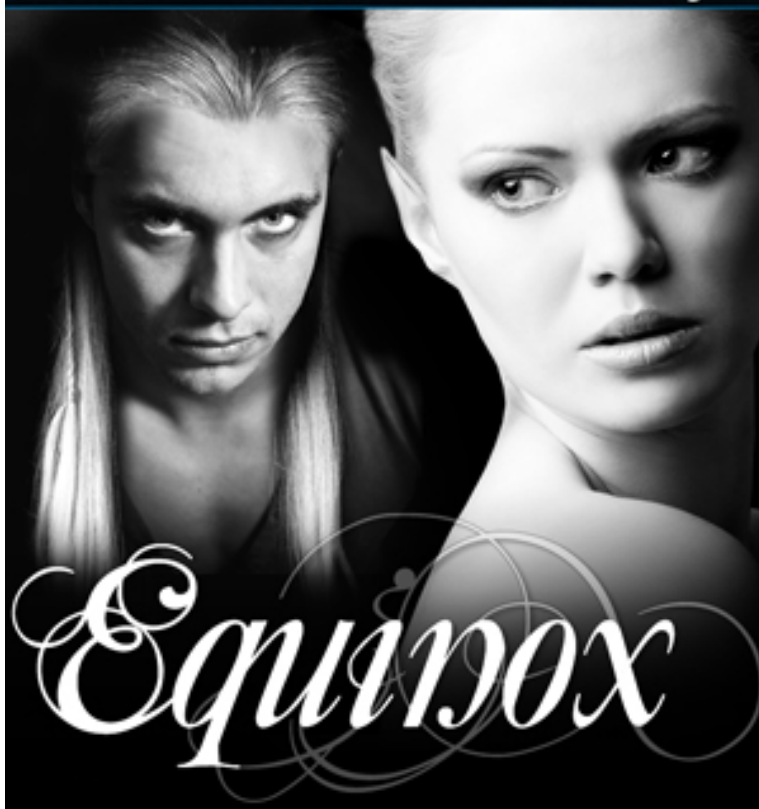


COBBLESTONE PRESS PRESENTS



# WICKED

Terri Pray



*Equinox*

*By*

*Terri Pray*

## Equinox by Terri Pray

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### **Equinox**

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## **Dedication**

To my Sam, now and always

## Chapter One

The leaves were changing. The deep green had shifted to yellow, orange, and a deeper brown, touching the edges of the oak leaves. The flowers were fading. Only the most steadfast, heartiest varieties would dare to put out any new blooms now. And when Morana turned her attention toward the distant fields, she could see farmers gathering the corn, wheat, and other crops. They were always busy this time of year.

She respected farmers, for the most part. They worked hard, tended their crops and animals, and respected the land—at least, that was true for the ones who didn't try every new chemical under the sun. The slow changeover to people wanting more natural foods had helped. The market encouraged farmers to try older, safer methods.

She helped encourage them, too, from time to time. So no one could truly blame her; not if they knew what she was. She shook her head and turned her attention back to the clearing, taking in the subtle changes in the ways the animals now behaved. Squirrels, gophers, and chipmunks scurried around searching for food to store for the colder weather. They burrowed into the earth, building caches, finding holes in the trees to store their supplies. Other animals hunted with a hunger that seemed to know no end, building up the layer of fat they would require for the winter.

It wouldn't be much longer before the earth would be ready for the first full touches of snow. Ah, the snow. She missed it. Even though it would soon be officially autumn, the weather was still too warm for her. Her instincts told her to leave, to return to where the earth was still

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wrapped in the chill of the winter months. To seek out cooler air, a place away from the heat that lingered in the clearing. But her heart had other ideas. It told her to stay, to wait, to endure, and that it would all be worth it.

This was her home, and she knew it well. The high mountains offered her both safety and memories. She'd traveled for weeks to find her way back here, and despite the fact that Somarlier had spent the summer only a few hundred miles away, she'd arrived well before him.

He was always late—which was another reason to either be worried or to tease him when he arrived. Summer fun always dragged at him and kept him by the edge of the ocean, watching humans play in the surf. She knew that would be the reason he was late, but she'd tease him anyway. Isn't that what women did with the men they loved?

Did she love him? *Truly* love him?

*Yes.* Until the last rays of the sun caressed the earth in a final sweep of light, heat, and pain. When that time came, she hoped he would be at her side, holding her, as they watched the earth be reclaimed by the Goddess.

She closed her eyes, her thick lashes brushing her cheeks as she took a deep breath and tasted the change of season in the air. It had become rich, magically-touched, and sensual. Here she would be safe. Here she could tap the magic long enough to spend perhaps four or five days.

*With him.*

This was her time, her world; and for a short time, she would share it with him. Just as she had before and would do so again, as long as they both had the ability to share their magic and protect this place for those few days twice a year.

A few short days among the changing leaves was all they would have for six months, when she would step into his world. A place on the beach, the ocean air caressing the protected cabin. She would be with him long enough to taste the spring before returning to the cooler temperatures that better suited her body. It would take their combined magic to be able to spend even this short amount of time together, but it

was worth it.

It had to be.

Morana shook her head, her long white hair slipping over her shoulders as she looked around the clearing, her gaze lingering on the cottage they'd claimed as their own. Roses climbed around the windows. The lingering flowers, those few that had lasted this long, were white. The first frost would kill them, leaving behind rosehips for the birds, or for those rare few who could see past the protections woven about this place.

Some humans were strong enough, and there was always the risk that one of their own kind, known as immortals, dryads, elves, or spirits, would stumble into this special place. Her lush red lips twitched at the thought. How many names had they been given over the generations?

What they were truly no longer mattered. They would live forever, bound by forces of nature over which they had no control. Forces most human beings ignored. Their lives, their dreams, were tossed this way and that by changes in the world they called home.

