let's go get comfortable," MacKay said soothingly, leading her back to the castle. Tasha didn't complain. Suddenly, being out alone on the cliffs didn't seem like such a good idea.

\* \* \*

MacKay made sure Tasha ate, and then cuddled next to him on the overstuffed couch in the den. Gathering her close, he decided to begin at the beginning. His hands rubbed along her back and legs to soothe her tense muscles. Poor thing, it had been a hard day.

"Long ago, when Scotland was young, the land was inhabited by many wondrous races of beings who lived together, though not always in harmony. They ruled the land, each race with its own territory, free from what they considered tiresome humans. Until I brought my clan across the sea from Eire, that is..."

"That's Ireland, right?" Tasha interrupted, snuggling closer. Her acceptance of him came so naturally, he wondered if she was even aware of it.

"Yes, luv," he murmured his approval, kissing her neck. She shivered when he did that, making MacKay's rock-hard cock jerk. Soon, soon. "I was a mortal then, a man with a dream. I wanted to forge my own path. I wanted to rule a clan on my own. So I set out with others who were tired of being lost in large clans and caught up in petty squabbles. But when we arrived, we didn't find the creatures had open arms. Most left us alone as long as we respected their boundaries. But the Fae of the woods resented it when we cut down trees for our dwellings. They were angered when we killed for food. But when I pledged my allegiance to Scot, Mother of Scotland, Elphame became incensed. She took away our fire. We could not cook; we could not warm ourselves. We were dying. So I did the only thing I could think to do. I stole fire from the Fae."

"How did you do that?" Tasha asked with the excitement of a child.

MacKay had to smile at her eagerness. "I caught a will-o'-the-wisp, the sacred fire of the Fae. Elphame was furious. She came after me, striking me with her powers repeatedly until I lay mostly dead on the muddy ground. My goddess Scot took pity on me. I'd never failed to give her tribute. I'd honored her in all I did.

"As a reward, she took half the soul of her only son, against his wishes, and gave it to me. It was a painful rebirth, tearing both Conaire and I apart from the inside out. From that moment on, we were tied together for all time. Whoever Conaire is bonded to, so too am I. He did hold that against me for a while, though he long ago forgave his

mother. I think he was tired of being one of the very few male deities in Scotland. We had grown close before his forced imprisonment."

"Where do I come in?" Tasha asked breathlessly, her body turning so that she was sprawled on top of him. "And how did she trap Conaire?"

Such sweet torment. MacKay could feel the heat from her cunt on his shaft. His hips pressed up without thought, desperately seeking closer contact. His arms snaked around her as he held her close. Ah, this woman was more than worthy to be a goddess. The centuries he would spend exploring all of her delights.

"Elphame was beyond furious Scotas had saved my life," MacKay went on. "And even more furious she couldn't kill me. She schemed for ages trying to find a way to get back at Scotas or me. She finally got her chance. Conaire loves -- er, loved human females. When her attempts at seduction failed, Elphame used that weakness against him by disguising herself as a mortal. She waited until his weakest moment, the moment of orgasm, and banished him to the Other Side. It is a realm where most magical beings retreated to when the world became too populated with humans. For Conaire, it was hell.

"She thought by allowing him back, she could curse him by casting a spell which would bond him to the first woman he slept with. Knowing Conaire's former appetite, she knew it wouldn't take long. But Mother, Scotas, caught the curse on the wind and set out to find a woman worthy of her sons, worthy to be a goddess."

Tasha's big brown eyes grew even bigger. "Me? But why? How?"

"Ah, lass, you are brave and strong, beautiful and bold. You are more than worthy to be a goddess." He didn't give her time to think about what he'd said. He'd waited too long to taste her as it was. Tangling his hands in her hair, he brought her lips down to his, drinking in the sweetest kiss he had ever tasted. His tongue plunged into her mouth, seeking, exploring. Her body melted against him, molding to the hard planes of his own.

So fucking perfect. He grasped her generous ass as he ground up into her. With a thought he could have whisked their clothing away, but the torture of having her so

close without being able to touch her flesh was almost as sweet. His lips trailed to her jaw, her neck, stopping at the small patch of skin showing through her shirt. It was a brief pause, no more than a breath of time, and her clothes were gone, as were his.

“Ach lass, you learn fast.” And he wholeheartedly approved.

“Don’t talk,” Tasha ordered. “Fuck me.”

He had known he could fall in love with this woman. She had to go ahead and prove him right. Climbing his body, she straddled him, lifting her breasts to his ready, greedy mouth. His lips clamped down on one nipple, his teeth scraping the sensitive nubbin ever so slightly. She shivered, her wetness coating the head of his cock.

Instead of guiding his swollen shaft to paradise, the vixen slid her dripping pussy up and down his entire length, driving him crazy with need. “Lass, ye donnae want to tease me like this.” It was the one and only warning he would give her.

And of course, she ignored it. “Your voice sounds sexy when you get all Scottish like that,” she teased instead, dipping her head to bite his flat nipple.

MacKay threw back his head and groaned. A bolt of electric longing shot straight to his sac. The woman did like to play with fire, didn’t she? His hand fell heavily on that full, delightful ass of hers. Once, twice, three times. Instead of getting her attention, the damnable woman jerked against his throbbing cock, her head falling back, a soft exclamation on her lips.

She had come! She’d had an orgasm by his spansks. There was no way MacKay could hold back. Lifting her just enough, he positioned himself at her opening and pushed her firmly down onto his cock. “Sweet merciful Fates!” He groaned as her vaginal walls gripped him, pulling him in deeper. “So tight. So good.”

