



Faerily Imperfect Series

Mind F*cked

Mia Watts

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A Faerily Imperfect Story

By Mia Watts

Resplendence Publishing, LLC

<http://www.resplendencepublishing.com>

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Edgewater, Florida, 32132

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Copyright © 2009, Mia Watts

Edited by Courtney Hoffman

Cover art by Rika Singh

Electronic format ISBN: 978-1-60735-078-1

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Electronic release: October 2009

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

To Christine Allen-Riley who is my soul's twin. My one and only, tree-hugging, orb-searching, cop-terrifying, neighborhood-flashing, goddess of awesome. My life would not be the same without you in it. I need to move to Michigan to catch some of it live and in person

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Chapter One

Stunned by erotic mental whiplash, Sage Harper jerked as though he'd actually been slammed against the white bathroom tile for a quickie.

Oh, shit. Here we go again.

Cool water scooted soap bubbles off his hands. Sage turned off the faucet and searched the mirror spanning the men's room for the culprit. Five open doors, one slightly ajar, and three unattended urinals reflected back. Images of hands clawing at Sage's shirt and his belt buckle rattling to his ankles came to him in rapid-fire succession. The suggestion of climate-controlled air tickled the hairs on his body as though he stood completely naked in someone's fantasy.

Sage grabbed a paper towel, jerkily wiped his hands and threw the wadded paper into the garbage. *The prick has to be in here somewhere.* Only proximity and the frequency of heightened emotion could transmit an image this realistically.

"Hello?" Sage called.

Invisible fingers tugged at his cock. The magic was strong. It bounced off the walls and magnified back at him. He closed his eyes, trying not to be distracted by the filmy layer of fantasy that washed his human vision.

The slap of hand wetly sliding on cock and accompanying grunts led him to the last stall. Sage pushed open the already ajar stall door. A young blond man with a hoodie leaned against the wall, his eyes closed, getting off to the fantasy in his head. The fantasy he projected to Sage unwittingly.

It was Sage's *gift*, bestowed through the trickery of faeries on the children born of a mortal and faery union. Half-breeds taunted with their partial birthright. A half-gift for a half-breed. As abilities went, it had been fun when he first hit puberty, but the appeal died within the first year.

Fucking sex-crazed lunatics inhabited the mortal world.

Without intimately knowing Sage's form, the young man's lust invented a cock and a body. Sage tipped his head, arms folded across his chest. "Well, as fantasies go, that one's interesting, but I don't have a tattoo of a cowboy riding the base of my cock."

The blond looked up sharply. His eyes widened as he saw the object of his desire before him, then rolled back in ecstasy on a loud groan. The young man pumped harder. "Suck it. Suck it."

Fantasy Sage's lips morphed into a Hoover attachment.

Sage sighed with annoyance. What kind of stupid-ass faery gave him the ability to see inside another person's mind during moments of elevated tension, and then blessed him with the physical appeal most mortals couldn't resist?

A perverted one, that's who.

"Wake the fuck up, moron. You're jacking off in a bank at midday. I know you're young, but control yourself." Sage glowered at the blond.

"Dude? You're here? Oh, God, I'm coming," the blond panted.

"I see that. But could you have some respect for yourself and not shoot your wad in public? For fuck's sake, keep your sessions in your home where I can be far enough away that I don't have to see them."

"Or me," a warm masculine voice agreed.

Sage turned abruptly to face the newcomer. Fuck. With Sage's luck, it would turn into a virtual threesome.

"Although," the man shrugged. "He's got pretty good technique for a kid barely out of high school."

Sage smiled. "We could give him tips."

Why the fuck had he just said that? He eyed the other man curiously, turning his back on the budding porn-star.

The newcomer's brows rose in amusement and humor twinkled in the depths of his moss-green eyes. A moment passed. Sage saw nothing. *Nothing*. Considering that since puberty, he'd never been in the presence of another person and not seen a detailed vision of *some* daydream or another, the difference was shocking.

The man's smile faded, dimming the light in his eyes. Sage waited for a vision that didn't

happen.

“Well, have a good day,” the other man said. He turned toward the wall of urinals.

The sounds of the youth behind him streaking toward orgasm brought a weary sigh to Sage’s lips. He didn’t bother to look back. He was more interested in the man who thought nothing of him at all.

It wasn’t until Sage stood immediately behind him, while the man tucked himself away, that Sage realized he felt vaguely disappointed.

The man turned sharply. “Can I *help* you?”

“You don’t want to fuck me?” Sage asked incredulously. The words hit the air and Sage grimaced. “That didn’t come out like I expected.”

“Really?” he drawled. He yanked his zipper with a harsh rasp and leveled Sage with a deadpan look of mild-irritation. “You mean that’s why I’m standing at a urinal pissing? I secretly wanted some stranger to come along and take it as a hint? Gee, and all these years I’ve been dangling my cock over the wrong receptacle.”

He brushed past Sage for the washbasins, shooting him a mirrored warning to stay back.

Sage had an appointment anyway. He shook off the feeling of absolute stillness projecting from the other man and exited the men’s room.

Ten fifty-six. Sage had four minutes to reach Mr. Glassman’s office. He crossed the wide expanse of marble floor to the teller. Her eyes clouded as Sage fended off another round of projected lust. She slipped him her telephone number in between rushed breaths, and pointed toward the security protocol office.

This was why he worked nights. Alone. And broke into empty buildings with nothing more erotic than his tool case and small arsenal of technology. Normally, his youngest sister, Willow, managed the daytime appointments. Today she had insisted there was something to address in the faery world.

Sage squared his shoulders and strolled to the back wall of mirrors. The clever decoration served several purposes. Not only did it have the darker sheen of one-way reflection, but it also housed the security protocol department. In a bank, with the open floor plan this one had, the promise of being viewed was psychologically reinforced as well.

Decoration, practicality and psychological impact. He could appreciate the economy in the interior design. Someone in security had his or her thinking cap on. Good. It meant Sage had

a smaller likelihood of dealing with security morons.

He tapped the inset door and heard the muffled buzz of an electrical release. Pushing the panel, it swung inward to an area running the length of the main floor. It should have felt claustrophobic with industrial grade gray carpet and too-bright fluorescent lighting, but it didn't.

Quality grade one-way separated them from the business area, making the long, narrow room feel as though it opened to the rest of the bank. Cameras faced the window like regular electronic eyes, keeping careful watch on the customers only feet away.

A dark haired cutie blinked widely at him. He caught a flash of pink ballerina slippers, bared ass, sweat-matted hair and a tinny, panting echo of her internal rutting montage before he stepped back from her counter to lessen the effect of his curse on the woman.

She licked her lips. "Mr. Harper, Mr. Glassman is expecting you in observation room one." She pointed a slim, trembling finger toward a door on his far right.

"Thank you," he said, striding abruptly toward the back corner.

* * * *

Joe Glassman stood before nine monitors. Sage Harper's sexy smile translated as a grainy black line set in sculpted features. He commanded a room, and it hadn't gone unnoticed on Joe's part that Sage seemed completely aware of it. Having seen that smile up close, the memory of it even poorly represented on the screen did nothing to still the flutter of anticipation in his belly.

Sage disappeared from camera. Joe listened, kept his back to the door. A matter of seconds passed when Joe heard the knuckle tap and called for the security contractor to come in. Joe prepared himself to face the dark, haughty sex appeal of the man he'd first encountered in the men's room. Sage turned him on and Joe didn't appreciate it one bit. Guys like Sage used guys like Joe for sex. Hadn't Sage all but proved that in the men's room?

"If you can keep your dick in your pants long enough, I'd like to show you our set up. You come highly recommended in your field. It's the only reason I'm giving you a shot at this contract," Joe said. He turned, keeping his expression neutral.

"You're Mr. Glassman?"

"One of two," Joe said, sliding his hands into his front pockets. "Neither of us wants to fuck you."

Which was a lie. Joe wanted to because Sage was a god among men, but since Joe required more than a fine ass and a pretty face, a fuck would only serve to satisfy his curiosity.

And his hard-on.

Sage's tanned complexion deepened a few shades. "I'm really sorry about that. I'd explain, but there's really nothing I can say to make that situation more palatable."

"No, there isn't," Joe agreed.

"I'd like to start over." Sage's lips pulled into an awkward smile. Uncertainty tightened his eyes, but he thrust out his hand and walked over to Joe.

Joe extended his hand and clasped Sage's. Warm, dry, and large, Sage's palm rubbed deliciously against Joe's. He had a moment where he thought he heard Sage suck in a sharp breath, but when Joe met his gaze, Sage's lips were pressed firmly together and his face writ with confusion.

"I spoke to Willow Harper about this meeting. I assumed she'd be here."

"My sister is away," Sage said carefully. "You'll have to do me instead. I mean, *work* with me instead."

Joe felt his throat close. Seemed all Sage could think about was his next fuck. "Are you going to continue with the double-speak, or can we get down to business?"

"I'm sorry. I'm not comfortable around people. That's why Willow normally handles the business negotiations." The contractor shook his head in apparent confusion and released Joe's hand.

"For the record, you need to stick with Willow next time. Reschedule. Most potential clients would have you up on harassment charges by now. Take it as a warning."

Sage nodded. He seemed to be biting his lips together, afraid to speak. If that's what it took to get through the meeting without more sexual references, Joe was all for offering him some superglue. Sage's innate confidence and sex appeal were even *more* appealing with every indication that his current state of insecurity was foreign.

It knocked at Joe's defenses. *He doesn't understand why I'm not taking him up on his offer. That's all. Use his arrogance to maintain your professional distance.*

"This is observation room one. These cameras patrol the perimeter of the bank. Monitors one, two, and three are on a circuit with two cameras each. They blink between the two sectors every forty-five seconds."

"Where's the guard who monitors these screens?" Sage asked.

"I'll call him in when we're done here. I felt the situation of our first meeting required

some delicate discussion. I won't have the second guard step out when we go to the next observation room." Joe looked at him pointedly.

Sage's shoulders went rigid. Joe jerked his head once to acknowledge the unspoken warning that he not say anything remotely sexual.

"This panel on the right monitors all the alarms and sensors on peripheral doors." Joe motioned toward the lights of the inboard computer. "We are set up with alarms that go directly to the local police department."

Guys like Sage are screw 'em and lose 'em types. He'd do his job, do you and leave you wanting more.

Joe motioned to the door. "Let's go to observation room two."

Don't look at his ass. Don't look at his ass. Don't—aw, shit. I'm a moron.

"Dante, please take your post," Joe directed the man who leaned over the cute brunette's counter.

"Yes, sir." Dante rushed to his post and shut the door behind him.

"This way," Joe told Sage.

The second room, next to the first, was staffed, and Joe preferred it that way. Better *not* to be alone with Sage, who still seemed to be biting his lips with almost painful determination.

Joe opened the door. He stepped aside to let Sage enter first. Sage's shoulder rubbed Joe's chest as he passed. The contact made him both hot and cold at the same time.

It's going to be a long day.

* * * *

"This is our second observation room. The bay of monitors and alarms are the same set up, we just have more of them," Joe said.

From where Sage was standing, Joe seemed to have no problem ignoring him. He noted the ten miniature televisions, five which flashed between two views, and the other five stationary, but capable of choosing which view to display.

"They're your internal set," Sage said quietly. He picked his words with care and concentration. He'd never experienced anything like what Joe did to him, but Sage wasn't accustomed to blurting out anything. Around Joe, Sage felt compelled to reveal his thoughts. It took real effort to arrange his words into safe topics and then speak about only those things.

Not seeing Joe's thoughts, not knowing if Joe envisioned *anything* about him, had Sage

breaking a cool sweat.

He wanted to get closer to Joe and try again. Proximity strengthened Sage's abilities. The guard hadn't turned around, hadn't seen Sage. The small room left an eerie imprint without the usual visions Sage had which should have ghosted over the real life moments like a projected movie without a screen. A growling stomach filled the short silence.

Sage wanted to get closer but he also didn't. Closer meant the temptation to blurt shit out grew stronger too. "I don't know what you're thinking," he said absently.

"Excuse me?"

Sage tried again, tried hard to pick the words he wanted to say not the ones that scrambled to his parted lips for freedom. *Think. What's your job? Why are you here? Right.* "I can already see areas for improvement, but why now? What is the urgency for the timeline?" *Good job, Sage.*

Joe's expression grew thoughtful. He seemed to look through Sage before blinking and squinting at him. Assessment. Sage almost thrilled that he recognized it. He didn't need to see the projection, he should have seen it, but hadn't. Still, Sage knew Joe *assessed* him and it gave him a strange measure of relief.

"Do I need an excuse to secure a bank?" Joe asked.

"You had Willow push back two other projects and offered to double our usual fee. You have an excuse already. I'm just asking you to share it with me so we see eye to eye."

"We can talk business back in my office," Joe said stiffly.

"Of course." Sage had one more theory to test before leaving. He dropped his hand on the guard's shoulder. As anticipated, the man looked up and his eyes instantly glazed over. The vision came on so strong that sparks lit his vision as though he'd stared directly into the sun. In this one, the guard imagined eating an enormous Philadelphia cheese steak on a park bench. The image faded to one of a football locker room, the guard looking on from a distance, several pounds more overweight than fact, and feeling inadequate with Sage in the center of the camaraderie.

They all had their own thoughts and fantasies. Sage had never been the guy at the center of things out of choice. His ability prevented him from socializing in large groups. The overload would be too much.

The cheese steak made Sage smile, though. Some straight guys looked at him and still wondered. This guy just wanted a sandwich.

“Thanks for your help,” Sage said.

“Sure,” the guard said, confused.

“Don’t even think about it,” Joe muttered. “Let’s go back to my office.”

Joe turned and left the observation room abruptly.

“Think about what?”

Sage followed a couple of steps behind. He stretched out his legs to keep up with the quickly moving man, snagging several mental pictures from the security staff on the way to Joe’s office. Once inside Sage happily closed the door behind him.

“It’s not me. It’s you,” he said, without thinking.

“It’s me *what*, Mr. Harper?”

“Never mind.”

“I think I’ve been pretty good about your unchecked libido. I’ve listened to your come-ons and your barely concealed double entendres, but don’t even think about hitting on my staff.”

Sage’s gaze automatically dropped to Joe’s *staff*.

“Don’t!” Joe thundered.

He dragged his gaze up, guilty. Joe wasn’t his type. As types went, Joe looked pretty average with the exception of his sparkling green eyes.

“I’d show you the rest, but I’m not sure you won’t try and seduce everyone in the building,” Joe snapped.

“Me? I’m not trying to seduce anyone. It’s all the sick fucks out there that have wild ideas about me.”

“And your ego is insane. God’s gift, aren’t you? Do you ever think about anything that doesn’t involve getting laid?”