They'd been doing this for less than a century. Before humanity had developed means of transportation that permitted them to travel more easily from one end of the globe to the other, both of them had been forced to use their magic to go underground to avoid the change of seasons. So she had one thing for which to thank human kind: They'd brought Somarlier into her life.

Humans had their other uses, of course. She'd taken more than one into her bed over the years, though such liaisons were brief at best and never more than a simple relief for her body, a way to tide her over until she was with him again. The humans' touches and kisses did little more than provide her with a temporary distraction.

Spending too long with one human carried a risk she wasn't prepared to take. Not pregnancy, but something that would bring too much attention to her kind. The coldness that was a part of who she was could kill a human, a mortal, if she stayed with him too long. Each time she made love to one, that human became colder; his heart began to freeze; and his ability to feel faded until he was frozen inside.

A human being couldn't live with a frozen heart.

Her lover was of *her* people, even if he was a summer soul. His kisses, the feel of his hands as they traced down her back—she only had to close her eyes and she could feel his presence; just a memory, but her body thrilled at the image. A blessed coolness washed through her body and pleasure followed in its path as she remembered their meeting. She couldn't be certain how long ago it had been. Keeping track of the seasons was easy; the years as a whole, no. Those she tended to let slip aside.

Soon. He'd be here soon. She just had to be patient.

Morana walked to the cottage, pressing one hand against the wood as she opened the door. Firewood remained stacked in one corner of the large main room, a table sat on the other side, and the fireplace was left clean, with plenty of room around it so they could walk past or he could settle in front of the flames to warm up. A small kitchen, little more than a sink and a few cupboards, was set in an alcove off the main room. Not that they needed to cook, but a human might have complained about the lack of facilities.

The most important feature of the cottage lay through a simple door.

The bedroom.

She brushed her hands down her jeans, wiping off the sweat. Part nerves, part heat, she didn't—couldn't—enter that room until he was here. It might jinx things. What if he didn't arrive this time? He might have found someone else, a woman more suited to his ways, one with whom he could share more than ten days each year. There were others of their kind around, and it made sense that at some point he might meet a woman who could be with him always.

When that happened, would he even send word to her?

Perhaps she was nothing more than what the humans called a *booty call*. The thought left her sweating, heat wrapping uncomfortably around her body until she focused and brought the chill back into her blood, chasing away the warmth.

Hadn't he asked her more than once why she didn't spend her time with another cold dwelling spirit? Perhaps one day she would find someone, but she doubted it. Despite the fact that he was her opposite,



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this man who crossed the world to be with her held her heart.

This man of summer sun and warm breezes, a spirit she should have shunned, turned her back on, or even found a way to destroy—and yet his presence allowed her to feel again. She frowned. Had she really stopped experiencing emotions before he'd walked into her life? For too long, she'd been left with nothing but the chill of the winter air, the ice that surrounded her heart and life. Nothing mattered except the cold, the snow, the winter, until his heated lips had first claimed hers in a kiss.

## Chapter Two

Even within the confines of the Greyhound bus, he could sense the change of seasons. The air was cooler here. Somarlier could feel it in his bones, and a soft shiver worked its way through his body. For anyone else, he'd have laughed, shrugged off the meeting, and gone back to warmer weather instead of lingering in this part of the world as the seasons changed.

He wrapped his arms about his body, holding the jacket close. She had white hair, ice blue eyes, and full, soft lips, and as she writhed beneath him, her smell crisp and cool, welcoming, she eased the flame in his soul, completed him like no other had ever done before—or since.

Had she found the occasional lover amongst their own kind as well?

He had in the first few years, but not for the past twenty. Even before that, they had been few and far between since he had come to know her. His winter queen. Her touch was enough to set his soul afire, and he belonged with her—now and always.

Humans were another matter. Spending time with them didn't mean he was looking for someone else; they were merely interesting opportunities.

Perhaps one day he would come to the clearing, or to the valley where they met during spring, to find she wasn't there. That she'd found a mate who could spend eternity with her, not separated by the seasons, the heat he needed in order to stay alive. Would he be able to cope if she

wasn't there? If she'd found someone else with whom to spend her days and nights? A cold hand closed about his heart, clenching tight as he tried to throw off the image of her in someone else's arms, her lips parted, soft and yielding beneath the touch of...

"Are you all right?" A soft voice broke through his thoughts, and the Greyhound bus jolted him. "You look a little pale."

"I'm fine, thank you." He turned his smile on the raven haired young woman. "I'm just a little nervous."

"About what?" She smiled, her dark eyes sparkling as she licked her lips with the tip of her tongue. Every inch of her body bespoke of sex, promising delight if he were willing to dally with her. "I'm a good listener, or so I've been told."

Every time he made this trip, he observed humans a little more closely, and still it didn't stop him from being curious about them, even after so many years. This one was interested in him and had used the opening to try and become—how did they describe it? Ah yes. *Closer*. The signs were there, the way she licked her lips, the slight arch to her back as she thrust her breasts forward, her nipples hard pips under her tight T-shirt.

"I'm meeting my lover." He let the words slip across his lips in a soft, deep purr.

Disappointment flashed across the woman's face even as she shivered at the sound of his voice. She narrowed her eyes, and tiny lines formed around the corners of her mouth. "I see."

Ah, humans were much too easy to read.

"She and I meet twice a year, our...work commitments keep us from being together full time." He waited for a flash of hope to appear in her eyes, and there it was, right on cue. "So all we ever get is a few days together, perhaps ten a year."

"Twice a year. For ten days? Is that all? I don't know if I could be separated from someone like you for six months at a time. I think it's a little selfish of her to keep you waiting on her career. I'd give up work to—"

"It's a decision we both made." He shook his head, smiling. "It's

the only way it can work between us.”