Tasha took in every inch, her pussy bathing his cock in hot cream, clenching his shaft just right. When she started to move, MacKay wanted to howl. Her body was pure poetry in the way she swiveled those hips on each downward stroke. He watched her body in fascination, loving the way her dark skin contrasted against his lighter tone, loving the way her breasts jiggled and bounced, beckoning him to taste more. Who was he to deny the call of the world’s most perfect breasts? Pushing them together, he took

both blackberry nipples in at once, sucking, scraping, and kneading the soft flesh as he did so.

Her movements increased in speed, making his balls draw up and burn with the need for release. He wanted to blow so bad, but he needed her with him. Reaching down between their meshed, writhing bodies, he found the pearl he was seeking. As he lightly bit down on her breasts, he pinched her clit, rubbing it between his fingers.

Her inner walls clamped down almost immediately, milking his cock. "MacKay! Yes! Oh, fuck yes!" Her exquisite body bucked, slamming down and grinding against him.

"Fuck, yes, Tasha, luv! Take it. Take my cock, lass. Make it yers." Never had a pussy felt so marvelous, never had he come so hard. Even after she'd slumped against his chest, he could feel his body zinging with tiny electric shocks. He felt the silken bonds of mating wrapping tighter around her, felt her body changing. It was almost done. When he and Conaire took her at the same time, she would change completely, being mated to them both for all time. MacKay, for one, couldn't be happier.

All too soon, Tasha was being lifted from his arms. Conaire stood cradling their precious gift, and damned if she didn't burrow into his brother's arms. "She needs to rest," Conaire told him with more care than MacKay had ever heard from him before. "She's had a trying day."

## Chapter Five

Conaire never thought the day would come when he would enjoy waking up beside the same woman, but he was growing to love it more and more with each passing day. Tasha filled holes in him he never knew he had. She was combative, abrasive, and never failed to make him hard when she got all bitchy -- like she was right now.

"You had better talk to that little troll!" she fumed, poking her finger at MacKay. "I've had about enough of his attitude."

MacKay cast a helpless look in his direction, but there was no way in hell Conaire was about to intervene. Tasha had only been here a week, but he was learning to never mess with her when she was in one of her tempers. Didn't mean he couldn't tweak MacKay a bit, though. "Aye, Mac." Conaire barely managed to suppress his laughter. "Ye need tae talk tae the druid."

"Oh, don't think I don't have a thing or two to say about you, Mr. Conaire-My-Shit-Don't-Stink!"

Uh-oh. What the hell had he done? He couldn't think of anything. In fact, he had been downright gentlemanly. His feelings for Tasha might have thrown him for a loop at first, but it was impossible not to be crazy about the woman. She was passionate in all she did. She was taking to her "goddess lessons," as she liked to call them, like a fish to water. While either he or MacKay taught her how to use her powers to protect herself, Scota had taken on the task of teaching the feminine points of her powers.

Conaire shivered just thinking about how she had chosen to use her last lesson. She'd held him immobile while using that wicked tongue of hers all over the head of his --

"Hello? Are you listening to me, Con?"

Damn, he even loved the way she renamed everyone around her. He was Con, MacKay was Mac. They had even taken to calling each other whatever she decreed their names were. It drove Angus, who was now referred to as Gus or Gussy, crazy.

"I wouldnae dream of nae listening, luv." And he wouldn't generally, except when he mentally undressed her. She always seemed to have too many clothes on.

"So tell me why you told Mac I wasn't ready for the final bonding?"

The question left Conaire speechless. He was going to kill MacKay. It might not be technically possible, seeing he was immortal, but he was sure as hell going to try. "Er, sweets, ye donna ken what that means..."

"It means that you can stop looking like you want to eat me alive when I am with Mac, and Mac leaving the room when I'm with you," Tasha told him without blinking. "I'm well aware of what the final bonding entails. Your mother told me all about it."

"Did she now?" MacKay seemed to find his voice while Conaire was still struggling to find his own.

His soul brother came up behind the lively woman who was their mate until her back was flush against his front. Since the harsh cold of the northern climate no longer bothered the budding godling, Tasha had taken to wearing lightweight dresses that looked more scandalous than anything Conaire was used to seeing women wear.

"And what did you think about that, Tasha-mine?" MacKay purred into her ear, his arms circling her waist.

Conaire noted the outline of her nipples becoming hard behind the scant material of her whimsical clothing, and his mouth watered. Delightful.

MacKay cocked his eyebrow, waiting for him to make a move. But Conaire couldn't seem to move. His entire existence had been one of privilege, the time spent in exile aside. He'd never had cause to fear anything. Yet, Tasha terrified him just now. There she was, demanding what was hers by right, and he was scared. What if he failed her? What if one day he let her down? He didn't think he could bear it. He had known her for all of fifteen days and he was completely at her mercy. It was far beyond the



magic that bound them; she had conquered him so completely he never wanted to be free. But would she want to one day?

"Con? What's wrong?" She bit her bottom lip, those deep brown eyes clouded with emotion. He hated that look. "Look, I'm sorry I pressured you. I -- never mind."

Pushing away from MacKay's arms, she fled the room, no doubt going out to the cliffs where she often went when she wanted to be alone. He wanted to follow her, to reassure her, but he couldn't. Not when he was so unsure of himself. He just stood there, staring after her like a great big idiot.