Sage closed the distance between them. “Fuck you. God’s gift? Try Faery curse. I’m the night guy. I’m the guy who stays away from people and judgmental pricks like you. I’m the man with the tools who sends his baby sister in to handle the business. Today I’m here instead of Willow. But contract or no contract, I don’t have to listen to your jealous spite. *You* came looking for *me*.”

“Can you even—” Joe grabbed his own head with both hands, his checks flushed. “Can you even *hear* yourself? Do you *hear* how egotistical you sound?” He released his hair to poke a finger in Sage’s chest. “I do need your expertise. You do come highly recommended. But you

have to be the biggest asshole I've ever met!"

"Right back at ya."

"I'll sign your contract. You'll work this job, but you won't have any further interaction with me. Go through Debbie." Joe nearly shook with contained rage.

"Wrong. I'll only work with you. Closely, or this job is at the bottom of my priority list for the next ten years."

Sage could have kicked himself. What the fuck was he saying? Work with Joe? The man made him crazy and threw accusations out like candy.

"Why?"

"Why do you hate me?" Sage asked before he could stop himself. The crux of it was that working with Joe would be maddening. It would be as close to hell on Earth as Sage had been in a while, but it would also give him the kind of vision-silence he hadn't had since his prepubescent days. And that was attractive. Very, very attractive.

"You're a cocky, arrogant bastard," Joe admonished softly. His eyes still snapped with banked irritation.

"You're a smug, assuming sonofabitch," Sage countered. "And if your eyes weren't so goddamn sexy, I wouldn't grant you a contract."

Joe jerked back. "*What?*"

"You heard me," Sage muttered. Feeling cornered, he looked away.

Joe paced away from him, stared out the one-way window that looked out into the bank with his hands on his hips. "I don't get you." He wheeled around. "Neither one of us can occupy the same room without shooting insults at each other, yet you won't take the contract if we don't work together."

Sage folded his arms across his chest stubbornly. He rolled his lips inward and bit down.

"Explain it to me," Joe said, looking exasperated. "And don't tell me it's my pretty eyes."

The longer the silence stretched—Joe waiting and Sage holding back words—the harder words pushed for freedom. Sage prayed Joe said something soon. Diverted the subject. Anything. Because Sage had the sinking sensation that when it came to Joe, something faery had backfired.

Joe's brows crowded together and his lips thinned.

Sage's throat ached from holding back his words, which became more difficult by the

second. In Sage's experience, that wasn't normal. That was faery magic. When he got home, heads were going to roll.

"I don't know what you're thinking, and I always know what people are thinking. And not knowing your thoughts means I get to take a break from hearing all the shit people think about me, so working with you will give my head a much needed break." The words spilled as rushed and unorganized as an avalanche. "And you don't want to fuck me, which I find a little disappointing but curious, since that was the point of the curse they gave me, and because I like the way your pretty green eyes crinkle when you're laughing. Or smiling. Or yelling. Or anything as long as it requires some emotion directed at me. Which I can't *see*."

And there go the pebbles of remaining thought tumbling down to join the boulders. How nice.

"Uh huh," Joe said. He stood absolutely still. Sage didn't think Joe could not have been more cautious if he was actually toeing the edge of a long drop and he'd caused the recent verbal landslide.

"So if you don't want me around, you'll have to break the preliminary negotiations and hire someone else. I won't give back your deposit," Sage finished.

Joe ran a hand through his hair as he blew out a captive breath. "I can't. I need your firm to handle the upgrades. No one else can do what you do, and you were specifically requested by the client."

Sage held out his hand for the second time today. "Then I guess you're stuck with me."

Chapter Two

“I’ve already reviewed the contract and had legal look at it. I’ve been authorized to approve your security procedures.” Joe walked over to his desk. Signing the contract now, agreeing to work exclusively with Sage, would be riskier than asking the client to look for an alternate security service. Harper Security could not come better recommended. Ms. Rudnick had been adamant. Sign with Harper or the last of the Zodiac stones would go to a different bank where Harper would still get the security contract.

Something that looked like determined amusement flitted across Sage’s face. He lowered the hand Joe hadn’t taken. “You can’t turn me down.” Sage said it with an air of realization.

“Doesn’t mean I want to fuck you,” Joe replied, smiling slightly in dark humor.

“Really wish I knew why.”

Why? Why Joe didn’t want to fuck him or why Joe couldn’t turn him down? Better to take the safer question. “Let me sign this contract with you, then we can discuss the particular needs for our client.”

Joe took a blue folder from a locked drawer. He opened to the last page, leaning on the other pages to hold them from falling back, and chose a pen from the two on his desktop. With an elaborate scrawl, he signed his name and dated it, then twisted the paperwork to face Sage. He held out the pen.

After Sage signed, Joe motioned to a chair. “Have a seat.”

Sage sprawled. He didn’t sit. His hips near the front of the chair, Sage slouched back. He propped he elbows on the rests and folded his hands over his stomach. Dark eyes beneath dark brows considered Joe solemnly. Black locks fell over one side of his forehead. His mouth was set in a stubborn, sensual line. Then, moving as though he didn’t want to scare Joe, he crossed his legs wide, an ankle balanced above his other knee, the cotton vee of his groin open to Joe’s gaze.

If he chose to look. Joe didn’t want to give Sage the satisfaction of catching him looking,

so he busied himself relocking the signed contract in his desk.

“Someone forced your hand,” Sage said.

“Our client wants you.” Ms. Rudnick would just hire Sage through a different bank if they didn’t see eye to eye. Joe wanted to make sure he didn’t lose Ms. Rudnick or her commission by not working with him. Sage had a smirk that suggested he knew as much.

“What are we protecting?”

“The last three Zodiac stones. The owner went public with them for display. That was four months ago. When there were repeated break-ins on her multiple properties, she split up the collection. Unfortunately, all but three are missing. She’s bringing them here and putting a forgery up for viewing.”

“Why here?” Sage asked.

“It’s a small town with no ties to the family and a secure, reputable bank which would never be suspected as holding the Zodiacs.”

“And Harper Security is nearby,” Sage added. “I’d really like to see you smile again.”

“Stay on subject, Harper.” Joe leaned back in his chair. Sage made concentration difficult just by lounging across from him. Though he’d dressed in suit without a tie, clearly the man was more comfortable in jeans. And the last thing Joe needed right now was to think about Sage’s shapely ass in a pair of snug jeans.

Sage frowned. “I’m trying to.”

“The Zodiac stones are coming here. We have three days to prepare the bank in whatever manner you see fit and then the stones are in-house.”

“How long?”

Joe toyed with the idea of telling him *a thick seven inches*, but thought better of it. Sage needed little encouragement. “The display will run a week. It’s for a charity drive, and frankly, we’re all lucky to have an opportunity to see them. Ms. Rudnick could have pulled the stones from viewing in light of the recent thefts.”

“Why didn’t she?”

“The charity is to raise money for children’s cancer research. She lost a child to brain cancer. The stones have been in the family for generations. Curators thought they were myth until she decided to show them instead of auctioning them off.”

“And now she’s losing the stones too,” Sage said, softly.

“Yes.”

“So which ones will we be protecting?”

“Aries, Cancer, Scorpio,” Joe answered.

“Stubborn. Like you.” Sage leaned forward, propping his elbows on his thighs as he looked at Joe. “You already think I’m an ass, so what the hell? You’re gay, I’m sure of it. Why don’t you want me?”

“Less and less every time you open your mouth. We are in a business meeting, Harper. Your lack of professionalism speaks volumes about your people skills.”

“It’s becoming an obsession to know the answer.” Sage smiled, a charming chagrined thing that caused Joe’s heart to trip on itself. “I’m an attractive guy. What’s the hang up?”

“You reminding me that you’re attractive comes to mind. Arrogance isn’t the least bit enticing.”

“It’s not arrogance. It’s truth, which seems the only thing I’m capable of when I’m near you.” Sage sat back again and rubbed his forehead. “I haven’t figured it out yet.”

“That’s as cryptic as the faery references. Are you on medication?” Joe asked.

“No. I really want to see you smile.”

“So you’ve said. Listen, buddy, it’s not happening. Let’s get through the improvement list before you get sappy over my eyes again.”

“They’re stunning,” Sage said. He winced as though the words embarrassed him.

Sage Harper, persistent seducer of plain men, should have been his title. Joe sighed. He’d never been anything but utterly average. Even the eyes Sage seemed fascinated by were typical green. Dark and earthy, but still just green. Joe didn’t turn heads. He was the guy people looked at, found relatively amiable and then had trouble placing on a second meeting. Was it because Joe hadn’t fawned over him that Sage wouldn’t let it drop?

“You need to connect the two observation rooms. More eyes are better. And for each station, you need a guard. One for each video console and one on each set of alarms. Guards are more alert when they are accountable to someone else. When you join the rooms, there should be only one door, and it should have a bulletproof glass window in it so the guards can see who is on the other side, and see out to the wall of one-way mirror. The door needs a lock. Only the four guards and their relief get access, one key per team. The monitor views will change. Instead of putting the timed circuit views on top, put them on bottom where the line of sight more easily

falls and change the variable to twelve seconds. Forty-five is more than enough to drag or roll goods out of sight.”

Air whooshed from Joe’s lungs and he found himself chuckling. The whole time Joe had been talking about security and thinking Sage couldn’t get beyond his libido, he’d noticed the kind of details the security team needed.

Sage smiled too.

The air in Joe’s lungs burned as he realized he’d forgotten to breathe. His skin tingled with anticipation.

“There. You smiled,” Sage murmured.

“We’re all happy then. When can you start working on the modifications?”

“Tonight after closing. Can you get a couple of extra guards in here? There’s going to be confusion as I rewire a few things. I won’t knock the wall out between the two rooms, but I will put in an opening.” Sage stood and moved to the door. “I’ll get the glass and locks on the doors. I recommend finishing the single room concept and single door when you have time to invest. Right now, the wiring I want to do, additional emergency precautions, is more pressing.”

Joe joined him by the office door. This time he offered his hand for a shake. “I’ll adjust my hours to join you on the job tomorrow night. Debbie can get you set up for tonight.”

Sage took his hand, but instead of shaking it, he held fast. “I told you. I’m not working with anyone but you. Go home. Change. Meet me back here at six.” He tugged Joe’s hand, bringing him crashing against Sage’s solid chest. “And now I’m going to kiss you.”

Joe barely had time to blink before Sage’s warm lips brushed his. Thought spiraled away. He forgot to protest, and kept on forgetting when strong fingers sank into his hair, holding him to Sage’s soft, hesitant exploration. The uncertain intimacy at odds with blunt conversation kept Joe off balance. Breath slipped between them.

“See you at six,” Sage whispered, placing one last kiss on Joe’s stunned mouth.

* * * *

Sage dropped a twenty on the pick-up counter and collected the pizza he’d ordered. He knew nothing about Joe Glassman. Maybe his appeal was that his thoughts were a closed book. Sage dodged fantasies through the entrance of Pizza Cabana and out to the van. He didn’t even know if Joe liked pizza.

Or him.

It had to be the enigma of finding someone on this planet, other than his family, whom he couldn't read. After the many fantasies he'd seen, all featuring their owners as enhanced versions of themselves, seeing only Joe provided a respite.

He pulled up at the bank. Sage had told Joe to change. Bad idea. Dark denim and a polo shirt made Joe appear far too approachable. Joe waited by the entrance with his arms folded over his chest, heavy silver wristband providing the stodgy reminder of a banker in ironed, low-slung jeans. God, Sage wanted to mess him up.

Sage shifted in the driver's seat, thinking his loose fit, worn Levis wouldn't hide his erection. After the kiss earlier, the erection wouldn't be easily dismissed.

"Oh, boy," Sage muttered. He flashed Joe a friendly smile and waved him over. "Hey, boss, I picked up a pizza. I could use a hand getting the food and supplies inside."

Joe stepped off the curb and came to the side of the van. He leaned down slightly to look in, one hand curling over the open window frame. His perfectly combed hair had relaxed too. Instead of the sandy brown locks going straight back, his hair flopped to the front and sides, giving him a tousled boyish look.

Mossy green eyes scanned the interior of the van. "How much?" Joe asked.

"For?" Sage couldn't remember what they'd been discussing. Joe looked young, yet his angular features and hard jaw were the aspects of a fully developed man in his early thirties.

"Supplies," Joe said, staring back at him without any hint of his thoughts.

"A big duffel, my tool box and a laptop. They're in back. If you will grab the pizza and pop from the passenger side, I'll get the heavy artillery." Sage hooked a nod toward the back of the van.

"Sure."

Joe stepped away and circled the front of the vehicle. Once again, Sage couldn't pick up any signals from him. He swore under his breath at the handicap and continued muttering to himself as he collected the tools of his trade and locked up. Once they were both at the door, Joe unlocked it then relocked it behind them.

"The guards are inside already. I doubled up as you requested. I don't think this will feed everyone."

"It's not for everyone. It's for me and you, if you want some."

Joe's look was inscrutable.

“I’ll set up a temporary monitoring station outside of the room, but we will need the extra set of eyes while some of the systems are down.” Sage said.

Joe quit walking halfway across the bank’s main floor and turned on him. “You didn’t say anything about the systems going down.”

“You didn’t think I’d be playing with live wires, did you?”

“I had hoped,” Joe intoned.

The petulance made Sage smile. He hefted the duffle on his shoulder to another position. Joe’s stance wasn’t welcoming. It said *keep away*. There’d been no mention of the kiss yet, and ignoring it seemed to be the intention. Normally, Sage might have. Joe’s eyes looked hard but dead of emotion. His soft lips curled downward on the edges, making his full bottom lip roll out slightly, better defining the lip line. He had great lips.

“Harassment is a bitch, Harper.” Narrowed eyes issued the warning far better than Joe’s words.

To Sage they felt like a dare. He’d never had to push the envelope before. He always knew what others were thinking. With Joe, he *wanted* to know. Wanted to see it for himself, and if not see, get a confession that he felt something chemical between them, just as Sage did.

“So is losing your contract to another bank.” He winked.

Joe scowled.

“Pizza’s getting cold. Your office?” Sage didn’t wait for an answer. He headed to the security door, waiting while Joe swiped an access card to let them in, then strode to the closed office. His damn jeans were getting tight. Joe would have spotted kittens if he saw the front placket now. Keeping his back to the spitting, snarling man would give Sage a few minutes to think about stuff. Dank caves filled with toothless, diseased women, mostly.

He heard a sigh come from behind him. There was a click and Sage knew Joe had closed the office door. With the way Sage was feeling right now, he hoped Joe kept his distance. Otherwise, Sage would blurt out everything without the ability to stop himself.

Joe had no sense of self-preservation. He came up beside Sage. “Cheese pizza?”

“I didn’t know what you liked.”

“Cheese is fine.”

Annoyance flared inside him over the noncommittal response. He faced Joe. This discussion went beyond baked offerings. “But what would you want on your pizza?”