“And you’re happy with that?” The woman twisted a little more in her seat, the curve of her breast brushing against his upper arm.

“No, but I accept it.” She was a pretty little thing. He could almost hear the thoughts working their way through her mind. If she could get him into bed, then she could show him what a real woman would do, one who didn’t care about her work. Or didn’t, until she needed to show him who was really in charge. Yes, he knew women like this one all too well. Focused on what *they* wanted, when they wanted it, and to hell with how screwed up it left the men in their lives.

Not to say human men didn’t do the same thing.

He’d seen both genders playing the game, but it never ceased to amaze him that a person could be so deceptive with someone who shared their bed.

“So do you—I mean, if you’re so far apart from each other most of the time, how do you cope with *those* needs?” Heat touched the young woman’s cheeks, and her voice dropped to a low whisper. “Don’t you ever cheat?”

“Yes, but she knows about it. Just as I know about the others with whom she spends her time.” Humans paled beside his winter queen, though. They could never make him feel the way she did. Their kisses lacked something, and their bodies, though pleasing, could never match the sheer icy perfection of his beloved.

“So you have an...um...open relationship?”

“That’s one way of looking at it. Yes.”

“I’m not sure I could cope with that. I mean, it’s nice to be able to get laid by someone who takes your fancy, but wouldn’t eventually it leave you a little empty?”

He narrowed his gaze and looked deep into her eyes. She was young, perhaps nineteen or twenty at most, yet her comment made her appear older. Perhaps she wasn’t just an empty headed young woman looking for her next playmate after all.

Interesting.

“Did I say something wrong?” She leaned back in her seat and

fiddled with the end of her belt. “I didn’t mean to offend you, I just thought—well, that what you two do is your business. Not mine.” She shrugged and turned away, dismissing him with a pouty smile.

And there it was—the typical reaction. He was surprised she hadn’t thrown the universal *whatever* at him. A pity. She’d almost shown him a sign of something special, but for now it remained hidden behind a wall of youth, impatience, and the *I’m young and know everything* factor.

He closed his eyes and leaned back in his seat. The trip would be over soon enough. Then he could put the woman and the other human beings on the bus into the back of his mind. Their lives were like flickering candles, easily snuffed out and quickly forgotten.

### Chapter Three

The last rays of the day caressed the trees with a soft orange glow. Fingers of pink and purple streaked the sky, and the clouds were stained with the beauty of the sunset. Morana smiled and leaned against an oak tree, listening to the low whisper of the spirit within it, her gaze never leaving the skyline.

*Soon, he'll be on his way, this one you wait for,* the dryad murmured.

She already knew that, but the words brought a smile to her lips. Yes, he was close now, perhaps down by the road, working his way up the hill. The cabin sat on a ledge-like section of the slope, allowing them to stare out over the valley and yet be safe from potential floods that might ravage a path through the valley. Even with the rage of a spring flood, the waters would never reach this far.

Her cabin, their place, would remain safe.

A crack rang through the trees and she chuckled, turning toward the sound. He wasn't familiar with forests, not the way she was. Beaches, plains, or a palm covered oasis were more his style. The place they used each spring reflected that—a beach, well away from the normal track, and a small beach house, well outfitted and protected from the eyes of the humans by a simple redirection spell.

"Morana." His voice was little more than a whisper, but the breeze carried it to her ears.

She smiled. "I wondered when you would arrive."

"No." He stepped into the clearing, his long blond hair loose about

his shoulders and his sea green eyes sparkling, beckoning her closer. "You wondered *if* I would arrive."

"Something like that." Ah, the doubts. She knew them well. They both did, if he were to be believed. He'd spoken of them a time or two before.

He cleared the distance between them, eating up the ground with long strides. His gaze narrowed on her face and his eyes grew hungry, his lips parting, but not to speak. He wrapped her in his arms and kissed her. His tongue delved into her mouth, stroking gently, claiming her breath and heart afresh. She groaned, wrapped her arms about his neck, and rose onto her toes, pressing herself against his chest. Her nipples hardened under her shirt as she sought to brand him with her love, hunger, and passion.

Her knees went weak, and cold surged through her being. She didn't know where he ended and she began; neither did she care. He slid one hand under her shirt, caressing her form, his nails scraping lightly, leaving teasing hints of pain across her back. She dug her nails into his shoulders and tried not to whimper.

She'd almost forgotten how to breathe when he finally pulled back, looked into her eyes, and smiled.

"I'd almost forgotten how beautiful you are, Morana."

"Somarlier," she whispered, enjoying how his name purred from her lips and rolled through the air. "You're late."

"By less than an hour," he protested, taking a step back.

He looked good in human clothes. Each year they did the same, picking out something fitting from the stores, using their magic to produce the money needed. It gave them a chance to travel with the seasons and hide in plain view. His jeans hugged his hips closely, coating his body like a second skin. His shirt was made of simple black denim, with the first three buttons open, giving her a teasing hint of the skin beneath, tempting her to strip the garment from him so she could lick his chest and taste every inch of him.

*Great Goddess, he does this to me every time.*

"I've missed you." He traced one finger along the line of her jaw.

"The time drags between our days together."

"Ah, and you never find a pretty little summer sprite to help you pass the time? Maybe a human wandering the beaches in need of your loving touch?" A smile twitched at the corners of her lips.

"One of our kind? No, not in some years now—but humans every now and then. There was one on the bus who tried to catch my interest. But even if I hadn't been en route to you, she was too young." He traced a line up into her hair, playing his fingers through the long, silken strands. "She has potential, if she continues to learn and explore ideas beyond the current popular cultural morals. She actually questioned if casual sex would leave me feeling empty after a time."

Morana leaned into his touch, not wanting to talk about the woman on the bus, a woman who'd spent time with him she never could. Buses were kept too warm for her taste, and even a short ride on one had left her ill. Yet she didn't want to silence him, because she was reveling in both his touch and the sound of his voice.