"Well, ye're a grand oaf, aren't ye?" MacKay scoffed. "And yer letting yer petty fear break our woman's heart."

"Yer accent is thicker when she's nae around," Conaire replied, rather than respond to the deadly accurate statement. He didn't want to hurt her, and by trying not to, he only wound up doing the one thing he didn't want to do. He was such an arse.

"Dinnae try an' change the subject, jackarse! What was that about?"

He could feel MacKay's anger beating at him. He couldn't really blame him. "Mac, she ne'er had a choice," Conaire agonized. "One minute she were goin' about her life, the next she finds herself nae mated to one, but two things that in her world dinnae exist. Once this is done, it cannae be taken back. I love her too much tae be able to handle her regret for being mated tae the likes of me."

MacKay was stunned. Conaire was an arrogant bastard; never in MacKay's memory could he recall the god worrying overmuch about the feelings of others. But then, Tasha was unlike any woman he had ever known. He could understand why Conaire was sinking fast, because so was he. It was impossible not to fall in love with that woman. She just stomped her way into a god's heart and made the place her home. Still, the last man, god or being, he ever expected to fall, and by the looks of it fall hard, was Conaire.

"Ye've been in love before." Conaire moaned, dropping heavily on the couch. "Is it supposed tae feel like this?"

"Aye." MacKay wasn't about to lie. "And worse." He plopped down next to Conaire. "I've never been in love like this."

MacKay had thought he loved the wife he had lost to the terrible time when his clan had no fire and no way to feed themselves. He had, in the sweet innocent way of a mortal. The love of a god was nothing compared to the feelings he had all those centuries ago. He breathed Tasha; he hungered for her. He could and would shake the world on its foundation for her.

"It's already too late to go back." MacKay prodded Conaire as gently as he could. "It was too late the moment ye took her the first time. And I cannae say I regret ye doing so."

"Neither can I," Conaire whispered. "And I dinnae want her hating me for it."

"She willnae," MacKay said with complete confidence. "Our Tasha is made o' sterner stuff than that." Of this, MacKay was confident. She was a brave, braw lass. She had faced down the Queen of the Fae without blinking an eye. She ordered the fearsome Conaire around his own castle as if she was to the manor born. She might miss her old life from time to time, but she would never look back in regret.

"She does like being a goddess." Conaire grinned, his eyes sparkling.

Poor sap, he was a goner. MacKay was in no position to look down on him, though. He was in the same boat. "Aye and the lass is damn good at it too."

Conaire nodded, climbing to his feet. "Go get our woman and bring her to bed. We've a mating to complete." There was a bounce in his step as he started for the door. "Ye had best go an' deal with Angus first, or she might turn the poor man into a toad."

A toad was way too conventional for the likes of Tasha. MacKay would bet his left foot she would think of something far more devastating if the man didn't learn to show her the proper respect. He was almost tempted not to go and warn the old druid to mind his manners. He was rather curious to see what she might do.

\* \* \*

Angus watched the Laird MacKay disappear, anger rising to the boiling point. He couldn't say he was mad at either of the gods he served. They were good and

honorable gods, benevolent in all they did. They had always been true to the old ways, respectful of the order in which Angus served. A symbiotic relationship that flourished from the beginning of time. His druid order took care of the lairds' properties and dwellings, whether they were present in this realm or not, and the gods they served gave the druids longevity, honor, protection and riches.

Angus had always served his order with fervor. He had risen to the top by serving faithfully and diligently. He'd never had a complaint or a problem, he was highly praised; he was among the highest of high priests. That was, until *she* had come here. Since her appearance, his stock had fallen in not only the eyes of Conaire the Great, but also MacKay the Brave, and the Great Mother Scota herself. He found himself in danger of losing his position, which was completely unacceptable, and all because of some crass mortal woman.

She was not worthy of the gods she found herself mated to. And all by a simple twist of fate. No matter what had been said, nothing would ever make Angus believe the American woman had been handpicked by Scota herself. The Great Mother had simply brought the woman here to be a tasty snack after Conaire had been so long in exile. How could she have known Elphame had cursed Conaire before he stepped through the ancient circle? The Fae were a wily lot, everyone knew that. All here had certainly witnessed how lusty the American was. Why, how many times had he walked in on her when she was in some lewd position with one of the lairds?

Just earlier today, when he was supervising the cleaning and updating of the rooms on the first floor, he had walked in on her and Conaire, the laird sitting on his knees in front of the fireplace with the wanton hussy wrapped around him like a snake. She writhed on him like one too. It churned Angus' gut to see her grinding and grunting on the laird like that. It was unseemly. A god such as Conaire should have an ethereal beauty, willowy and light. This woman was just too earthy, too base.

He had to stop this. The American woman might be bonded in a minimal way to the great lairds, but the final bonding had yet to happen. If any one being could stop this travesty, Elphame could. It would be sacrilege for him to make a deal with the Fae;

he was sworn to the House of Scots, the enemy of Elphame. However, desperate times called for desperate measures.

He snuck out after the lairds had ensconced themselves in the master suite with that woman. That could not be good. They would no doubt be bonding any time now. No matter, Elphame could still rip the woman from their realm. It would hurt his lairds, but only for a short time. A few hundred years or so and they would forget. They would even thank him, though he would probably be forfeiting his life. It was worth it. They would be free... in time.