“I said cheese was fine.”

“But that’s not what you’d choose if you could have chosen, is it?” Sage pressed.

“Harper. It’s fucking cheese pizza. Who cares?”

“I have no fucking idea what you’re thinking right now. I don’t know if you genuinely can’t stand me, or if you are pissed because I’m making you work on this job with me. I don’t even know if cheese pizza gives you a culinary hard-on.” Sage seethed silently, cursing his ability for failing him when he actually wanted it to work.

Joe dropped the cheesy triangle back in the box. He shook his head. “Why do I get the feeling that this has nothing to do with pizza?”

Sage tried to hold back the words. He clamped his jaw, but being this close to Joe, the faery-fuckup of a backfired ability wouldn’t be quelled. He felt like the way one of his sisters acted when they were PMS-ing and cried over a bent ice cream spoon after *the worst fucking day of her life*.

“Well? You want to tell me what this is actually about?” Joe asked.

“No.” That part was easy. Short and direct. Words still threatened.

“Oh, I get it. You’re still upset because I don’t want to fuck you. You kissed me a couple of hours ago and you still can’t figure out why I’m not falling for the Sage Harper charm.”

“Exactly.” *Shit, shit, shit, shit, shit.* “Don’t roll your eyes. I usually know this kind of thing about people, and I can’t read you. Why can’t I read you? No, instead of seeing what you really want, I’m infected with the Personal Confessions virus. Do you know how annoying that is?”

“I can’t figure out if you’re a creative type who isn’t supposed to make sense, or you genuinely have psychological issues.” Joe snatched the wedge of cheese pizza and bit into it. “Getting cold,” he told Sage around a mouthful.

Sage’s breath caught in his throat and something twisted in his gut as his eyes riveted to the sheen on Joe’s lips. “What I’d give to have those lips on me,” Sage murmured huskily.

Joe stopped chewing and swallowed. His eyes widened. “They’re not coming near you. Eat your damn pizza and get to work.”

“Debbie likes it from behind. Of course, she thinks her behind is tight and shapely. I couldn’t see much of it since she was sitting, but there is no way her ass was the one she projected. The security guard this afternoon is insecure with his self-image and is on a diet. He’s

about to break it, though. With a huge Philly steak and cheese, somewhere his wife won't see. And your teller wants to be eaten out on the job while she's standing at the counter and has to keep a professional face."

"What are you talking about?"

"The guy in the bathroom wanted to be sucked off."

"I heard," Joe said. He looked confused. "He said suck me, suck me. I figured it wasn't a speech impediment."

"You know what they all had in common? Well, not the guard, he's straight without any bi-curiousness—which is refreshing, actually. They had me in common. Do you know why?" *Shut up, Sage.* He couldn't. Physically could not stop the spill of information. "Because my mom is a faery who married a mortal and the faery realm thought it would be fun to give me the ability to see other people's thoughts—all the damn time—and then give me this face with the magical ingredient that mortals have difficulty resisting."

"Ri-ight."

"Except you. I can't read your thoughts at all. What I get when I'm near you is the compulsion to spill my guts with every thought that enters my head. Even if it makes me look like an oversexed egomaniac."

Joe backed away with his pizza slice, circled the desk and sat down. Not done, he scooted his chair until it hit the wall. "You're crazy."

"Oh yeah? Fine, I'll prove it. Are any of your guards gay?"

"I don't ask," Joe said, flatly.

Sage leaned over the desk on his knuckles, steaming pizza wafted up to him and his stomach growled. "Call one in here. Any of them."

"I don't think I will."

Sage picked up the phone. He hit the button that said Ob1 and called the guard who answered into Joe's office.

"Damn it, Harper, you can't order my people around like that. Keep your crazy to yourself."

"I'd love to, but for some sick reason, I have to know why you break every expected law of my freak ability."

A knock. Sage invited him to enter. "Come here and settle a bet for us." He held out a

pen as an excuse for the guard to get close enough to take it. Close enough to be effected by the faery curse.

“O-okay,” the guard said uncertainly.

“Just stand here until I say you can go,” Sage said.

Chapter Three

Joe watched with a touch of fascination. He'd heard of quirky creative types, but Sage took the cake. Nevertheless, he crossed his arms and let Sage try to prove his ridiculous claim. The guard took the pen, looking at it as if it might explode. A smile touched Sage's lips, and though he didn't look at the guard, Joe was intrigued to see a flush of color darken his neck.

If Sage weren't so in love with himself, Joe might have been tempted to confess that he actually did want to fuck Sage. Hard, frequently, and now. But Sage was one mixed up guy, and while the kiss had curled Joe's toes, he had no desire to give into lust when the object had the social decorum of a baboon in heat. Joe was half-ready to tell Sage to put his flashy red ass away and try somewhere else.

"You're married," Sage told the guard. "And you have a girlfriend who wants a threesome. Right now you think I'd be a great candidate."

"Wh-what? No way. No girlfriend and no guy sex," the guard stammered.

"I'm bigger than that, Brad. You'd need more lube," Sage said, almost apologetically.

"I'm gettin' the fuck out of here. You're messed up, man." Brad, the security guard, put the pen on the table and hurried backward.

Sage followed. "Just a sec. Sorry about that. I didn't mean to embarrass you. I forget not everyone is used to thoughts like that being exposed. I see them all the time."

Brad looked away guiltily. He'd begun blushing and sweating. "I don't swing that way."

"It's not your fault. You're under a spell, in a way," Sage shrugged.

He looked through Brad, Joe thought. Those were the kinds of statements Sage had made since Joe met him. Loony-assed claims. "You're treading a thin line, Harper. Brad, you don't have to listen to this. I'll take care of the situation."

Sage shot him a pained look. "One more minute, all right?"

Brad looked between them.

"It's up to Brad," Joe said finally.

"You think she's stealing from you," Sage said. Brad's eyes grew round and he nodded.

"You also think she might tell your wife, Cindy. Jenny has blonde hair. You love the way it looks spread out on the pillow, and she wears a tiny diamond stud in her belly button."

"Holy shit!" Brad gaped at Sage.

Sage's face turned crimson. "Uh. I'm not going to say that one."

Joe got up. Hell if he wouldn't say it. Joe didn't know how Sage knew all this stuff, but if it was real, Joe wanted every piece of information to prove the point down to the detail. And he wasn't saying it was real. Just a really great parlor trick. Sage said he had to confess when Joe was near. He'd start by putting that to the test.

Joe closed in on them, crowding the men by the door. "Go on."

Sage's face burned and his eyes snapped mutiny. "Back off, Joe."

"Nope. Let's hear it."

"Brad's imagining my face between Jenny's thighs. He thinks my black hair would look good draped on her white skin. She's arching off the bed, touching herself, and he's play acting surprise. In the fantasy, he wants to punish me for taking Jenny. Wait...he's put a blindfold on her and imagining I told Jenny I was him."

"Fuck! What the fuck?" Brad's back slammed against the door. His hand juggled the doorknob.

"How is he going to punish you?" Joe asked. He looked from Sage to Brad. Brad had gone pale. Except for his hand on the door, he appeared transfixed, as though living the fantasy Sage detailed.

"He's dropped his pants and—" Sage swung his head to pin Brad with his gaze, "Ow, fuck, man, that hurts to look at. Seriously. *Lube*." He shook his head.

"That's okay," Joe interrupted. "I don't need any more information. Brad, go to your post. Or call in a replacement. I'm really sorry about this," he told the guard.

Joe leaned on the door after the guard left. "Remarkable," he said. "If everything you told me is true, then you can't help but answer my questions truthfully. Is that correct?"

Sage ran a hand through his hair. The thin cotton tee stretched over his impressive torso.

“Yeah.” He didn’t look happy about the admission.

“Good.” A predatory idea came to mind. “My turn.”

“We should go eat pizza. Now. I have some work you hired me to do and I’d really rather do that *right now*.”

“I’m sure you would. But first, you were trying to prove your point. Let’s say I believe you can see thoughts. We’ll forget the whole faery explanation for the moment. And let’s also say that maybe I believe you have to tell me whatever I ask. I think we should prove that next.”

“Can we eat first?” Sage asked. His voice sounded choked, tight.

“What is your favorite kind of pizza?”

“Everything but olives. I’d have told you that anyway,” Sage said.

“If you have magical appeal and could have any guy you want, why do you keep going for me?”

“Because you aren’t going for *me*,” Sage answered.

“So my appeal is because I’m not affected by your charm?” If only Sage knew how effected Joe was, Sage wouldn’t be so keen to have him.

“It’s a bit of an unprecedented mystery,” Sage agreed, “but there’s something else.”

“Go on.”

“You’re a fucking turn-on.” Sage winced when the words left him. “Confident, business-like, decisive, and you don’t fall over at compliments. You don’t even flirt.”

“All you’re telling me is that you want to get under my skin because you can’t. Which is good to know.”

“We should get to work,” Sage suggested.

“You aren’t off the hook. You wanted to work with me. You’re going to have to deal with me.”

“Shit.”

“Grab your stuff. We’ll take the pizza into the first observation room, where you can update while we chat.” Joe smiled benignly.

Joe returned to the desk and lifted the pizza box. Sage took a few seconds, sighed heavily and grabbed his gear. The first room had two guards in it, the doubled security Sage had requested, and Joe didn’t want to ask personal questions in front of them. It was another hour before Sage had set up observation room two for feed of all the cameras. The guards are on a

patrol of the bank.

Sage spread assorted tools on the console. Nothing else could distract them from the job at hand and Joe couldn't think of a more perfect time to spring questions on him.

"So how's my technique?" Joe asked.

"What?"

"Kissing. You kissed me. Did you like it?"

"Yes," Sage said, giving him an annoyed look.

"I should probably not ask yes or no questions if I want details," Joe mused.

"Probably not." Sage rolled his eyes and shook his head. He held a pair of wire cutters in his hand so tightly, his knuckles paled. Sage moved as far away from Joe as the room allowed.

Joe closed the gap. "*Why* did you like kissing me? What did you feel?"

A look of pure panic entered Sage's eyes. He shook his head rapidly and kept his lips pressed together.

Joe grinned. Even if it was all bullshit, Sage played his part well, and Joe liked the idea that Sage *had* to share the details of his attraction.

Joe laughed and picked up a circuit board. "Never mind. I don't actually believe your mother is a faery and you have special abilities."

Sage scowled. His cheeks hollowed slightly as he pulled the final screw of the faceplate covering the security alarm dash. The colorful wires meant little to Joe. Silence filled the space between them. Sage refused to look up.

Joe brought over Sage's felt-wrapped kit and dropped it on the console beside Sage.

"Fucking fantastic. You tasted like peppermint." Sage's eyes widened and he clapped a hand over his mouth, continuing to talk through the muffle.

Joe focused on him. "Toothpaste."

Sage backed against the console.

Joe matched him step for step.

"Soft. Ticklish. Not just on my lips, but lower. God, you gave me such a hard-on. And the look on your face was surprise and interest." Sage dropped the hand from his mouth and seemed to give over to the urge to confess, staring at the ceiling as he did. "I'd fucking kiss you again if I thought you'd let me, and I've been biting the insides of my cheeks from spewing all that out there, which clearly didn't work because I said them and you're listening and look like

you're going to laugh your ass off at my expense."

Sage slapped the console. "Shit!"

Joe did want to laugh, but from stunned disbelief more than anything else. "Really."

"Yes."

Joe's eyes narrowed and he took another step forward. His thighs brushed Sage's knees where he leaned back on the console. The contact of warm, jean-clad legs high on his thighs surged interest into his already filling cock.

He locked eyes on Sage. "What else?"

"I'd give a month's pay to have your peppermint mouth go down on my dick, and swallow my cum like it was fucking mouthwash, and you're the dental hygienist of the year. God, to see you on your knees taking me 'til you gag and moaning for more while I fuck your face—I'd jack off to that image every night."

"Wow. I bet that confession hurt," Joe said, hearing the husky words scrape up his throat.

"Yeah, so quit asking questions. You have your proof."

"I don't think I do. You said something about faeries?"

"My mom is a faery. A nymph. She had five kids. We all have faery blood."

"Is it red?" Joe asked sarcastically.

"Yes. Fuck you."

"Apparently...in your dreams," Joe cracked. "You said the faeries gave the offspring gifts. You say yours is seeing other's thoughts. What do your siblings do?"

"Dill freezes time. Fauna has invisibility, and Flora transports. Willow transforms," Sage listed.

"*Dill* freezes *thyme*? Sounds like these faeries have a sense of humor."

"I don't. I have a job to do," Sage grumbled.

"You're right. Of course, I still don't believe you. You don't have wings or anything." Joe tried to peer around Sage's side. "Do you?"

"No, I don't have wings. I'm half-faery, not half-airplane."

Joe backed away until they were no longer touching. He picked up a screwdriver, idly slapping it against his palm. "Just one more thing."

Sage's cheeks puffed out slightly when he breathed with evident relief. "Shoot."

"Ever couldn't get it up?"

Embarrassment, annoyance and stubbornness heated Sage's neck. What the hell kind of question was *that*? But the words pushed at his lips, begging to be said. "Once. After an all night binge at the local pool hall and three blowjobs. Why?"

"Because it's something you wouldn't want to admit freely." Joe lifted his brows as though challenging Sage to question his logic.

"Touché."

Joe stifled a yawn. "What's next?" he asked, nodding to the console.

Sage twisted around to look at it. The rewiring was straightforward. There really wasn't anything Joe could do here other than keep him company, or keep him distracted. Distraction no longer seemed like a good idea.

"Go home."

"I thought you wanted me here." Joe's voice sounded casual enough, but Sage wondered if there wasn't a bit of disappointment mixed in.

"I do," Sage said. Embarrassment died down. He no longer felt edged into lust, and the need to confess similarly relaxed as the frequency of high emotion dissipated. "I did. It's been a long day and you're tired. I've got this underway and will be in room two before the end of the night."

"You sure?"

"Yeah, I'm good. Be here tomorrow to let me in. I need to go over some of the other bank schematics with you." Sage reached into the duffel at his feet and pulled out a tiny box with wires leading from the back. "Lasers. To protect the vault where the stones will be."

Joe smiled and nodded.

Sage liked the other man's easy acceptance. A comfortable silence settled between them, similar to their first meeting *before* Sage had planted his foot in his mouth.

"Okay, then. Good night."

Shutting the door behind him, Joe left him to his work. Sage took a deep breath, dropping the wire cutters to clatter on the surface behind him. A short, burst of electricity set off an alarm buzzer and Sage whipped around.

"Damn it!" He knocked the cutters away from the imbedded circuit board. "Nothing like bringing the police around by accident."

Sage grabbed the radio he'd been given to check on the guards and provide warning when he tested different systems. "Sorry guys. That was Harper." The radio blipped after closing the open channel.

"Affirmative. Harper's running tests," an anonymous voice blipped back.