Would he ever know just how deeply he affected her?

"What of your time since we last parted, beloved?" He slid his hand down before settling his arm along her shoulders and guiding her toward the waiting cabin. "Any interesting lovers I should know about? Perhaps you've found one who wiped the memory of my touch from your mind."

"No one could ever do that to me." Even though she knew he was only teasing, his words hurt. She faltered for a moment.

He tightened his grip on her shoulders.

A soft shudder rippled through her body. She belonged here, with him, even if only for a short time. She shook her head, trying to chase away the wave of uncomfortable heat that had wrapped around her heart. *Don't think about the shortness of our time together. Just relax and enjoy it. Enjoy being with him. He's everything you ever wanted, ever needed—so don't let the doubts win.*

"Morana, I know what's going through your mind. I deal with the same thing. The doubts, wondering if this will be the last time we spend together, if you'll find someone else. If humans will stumble upon our



hidden places. I don't want to have this time ruined by doubts. Please don't give in to them."

Could she do that? Shut them down long enough to enjoy the evening?

She had to try.

He walked her into the cabin, closed the door behind them, and traced his hand down her spine before stepping away and going into the main room.

"Kiss me, then," she said. "Kiss me and chase them away."

## Chapter Four

Her beauty stole his breath and robbed him of his ability to think. That she was with him and no one else continued to astound him. She could have chosen any one of their kind. A spirit, an elf, a guardian, or even a dragon, if that was what she truly wanted, and yet she'd told him time and again that she needed to be with *him* and no one else.

Her long white hair, loose and tantalizing, reached down her back. Her ice blue eyes could chill a person's soul to the core, but with him they turned to liquid, matching the color of the ocean on a summer's day. No sun touched her alabaster skin, and her lips were a natural deep red that needed no make-up. She smelled of after-storm sweetness, the mix of fresh and wild all rolled into one, and she tasted of—

"Kiss me, then," she repeated. "Kiss me and chase them away."

He groaned and focused his gaze on her soft, parted lips. Winterberry. They'd tasted like bittersweet winterberries the last time he'd kissed her, but he was eager to drink from them again. He opened his arms, watching as she walked over to him, her sweet body barely hidden in the jeans she'd chosen. Her rounded hips and sweet bottom were well displayed by the denim; her breasts were full and high against the thin white shirt. It would be so easy to tear it from her body, but for now he was content to let her wear it.

She entered his arms and leaned into his touch, her body cool beneath his warm fingers. He pulled her close, edging his legs apart until she nestled between them, stroking his fingers through her hair as he

pressed his mouth to her lips, covering them. He all but groaned as he slid his tongue deep inside her mouth, stroking hers and teasing her inner lips, her trembling body pressed tightly against his.

He could feel each breath she took and the way she tried to meld with him, her fingers tracing down his spine. Her touch was feather light, sending a wave of shivers through his body. He growled, gently, into the kiss, sweeping his hands into her hair, gathering the long, silken, white lengths into his hands, and bringing them up before he dropped them about her shoulders once more.

She was cool, so very cool to the touch. He'd never tire of how she felt in his arms. So different from the heated sprites of his home, but it wasn't just the differences that he loved about her. It was her heart, the way she opened it to him despite her fears, the concerns that he would leave her for another. She had never faltered in sharing her love.

He edged onto the kitchen table, lifted her onto his lap, and twisted until her bottom nestled against his groin. He murmured into her mouth, tracing light patterns over her denim-covered thighs, cupping her ass for a moment, only to return, weaving sensual, delicate patterns over her thighs until she arched, squirming, on his lap, her tight buttocks rubbing his cock. Heat surged through his body, his cock tightening, and pressure slowly building in his sac as it pulled closer to his body. He could hold her for a lifetime and never grow tired of how she felt in his arms.

He had to have her *now*. It had been too long since he had tasted her, felt her body clench on his length, far too long since she had screamed her desire aloud for him, for them both. Damn it, he could almost taste her; the intimate taste of her cream, her desire. She was addictive. Did she even know just how addicted he was to her?

He doubted it. She lacked faith in her abilities, in her beauty. Strange, since she was with an immortal like him, yet she refused to see it.

Had there been someone, long ago, one of her winter people who had spurned her and filled her ears with hateful lies until she'd no longer been able to grasp the truth of her elegant beauty?

*Too much thought and not enough action.*

"I want you." He pulled free of the kiss long enough to give life to

those words. "Now."

"What's stopping you?" She smiled, her gaze soft as she wriggled on his lap, her buttocks tightening as she clenched them, trying to capture the head of his cock through two sets of jeans.

"Too much clothing."

"Then you know what to do, don't you?" She leaned in, nipping at his neck, tracing cool patterns across his skin with the tip of her tongue.

"Yes." He slid her onto the table, standing and seeking out the buttons of her shirt, undoing them, slowly exposing her pale skin. Undressing her was half the fun. Sure, he could have used his magic and banished all of their clothing, but there was something magical about slowly unbuttoning her shirt and peeling back the layers to explore each newly exposed inch of alabaster skin.

He slid his fingers under the edges of her shirt, sliding it from her body and feeling her skin tighten beneath his touch. Her nipples hardened within the lacy, barely-there cups of her bra, threatening to poke through the gaps in the wisp-like creation. He'd never understood why women wore those things, but he growled in delight at the sight she presented.

He eased his hands from her waist, committing each curve to memory as he found the button and fly on her jeans, opening them and tugging the garment down her legs. She kicked off her shoes before he reached for them. He knelt and pulled them free, his nose only inches from her silken mound. A triangular scrap of pale blue silk hid the beauty of her sex, and a thin ribbon-like piece vanished between her buttocks, splitting her firm, rounded ass into two delectable portions.