Calling on all the limited powers of the druid order, he projected his spirit to the forests across the strait from the island they now inhabited. As he expected, it took little time at all before the Fae took note of his presence. His order of druid did not come here; they knew they weren't welcome.

"What are you doing here, druid?" The Fae that confronted him first was not the only one that watched. Angus could feel thousands of eyes watching him, waiting.

Bowing down, he held his hands out in supplication. "I come with a gift for your queen."

The light pink Fae who had spoken scoffed, her burgundy hair billowing out around her. "You think you have anything to interest our queen? How dare you!"

"I can get her into Laird Conaire's island lair," Angus shouted in a rush. "I come to offer the mortal for her to do with as she will." There was a pointed hush. Not even the birds in the trees made a sound. Angus dared not look up for fear of what he might see. If this was how he was to meet his end, he would really rather not see it coming. To die in the Fae forest was inglorious, to say the least. His name would be a curse for his order for all time.

"And why would you offer me such a boon, Angus of Scots?" The queen appeared out of the mist looking every bit as deadly as he knew her to be.

"The mortal is not worthy of my lairds," he answered honestly. "I have no other motive than that."

“And you would see her gone, so you came to me?” The queen’s voice was painfully beautiful, like the lightest tinkling of bells and a call of a siren. It demanded the truth, would accept nothing else. As a mere druid he was powerless and gave her just that. “You hate my laird, you would want to take away his mate,” he answered. “He would mourn, but he is a god. He will recover. They both will.”

“Both? What do you mean ‘both’?”

This time Angus did lift his head, looking at the Fae Queen askance. She didn’t know? How was that possible? She was aware Conaire and MacKay shared a soul. Why did she not know bonding with one would be bonding with both? “Conaire and MacKay, Great Queen. The mortal woman is even now bonding with them both.”

Her face became like ice, her eyes shooting violet fire. “You will let me in the castle, and I swear she will suffer like she has never suffered before.”

“It is done!”

## Chapter Six

Tasha's breath escaped in an audible *whoosh* as she entered the master suite. The usually dark room of rough-hewn stone and ancient tapestries was illuminated in the soft glow of dozens of pure white candles. The huge bed that had given her such delight in the time she'd been here had been dressed in equally stark white sheets with red rose petals scattered across the white surface. The air held just a touch of sweet heather, mixing with the roses, both calming and inviting. Conaire stood by the window, watching her with a predatory gleam. That look never failed to bring heat to her skin, sending spikes of need throughout her body.

"Ye are pleased?" Conaire spoke in the silence of the room, his voice sonorous and beguiling. He was very good at the art of seduction. But then he had centuries on her.

"Very," she answered in a voice softer than she would like. Conaire always reduced her to a jumble of all things feminine.

"Then why don't you get more comfortable?" This came from the smooth-as-honey voice of MacKay behind her.

As much as she wanted to close her eyes when she felt MacKay's large warm hands sliding the spaghetti straps of her dress down her shoulders, she knew Conaire wouldn't like that. She kept her gaze firmly on him, watching as he tracked MacKay's tantalizing slow movements.

Either of them could have simply wished her clothes away as Conaire often did, but MacKay loved to undress her with his hands. Perhaps because he was once human, perhaps because he took delight in delaying the moment. It always increased her own longing. MacKay seemed to pause, adding extra pressure as he brought the dress down

across her nipples. She noted his own clothing had disappeared. Talk about double standards.

A tiny moan escaped her as the sensitive nubs screamed out to be touched. Conaire's eyes darkened to a stormy dark gray, his tongue swiping across thick sensuous lips. Tasha shivered, feeling a ghost of tongue, close, but nowhere near enough.

"You see how he watches your luscious body?" MacKay rasped in her ear. "'Tis like unwrapping a precious gift. He can barely stand to wait. Can you feel his desire for you?"

"Yes." Oh, sweet heavens, she could! His thirst beat at her as if it were her own. In a way it was. Watching either man/god want her increased her need just as much as a caress or a soft-spoken word.

"You have a beautiful body," MacKay continued, finally pulling the dress down over her hips. "The body of a goddess."

The feel of the hard cock against her back, MacKay's broad chest pushing against her, his arms encircling her -- it was almost paradise. Almost. "Come to me, Conaire." She didn't recognize her own voice. "Make me want you."

It was like waving a red flag in front of a bull, and she knew it. With every step he took toward her, an article of his clothing disappeared. She loved her men *au natural*, so scrumptiously cut and all buff. She had never been attracted to men so large before -- in every area. Well-hung didn't begin to cover it.

"Ye are a saucy wench, aren't ye?" Conaire buried his hands in her hair. The soft jerk bringing her head back sent a spark straight to her clit.

She loved it when Conaire got all forceful. He didn't kiss her, he plundered her mouth, taking total possession. Her body molded backward into MacKay as Conaire pushed closer, inserting his thick thigh in between her legs. Whimpers came from the back of her throat as he pushed the rock-hard leg up against her wet pussy, creating gratifying friction against her empty core.

"Aye, luv, ride that leg," MacKay encouraged, thrusting his cock against the cheeks of her ass. He went no further, just nestled there sawing back and forth, igniting a slow burn in her rosette even though he wasn't attempting entrance. "Get hot, luv. Get wild."

Like she needed encouragement for that. Just a little bit more, just a little more pressure... But Conaire removed his lovely thigh, placing her softly to the ground while lifting his lips from hers. She was panting, taking in great gulps of air.