A damn rookie mistake. He bent to his task, determined to get out of there in the next three hours. He wanted observation room two done by morning.

That meant no more thinking about Joe. Not about supple, kiss-flushed lips or the twinkle of amusement when Sage struggled through his confession about getting it up. And he really wouldn't think about Joe's hooded green gaze when Sage described jacking off to thoughts of him.

He sighed in mild irritation and glanced down at the bulging front of his jeans. "You think this is funny, don't you? Well, cut it out."

* * * *

Sage Harper owed Joe at least eight hours of sleep. Joe had paid for the truths he'd asked of the other man. Closing his eyes, he imagined Sage's glistening naked body thrusting into Joe's mouth. He imagined Sage looking down on him in wonder and adoration as Joe sucked him dry.

The ghost of seduction had clung to Joe all night, causing him to toss and turn. It made the pressure of the mattress on his engorged cock sweetly tormenting until he thrust against it in partial slumber and moaned himself awake. He'd taken his hot dick in hand and pumped with Sage's name on his lips in the darkness more than once.

Chafed and sore, Joe still couldn't wait to see Sage Harper tonight, in the flesh. Joe was loath to admit that Sage was right. He did want him despite the fact that arrogance turned him off.

Joe stumbled to the door, blinking back the gritty fatigue that dried his eyes and made his eyelids feel like sandpaper from the inside. He groped for the push-bar on the bank door. He couldn't help but compare the cold hard metal he touched to the steely flesh he wanted lining his palm, or the hunger to hear his name rip from Sage's lips in passion.

God, he was stiff already. *Still*, more accurately. It was shaping up to be a helluva day.

"Good morning, Mr. Glassman," Debbie called out, running to catch up to him.

Joe muttered some kind of response. Hopefully not about stiff dicks and naked security specialists. He wasn't sure what he said, but he held the door for her and plastered a smile on his

face. He also walked with her across the expansive main floor. Her heels clacked on the marble and rebounded to the vaulted ceilings of the old gothic building. He scuffled along beside her, until they reached the security protocol office.

Once there, he swiped his card and she scooted past, saying something about a lady's party she'd been to the night before. "Isn't that wonderful?" she said, her eyes sparkling.

"Sorry?" Nailed. Joe cringed that she'd caught him inattentive, but chatter about parties and door prizes had hit his automatic tune out response.

Debbie made a sound of disgust. "You aren't even listening to me, are you? I just said that I went to a Lady S Party last night and won the door prize."

She giggled and then angled her large body through the small flip door before plopping in her desk chair. It objected with a metallic whine and several pops. Oblivious to her protesting chair, her eyes twinkled as if they held a secret.

"That's nice?" Joe offered uncertainly.

"It's more than nice! I was just wondering if maybe you thought that hunky Mr. Harper would like to open it with me."

Was that a blush? Why would Sage care if she'd won a door prize?

"You know," she said, leaning forward conspiratorially. "A *Lady S Party*?" She nodded her head rapidly like it would help him understand. "*Toys*," she whispered at a near roar.

Toys? Oh, toys! Instant vengeance on the man who'd kept him up all night with erotic blowjob descriptions—sic Debbie on him with a sex toy basket.

"You know, Debbie, I think he would really like to see those," he said, giving her a broad wink. Sleep fog dissipated a fraction.

"Will you send him over when he gets in today?" she asked hopefully.

"Sure I will." Joe started to turn away, but stopped and patted the countertop. "And Debbie?"

"Yes, Mr. Glassman?"

"Have a great day." Joe hummed as he headed toward his office.

When he got there, he found a folded note taped to his name plaque. Sage's chicken scratch informed him that, "both observation rooms had been rewired. Initial programming had been installed to accept the laser feed and that unless he wanted ham sandwiches, Joe could provide take out."

Or it read, “an obstetrician had arrived and impregnated Ben Stiller with loser-beads and useless hamster-witches for Joe’s stakeout.”

It was a toss-up.

Sage came across as a confrontational egomaniac, but Joe had seen some depth last night. Not enough to convince him Sage wasn’t a playboy out for a challenging lay, but enough to suggest Sage wasn’t all bad boy charm.

Computer programming took intelligence. Sage had to realize how much like an asshole he sounded. The faery explanation reminded Joe just how little he knew about the other man. Lusting after him was understandable. Sage was a Grade A piece of ass.

Believing Sage’s ridiculous and far-fetched claim took more gullibility than Joe possessed. Being asked to believe it anyway pissed Joe off no small amount. Did Sage think Joe was so hard up for companionship and sex that he’d overlook the fable, pretend that by doing so he didn’t notice Sage would laugh his ass off later when he dumped Joe? Was Joe supposed to fall to his knees in gratitude for no-strings sex with the hottie?

The stunt with the guard had been impressive, but it seemed more believable that Brad had been in on the joke—guys of the trade sticking together. He probably thought it would be harmless and funny.

Joe wasn’t laughing. So completely opposite of laughing—the building irritation of having been played festered. Meanwhile, Joe’s dick kept vigil for its owner to see reason.

That’s how the day went. Seat shifting, paperwork, and resisting the urge to whack-off every time he thought of Sage coming by later that night made hours drag. It also made his stomach flip with nausea, teetering between excitement and dread.

Finally, his wristwatch read four-thirty.

He picked up the phone and buzzed Debbie’s desk.

“Yes, Mr. Glassman?”

“Have the new intern go to The Wok King down the street. I have a credit on their books and I’m going to be working late tonight with Mr. Harper.”

“Yes, sir.”

He held down disconnect and picked up the receiver to call. “Black pepper chicken, white rice, sweet and sour pork, and egg rolls.”

“How many egg rolls?” the clipped voice asked on the other end.

Fuck it. “Six.”

He wanted to watch Sage wrap his mouth around them. Joe stifled a groan and rubbed his hard-on. The office would be empty in about forty-five minutes. Joe could take care of *this* well before Sage ever showed up.

Chapter Four

The rooms were silent. The tangy sweet aroma of Chinese food lingered in the air. Joe checked his watch. Five thirty-two. He had plenty of time now that he and the manager had jointly seen to locking the safe room. A lone security guard made the rounds, checking teller booths and access doors.

Quitting time and everyone had gone home, except Joe and the security detail. With his office door shut, Joe knew no one would bother him, and the thought brought a twitch from his engorged cock.

Joe stood at the one way, looking out, checking to make sure he hadn't missed anyone. The security guard moved away from the teller booths and down a wide hallway where the elevators would take him upstairs to the desks overlooking the open bank floor below.

Yeah, Joe had plenty of time to take care of his needs before Sage got there.

He turned his back on the window and experimentally rubbed the flat of his hand over the bulge in his slacks. He closed his eyes, enjoyed the needed pressure.

"Oh, yeah. I definitely need to take care of this before he gets here."

Leaving the window to slouch low on the black leather chair that made up a small sitting area in his office, Joe fleetingly thought about locking his office door. The guards were busy—they wouldn't bother him and never had. Sage wasn't going to arrive for another twenty minutes. And even then, he'd have to be buzzed in.

Joe leaned his head back on the edge of the chair. The supple leather cradled his head and he allowed himself to imagine what he had resisted most of the day: Sage.

He imagined Sage kneeling before him, anxious to touch Joe's cock through tented fabric, but not allowed to. As punishment for the early arrogance he'd shown, Seth could look at Joe as he came, but he could not participate. Except, Sage watching him *was* participation. It

turned Joe on to have Sage's imaginary eyes locked on his shaft.

"You like what you see?" Joe murmured.

With his eyes closed, Joe dragged the zipper downward. Its rasp competed against his audible breath. Anticipation made him groan and the freedom wasn't enough. Joe pushed his pants and boxers past his knees. Elastic and cotton tickled his shins when they dropped to his ankles.

Now his ass on leather brought new sensations, like skin on skin while cool air teased his heated cock.

Joe spread his knees, letting them fall to the sides and stroked his hands up his thighs. Using the tips of his fingers to tantalize himself, he tickled his leg creases before rubbing the sensitive skin between his anus and his balls. Sage's tongue would feel like heaven there.

Maybe what he needed was to let Sage fuck him senseless just to get the arrogant bastard out of his system. When the security upgrades were over, and the Zodiac stones had been moved, he'd give Sage a call.

He cupped his balls with one hand and fisted his dick with the other, sweeping from base to moistened tip.

"I'm going to fuck my hand, Sage, and you're going to watch me come."

In his mind's eye, Sage's lips parted and his dark hair fell forward around his high cheekbones and firm jaw. A jaw that could be working Joe's cock if he allowed it. But in Joe's fantasy, he didn't allow it and Sage's nostrils flared with barely contained desire.

When it was all over, he'd let Sage suck him, fuck him and spread him. No dinner. No date. There was no need to pretend they had a relationship or that Joe expected one. Just sex. Rough, soft, fast, slow, and all variations all night long. For one night. After he'd had Sage and been had by him, the curiosity would be satisfied.

He ignored the niggling suspicion that getting enough of Sage would take more than one night.

Joe pumped his fist again, rolled his balls. His skin ached from rough handling the night before, so he spat in his palm but kept pumping.

● * * *

Sage thought about knocking, but Joe expected him in about ten minutes anyway. He'd probably be overjoyed that Sage had showed up early without charging the bank for his time.

Banking types appreciated eager workers. And fuck if Sage wasn't eager.

Stepping into Joe's office, a greeting snagged in Sage's throat.

Joe moaned softly from a leather chair across the room. With his legs spread, Joe's cock was on full display. Rod, sack and hole offered up for Sage's eyes to feast on.

He watched as Joe spat on his hand and pumped his cock with measured care. The other hand cuddled his balls. One finger stole downward to the sweetly puckered hole and plunged its tip inside.

Sage bit his lip to keep from groaning with him.

Eyes transfixed, Sage silently closed the door praying he wouldn't disturb the performance. His own cock filled, ready to give more substantial satisfaction than Joe's fingertip.

Strokes quickened as Joe's breath shuddered from his lungs. "Oh, God, yes."

Sage agreed, completely.

Joe's diligent finger plunged deeper and he forsook his balls to add another finger to the first. His eyes squeezed so tightly, Sage knew Joe was close and Sage wanted front row seats on that spunk.

He sneaked to a place in front of Joe, then carefully placed his hands on the armrests for balance as he watched Joe's hand pump and twist the long, thick, reddened shaft. Moisture slicked the plump rosy head and the web of his hand.

Joe's hips lifted, thrusting into the motion as his other fingers rubbed deep inside.

Sage tried to keep his breathing under control, not wanting to let Joe know he was there, but it became impossible. So did not encouraging him. "Fuck it, Joe. God, fuck it harder."

Joe's eyes flew open. Too far gone and glazed over, the words only tipped Joe over the edge. Sage leaned closer. Cum spurted his face, thick, warm and salty.

Sage licked his lips, looking up at Joe as he did so, and seeing the bondage of Eros break into surprise and horror.

"You're early," Joe said lamely. *How much did he see?* As soon as he thought it, he grimaced. The man had his face covered with cum inches from Joe's sated cock and two of Joe's fingers still nestled in his hole. Chances were he'd seen a lot.

"You're not," Sage said. "That was fucking incredible. I almost came with you."

Joe found his momentum. And his rage. "What the fuck are you doing in here? How did

you get in? Don't you fucking *knock*?" Joe scrambled to cover himself, but he couldn't move without banging heads with Sage.

"I made myself a temporary security pass for the protocol office. The guard let me in the bank." Sage's eyes roamed Joe's flaccid cock and smooth, hairless sack, in no hurry to move.

"*Move!*" Joe lifted a foot and pushed it into Sage's belly. He needed to clean up and the sooner he got his pants up, the better.

Sage let himself be pushed, seeming to understand Joe's need for privacy. He mumbled something about going to the bathroom to clean up as he headed toward the office door.

"Stop, just stop," Joe snarled.

Sage stopped and lifted an eyebrow as he waited for Joe's next command.

Even submissive, the sonofabitch was an arrogant ass. "Not with cum on your face. There's one over there," Joe said, pointing to the small alcove. As soon as Sage turned his back, Joe yanked up his pants. He waited for Sage to finish before he went in the bathroom to wash himself off.

Feeling more than a little awkward about facing him, Joe tucked his shirt in and secured his pants. He glowered at his reflection.

"I asked you to supply dinner, but I didn't know you were going to treat me to a protein snack too," Sage quipped from outside the bathroom.

Joe's eyes closed and he swallowed hard in mortification. He'd wanted to keep his professional distance. Shooting a wad on another man's face wrecked the whole illusion. His sigh sounded as labored as it felt.

But God, imagining Sage watching had been an erotic thrill. Sage actually watching him jack off and ready to take Joe's cum had been indescribably orgasmic. Then Sage had tasted it, running the tip of his tongue across his bottom lip and tasting him.

If he hadn't been so shocked, Joe would have dragged Sage down on top of him for a thorough kissing. Not more of the chaste stuff, an actual lip-lock.

Joe steeled himself and left the small bathroom. Sage rustled through the brown paper bag and set food out on the glass coffee table. He paused to look at the chair where Joe had been and Joe swore he heard a groan. Just as quickly, Sage folded up the bag and set it aside.

"I'll go get some pop," Sage called, not yet realizing Joe had returned.

Too soon, he came back. He flashed Joe a warm smile and offered him a can.

“Thanks,” Joe said.

“It’s the least I can do after—”

“Yeah, yeah, I got it. How long were you watching?” Joe chose not to sit in the same chair, picking the matching loveseat instead. He snatched a pair of chopsticks and the box of black pepper chicken.

“I arrived in time to see the inaugural address of your finger into your ass.” He chuckled.

“Hear anything?”

“You mean other than panting, Oh Gods, and wet slapping cock?”

Joe tried to chew the morsel of chicken. He had to think about it, each bite downward. Swallowing wasn’t an option yet. “Words. Did I say anything?”

“Nothing else. Why?”

Sage sat down next to him with an egg roll and the box of sweet and sour. Every thought Joe had about seeing Sage go down on the phallic food sucked the air out of his lungs. It didn’t help that Sage’s warm muscled thigh rested against his.

“Can you move?” Joe snapped.

“Post-sex shyness? That’s cute.” Sage grinned and slid the egg roll between his lips. He pushed it in, sucked, and slowly dragged it back out again. “You were thinking about me, weren’t you?”

“There was no sex.” Joe stood up, looked between Sage and the leather chair, debating. Finally, he took the chair at the risk of reminding Sage what he’d been doing there moments ago. It was still safer than sitting next to him, feeling the heat roll off his body, watching him suck off an egg roll and being acutely aware of Sage’s not-so-subtle erection.

“There could be.”

“A guy jacking off is not an open invitation. Unless I invited you to the party, I didn’t want you to see it. Do me a favor and quit thinking about my dick long enough to finish dinner so we can set up the lasers tonight, okay?” Joe snapped.