"You look good on your knees," she teased, a soft chuckle ringing through her words.

"I have plans to put this position to good use." He tugged on the edges of her panties. "But first, these have to go." He snapped them free from her body, and she emitted a soft cry of pain and shock.

He leaned forward, grasped her buttocks, and parted her thighs. Then he edged between them and nuzzled his way to her mound. He growled against the firm bud of her clit, licking over it, tasting her afresh. Power, lust, and hunger flooded his senses. He groaned into her sex,

parting her lower lips until he could bury himself fully between her thighs and lick at the small, throbbing nub of flesh.

Morana whimpered, pressed her hands against the table, and rested the edge of her bottom against the wood. "I-I've forgotten just how good that feels."

He smiled into her sex. Good. She hadn't found anyone else to touch her in this way, or at least this well. He pressed one finger into her sex, shuddering in hunger as her inner walls gripped his finger, working on it, her hips rolling, pressing toward him, urging him to do more, so much more.

But was she ready?

He nibbled on her clit, flickering his tongue over the trapped nub, rolling it in his mouth until she caught her breath. Her low gasp told him her body was ready for more, so much more. Her cream coated his lips and he swallowed it, tasting it, tasting *he* as he smiled and lapped at her clit, seeking more.

She tangled her fingers in his hair, holding him close to her mound as he delved his tongue and fingers deeper into her sex. She groaned above him and arched her back, her thighs taut, as each jolt of pleasure he brought to life within her body twitched through her hips. Then she screamed out, her cool cream flooding his mouth.

He finally pulled away from her, standing and reaching for his clothing, only to have her slap his hands away and shake her head.

"No. My turn."

## Chapter Five

Morana's thighs shook, and blessed cold washed through her body as she looked at Somalier and slapped at his hand. Did he really believe she was going to pass up the chance to strip him and enjoy his body the same way he'd done with her?

His lips glistened with the taste of her passion. His cheeks were flushed, and his sea green eyes sparkled with his eagerness to see what else she would do.

"I've missed your taste."

"Now it's my turn, isn't it?" She grinned, tugging his shirt out of his jeans. "Or don't you want me to strip you and see just what you have hiding under here?"

"Tease."

"Always." She laughed, shaking her head, the centuries falling away from her shoulders. He did this to her—turned back the years so she could forget how old she truly was, how she'd seen the dawn of the Earth, the birth of mankind, and everything since. With him, she felt young, complete, and hungry beyond all reason.

The buttons on his shirt parted easily as she worked it from his body. The material was soft, almost suede-like, a sensual delight beneath her touch. Her breath hitched as she looked at his chest. He had sculpted muscles, yet he was slender, with a swimmers build, as he had once called it, and she could imagine him cutting through the waves, parting them with long, firm strokes as he swam out toward the setting sun.

She leaned forward and pressed her lips against his smooth chest. No hairs, not even a hint of them, were present to tickle her nose. Morana smiled at the taste of his sweat, the heat rolling from his delicious form. With anyone else, the heat would have told her to stay away, to keep clear of him. For even if they could have found a way to tolerate the weather for more than a few days at a time, the differences in their body temperatures would have eventually forced them apart.

His heat ran the risk of being extinguished by her cooler body, and there would always be the chance that she might melt or overheat simply by being with him. Even during these few days together, they would have to take some time apart. A few hours here and there, to allow their bodies time to recuperate.

It was worth it.

She took hold of his shoulders, turning him around until his back was to the table before dropping to her knees. Out of all the men she had ever known, he was the only one she had ever knelt to, for any reason. She eased off his boots, vaguely aware that they were western style, or *cowboy* boots, as one person had called them, and tossed them aside.

"I wonder if you'll ever know just how beautiful you are," he whispered.

A chill touched her cheeks, and she was all too aware of the flush of pale blue that chased across her face, crept down her neck, and slid over her partially-covered breasts. "No, I'm not."

"I should spank you for that."

She blinked, staring up at him as she opened the button on his jeans. "Only if you want to spend the next few days sitting in the middle of a block of ice." His laughter eased the fear from her heart. He was just teasing. He'd never truly harm her. She leaned forward, nipping at the tented jeans close to his cock. "Well, you'd better remember that I bite, scratch, and claw. So if you try to spank me, you'll be well marked before you ever lay a single swat on me. Then will come the ice prison."

"You're a wicked woman."

"Yes, and you love me for it." She grinned, tugging the denim down his thighs, her gaze drawn to his thick, eager, and very naked cock.

He wore no underwear.

Her inner walls tightened at the sight of him, and thanks to the knowledge that he hadn't put on anything else. How odd. Why did that affect her? Why did it even matter?

Morana pressed a delicate kiss on the head of his cock, grinning when it twitched. She leaned forward, capturing it between her lips, tasting the salt and heat that coated his erection. She groaned into it, wrapping her tongue around his silky, smooth skin, teasing the slit as she tasted him. He groaned, pressed his hips forward against her lips, and slid his cock deeper into her mouth.

She cupped his balls. Heavy and tight, they pressed close to his body, and she knew he was ready to explode. It wouldn't take long—but unlike so many human males, he'd be ready again within minutes. She smiled around his cock, taking him in to the hilt, stroking his length with her tongue, and suckling on him, as her hand gently massaged his balls. One finger pressed behind his sac, massaging that tender spot as he lifted onto his toes and cried out.

A small surge of delight touched her tongue. It was heady and salty. She suckled a little more on the head of his cock, swallowing his taste and rubbing her finger firmly behind his balls. Each beat of his heart pulsed through his cock, and her own sex rippled in response.

She pulled back and looked up at him. His long blond hair fell over his shoulders as he tipped back his head, closed his eyes, and rolled his hips toward her. She lapped over the head of his cock, teasing him, watching his hips twitch with each light touch. She knew what he wanted, and his white knuckles told her just how hard it was for him to control himself.