"I want more," she demanded, fixing Conaire with more of a scowl than a pout. He loved it when she challenged him, which is why she did so, of course. It turned him on that she wasn't the least bit cowed by him.

"Do ye now?" Conaire raised an eyebrow while giving that little smirk that drove her batty. "Ye'll wait and ye'll luv every second."

He was right, she knew he was, but she would never let him know that. She was about to reply, but MacKay chose that moment to pinch her nipples, eliciting a small cry of surprise. Her head fell back as she closed her eyes. MacKay was well acquainted with that weakness. Playing with her breasts got her unbelievably hot. He rolled the hard points between his thumb and forefinger, biting on the side of her neck just the way she liked it.

"Ye like that, luv?" MacKay's accent was deepening, evidence of his own growing passions.

MacKay was the one who always held back just a little, as if he was afraid he would hurt her somehow. She longed to have him untamed and raw, but thus far, she had been unable to goad him into letting go completely. "I hate it," she lied. "It doesn't do a thing for me."

That must have done something, because the next thing she felt was a sharp smack, right on her clit. Not hard enough to cause serious pain, but enough to shoot bolts of electric current through her body. One smack, followed by three others, and she was aflame.



“Och, luv, looks like ye liked that,” MacKay murmured. “Did ye like that, sweets?”

She couldn’t speak just then. He plunged two thick fingers deep inside her, stroking her just right. She nodded weakly, her hips speaking for her as she gyrated, seeking deeper penetration.

“Nae sae fast, sweetheart.” MacKay stopped much too soon, leaving her hanging there so close, just like Conaire had. “Move onto the bed, luv. Straddle Con’s face, and turn toward me.”

She hadn’t noticed Conaire had moved away and now lay sprawled on the bed, watching intently, his thick cock in his hand. He smiled as he slid down, lying flat on his back with his head toward the foot of the bed.

Tasha didn’t need to be told twice. One thing that never failed to send her careening over the edge was Conaire’s wicked tongue. And he didn’t disappoint this time either. As soon as she was hovering over his mouth, he pulled her hips down toward him, diving in voraciously.

“Oh, aye, Tasha-luv,” MacKay encouraged, moving closer. “Ride his face, baby. Take what you need.”

But she needed more than just Conaire. She reached out, almost weeping with relief when MacKay came closer without question. Taking his shaft in hand, he offered her what she was begging for without words. His hiss when she circled the ruddy head of his cock with her tongue was sweet to her ears. His hips jerked as she swallowed him down to his root, something she could never do in her former life. She had never wanted to. Now she wanted every bit of them both. Every delicious inch. She suckled MacKay every bit as avidly as Conaire suckled, licked, plunged, and even bit her.

Surely this time they would allow her release. She needed it so very badly. Her nipples drew up impossibly tight, her body felt as if it were strung on a bow, ready to be fired off into the sweet abyss of release any second.

Then they stopped, yet again. MacKay pulled away, depriving her of her lollipop, while Conaire deftly moved his mountain of a body from under her with the

agility of a cat. How a man, er, god, his size could move like that she would never know.

"Come here, Tasha-luv." MacKay, who was now lying the correct way on the bed, patted his thigh.

There was no way she was sitting on his damn thigh. Before she could settle herself on that magnificent shaft of his, Conaire grabbed her back from behind. Both hands grasped her breasts in a firm, controlling grip, pulling her against him.

"Nae sae fast, Tasha-mine." Conaire bit down near her collarbone. Her body shivered at the small pain. She was going to kill them, the both of them. "I dinnae think ye are ready."

"If you don't fuck me -- one of you, both of you, at this point I really don't give a shit -- I am going to go... fuck that little troll Angus!" Never in a million years, but it was all she could think of at the moment.

"And I'll string him up by his cock 'n' balls!" MacKay uncharacteristically roared, seating her right on his cock. Despite the almost unbearable tightness, she was so wet she sank down to his balls. So full, so perfect, so damn good! There was no staying still. She rose and fell, loving the delicious friction with every stroke. He was so thick, so long. Every downstroke hit her G-spot just right.

"Oh, Tasha-mine, ye look sae damn guid riding cock," Conaire praised behind her, his hands soothing down her thigh. Grabbing her ass, he pushed her cheeks together before pulling them apart. "And I am going to ride that ass, luv. Would ye like that?"

"Yes, oh damn, yes!" Tasha moaned. She felt a cold sensation around her puckered back opening, then a slight burn of first one finger, then two.

"Relax, luv," Conaire encouraged. "Ye're a goddess, you simply have to think ye're ready, and ye will be." He was right. When she felt the broad head of his cock, she willed her body to relax and accept. MacKay brought her down, kissing her into distraction as Conaire slowly made his way inside until he was all the way in.

"Fuck! Sae damn tight!" Conaire groaned, jerking her up against him and taking her mouth with his. She'd never felt so very full, so very complete.

Then they started to move. Tasha couldn't seem to gulp in enough air. The burning pleasure was so intense with the exquisite bite of pain coupled with the delicious friction of MacKay's marvelous stroking.

"Yes, Tasha-luv, give it to us." MacKay groaned, reaching between them to tweak her clit. "Come for us, luv. Be a part of us forever."

"So guid." Conaire cupped her breasts and tweaked her nipples as he plundered her from behind. "Ye're a bonnie perfect lass. Sae damn perfect."