Sage bit the egg roll in half, his eyes flashing. “Okay.”

“Good. Now shut up.”

Sage fumed silently. After keeping his silence through the rest of dinner, Sage had grabbed his duffle bag from outside the observation rooms and fished out the laser eyes. He

slipped his micro-tool kit into his back pocket and fitted his hips with the wide leather construction belt modified for his trade.

He hadn't uttered a word. Neither had Joe. It became so pronounced as to be pure stubbornness for one man to outlast the other. Damn thing was, Sage needed to communicate with him about the foot traffic in and around the safe where the Zodiac stones would be kept.

Sage pulled out his security card and left the protocol offices. Joe followed. When Sage left the building, Joe waited by the door to let him in with a ladder. Sage stopped inside the door.

Let's see if he can figure out what needs to happen now.

Joe angled his body toward the back offices and elevator. He'd barely taken a step when his cell phone rang. Sage listened to the garbled exchange from the phone and Joe's monosyllabic responses until Joe's stillness signaled a change. Something was wrong.

"Tonight, sir?" Joe asked, then paused to listen. "The security professional has upgraded the cameras and some of the alert systems, but the lasers aren't installed yet."

Joe listened a moment longer, then twisted the phone away from his mouth to speak to Sage. "How fast can you plant the lasers and get them programmed?"

"All of them will require the full night to put in place and begin the precision testing. Programming coordinates, frequencies, time-delay, will all take at least another night."

Twisting the phone back, Joe asked, "Did you catch that? Yes, sir, two nights."

Joe jerked the phone away from his ear. "You don't have two goddamn nights! You've got three hours." The yelling quieted and again the phone touched Joe's ear as he listened for several minutes. He glanced at Sage a couple of times, looking resigned.

Finally he flipped the phone closed and rubbed his forehead with the side of his knuckle.

"Three hours?" Sage prompted.

Joe sighed heavily. "It gets better. Or worse, depending on your perspective." He dropped his hand, slipping the phone in the case on his hip. "C'mon mind-reader, this is definitely a high tension moment. Tell me what I'm thinking."

"I can't. I don't seem able to read you."

"See, that's where your little claim falls apart. You can get the guards in on your prank, but when it comes to substance, you've got nothing," Joe said.

"I have a hard-on. That has to count for something." He ignored Joe's eye roll. "Why three hours to get the lasers up and working?"

“The Zodiac stones are coming early.”

“I thought you said I had a week to get this place to specs.” Sage’s mind raced with all the things he still had to finish. One of them, getting the guards off the premises, wasn’t going to be well received. Traditional bank with traditional methods and traditional guard duties weren’t going to cut it in a world of high-tech crime.

“The stones have to be moved. There was another attempt made to steal them. They will arrive here tonight.”

A migraine stirred warningly at the base of Sage’s neck. “We won’t be ready in time.”

“Hey, that’s all right,” Joe said with false cheerfulness. “The boss has decided to have us live on-site for the next week. He wants us here to continue the work all night and keep a protective eye on the technology guarding the stones.”

“Fuck that. I didn’t sign up for that shit. I sleep in my own bed and generally don’t martyr myself for a job or a man I can’t fuck.” The words were out. “Fucking curse! Damn the fucking faeries and their fucking twisted pranks.” He knew they were listening. Faeries always listened, the little shits. “Fuck you, Faery court, may some little kid pull off your wings and stick straw up your tiny, puckered asses!”

The words echoed, died and were swallowed by the marbled main floor.

Joe coughed. “Creative.”

Sage glared at him, but the twinkle of laughter in the other man’s eyes ruined Sage’s anger. Reluctantly, a smile pulled his lips into a wry semblance of humor. “Thanks.”

“Basically, you still want to fuck me,” Joe deduced. “And it pisses you off to be stuck here with me twenty-four, seven.”

“About the sum of it,” Sage agreed. He ran a hand through his loose hair, not caring when several long strands fell back over one eye.

“The board is willing to pay you time and a half as long as you are on call here at the bank.”

“How generous. They might have to bump that to double time and a half.”

“I’ll make the suggestion tomorrow morning,” Joe offered quietly.

“Just don’t...” Sage paused, dragged in a deep breath before he continued, “Don’t jack off for a week unless you want my help. I don’t think I can fucking take the temptation. Because I can promise you, the next time you whip out your joystick, it’s going to say howdy to my

tonsils. Got it?”

Joe’s sharp laugh surprised him. “You still have your tonsils?”

Sage grinned. Tension crumbled and eased in his shoulders. “And I know how to use ’em.”

“Glad we got that settled. Listen, we can’t leave the bank now, so you’ll have to call someone to bring your clothes and toiletries tomorrow morning. We’ll set my office up as a crash-point. Make your call. I’ll let the guards know to collect your bags when they’re brought.”

“Fine. We have three hours, right? Let’s quit talking about our love nest and get to it. Some lasers are better than no lasers when it gets here,” Sage reasoned. He flipped open his cell and placed a call to his brother. “Dill, I need you to go to my place and pick up a few things.”

● * * *

Joe was going to kill Sage with unintentional touches. “Screw driver,” Sage called from the top of the ladder. Joe’s fingers brushed his wrist and Sage felt it straight to the tip of his cock. Taking the tool from Joe, Sage applied himself to setting the laser firmly in the wall. He pushed and grunted with the combined sexual frustration and physical effort since he’d opted not to use the electric driver.

Joe chuckled softly.

Sage studied his handiwork then glanced down and back to see what was so funny. “What’s wrong, Joe, never see anyone screw before?”

A dull flush crept up Joe’s neck and darkened his cheekbones. “We only have a few minutes left before their expected arrival. We should get upstairs and be waiting at the doors.”

“Nice save.”

Joe shrugged. “I try.”

Sage backed down the ladder. He could feel the heat of Joe’s body behind him as he descended. It was the hand on his shoulder that made Sage turn around.

Joe pushed him until Sage slightly reclined on the wall-propped ladder. Joe pressed against him, lining their bodies together and thrusting once to roll cock against cock.

Sage groaned. “What the fuck, Joe?”

Joe had to push up on his toes to reach him. Smooth, warm lips fitted on Sage’s, stole his breath and replaced it with slick desire. Joe’s tongue tipped against Sage’s teeth and he opened wider.

He grabbed Joe's ass and pulled him hard against his aching cock.

Joe held him in place with widespread fingers, sifting through Sage's hair to cup his skull as he captured Sage's mouth. Sage couldn't have resisted if he wanted to. Heavy male body to heavy male body, the shift of pectorals and abdominal muscles sculpted for sleek erotic stamina, rigid cocks testing the other's length, and inter-splayed thighs were a sexual glove of seduction entrapping Sage in a spell Joe's hunger wove.

Joe's effect was stronger than any faery magic. Sage succumbed to teasing lips, playfully nipping teeth and slow flicks of wet tongue exploring every part of his mouth. Too soon, Joe broke the kiss and stepped back.

"Let's go meet the Zodiac stones," he said, as if nothing had happened.

Sage grabbed his wrist, "Wait. What the fuck was that about?"

"I felt like kissing you," Joe answered. He twisted his wrist free and sauntered out of the safe room, his rubber soles squeaking as he walked away.

Sage levered himself to his feet. "You going to finish that later?" he called.

"No," Joe's echoed shout returned.

"Why not?" Sage's words didn't leave the room, spoken more for himself than for any other ears. "Hey, wait up," Sage called, jogging to catch him.

The elevator doors dinged closed on Joe before Sage got there. He swore softly. "Yeah, well, you're gonna have to answer for some of it, buddy. We've got all week."

Chapter Five

Joe didn't know what he'd been thinking. He hadn't been thinking at all, he supposed. Not since Sage's gorgeous ass and hip-hugging jeans had been at eye level, and certainly not when those same sculpted cheeks and hips unconsciously rocked with each effort-filled twist of the screwdriver. Hard thighs, thick with firm muscle and so much heat it radiated off the man, had made it difficult to keep from doing something stupid. Like taking a bite out of Sage's ass. But God, he wanted to.

This close, Joe imagined what it would be like to step beneath the ladder, unzip Sage's jeans and take a long, savory draw on the rigid flesh—if it were rigid. Would Sage stop him? He didn't think so, which made it even more important not to indulge in a sex romp with the wet dream on a stick.

Or a ladder in this case.

He'd been in total control until Sage climbed down, flexing shoulders, ass and torso only inches from Joe's face. And when he was low enough that Joe could smell his body-heated scent, traces of soap and shampoo, Joe had quit thinking all together.

The first kiss had whetted his appetite. Sage licking cum off his lips and teasing him about more would have undone Joe if he hadn't just shot his wad on the man in question. Unfortunately, Joe's libido had time to recover between then and Sage-on-a-stick. The second kiss had been a mistake. Now he knew what the sexy, tool-belt wearing, techno-stud tasted like.

"Dumb thing to do," Joe muttered to himself.

He glanced at his watch and paced inside the glass doors. A black Mercedes pulled up and three suit-clad security types stepped out, looked around, then ushered out a woman in stilettos carrying a box.

Sage ran to a stop beside him, holding out the elevator keys. "You could have held it for

me.”

“No, I couldn’t.” There were many things Joe would like to have held for him. He stepped away, trying to give himself room to breathe un-Saged air. “Besides, they’re here.”

“Is that—?” Sage walked the two steps to the glass looking out. “Oh shit. I know her.”

“Of course you do. She asked for Harper Security, specifically.”

“Fuck me sideways,” Sage swore quietly.

“No thanks. Last time I strapped a dildo to my hip, I threw the joint out.” Joe deadpanned. He scanned his security card and hit a series of numbers on the keypad to unlock the outer doors.

“Did you really?” Sage asked.

Joe shot him a look. “What do you think?”

“I think you’re shittin’ me.”

“Clever man.” Joe waited until the security detail and Ms. Rudnick had entered and the first set of doors locked behind them automatically. Then he opened the second set. “Welcome, Ms. Rudnick, Cleborne Federal is honored you’ve chosen us to—”

“Why, Sage Harper,” she drawled. “You’re lookin’ more an’ more han’ some every time I lay eyes on you.”

Sage gave her a weak smile. “Hello, Ferrah.”

She handed a box to one of the three silent men with her, then reached for Sage. She wrapped long, sinewy arms around his neck, and went in for the kiss. Sage dodged, taking the hit to the cheek. Fuchsia lipstick smeared on his chiseled jaw and Joe thought he might like to rip her auburn hair out after he peeled the woman off Sage. It would be tough, she appeared to be adhered, smashing her spilling lady parts to his gorgeous, rock hard chest.

Joe finally understood bitch fighting. This annoyed him even more than realizing his emotions were jealousy-charged. “Fuck her,” he muttered.

“Pardon, darling?” she asked, eyes still locked on her dark-haired prize.

“I said, *Ferrah*, let’s get these stones put away before the car out front creates too much attention. Pulling up after hours like this will stir the gossip mills,” Joe said.

She harrumphed. “I don’t believe I said you could use my first name. Only family and lovers get to do that.” She eyed Joe critically, seemed to find him wanting and sniffed disdainfully. “You don’t fall into either category.”

“Yes, ma’am,” Joe answered. His gaze flashed to Sage, who looked both embarrassed and horrified. “Follow me, please.”

Joe led the way. Ferrah cooed over Sage behind him and the guards took up the rear.

“I just love what you’ve done with your hair. So sexy all long like this. Tell me, Sage honey, you still like givin’ it in the ass?”

One of the guards choked on a cough.

“I haven’t been ridden like that since you ran out on me,” she said with a whining mewl.

“I didn’t run out on you,” Sage muttered.

She stopped walking and Joe was forced to wait. He sighed, turned to watch the dialogue play out and folded his arms across his chest. His gut churned uneasily. Sage slept with women. Of course he did. He was Sage, egomaniac sex god in his own mind.

He probably fucked anyone who wanted him. He probably wished his dick were long enough to fuck himself. Then he could tell himself what a great lay he was and how much he enjoyed pounding his own tight hole.

“You did *so*,” she argued. “You fucked my ass like you were a jockey on a thoroughbred and made me come so hard I blacked out. When I woke up you were gone.”

“Ferrah, not here,” Sage ground out.

“We’ll do this wherever I say. I got your first business connections and you owe it to me.”

“I didn’t leave you because we were never together,” Sage said.

“What do you call that night in Mamma’s bedroom?”

“A mistake.”

Ferrah rounded off and slapped him. The sound echoed through the narrow corridor. “Bastard. I’ll let you make it up to me tonight. Johnny, the cute one there,” she said pointing to the middle guard with her dagger-like nails. “He can suck clit to keep me coming for hours. And the red-head likes to fuck my face while that guy twists my nipples.” She eyed the other one, who loosened his collar. “That one is new. I haven’t tried him, but we can figure it out while I let you take my ass again.”

“I was nineteen, Ferrah. I barely knew what I wanted, and you got me drunk.”

“Not too drunk, though,” she cackled, rubbing her hand over his cock.

“Drunk enough to think one hole was as good as another,” Sage’s eyes flicked to Joe.

“What’s that supposed to mean?” she asked.

“It means I don’t do women. You were my first and last.”

Ferrah followed his gaze to Joe. A look of shock washed over her face. “No! Him? You could do so much better! He’s not even *cute*.”

Joe pressed his lips together. *Cow*.

“Fuck one of my men. I’ll watch while Johnny eats me out. And then I’ll use my vibrator on you.”

“I said no.”

Sage looked strangely pale. He seemed to be dazed, yet fully aware, and Joe wondered fleetingly if Sage was seeing her fantasy play out against his will. Joe watched the hard planes of Sage’s face take on a resolved determination. He held himself rigid except for trying to untangle her arms from around his neck.

Sage didn’t look good. He looked ill. Joe didn’t put much stock into the faery story, but he didn’t like the effect Ferrah had on him, either.

Joe stepped forward. “Sage is my lover. I’ve watched you drape yourself on him in the guise of friendship, but I’m going to ask you to take your hands off my man.” Joe’s tone stayed measured and firm.

She dropped her arms. Her eyes narrowed menacingly at Joe. “How badly do you want the Zodiac stones here, little man? You’ll watch your tone with me.”

“Don’t mistake me. We want to protect the Zodiac stones for their historical significance and the charitable donation they will provide for sick children while on display. We want to protect the Zodiac stones because it’s an honor to do so for your late father and for the town of Cleborne. But, Ms. Rudnick, my charity stops there. My lover is not at your disposal, and frankly, you aren’t able to take the stones elsewhere this late in the game. You, madam, are stuck with us.”

She gasped.

“Now, if you continue to manhandle my boyfriend and assault my ears with your sexual escapades, I’ll be happy to slap a restraining order on you and charge you twice the security fee for placing the stones in our care—which will then be given to the charity of *my* choice. Perhaps the Fucking Faery Court you mentioned earlier, lover,” he offered the last as an option for Sage, then turned his attention to Ferrah with a smile. “You decide your course of action, and do it

quickly.”