"Is there something you want?" she murmured against his cock.

"You know what I want, wench."

"Do I? Ah, I never knew mind reading was one of my gifts." She tapped lightly on the tender spot behind his balls, and he gasped for air. Her slightest touch was enough to leave him groaning for more. "But perhaps I can think of something to ease your discomfort. Perhaps a dip in the river? It's not far, and it might ease your tension."



He growled, the sound ringing out through the air. "You're an evil woman, a terrible spirit, and I love you for it. But if you don't return your mouth to my cock soon, I swear I'll—"

"Explode?"

"Something like that." He groaned, shuddering for breath. "Please, love."

She nodded, a soft smile touching her lips as she re-captured the head of his cock with her lips. He cried out in delight, thrusting forward, his cock filling her mouth. Her inner walls clenched, rippling in need. She needed something from him; although she'd already experienced one beautiful wave of release, her body now craved so much more.

She suckled his cock, pulling it deeper inside, letting him fill her cool confines, knowing that he shuddered with delight and hunger. His erection throbbed in her mouth, filling it, the taste of him almost more than she had expected. Heady and strong, and she knew he was close. He slid his hands into her hair, his movements soft and tender as he thrust into her, fucking her mouth, barely controlling his hunger as he sought the sensual delights she offered.

"I'm going to come. Please, Goddess, have mercy!"

He growled fully, his hips pressing forward, his desire filling her mouth in thick ropes that she swallowed, hungry for every ounce of passion he contained. Her inner walls rippled, cool need coating them, her thighs taut as she licked his cock clean and looked up at him.

Peace claimed his face. His eyes were closed; his long lashes, gently caressing his cheeks. He was so beautiful. He needed a woman with him always—not just twice a year—and not a woman who could kill him if they spent too much time together.

But for now, the Goddess had granted her this time with him, to feel his love, his touch. For now, they belonged together.

## Chapter Six

Small candles flickered along the mantle. They gave out little more than small circles of light, but it was enough. At least for now. His hunger for her touch hadn't died, yet it had faded for a little while. He controlled it with every breath. Yes, he wanted so much more from her, but not yet. No, not yet. Their bodies needed time to recover. She was weary; they both were.

The scent of her crisp, clean perfume filled the cabin. He wanted to wrap her in his arms, but the touch of her cool skin had almost been too much. He could have died from the pleasure of the mix of pain and pleasure of her mouth on his cock. That was a risk they always took. Either his life, or hers, could be snuffed out from what they did.

There were few ways their kind could die. Yet the conflicting elements, the magic they carried within their souls, could be strong enough to destroy each other. But he could not imagine life without her, without these few brief days together.

"You're thinking too deeply again, my love." Her soft voice broke through his thoughts, and he turned to look at her. The candles outlined her with shadows, and her body was displayed through the long, thin cotton garment she wore; her breasts high, her nipples dark against the cloth. She'd pulled the shift from a small bag she'd brought with her, and he decided it suited her.

His hands itched with the desire to rip it from her, however, to expose her firm body to his view. She was ancient, like him. They had

both seen the world form, grow strong, and then change around them, forcing their people into hiding once humanity decided their kind was either evil or didn't exist.

Now, views were changing.

Some were turning back to the old ways and leaving gifts for his people. Offering prayers, seeking the magic—but did they truly understand it?

No, and perhaps they never would.

But at least some of them tried, and he saw glimmers of hope in their kind. Like the unnamed woman on the bus. She had shown some level of understanding. Perhaps she'd sensed he had something with his Morana that she could not quite grasp.

"Somarlier?" She brushed her fingers over his cheek. "Don't leave me. Not like this, please. I wouldn't give you up to another right now."

"Not even my thoughts?"

"Especially not those. They are unseen, hidden within you. How can I fight them?" She brushed a kiss against his lips. "Stay with me and not with your thoughts, my heart."

\* \* \* \* \*

Shadows passed over Somarlier's eyes even after he agreed to not let his thoughts claim him, but Morana fought them. He had to be able to focus on her, on what they had together.

He slipped his hand over her breasts, cupping them and teasing her nipples with his thumb. She belonged with him, needed to be with him. Her breath caught in the back of her throat, a low whimper filling the room. She pressed against his touch, her eyes drifting closed. Each moment they stole together was worth the pain of the other's apposing nature. Fire and ice clashed with each touch they shared. But she embraced the pain, welcoming it as it surged through her body. Her nipples hardened, as though they might burst if he didn't suckle them soon.

Trembling, she curled her fingers in his hair, trying to keep her

emotions from taking control. She needed to remain focused. They hadn't recovered enough from the last time. He still hurt, she ached, and now his touch threatened to have her crying out, demanding that he fuck her here and now.

Would it be so bad if she gave in?

She could channel some of her magic into shielding her body, into hiding the cold deep within. He might do the same and...

She gasped as he kissed her neck and nibbled on her tender flesh. His heated tongue stroked over her throat, teasing across her pulse. She tightened her grip on his hair and held him close. She needed this; they both did. Her body throbbed with cool delight at each soft caress of his tongue.

"You like this, don't you?"

"Yes," she said, the word little more than a low hiss.

He purred against her damp flesh. "We should wait."

"Yes, we should."

"But?"

"I don't want to."

"Nor do I." He suckled hard on her neck, bringing a painful warmth to the surface as she cried out, caught between pain and sheer delight. She whimpered when he moved away and slipped free of her grasp, taking her by the hand and leading her to the bedroom.

She should have told him no, pulled back, and found a way to give them both more time to recover, but she craved him with her heart, body, and soul. And perhaps they had waited long enough—it had been a couple of hours, maybe two, since they'd made love. Yes, enough time had passed.