One coordinated stroke followed another and another, causing her world to spin out of control. An inner light she had never been aware of before started to glow, encompassing all three of them. She could feel invisible ribbons of the bonding tightening, entwining, until there was no one individual remaining, but a triad, complete and whole. Tasha screamed, grasping shoulders, thick hard muscle, stars exploding behind her closed eyes. "Yes! Yes! Oh, great damn, yes!"

"I love you, Tasha-lass. Forever." The soft whisper sounded in both ears at the same time as she fell forward into a welcome cocoon of darkness. Her last conscious thought was to marvel at how they had both said the exact same thing at the exact same time.

## Chapter Seven

Finally, she was a fully bonded woman. Well, goddess, now. Fully-fledged, bona fide, can turn a person into a slug goddess. What she hadn't counted on was the burning need she seemed to constantly have for one or both of her mates after the final bonding had been completed. This was the first respite she had gotten in over a week. Walking the castle's upper wall, she stared out at the North Sea with a little sadness in her heart.

Below in the master suite, Conaire and MacKay were sleeping off the aftereffects of yet another marathon lovemaking session. Not that either needed sleep. MacKay did it out of habit, a vestige from his life as a human man. Conaire slept because he could. Tasha couldn't find rest today.

It had finally hit her how much her life had changed in such a short time. While she could visit home any time she wanted to, she could never really go home again. Aside from needing her men far too much to be away for long, and the disaster that might ensue should she actually even think of taking two ancient gods back to the States, she was different. Too different to go without notice.

She only had one loved one who would really miss her, her cousin Patricia. Her parents had died years ago, as well as any aunts or uncles she had ever had. It had been the curse of being born to two people who thought they were too old to produce children. She had a few friends, but none so close as to truly cause heartbreak. Pat was really all she had, her best friend and closest confidant.

She could never tell Pat about this. She would think Tasha was stark raving mad. Hell, there were times when Tasha herself feared it was all some drunken dream and she would wake up in that damn pub thinking of ways to find and kill what's-his-name. She really should make an effort to find her ex one day and thank him.

As for now, she needed to call Patricia and assure her she was all right. She ought to have her ass kicked for not thinking of it before. "Well, it isn't as if I haven't been a little preoccupied," she said to no one at all as she made her way back inside. No more putting it off, she had to call her cousin.

"Tasha? Where are you? Girl, are you all right? Derrick's skinny white ass has been back for over a week, dragging some skanky Jamaican chick with him," Patricia screamed into the phone. "He said you should have been back at least a week before him."

"Derrick's not white, he's Puerto Rican," Tasha said by rote. It was an old argument, but it was nice to start the conversation on familiar ground. "And how did he expect me to get back when he had my passport, my ticket, and most of my damn money?"

"What?" The screech was so loud, Tasha had to hold the phone away from her ear. "I'll roast his narrow ass myself! I'm coming to get you. Where are you? You need me to wire you some money?"

Tasha had to laugh at that. Patricia was struggling to make ends meet and yet she was ready to wire her whatever she had. A tear trickled down Tasha's cheek. She was going to miss this woman something fierce. "I'm not coming back," she told her cousin quietly.

"What the hell do you mean you're not coming back? Girl, don't make me walk to Scotland to drag your black ass back here."

Tasha took a deep breath, searching for the right words. "I can't. I mean, I could if I wanted to, but I don't want to. I, um, got married."

There was dead silence on the other end for a full minute. Tasha could see Patricia staring at the phone. All she had to do was project, and she could watch her cousin's reaction. It would be funny if it wasn't breaking her heart a little. They had always been close. For so long, they had been all each other had. Tasha felt as if she was abandoning Patricia.

"Say that again," Patricia finally said. "I don't believe I heard you right."

"Married, I got married. He's a, er... Scottish laird." Well, that wasn't a lie, exactly. "We are at one of his castles right now. It just happened so fast, I didn't have time to call..."

"You can stop babbling now." Patricia's caustic reply came quietly, but effectively cut off the lame excuses Tasha had formed. Man, Patricia was pissed. "Who is he, what's his name?"

Tasha stopped projecting her cousin. She really didn't want to see the hurt and anger she was causing. "Conaire. Conaire MacKay." It was the best she could do. As far as she knew, neither Con nor Mac had a surname.

"You listen to me good, Tasha Marie Washington. I'm coming to Scotland, and I'm bringing you home. Don't waste your breath telling me how in love you are with some Scottish man. I want to see it for myself. Then, if I think he's worthy, he can carry his ass back with you. But you are coming home!"

Tasha tried to swallow the lump that had formed in her throat, but nothing could stop the flow of tears. She was leaving her one and only family member all alone. She had to make sure at least Patricia was well taken care of. But going home was out of the question.

"I love you, Patty-Pat, but I'm not coming home. Be happy for me, please?"

"We'll just see about that!" was the only reply before the distinct sound of the dial tone blared across the line.

She carefully placed the phone back on the cradle, wiping away the tears streaking her face. She hadn't meant to hurt Pat, she really hadn't.

"Oh, you poor, poor dear."

The voice grated on Tasha's already stretched nerves like nails on a chalkboard. She had only heard it once before, but she had never forgotten. That and the purple lightning thing the bitch had flung at her.

Tears and sorrow forgotten, Tasha whirled on her unwanted guest, directing all the hurt and anger she'd felt at hurting her cousin toward the too-beautiful creature who stood behind her. There was no breeze in the comfortable first-floor parlor, yet the

shimmering lilac gown and white-blond hair floated on a breeze only they could feel. The effect was probably meant to make Elphame appear harmless and benevolent, but it just plain pissed Tasha off. Pretentious bitch. Tasha really didn't give a damn how powerful and ancient this creature was, she pissed her off something fierce. "Why are you in my home? You were not invited."