Ferrah stared, openly confused.

“Excellent. Let’s get these stones safely tucked away, shall we?” Joe smiled widely and led off, held the elevator door until everyone had entered, and then hummed as he pressed the down button.

Before leaving the stones in the safe, Joe had Ferrah unwrap them. He wanted to be sure they arrived, compared with the color photos he’d been provided, pictured again and then locked away. Only Joe, Ferrah and Sage witnessed the entire process while her lusty guards stayed outside the room.

Silently, Joe led them back up and through the main area before securely locking the outer doors behind them.

Joe breathed a sigh of relief.

A heavy hand dropped on his shoulder and spun him around. Sage barreled into him, slamming Joe’s back to the glass door, and kissed him. Joe’s head smacked backward. Pain throbbed dully on the spot, but he was too busy catching Sage behind the neck and kissing him back to complain.

Cool air touched his abdomen and then rough, seeking fingers flattened on Joe’s bare chest, dragging upward to rub tightly budded nipples and tease the sensitive skin beneath his arm. Their teeth clacked, at one point pinching Joe’s lip between them. He grunted, tasting the faintly metallic flavor of blood before Sage pulled away to lick and suck a sweet spot under Joe’s jaw line.

“Oh, God, Sage.”

“I want you.”

Joe’s mind nagged for attention. “Sage, the security guards, the video feed. Stop. You have to stop.”

Sage stopped kissing, but he didn’t pull away, didn’t remove his hands. Sage’s breath spilled hot and fast on Joe’s heated flesh. Goosebumps rose up. In stages, Sage stepped off, then dragged Joe’s shirt into place, then took two more halting steps backward.

“Thank you,” Joe said, his voice sounding as unsteady as he felt.

“Uh huh.”

Joe tucked his shirt into his pants, ran a hand into his hair to tidy it up again.

“You look sexy as hell, don’t fix it,” Sage said, grinning.

He cocked a mocking brow. “I’m not even cute,” he said, repeating Feral Ferrah’s words. A grin of his own escaped. “You could do a lot better.”

“Don’t say that,” Sage growled. “You just insulted my lover.”

“I’m not your lover, Sage. I just said that so she’d leave you alone.”

“You aren’t my lover *yet*.”

Joe’s grin evaporated. “You’re so fucking full of yourself.”

“God! Don’t you get it? I want you to be full of me!” Sage rolled his eyes. “I mean, I want you to want me. For a minute there, I thought you might.”

“C’mon, get real.” Exasperated, Joe pushed past him and headed for the securities offices. “What you want is a challenge. I happen to be one because I haven’t put a welcome mat on my ass.”

“All that stuff you said to Ferrah didn’t mean *anything*? The way you told her off, I thought maybe it actually mattered to you that she had her hands all over me.”

Sage sounded so dejected. Joe turned to look at him before they got inside where the guards could hear them talking.

Sage shifted from foot to foot, hands on his hips. He shrugged minutely. “You came to my rescue.” He shook his head, his look turning inward. “You should have seen the shit she imagined me doing. And she’s actually seen me naked so her visions were accurately unpleasant.”

“I’d defend any friend who needed my help,” Joe remarked.

“But coming to my defense like that, the things you said and the way you commanded her attention, was the hottest damn thing anyone has done for me.”

“Hotter than watching me jack off?” Joe asked. He hoped humor would take the pained look off Sage’s face.

And it did for a moment, because Sage gave a short laugh. “No, that was definitely hotter.” His expression grew serious again as he searched Joe’s eyes. “I just thought maybe you meant it. Maybe, you know, that *I* was important to you.”

Joe swallowed hard. Longing and hope worn on Sage’s face with his incredible chocolate eyes pleading almost cracked Joe’s skepticism. Falling in love with Sage, allowing himself to believe a man like Sage could be vulnerable to him, would be stupid. Men like Sage loved and

moved on.

Men like Sage had ploys and tricks to get what they wanted. If Joe even allowed for the possibility of loving him at some point in the future, he'd lose the battle to a playboy who would break his heart.

One week. He only had to keep Sage at arm's length for one week. How hard could it be?

"You are important, Sage. Without you, the Zodiac stones wouldn't have a chance." He slapped Sage's shoulder heartily, a too-bright smile plastered on his lips. "Go get the ladder and the tools you left outside the safe room. You have some programming to do, right?"

"Yeah. Right." Sage's expression darkened and he spun away to walk back the way they'd come. "I'll go get my shit together and be back in a few."

"Great idea." He beamed at Sage's back. His stomach churned with loss for each step away. It took him another moment to get his shaking hands to properly operate the card scan and doorknob.

"And quit kissing him," Joe admonished himself.

* * * *

"The programming is finished for stage one, but we need to talk about the wandering security guards," Sage said, zipping up his duffel bag.

"What about them?" Joe asked.

"They're not necessary. Once the second stage is complete, this place will be tighter than your ass. Human guards allow for human error."

"Like bribery?" Joe asked, annoyance forming a wrinkle between his brows.

"Yeah, like that. And like temptation." Sage certainly was tempted. Not for stones, though. At least not the kind in the vault. The only stones tempting him were tucked away at the base of Joe's cock. Nice little mouthfuls.

Sage recognized the building irritation in Joe's body language. If Sage didn't back off, that high frequency of emotion would have Sage blurting out confessions again. He could do without that. Repeated rejection didn't make for a comfortable self-image.

"Most banks are all teched-out these days. Why have hovering personnel?" Sage asked, lightly.

"It's a small town and a well-respected bank. People here like to see the ones guarding their assets. It's a personal touch we find works for the clientele and has never been a problem."

“The Zodiac stones make it a problem, Joe. According to you, they’ve been swiped every other time. Whatever the financial gain, it’s enough to convince someone to let their defenses down. Computers don’t get bribed or flattered or make bad character judgments.” Sage rolled up his tool kit and snapped the karabiner closures around the duffel.

“You asked me to double up two days ago.”

“While I had some of the systems offline and worked on programming. I’ve finished that. Stage one is more secure than all your previous systems and your four guards. It’s time to lose the guards and begin stage two.”

“Which is?” Joe hedged.

“Souping-up the existing programming to make this place impenetrable.” *Like you*, Sage thought.

“Except you’re forgetting that the human element will be in play. Ms. Rudnick wants us here. On site. Throughout the showing of the stones until they leave the bank.”

Sage rubbed a knuckle on his jaw. Nervous about spending night after night alone with Joe and feeling a little insecure, Sage wasn’t looking forward to the hours ahead. Keeping the security guards made the system weak, but keeping the security guards might also help Sage keep his libido in check. Because Sage was fucked if he saw Joe jacking off again, or sleep-worn drowsy at the beginning of a shift.

At least, Sage would *like* to be fucked.

“I didn’t forget,” Sage said. “Not even close to forgetting.”

Joe glanced at his watch. “It’s four a.m. We should get some sleep. Adjusting to the new schedule is hard and we might as well take advantage of the guards on duty while we have them.”

Sage smiled for the first time in hours. “So you’ll do it? You’ll nix the guard duty?”

He walked with Joe back to the office-turned-lodging. All they were missing was a campfire.

Joe closed and locked the door behind them. “I’ll think about it.”

Sage dropped his duffel bag beside the leather chair. A memory of Joe’s cock straining, his fingers working his own hole, intruded on Sage’s thoughts and brought him partially erect. If Joe had shown any interest in Sage beyond that kiss, he would swear the man was a tease. But other than those two instances, Joe had given him nothing to hang his hopes on. Sure, the one

guy Sage wanted to have fantasies about him wouldn't.

"Do you have any siblings?" Sage asked, trying to kill the sexual thoughts teaming for his attention.

"Mom would say yes. She sure treated that Dachshund like a child."

Joe grew up with a wiener dog? The thought of a stubby-legged, waddling puppy with floppy ears licking Joe's chin made Sage's stomach flutter.

God, that was cute.

He grinned at Joe, though Joe didn't see it. He bent to unroll an egg-crate foam pad for his sleeping bag. That was cute too.

"What was his name?"

Joe paused, looking over at Sage with a beleaguered wince. "Baby." He turned back to unroll his bag over the foam pad and gave a short laugh. "I called him Little Shit. He used to mark my bedroom."

Sage laughed. He was still chuckling as he rolled out his sleeping bag next to the couch. He tried to give Joe as much room as the space allowed, but it only amounted to a foot and a half. Sage could reach across that distance in his sleep.

If Joe gave him a reason to.

Joe walked to the small bathroom, closing the door within a sliver. Sage watched him turn on the water and wet a toothbrush. For some reason, even that little personal insight, the flash of a red toothbrush and blue paste, turned Sage on. Intimate information like that wasn't something you asked about a lover, it was something you saw and noticed because it was a part of their routine.

He felt like he'd been let in on a small piece of Joe. Sage pulled off his tee, kicked off his shoes and shucked his pants. He'd balanced on one foot with his finger hooked in a sock when Joe came out rubbing a towel on his face, shirtless.

Sage forgot to breathe. For a *suit*, Joe had a lot of definition. Diagonal obliques disappeared beneath the trim waist of Hanes banding and khaki slacks. Sage lost his one-legged balance and toppled to the couch.

"Nice moves. Did you work that out yourself?" Joe teased. His green eyes crinkled with humor and Sage thought he might have to work a lot harder to forget sex for a week.

"You're saying it doesn't work for you?" Sage teased back.

Joe's smile broadened. "I've never had a man fall at my feet before. I can see why you get off on it."

Sage wrested the sock free of his foot and went for the other one. Joe still seemed to think Sage had an ego problem. Not what he'd hoped to discover.

"I don't, you know. I wish people kept their thoughts to themselves. Most times," Sage amended, thinking of how much he'd like to know what Joe thought of him, wanted from him.

Joe's expression grew serious. "I'm still waiting for the tangible proof of your tall tale."

The other sock came free. Sage dug through the backpack Dill had put together and found the toothbrush. Something crinkled and he held his head to the side, letting the overhead light filter in to see what else Dill had provided. The entire bottom of the bag glistened with individually wrapped condoms separated into little foil squares by Sage's diligent brother.

Sage shot a hasty look at Joe and quickly zipped closed the stash. Joe would never believe he hadn't asked Dill for them, hadn't anticipated Joe's capitulation. It gave more ammunition to the claim that Sage thought his charm was irresistible. This was ironic, because Joe had rejected him, and the evidence of what looked like several boxes of freed packets would only seal that rejection if he found them.

I'm going to kill Dill.

"Can I use your toothpaste? He forgot mine," Sage said.

"It's in the medicine cabinet."

Sage pushed his pack around the edge of the couch and stood. Joe glanced up at him, his eyes lingering on the swell in Sage's Jockeys before turning away as if nothing had interested him.

Biting back a groan, Sage shut himself in the bathroom. Peppermint toothpaste bubbled around his teeth as he brutally scrubbed them. Unfortunately, it reminded him that the flavor was exactly the one Joe had in his mouth right now. Two degrees from a kiss, they at least shared the common taste.

It shouldn't have been erotic. It shouldn't have reminded him of other tastes.

Joe's jack off session, the musky flavor of his cum, the smooth warmth of his lips—all combined to make Sage's skin itch with longing. Could Sage flip the tables by doing something similar? What would it take to crack Joe's code? If he didn't try something soon, Sage's balls would explode.

The room was mostly dark when Sage got back. Glow from the main bank floor through the one-way windows touched everything in grays and silvers, made the dark spaces darker. Joe lay on his side facing away. The leather chair blocked the light from touching his face and shoulders, but it did nothing to discourage Sage from taking in the gleam of bare arm and waist to where the nylon shimmer of sleeping bag encapsulated him.

The moon shining through the skylight a room away made Joe an unintentional peep show to tease Sage's senses. He could see Joe, but not all of him. Night caressed him in alternate swatches, objectifying him as an untouchable sex conquest.

Sage reminded himself of the details, fighting the urge to treat Joe's body like a fantasy. Single child, dog named Baby he called Little Shit, peppermint toothpaste and red toothbrush. White Hanes and golden chest hair tinged slightly rust. Green eyes. The left eye had two laugh lines when they crinkled; the right had two and the beginning of a third. There was a small pinpoint surface mole on the inside of his right thigh not an inch from his balls. His bottom lip extended a little farther when he pursed his lips—something Joe did when straining for orgasm or when he suspected that Sage was lying.

Other things swamped Sage too. Things he hadn't realized he'd picked up about the man's character. Joe held eye contact long after his personal comfort level if he had a point to make. He asked questions, sometimes leaping ahead three steps like a chess player planning his next move. And he liked to laugh. It lit his eyes and teased at his lips until Joe either did laugh or smiled.

If Sage could inspire in Joe even a measure of the desire raging through Sage's body, it would only be fair.

Joe sighed deeply, settling into sleep. His back was a wall to Sage, as impenetrable as the man's thoughts. Sage had never felt so isolated, alone, adrift without some familiar anchor. He hadn't realized how much he'd come to depend on his abilities to take the measure of a man. Instead, Sage had been stripped. Not only unable to read Joe, but unable to keep his thoughts private when he most needed to guard his heart.

His *heart*?

The thought stopped Sage cold. God, when had he decided his heart was involved? It had to be the vulnerability talking. He couldn't believe that Joe held more than a passing fascination for his very differentness.

“G’night,” Joe said, his voice already husky with immanent sleep.

The low sexy tone shot strait to his already eager cock. He barely strangled off the end of a groan. Joe had to have heard it. Had to have heard the way he tried to cover it with a cough.

“Night,” he answered.

Chapter Six

Water droplets sprinkled on Joe's face, ripping him from blissful sleep. The—he groaned as he groped for and then squinted at his watch—ninety minutes he'd drifted off. "It can't be time already."

"You snore. Quietly, but you snore," Sage said, chuckling.

Another drop hit him and Joe sat up. Sage stood over him, bare-chested and glistening from a shower, with a white towel draped low on his hips. Joe swallowed hard, his mouth having gone suddenly dry. Slick, wet, tanned and chiseled, Sage's hairless torso and abs begged to be licked. Muscles cut from his waist to diagonally underscore his six-pack.

Sage's roped hair rested over his shoulders and collarbones, dripping steadily. As Joe watched, a liquid trail detoured from the top of a lean pectoral to the inside before following the indent of flesh to slide lovingly around a tight belly button and sink to the sagging towel line. All that moisture and none of it in Joe's parched mouth.

"God," he murmured, licking his lips. Joe's morning wood hadn't a chance of dying a fast death.

The towel edge may have been sagging, but the bulge lifting moist terrycloth below was anything but. Sage's weight shifted, drawing Joe's gaze back up the sculpted Adonis body to the cleanly shaven square jaw and half-smile.