*I need to just let it happen.*

He tugged the thin material off her body, tossing it to the floor before he pushed her to the bed, nibbling on her shoulders as he settled next to her. He kicked free of his shorts, and his warm body pulled the cold from her form.

No more words were said.

He leaned over her, capturing one nipple between his teeth,

pressing lightly, holding it as he licked the trapped nub. She groaned, arched her back, and grasped at the bedding beneath them. She shivered, desire fighting back against the wave of warmth that radiated from him. The cloth caught between her fingers, and her thighs parted as she silently pleaded with him to slip between them.

He ignored her plea and lapped over her nipple, tasting her skin, teasing her with soft, tiny licks before he tugged the trapped nub fully into his mouth, suckling hard. Her breasts grew taut, his sucking pulling desire across her breasts, rippling it down into her body. He smoothed one hand over her, playing a light pattern across her tight belly, but never quite touching her, never reaching into her nest of curls.

Why wouldn't he touch her there?

She groaned and pressed her heels into the bedding, her muscles tight, knotting as she whimpered. No, she wouldn't speak. She wasn't about to ruin their time together by getting into a discussion about their needing to wait, having to take their time, or giving them a chance to recover.

She tightened her buttocks. Her nipples throbbed, and her clit ached for his touch. Still, he didn't reach for anything else on her body. She whimpered, untangling her fingers from the bedding and reaching for him, scraping her nails lightly over his upper arms as she tried to pull him on top of her. But he just chuckled, shaking his head and refusing to move.

She growled, trying to force him, the hardened length of his cock throbbing against her thigh, teasing her with his presence. Why wouldn't he shift?

Fine. *She'd* take control.

She searched for her magic, grasping it and using it to fuel her body. Without warning, she tangled one leg around him, rolling them both, using her leg to hook him and carry him with her, moving him without warning until he lay flat on his back and she'd straddled him. His eyes flashed a warning, but she didn't care.

She wanted him. Now.

He growled, shook his head, and bared his teeth, but she wasn't

ready to listen to him. She lifted up, brushing her swollen lips over the head of his cock, and shuddering at the feel of his heat as it threatened to sear her soul. She thrust down onto his erection, taking him deep within her. Heat and cold clashed. Pleasure, pain, and pressure merged in an eruption of delight.

“Morana—”

She pressed her fingers against his lips, silencing him with a curt shake of her head. No, she wasn’t going to discuss it. Her inner walls tightened on his cock. She rolled her hips, circling it, trying to ignore the clash of temperatures. Her clit ached, and her breasts grew heavy. She craved his touch, his fingers brushing over her body, but he merely stared at her from the bed, blinking in shock at what she was doing.

She tipped her hips, rocking down on him, and the shock changed into desire as he arched under her. He reached out for her breasts, rubbing his fingers over them, teasing her nipples, taunting them with light strokes until she whimpered on top of him. She slid one hand between her thighs, tapping her clit, and his gaze became fevered as he realized what she was doing.

She clenched her thighs on either side of his hips, and her finger grew slick as she slipped it over her clit, her tight walls rippling on his erection. It stretched her walls as she groaned, dancing down on him. He pinched both nipples, rolling them between his fingers as she groaned, rocking her hips on his cock. Each breath burned her lungs, the cold being chased from her body as she rejoiced in his stretching her core.

Somarlier pressed upward and dug his heels into the bedding, his body tight under hers. His fingers tightened on her nipples, and small shards of pain flashed through her breasts. Cool delight slid through her body, chasing away the heat that had threatened to consume her.

Liquid desire coated her inner walls as her body rocked on his, her thighs clamped tightly on either side of his body. She danced slowly on his cock and tipped her head back, her finger sliding over her clit, circling it as pressure built in the pit of her being. Small beads of ice formed on her body, glittering across her flat belly and sparkling on her breasts. Still, she rolled her hips, grasping his erection within her slick core.

Soon. So very soon.

"Please..." It took her a moment to realize she'd uttered the word. Seeing the flames shift over his gaze, his eyes wide, with sweat beading across his body, she trembled. Each of them were lost within the throws of their desires; passions that merged and flared, threatening to swamp each other until they rode the shared wave.

"Now!" he shouted, bending his knees, pressing against the bedding, and lifting her half off the bed. "Come for me now!"

What other choice did she have?

She closed her eyes, and a scream ripped from the back of her throat. Her lips parted as she pressed down on him, her inner walls tight, claiming him, her body pierced by his, her fingers slick with her own cream. And still she tipped her hips, her bottom tightening as his cock thickened within her walls. Passion pulsed through him, filling her sex and pushing her closer to the edge, only moments after the first wave of ecstasy had claimed her being.

Her body wouldn't stop, her hips rolling with each new wave of delight. She knew it was dangerous; she knew she had to stop, but couldn't. She just couldn't. Heat surged through her, her hands sweating, the ice crystals melting on her body, dripping down her breasts and belly. Her head swam, and her thighs trembled. She couldn't keep her focus.

"Beloved?" His voice barely registered as she slipped into the darkness of her own mind.

## Chapter Seven

Somarlier twisted the cloth, watching water drip into the bowl before spreading the cool cloth across Morana's forehead. They'd pressed too far this time. He should have known that what they were doing was dangerous, but he'd allowed himself to be entranced by the moment. By her touch, the beauty of what they'd shared together.

Now, she had paid the price. He'd moved the minute she'd collapsed. Pain had wracked his body even as he'd lifted her onto the bed and opened the windows to let the cool evening breeze into the room. She'd become overheated. Her skin had been flushed instead of pale. He brushed the backs of his fingers lightly over her cheek, checking to see if she was cooling down, and he breathed a sigh of relief.

She wasn't as cool as she needed to be, but she was much cooler now.

*Don't die on me. Please, don't die on me, my love.*

No, she wouldn't die. She'd live. They both would. They belonged together, if only they could learn to control their passions. If they'd waited just a little longer, then perhaps she wouldn't have collapsed.