Unlike vampires, the Fae Queen could enter a home uninvited, but not the lair of a god. This castle was protected, which meant someone let her in. Tasha didn't have to test her newfound powers deeply to hear the troll-druid Angus whispering an incantation allowing this she-devil inside. She would deal with him later, the weasel. Maybe he should be a weasel, in truth.

No sooner did the thought occur, the incantations stopped. There were tiny scraping noises, and then a weasel bolted from behind the door across the wooden floors, emitting a high pitched screech as it scurried aimlessly around the room. Oops. She was really going to have to learn to control that. Funny, Elphame seemed to waver ever so slightly, fading just a bit. Her eyes widened at the weasel, then narrowed, an evil light glinting in her icy eyes.

*Wow, and she thinks I'm going to trust her for a second?* Tasha thought with great amusement. The Fae Queen pulled herself together, but Tasha swore she detected strain around her eyes and mouth. *Hmmm, interesting.*

"I come bearing a gift for the newly bonded goddess," the bitch creature purred. "I can see how much you miss your life, your home. With one simple wish, you can turn back the hands of time. One wish and you can be far, far away from here. All you have to do is wish with all your heart."

If the sickly sweet tone didn't clue Tasha in, the deliberate wording of this so-called "gift" set off loud warning bells. Was this bitch serious? She'd trapped Conaire in some weird no man's land for centuries, and Tasha was supposed to believe now all of a sudden she wanted to give Tasha her heart's desire? Right. "And why would you do that? You don't even like me."

Elphame made a great show of looking offended, even a little hurt. Tasha was simply flabbergasted the woman could think any of her show was convincing. She had to know Conaire would have long since told Tasha of his capture.

"I know your mate must have told you of my little temper tantrum." Elphame was laying it on thick now. Her voice dripped with regret that rang as false as it was. "I was so silly back then."

The Fae woman really did think she was stupid. She probably thought all humans were stupid. That would make her sloppy. Tasha forced herself to concentrate on every word the Fae Queen said. If her hunch was right, the bitch would trip herself up.

"It breaks my heart to think you were trapped into such a mating, with not one but two rather rough, base men. Human brutes are bad enough, but gods?" Elphame made a great show of shivering delicately.

Tasha had to bite her cheek to stop from laughing out loud. She loved being mated to those two brute gods.

"I know you probably miss your life. I offer you a chance to go back. I'm giving you a chance to return to your life, only with an incentive. You can wish to be at your home right now, but with riches beyond your imagination. You can wish to be a superstar, an heiress. Anything at all. Do you not miss your home and family and those you left behind? How it must sadden you that you can never go back. All you have to do is wish. Open your heart to the wish and it is yours. Anything at all and it is yours."

It sounded a lot like the witch offering Sleeping Beauty the poisoned apple. If Tasha could have her heart's fondest wish, it would be for Elphame to be trapped in the place she'd trapped Conaire for so long. That would be Tasha's fondest damn wish. *For Elphame, the Queen of the Fae, to be trapped in the prison she intended to leave Conaire to rot in. That is my fondest wish, you she-bitch from hell.* Tasha snorted.

She hadn't really meant it literally, because she hadn't believed it could possibly be so simple. But at Elphame's screech, then the wailing and pleading, Tasha knew she



had done it again. "No! No! Take it back, you idiotic mortal! How dare you banish me? *Take it back!*"

"Ach, luv, ye have done it now."

Tasha blinked up at Conaire and MacKay as they rushed into the room with Scotas on their heels. The goddess came to an abrupt stop with her bow-shaped mouth agape, staring at the slowly disappearing Fae. Uh-oh. She hoped she hadn't fucked up so bad it couldn't be made right. "Can I take it back?" she asked anxiously. "I really didn't mean it."

Scota's peeling laughter washed away all the doubt Tasha had experienced in that brief, terrifying moment. Whew. She thought she had done something really bad for a second there.

"Tasha-luv." MacKay laughed, sweeping her up into his arms. "You have managed to banish the arch-enemy of the House of Scotas and punish a betrayer all in about ten minutes."

He kissed her soundly before turning her over to Conaire who did the same. "Aye, Tasha-mine. Ye've conquered the enemy with naught but a thought. What a brae lass ye are."

"Oh, my dear." Scotas clapped her hands together in pure delight. "I knew when I first saw you, you were the perfect woman for my lads. I couldn't be happier than I am at this moment. Well, until you bless me with grandchildren, that is."

Conaire, MacKay and Tasha all froze, looking toward the Mother of Scotland as if she had grown another head. "Grandchildren?" all three repeated dumbly.

"Yes, you know," Scotas declared, airily waving her hand in the air. "Babies who grow into children who grow into gods."

"Can gods have children?" Tasha asked before mentally kicking herself in the behind. Of course they could have children, otherwise there would be no Conaire. She just never imagined he'd been born in the conventional way.

"Er, maybe we can talk about this later." Conaire looked a little sick. "Like maybe in a hundred years or so."

"We were only just bonded." MacKay's face was scarlet. That was just funny. A god blushing. Who would have thought? "We would like some time to get to know our mate. Babies are a lot of work, I hear tell."