Joe dared to look higher, to meet Sage's gaze, astonished to see the uncertainty in the deep brown depths.

Sage's gaze darted over Joe's face, gauging him perhaps. Whatever he looked for, he didn't seem to find it as Joe struggled to maintain a flat expression.

"It's tight but I was able to squeeze in," Sage said.

What the fuck kind of erotic dirty talk was that?

“The shower stall,” Sage clarified.

“Right! Right. The shower stall.”

“What did you think I meant?” Dark brown eyes bored into his and Joe looked away, pretending to search for his change of clothes.

“I wasn’t sure. It helps when you put a subject to the sentence instead of assuming people know what you’re talking about,” Joe snapped.

“Say the word, Joe, and I’ll drop this towel right now and give you whatever you want,” Sage blurted.

Joe’s eyes widened and he swung his head back to look at him. Sage winced and his complexion paled slightly.

“What do you think I want?” Joe asked.

“I can’t read you for shit.”

Moments of high emotion led to confessions, according to Sage. Was he feeling strong emotion and unable to keep his silence? Interest flared in his chest. Just how much would Sage reveal if he were compelled to tell Joe everything?

“Then what do *you* want?” Joe asked.

“For the love of all things holy.” Sage glared at him. “Don’t fucking ask me shit like that.”

Joe couldn’t help the smile he knew he wore or the distinctly gloating flavor of it. Every cell in his body demanded that he rile Sage, set him up for confession—if he’d been telling the truth about that much.

He got to his feet, facing off with him. “What do you want?”

Sage looked horrified or scared, maybe both. He pressed his lips until the fullness reduced to a white line. His nostrils flared and his jaw ticked with effort.

Looking at him like this, without an ounce of contradictory signals, Joe believed the struggle. He felt a little guilty for using Sage’s emotions against him, but Joe had to know what kind of playboy he was dealing with.

With a groan, Sage lost the battle. “You. To want me. To tell me how you want me, where you want me. To can’t get enough of me.”

“Is that all?”

“No.” Sage’s brows drew up in horror as the words seemed to be a realization.

“What else, Sage?” Joe stepped closer. He trailed his fingers over Sage’s chest, examined the moisture and slowly licked the tip of one finger. Clean, smooth, and an undetermined essence that he’d bet was all Sage.

“Love me,” Sage said, then swore.

Joe blinked. “Love you, or make love to you?”

“Both. God, I want you to fall for me. Not be able to get enough and ask me to stay when this job is over. And I hate that I sound so fucking desperate, so fucking say something already.”

He was ready for sex. Sage confessing to that would have been easy to blow off. But the other? It stalled his breath, made his lungs burn until he remembered to breathe. Love had no place in the games Sage played. Unless being *played* is what Joe had been.

Relationships meant far more than random sex to Joe. Sage could have figured that out. Could be using it to get into Joe’s pants and win this insane sensual tug-of-war just to maintain his record of being undeniable.

What was the price of ego? This conversation would never be heard by anyone else. No one would ever know that Sage had begged him to capitulate. Yet Sage would walk out of this job and out of Joe’s life having *scored*. Unbroken record.

Joe stood to lose a lot more. He didn’t give his body without investing his soul. Sage would naturally play to the weakness, con him to get what he wanted. He expected Joe to fall for the line like the suave pickup it was, agree to rampant sex for the next few days while Sage slaked his ego and his needs on a warm willing body. Conquering a man who hung love with more than a great orgasm and a hot body.

He saw no benefit in accepting Sage’s confession. Nothing more than another act. A new way to come at Joe while hoping for a favorable response. God, this man was good at seduction. Joe had no intention of succumbing.

Sage stood like temptation incarnate, a walking orgasm within arm’s reach if only Joe said yes. If he said yes, Sage’s shower-wet body would be Joe’s for a short time. Sage’s slick chest against his, hard length anyway Joe wanted it, and one hundred percent of the dark god groaning for *him*. Sage’s considerable love making skills dedicated to making Joe come for the next few days.

Joe’s dick wept for his mind to agree. His sack already hung heavy with need, and morning wood had become something far more demanding.

“For God’s sake,” Sage pleaded softly. His shoulders dropped slightly and he canted his head to the side. Liquid brown eyes implored him in a flawless imitation of desperate vulnerability. “Say something.”

Confusion crowded in on Joe. His eyes told him one thing, studying Sage’s body language and expressions, but his character to this point put it in doubt. Didn’t it? Unless Sage really did have to tell him the truth, in which case it was bald emotion. Which did Joe believe?

He clutched his clothes tighter and headed for the closet bathroom. A cold shower would help him think clearer. “I’m going to clean up. I asked Debbie to put sandwich makings in the break room.”

* * * *

The bathroom door closed.

Breath exploded from Sage’s lungs. His knuckles ached from holding the towel so tightly and his chest tingled where Joe had touched him.

His head fell back as he swallowed past the tightness in his throat and sought guidance from the ceiling. “You won’t win. Damn faeries.”

But God, it hurt! He hadn’t even realized how much he wanted Joe to love him until the words emerged.

He’d had lovers. Aggressive lovers and needy lovers. He’d seen the fantasies of a thousand possible lovers, but Joe’s gentleness and refusal to be lured by Sage’s appearance made him wish for a bond. A real bond with accountability and tenderness, and the same gentle spirit loving him back in spite of Sage’s social ineptness.

Sage dressed in his favorite blue jeans and a navy tee that clung to his body like second skin. Joe had looked. When Sage had come out of the bathroom and quietly watched Joe sleep, a quiet rattle on each deep pull, he hadn’t intended to wake him. But the minute those sleepy green eyes had fixed on him, Sage had been unable to move.

Joe’s slow appraisal had shown appreciation. Sage didn’t put much importance on that since faery magic had made his body and face appealing, yet he’d loved every second Joe’s eyes were glued to him. When he’d stood to square with Sage, Joe’s unflinching gaze and dare had turned Sage on more than he could account for.

He glanced at the closed bathroom while he rolled up both their mats. Joe *had* been attracted, though. There was a chance Sage could use that attraction to tempt him into a deeper

relationship. Even a physical one would be welcome if Sage could use it as a jumping off point to convince Joe to open up to him emotionally.

Sex to get love. Weak, but plausible. And right now, it was the only option Sage had open to him, the only point of weakness Joe had shown when rejecting him.

Sage decided to give him a modicum of space before he tested Joe's resolve. Breakfast first. Seduction later.

* * * *

Sage leaned over the console, frowning. Joe might as well have not been standing there for all the attention Sage showed him. Isn't that what he'd wanted? For Sage to leave him alone and forget about cock? Specifically *his* cock?

"What are you seeing?" Joe asked after another minute.

"It's what I'm not seeing. There's a bad read on one of the lasers we set up last night."

"You checked them, did you notice anything off?"

Sage shook his head. He typed in another command and flipped between screens. Angling his head to the right, Sage scanned another monitor and hit a series of programming codes into that one too. "You sent the guards home for the duration?"

"No one on night shift, but us, through the showing," Joe confirmed.

"Someone clocked in. Less than a minute later, he clocked back out. That's not enough time to get to the protocols door from across the lobby, yet there's record of an access code being entered on this door twelve minutes after the first anomaly."

"Which is more than enough time to cross the lobby," Joe said.

"More than enough time to confirm he hadn't been seen before letting himself into protocols."

"Who? When?"

"The I.D. tag is a blank, like the one I made for myself. Someone was in here at four forty-one a.m., right after we turned in," Sage answered.

"That's not possible. We were both awake."

Sage leveled him with a look of interest. "You were awake?"

Joe had been awake most of the night, tossing and turning next to Sage, and wishing they were tossing and turning with each other. "I didn't hear anything," Joe said by way of answering.

"Me either." He turned back to the screens. Joe watched a quiet smile curl his lips.

“Cameras?” Joe asked coming to stand beside him. He leaned over to see the screen better, he told himself, not to catch Sage’s heady masculine scent.

Sage flipped a switch above the data monitors and the surveillance screens came on. “Did you tell anyone we changed the duration each camera held before flipping?”

“No, but all feeds still record, even if the view to these rooms is changed.”

“And the images are downloaded to hard drive, or are they taped and written over?” Sage asked. “Damn it. I should have asked you that days ago.”

“They get recorded over,” Joe’s stomach hollowed. “It shouldn’t matter, though. It happened today, not yesterday when it could have been lost.”

“Except that this may not be the first breach we’re seeing.” Sage rewound the images. Periodically he let them run then flipped to another view. Finally, his interest on the images intensified. “There. Look at that. There’s a dark shape to the left of the teller’s area not on the last segment of this angle.”

Sage pointed to the shape on different views. It captured only three.

“He knows where the cameras are,” Joe said, feeling sicker by the moment.

Sage turned from the screens, propping his hip on the console and facing Joe. “Hey,” he began gently. “Any criminal who’s good enough to break into a bank, is good enough to case the security systems. We wouldn’t have caught him if we’d told anyone the new time lengths on the monitors.”

“Of course,” Joe agreed.

The bank was accessed on his watch. Joe’s neck was on the line, and he couldn’t seem to get past that shock to determine his next course of action. What he wanted to do was lean forward across the short distance to rest his head on Sage’s shoulder for a minute.

“Has the bank ever been breached before?” Sage asked.

“Sure, but not in the past six years since there have been onsite guards.”

“Not since you’ve been here,” Sage deduced.

Joe sighed and dropped his hands on his hips. “Yeah.” He bowed and shook his head.

Warm, slightly roughened fingers slid behind his neck. Not a caress, but Sage’s contact did give him comfort. “We’re in this together, all right? We’ll work it out.”

He looked up, meeting Sage’s tender gaze. “Did they leave?”

“Yeah, the camera shows a clip of foot going out an hour and twenty minutes after the

first access. Whatever scan he did on the door mechanism left shadow trace of electric bypass. Nothing I can pinpoint, just missing data where data should be in the programming.”

Sage’s thumb swept into Joe’s hairline at the nape and back down again several times. Hypnotic, erotic, it charged his nerve endings.

“We need to do a full sweep of the property, immediately,” Joe said. Space. He needed space before he did something stupid. “And check the stones to make sure they’re still in place.”

“We will, as soon as I reset the security scanner on the protocol door. You and I will be the only ones with access to these offices. Tomorrow morning, all the employees will have to check in through us. Until the stones leave here safely, we can’t take any chances that you have a security mole.”

This Sage made resistance a challenge. His quiet voice and intuitive concern for Joe’s anxiety about the bank, coupled by calm, non-intrusive touches would have had Joe in the sack faster than Sage’s earlier blatant proposals. If *this* Sage had hit on him first, Joe would have been a goner.

And his neck—the man had a gift for tapping into Joe’s favorite erogenous zone. He wasn’t sure if steadily stroking the sensitive nape or Sage’s sweetness had knocked down the barrier Joe had erected.

That’s not all Joe had erected. God, was Sage’s mouth really that beautiful?

The kiss seemed like a natural extension of thought. Their lips met, fitting to each other and lifting away, touching and barely clasp, only to retreat. Soft repetition, tangled breaths, lips warming against one another, and all the time, Sage’s thumb teased Joe’s nape.

He didn’t rush or insist. He didn’t do any of the things Joe expected from Sage’s brash nature. Sage followed and met each kiss with another just as soft, just as comforting, just as beautiful as the one before.

Joe’s hand came up to rest on Sage’s chest. The tips of two fingers touched collarbone and his palm pressed the warm muscle thudding with Sage’s quickened heart. Joe wanted more proof.

He parted his lips slightly, taking his time on the next clasp, and slid his hand over the contours of Sage’s shoulder until his thumb rested on the pulse point beneath Sage’s ear. It tattooed a quick, strong rhythm. Then higher to stroke his jaw and slide his fingers into silky dark strands behind Sage’s ear.

Sage groaned, a long, tortured sound that coiled around Joe's cock and tugged moisture from the slit. Sage's hands moved, dragging slowly down Joe's chest to his waist. Their kiss broke. They were both breathless, and Joe felt more than a little scared at the meaning behind their joint desperation. He pressed his forehead to Sage's. Sage loosely wrapped his arms around Joe's waist and drew him closer, forcing Joe's legs to part and one of Sage's muscled thighs to slide between them.

"We should check the bank," Joe protested weakly. Sage's hold couldn't have kept him if he had chosen to pull away. But the heated look in his dark brown eyes chained Joe in place.

"You're right."

"We should go, now," Joe stressed. The hot thigh remained motionless, unthreatening, between his legs, yet its intimate pressure on his balls felt too delicious to ignore. His fingers curled in Sage's hair, lightly scraping his nails on his scalp.

Sage took a shuddering breath, blinked slowly and dazedly. "I agree. They could be breaking in again as we speak."

"Why aren't you moving?" Joe asked. One of them should have their wits about them. One of them should show concern for the bank. Sage's eyelids slid to half-mast. He licked his lips and seemed to need a moment to catch his breath. Joe watched it all.

"How would you like me to move?" Sage lifted his thigh only millimeters, but it was enough to draw a gasp from Joe.

The sides of their noses brushed. Joe's lips tingled, ready. "That's not what I meant."

Sage's mouth coasted over his. "What did you mean?"

Joe ignored the question. He took Sage's face in his hands and kissed him properly. Their lips fused and Joe swept his tongue inside to taste him. Sage's palm cupped Joe's ass, kneading it with his fingers before tracing up the center seam. Joe's hole fluttered, and though Sage couldn't possibly have known, warning alarms streaked through Joe's body.

He pushed off, taking several steps back.

Sage looked stricken. "What's wrong?"

"This. *This* is wrong. We're supposed to be protecting priceless stones and you're seducing me," Joe bit out. He lied. Sage had remained still, accepting, while Joe had applied himself to seducing his own will.

Disappointment cooled Sage's eyes. He clamped his jaw.

“All you think about is fucking, don’t you?” Joe accused.

“All I think about is you.” Sage’s eyes snapped, but the words rang sincere. “You want to work? Let’s work.” His lips twitched around more words.

Joe recognized the signs of him holding back. “And?”

“And when you finally work out that you want me as badly as I want you, then I’ll fuck you. Until that happens, quit yanking me around by the balls.”

“I’m yanking you around by the balls? That’s a laugh. You’ve been trying to get into my pants since the day we met. You act like you’re the wronged party,” Joe countered. He grabbed his security badge and tossed it to the console. “Recalibrate the badges already. I’ll be waiting in the lobby.”

“When have I wronged you?” Sage shouted after him.

The door slammed behind him, shutting out anything else Sage would have said. Sage hadn’t wronged him. He’d been blunt, truthful and honest about what he wanted from the beginning. Faeries were farfetched, but everything else had been true as far as he could tell.

Sage’s only crime was finding a way through Joe’s defenses and landing a sucker punch to his heart. *Damn him for that!*

Well, Joe would put an end to the fantasy right now. It would be all business from this point forward.