*And beating myself up about this is going to do what?*

Good point. She'd recover. She was already looking better, but was their passion worth the risk?

*Of course it is, or we wouldn't do it. We wouldn't take the risks. She needs this; she wants it as much as I do.*

That wasn't the point, though. Needing it didn't mean taking



foolish risks.

"You're still lost in thought, my Summer King." Her voice was low, soft, and trembling, lacking the cool strength he was used to hearing from her. "You look so worried."

"I am. You collapsed on me." He dipped the cloth into the bowl of water, wringing it out before placing it back on her forehead. "You're still too hot, although you're better than you were."

"I'll be fine. I just need to rest a little longer," she murmured. She made no attempt to sit up. "I couldn't stop. Each time I moved, I could feel you buried within me. It felt so right, I ignored the pain. I shut it out and kept on pushing myself further, higher. The pleasure, love—I've never known such pure pleasure as I did in that moment."

"I should have made you stop."

"We both needed it, despite the risks. We needed it, and I—I wouldn't have changed how things turned out. I'll recover soon enough. I just need to rest and let my temperature return to normal."

He shook his head, leaning back in the chair at the side of the bed. She was a stubborn, headstrong woman, but he loved her for it. Still, it didn't mean that he wanted to see anything happen to her. Dying from sex sounded amusing, but it didn't mean he wanted to see it happen to either of them.

He raked his gaze over her, taking in each inch of her beautiful body. Her long, silver white hair spilled over her breasts and spread around her face on the pillow. Her grace was undeniable, and her courage was greater than that of any woman he had ever known. With her high cheekbones, full lips, and ice blue eyes, she would give even the most beautiful human woman a run for her money. But it was the beauty of her heart, mind, and soul that attracted him the most.

Her body temperature was slowly returning to normal. The cold had begun to radiate from her, and that knowledge brought him some measure of relief. The last thing he wanted or needed was to see her sick. His heart had twisted as he'd tended her closely. Now the soft blue tinge had returned to her cheeks, her gaze had returned to normal, and she had regained her focus.

"I don't know what I'd do if I lost you."

"You'd find another. Someone to spend time with, perhaps one you could be with throughout the seasons." Her gaze softened and she looked away, tears slipping from her eyes to form ice crystals on her cheeks. "It would be better for you. Our kind shouldn't be alone."

His heart clenched, a band of steel wrapping itself tightly about his heart, his breath catching in the back of his throat. He reached out, turning her face toward him again, searching her eyes, looking into her soul as he struggled to find a way to tell her how he felt. "I don't think you understand me, love."

"I just don't want you to be alone. Is that so wrong of me?"

"But I'm not alone. I carry you with me, in my heart, no matter where my journey takes me. I can feel you there, a part of who I am, from now until the end of time."

"You can't mean that." Her eyes lit up, and tiny sparkling jewels of ice glimmered at the corners of her shining orbs.

"Oh, but I do. I've always known it. Ever since we first met. It's why I can't spend much time with others of our kind. They aren't you. They'll never be you. I can have sex with them, but never truly make love to them."

For a moment, she didn't speak. Ice crystals sparkled on her skin, and a soft blue flush worked its way across her cheeks. She swallowed hard and slipped her hand into his. Even this brief contact brought with it a light touch of pain as their natures conflicted.

"Somarlier, you can't—I mean, one day you'll..."

He shook his head and pressed one finger lightly against her lips.

"No. I've had long enough to think about this. I've tasted the temptations offered to me and come away from those meetings feeling sated but empty. I've made my choice, and I don't regret it. I'll carry you in my heart until the day the earth dies. Now, listen to me and understand. We'll find a way to be together. There's an answer out there somewhere. A way we can beat this and not be subjected to the whims of the weather, the seasons, and our own bodies. I don't care if it takes an eternity. I'll find a way to be at your side."

## Epilogue

Morana stood in the breeze, her eyes closed as cool air teased her body, wrapping her in the delights of the evening. Here, at least, she could think straight away from Somarlier's touch. His presence drove her insane with wanting him. They were trapped in a potentially fatal addiction and...

She was letting doubt spoil things again. She shook her head and opened her eyes, looking out over the valley. She could spend the rest of her life here, with him. Watching the changes in the world around them, enjoying each others' touches, and perhaps, one day, finding a way to control their magic instead of being controlled by it.

*Love. I know he loves me, and I love him. What's wrong with accepting that fully?*

Because they couldn't be together, except for short periods of time, and even then it would be months before they could be together again. Three days had already been spent, and the seasons were pulling them apart. The air was growing cooler, which meant Somarlier wouldn't be able to stay much longer, and the drive to seek the true cold of the mountain tops had become almost unbearable for Morana.

Her body craved Somarlier's touch and her heart acknowledged his presence, but pain came from the knowledge that they would soon part. Morana blinked, fighting back the tears that threatened to claim her. She wouldn't cry, not yet; not until she knew she was alone. She wasn't about to spoil their last remaining night together.

## Equinox by Terri Pray

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*Another day, maybe two. Would that be too much for which to ask?*

Yes, unless they both wanted to die. She had seen how the cooler temperatures had begun to affect him. They were slowing him down. His reactions were sluggish, and yet it was still too warm for her here.

She turned back toward the cabin, knowing he was waiting for her. He always cooked for them on their last evening, taking time to prepare a meal they could both enjoy, waiting on her hand and foot as he soaked in each moment they shared together.

Once more night was all they dared risk.

It was all the change of seasons would permit, until an answer could be found.

### **Author Bio**

Originally from England, Terri Pray now lives in Iowa with her husband and their two children. The couple's shared love of role-playing games brought them together via the Internet. They continue to indulge in their passion for games and look forward to their first joint release of a D6 RPG in 2009.