Tasha just stared. She hadn't considered things like contraceptives. They were gods for crying out loud. Wasn't it a perk or something to be able to get busy without a surprise nine months later? Ah, man, she was sure as shit knocked up if the reproductive rules were the same with gods as they were with normal people.

"Oh, fine." Scotla sighed. "Whenever you're ready, I suppose." Turning to Tasha, she gently extracted her out of the arms of her sons. "Just remember, all you have to do is wish it, and it will be. As long as you wish it at the right time, that is. And it must be a time when you are all together. I'm sure you know what I mean."

Sweet relief flooded every fiber of Tasha's being. Not that she didn't want children, she really did. She just wanted them in her own time.

"Good-bye, children." Scotla smiled benignly, taking a step back as she prepared to make her exit. "Do remember to come to the mainland once your little honeymoon is over. Scotland misses you."

"We will," Tasha promised for them all.

"In about fifty years or so," MacKay muttered under his breath.

"I heard that, Mac dear." Scotla laughed before she disappeared from sight.

Tasha slumped against whoever it was behind her. As soon as their bodies made contact, she knew. Conaire. "Let's go back tae bed, lass. I seem to have worked up a powerful hunger."

Tasha liked the sound of that. "Hey, I did all the work." She pouted, just because she could.

"Don't worry, lass." MacKay kissed her nose as they both took her hand. "We'll take good care of you."

"But first, I think I should take care of a little weasel." Tasha sighed, stepping back from the warm cocoon of her men's arms. Bending down, she beckoned to the weasel that used to be Angus. She didn't touch it -- it was an animal, after all. "Back to

your usual disagreeable self, Angus the Druid.” Tasha waved in his direction. She really didn’t need to wave, but she liked to. Kind of made her feel a little witchy, like she was on *Bewitched* or something. Conaire rolled his eyes, but Tasha ignored him.

As soon as Angus was back to his short, disagreeable self, both Conaire and MacKay made to move forward, fierce scowls all over their faces. Tasha stopped them with a thought. *If I’m going to be a goddess, I can mete out my own punishments. He may have betrayed both of you, but it was me he intended to harm. It is my right.* They didn’t like it, but they both gave a jerky little nod.

“My... my Lady, I am... I never...” Angus stuttered but didn’t seem to be able to apologize. Probably because the only thing he was sorry about was that Elphame had failed. He wasn’t sorry about what he’d done at all.

Tasha didn’t have to dig very deep but she did go deeper. She wanted to see the thing he hated the most, besides her. Turned out, it was her. Not her specifically, but all women. Although he wasn’t gay, he disdained women -- all women. He saw them as something akin to necessary evils, a man’s burden to bear. She saw how he casually dismissed his love of the Great Mother of Scotland as something outside his chauvinistic attitude.

“I think you need to earn respect for that which you know nothing of,” Tasha whispered more to herself than the man who was beginning to shiver with trepidation.

Quick pleading glances toward Conaire and MacKay showed the man he would be getting no help from that quarter. It didn’t stop him from pleading though. “My Laird Conaire,” he whined. “I kept your castle in perfect repair even though we had no knowledge of when you might return. I have been faithful to your memory, going to the ancient circle every night until you did return. And, my Laird MacKay, have I not served you and your Great Mother faithfully since I joined the order?”

Both Conaire and MacKay shook their heads. Tasha didn’t need to open her eyes to see, it was spread before her like a movie. She was really going to enjoy this goddess thing.

She searched for a fitting punishment for a man such as this one, a man so blinded by his own prejudice he would never see clearly. Death would be too good for him. A lesson might be in order.

"The cycle of life is never-ending. The giving of life is a precious thing," Tasha said in a loud clear voice. "A woman's life is as beautiful as it is heartbreaking, sometimes simple, and sometimes complex." She could feel true fear spiking from the little man she held immobile before her by her will. "You neither care, nor understand what it is to be a woman. I'm going to give you an opportunity to remedy that."

Conaire's amusement and MacKay's shock stroked across her consciousness as well as Angus' absolute horror. "You shall live as a wife and mother for twenty life cycles, from birth to death, throughout the ages, until you once again reach our time. Then you shall stand before me again. After that, if I see you have learned anything, I will pronounce your punishment."

"Pronounce my punishment?" Angus croaked. "Have ye not done this already?"

"Not even close." Tasha smiled. "This curse shall not be lifted; the curse shall never be relieved. Should you even attempt such, you will suffer another twenty cycles with children constantly in your belly and husbands constantly on your back. Back in time you go, to a time where you can fully experience all it is to be a woman." Holding a picture of medieval times in her mind, she projected Angus there as a beautiful blonde, right in the midst of a conquering army. It was cruel maybe, but no one deserved it more.

"Remind me never to piss you off." MacKay shuddered, placing a fleeting kiss on her forehead.

"Aye," Conaire agreed, shaking his head. "'Twas a cruel thing tae do."

"And you would have let him off easier?" she challenged both men, shoving them backward and tapping her foot.

"I was just going tae tear him limb from limb," Conaire answered honestly. "With my bare hands. Then revive him for Mac tae have a go."

“But what you’ve done...” MacKay shivered again. “You’re going to be a perfect goddess.”

## **Shara Azod**

Shara is the first one to admit she is a little off. Her favorite movies are *Steel Magnolias* and *Apocalypse Now*, with a little *Godfather* and *Animal House* thrown in for fun. When not planning to take over the world, she can usually be found having deep and meaningful conversations with her kids about the meaning of life or trying to talk her husband into buying her weapons -- just in case of Armageddon.