Chapter Seven

“Damn it, Sage, nice going,” he berated himself. He jabbed the system reset buttons and entered a new pass code. Scanning both their badges, he deleted the old code from the permanent file and replaced it with the new one.

He blew out a breath, willing his hard-on to relax. It wasn’t as though Joe wasn’t aware Sage had one. After that embrace, the fucking computer had an erection. The things Joe did with a kiss could turn a guy’s insides to mush.

Sage threw his kit strap over his shoulder and grabbed the passes. Striding to the lobby, he tipped his head toward the back. “Let’s go.”

He stifled the chuckle that threatened to escape when Joe’s eyes widened with surprise. They took the stairs up to the overlooking upper level. Low moveable walls separated the various work areas, granting each desk generous space to entertain clients while leaving the balcony open to viewing.

Joe flashed a light into the corners and around. “I don’t see anything out of place.”

“There was always the possibility that the intruder didn’t know about the stones,” Sage said.

“Too coincidental and not likely in my book.”

A full circuit of the upper level showed nothing obvious out of place. Sage placed a couple of discrete motion sensors and took out his electronic calibration unit to set their frequencies. Top of the line electronics, this unit had been pieced together of Sage’s own design.

One sensor covered the stairs, another the elevator bank, and two more concentrated invisible beams at the entrance.

“I’m good. Let’s check the safe room,” Sage said.

“I still think we should have checked there first.”

“Surveillance pulled up nothing, and there were no trips to the lasers already in place. I don’t know what your thief was doing, but cracking the safe wasn’t it,” Sage argued. “Whereas you have an entire floor of financial records to protect with no more than a couple of passwords and a hard drive to bypass.”

“Let me guess. That’s part of phase two,” Joe said. He lifted his brows as though daring Sage to argue.

Sage grinned, determined not to show traces of hurt. “Exactly. C’mon. I’m ready to go check your metal baby.”

Joe’s return smile relaxed the tension between them. “Finally.”

Back down the stairs and to the only down elevator, Sage stood aside while Joe fitted a key into the interior panel granting them access to the basement level. The heavy metal doors slid open and Sage hit the lock open mechanism, holding the elevator open.

“What are you doing?”

“I’m going up,” Sage said. He hoisted himself onto the interior handrails and pushed the central panel. Grabbing the drill from his tool belt, Sage intended to hide a small camera. He glanced down into the elevator box, adjusting his stance so that his feet steadied on adjacent handrails, his hips open to the elevator doors.

“You need help?” Joe called up.

“Yeah. Open the leather pouch inside the kit. See the little black boxes with the pinhead lenses?”

“I see them.”

“Hand me one,” Sage told him. Using an elbow to keep him propped in place, he lowered his free hand to accept the unit.

Warm fingers brushed his. And gave Sage an idea. He took the small box and leaned into the drill. Still holding his upper body, Sage purposefully let on foot slip on the handrail. “Joe!”

“Gotcha.” Joe’s warm hands caught his leg and positioned it back on the rail. “Need me to hold you?”

God, did he. “Yeah, can you support my legs so I don’t drill my face?”

Hot palms and wide spread fingers caught Sage behind his knees. He grinned in the darkness of the elevator shaft. Anything he could do to get Joe’s hands on him, he’d do. It might

be a cheap shot, but it thrilled him all the same.

He took his time anchoring the camera to shoot between the lighting grate and made a show of pulling the panel back in place, teetering until Joe's hand reached higher to hold Sage's hips. He fit the drill into the loop on his tool belt and then held Joe's rock steady shoulders to descend.

He jumped, landing squarely in front of Joe, and knocking them both off balance.

Joe wrapped his arms around him. "Whoa."

Sage braced against a wall before either of them could hit. His hips thumped against Joe's, grinding their cocks together. Joe's grip tightened, held their pelvises close.

Hot breath huffed on the underside of Sage's jaw. Barely righted, Sage still felt off balance with Joe hanging onto him. Joe's nose grazed his chin. Sage dipped, kissing him full on the lips.

His head swam dizzily and Joe's muffled moan fired Sage's blood to take as much as Joe would allow.

He parted Joe's lips, lightly flicking them with the tip of his tongue before delving inside. Joe's hands lowered over Sage's ass. Joe gently thrust once, twice, his cock as hard as Sage's.

Sage pressed him backward to the paneling and out of view of the security camera in the hall. Blocking Joe with one forearm pressed to the surface, his free hand searched out and found Joe's nipple. He thumbed over it. Joe inhaled sharply and abandoned Sage's ass to yank the t-shirt off Sage's body.

It forced Sage to relinquish the kiss temporarily, making him grumble, but Joe lifted his face the short distance for renewed contact like a priceless gift. He stroked up Sage's back as though trying to memorize the contours.

Nails bit the flesh at Sage's shoulders and Sage pulled on Joe's shirt, popping buttons until he could pinch the sweet budded flesh he sought. He ripped it the rest of the way in his impatience, not caring when the plastic closures rattled on the elevator bottom.

He sucked gently on Joe's tongue, cooling the lust, to prove it was more than his body Sage wanted. Sage tried to show him with lips, then trailing kisses over his cheek to the cords at the side of his neck.

Joe shuddered against him.

Sage couldn't resist touching Joe's smoother body, taut with muscles. His finer skin

tasted sweet and salty. He didn't think he could stand not sampling all of him.

He sank lower, planting a hand square in the middle of Joe's chest, holding him to the paneling as he tortured first one tight nipple and then the other. Joe nuzzled the top of his head, moaning. His hips bucked and Sage nearly lost all control.

He kissed his way down Joe's body, reveling in the deep abdomen-caving breaths Joe took. Sexy didn't describe it. Sage felt humbled, and privileged. He trembled to the core, hoping Joe would read how much Sage wanted to please him.

He nipped Joe's abdomen, fumbling with the closure to drag the pants down.

Joe tangled his fingers in Sage's hair forcing him to look up. "No condoms."

"Don't need them." Sage answered, staring into his mossy eyes as he grasped Joe's cock and rubbed the tip along his bottom lip. "Got it covered." He chuckled at the word play. "So to speak."

Sage closed his lips over the tip and Joe's head thumped backward. Still tangled fingers urged him to continue. He flattened his hand on Joe's stomach and rubbed upward to one of the delicious nipples he'd tasted. He twisted it hard simultaneously, swallowing Joe until his cock bumped the back of his throat.

Smooth and firm, Joe glided sensuously in Sage's mouth. Molding his tongue to the underside of Joe's length, Sage sucked, hollowing his cheeks in his effort to give as much pleasure as possible. He tasted sweeter, tangier here.

"Shouldn't be doing this," Joe gasped.

He pulled off, tonguing the slit. "I could stop." Sage silently begged to continue.

"What are you thinking?" Joe asked, incongruently.

This time Sage didn't fight the words he couldn't stem. "I want to taste you. I want to be the one who makes you come. Please don't ask me to stop."

Joe's lifted his hips, pressing back into the warmth of Sage's mouth. He should stop. He should make Sage stop.

It's a blowjob, not sex.

Same as sex, he argued with himself. Nails scraped lightly on his inner thigh and Joe forgot to continue the argument.

So hot in Sage.

The head of his cock slid along the ridges of Sage's hard pallet. The bone-rattling groan was his, and Joe knew it, but he still couldn't stop the needy sound from spilling out of him even as his seed prepared to do the same. His balls squeezed tight against his body.

Sage cupped him and tickled the tips of two fingers over his anus.

Joe tried to hold back, tried to pull himself from the well of sensations to keep his wits about him. Giving Sage everything, including command of his heart, couldn't happen.

Yet the tunnel of Eros closed in on him. It blocked out all thought, all light. His breaths echoed in his own ears, and his chest burned for the insatiable pumping of his heart to keep up with the tide washing through him, dragging him irresistibly forward into pleasure.

Sage worked faster, pulled harder, swallowed deeper. Heat tugged up from the base of Joe's cock. Fingers of lightening quickened in his balls and swelled his shaft.

"Oh, God!" Joe quit fighting the battle against his own orgasm. He flexed in rhythm with Sage's dark, delicious sucking mouth. His spine tingled, his head swam and he closed his eyes, let his mouth fall open as sensation swept him, spun him and pounded his body.

"I'm coming. Oh, God, I'm coming." Joe's words choked off as he went mindless, no longer able to hold back and terrified that if he didn't, Sage would have all of him and leave him broken.

A teasing probe and then sharp penetration of a digit into his hole ripped a yell from Joe as cum streaked up his cock and emptied endlessly into the abyss of pleasure.

His rough breathing filled his ears first, followed by the well-used hum of his body and the wet flicks of tongue around his cock and into the slit at the top. Soft lips pressed tenderly to Joe's tip.

And that's when the dread hit him. What the hell had he just done?

Sage looked up to catch the lingering daze of orgasm on Joe's face. The flush across his cheekbones brightened his green eyes, and his kiss-swollen lips had parted. Sage wanted nothing more than to kiss them again. Actually, he wanted a lot more than that, but he'd take his time making love to Joe. Work him back up again before they came together this time.

He nuzzled Joe's abdomen, placing soft kisses on the firm skin.

Joe's brows knit. His gaze darted around the small elevator, then down at Sage where they widened. He licked his lips and slowly shook his head.

Fear hit Sage squarely in the gut. Joe regretted coming for him already. The sweet, salty flavor of Joe's release still graced his tongue and his mouth still had the numbness of sucking him off, yet Joe already wished it hadn't happened.

He couldn't see it, wouldn't let the horror bloom in Joe's expression. He didn't think he could handle the manifestation of rejection, because God, it already hurt. Far more than the burning ache in his balls. Physical discomfort didn't compare to the emotional hit he was about to take.

He hadn't been able to do anything right where Joe was concerned. The curse caused him to keep his distance in relationships. He always knew when his lover wanted someone else. He couldn't read Joe, but some things didn't require a faery curse. Solitary existence looked better and better if this soul-deep rejection were a sample.

Sage plastered a smile on his face and stood. "Was it good for you?"

Joe's dawning dread shifted into confusion. "What?"

"You were so uptight about that kiss, you needed to get off and relax a little."

The blush that stained Joe's cheeks and brightened the tips of his ears shamed Sage. But anger was better than pity. A lot better. And a thousand times more preferable than outright disgust.

Sage slapped Joe's naked hip. "Get dressed. We have a safe to protect." He left him to sort out his clothes and lugged the kit to his shoulder.

Sage checked the lasers. Nothing was out of place. He heard Joe approach, but couldn't make himself turn and smile this time.

"You reach to new heights of callousness with every breath," Joe muttered, voice shaking.

His chest squeezed.

Joe went through several rounds of keypad entry before the safe unbolted and both men walked in. Joe unlocked the case in the back and examined the stones. "They're the same."

"I'll put a couple more cameras in the blind spots tonight. Why don't you go up and watch the monitors?" Sage suggested.

"Yeah, I'll do that," Joe said flatly. He closed up the safe and didn't look back as he walked briskly toward the elevator. He turned the key in the panel, then tossed them through the closing doors to land at Sage's feet.

After he left, Sage took a moment to gather himself. He felt fractured, hopeless. He'd wanted to show Joe how much he wanted to be with him, not scare him away. But he'd pushed too hard, too fast.

The cool safe felt good against his forehead and he rested it there, taking deep breaths to ease the tightness in his chest. Having never felt this way about anyone before, he had no reference point on what to do next.

Confess? He'd done that. Too often.

Seduce? He'd done that too. It had backfired.

Subtlety? Impossible because of the curse. *Damn the faeries!* What had been the point? To teach his mother a lesson? Sage had learned nothing but resentment by just being born. Until faced with someone he could actually lose and miss the loss of, it had been an inconvenience. Now his life stretched out in lonely shadows through the years.

He didn't want to find another man. He wanted Joe. Down to earth, funny, intelligent, curious, confident, sexy Joe.

With trembling hands, he dug through the kit and set up two more cameras. Where had his confidence gone? God, he'd never been this affected before.

After calibration, he double-checked his work, not taking routine for granted. The set up had gone smoothly without default. Sage put his things away then prepared himself for the worst as he got in the elevator and turned the key.

Chapter Eight

It didn't add up. Sage's admission about wanting Joe, the plea in his hot brown gaze, the way he'd loved Joe didn't add up to the words he'd flippantly said afterward. He'd known Sage had to tell him the truth if he asked what he was thinking. He'd planned on it and it had been exactly what Joe needed, wanted to hear.

He'd believed Sage. He'd felt the truth in the unspoken promise of Sage's eyes. You couldn't turn off emotion like that. Lust could be slaked, but love—and Joe was certain he'd seen it—couldn't.

When the passion died down, Sage had looked up at him with such tenderness. What had he seen to make that tenderness burn out?

Joe watched the monitor filming the safe room. Sage leaned against the safe as though for support, rested his head on it, then unsteadily worked. His movements were dull, slow motion versions of the same skilled techniques Joe had seen him employ on several other occasions. Then Sage checked his work, something he'd not seen him do before.

Uncertainty didn't fit Sage.

The more he thought of it, the more he knew Sage had seen Joe's shock and interpreted it in a bad light. He'd have to fix that.

Sage left the safe room, reappeared on the elevator cam, then exited and crossed the lobby. He waited until he heard the card slip in the scanner and the door swing open.

"I'm back here," Joe called. He'd left the door to the observation room propped open.

"Do they work?"

"You know they do. Get in here. There's something we need to address," Joe informed.

Sage sauntered in, a cocky smile on his lips that didn't quite reach his eyes. He looked

wary, tense, and though his hard-on had flagged, it still looked to be semi-filled and uncomfortable behind his fly.

He'd take care of that too.

"Everything set up?" Joe asked.

"We're golden." Sage avoided his eyes and dropped his kit by the door. He took a deep breath. "Okay, I'm ready. Let's hear it."

"I recommend shutting the door. You're going to need to lean against it."

Sage cocked an eyebrow, but did as he was asked. Joe watched every line, every contour of his upper body twist and the movement of his fingers over the handle. Then Sage stuffed his hands in his jean pockets and leaned back, only his shoulders touching the wood.

Cotton stretched across his chest, and as Sage stiffened his elbows, digging his hands deeper in the pockets, the waistband of his jeans drooped more than an inch. Joe thought he might need some support too. The man made his knees weak. He could fight giving in all he wanted to, but he'd already lost the battle once. Stunningly.

This time was for Sage.

Joe nodded toward Sage's fly. "You look mildly uncomfortable there."

"I've been better."

"Show me." Joe leaned back on the console, crossing his arms across his chest to keep from reaching out as he watched Sage.

"Show you what, exactly?"

Joe had planned to ask Sage to stroke off for him. To see the delicious package Sage sported beneath faded Levi's, and watch him jerk to completion. That had been the plan. He wasn't able to get the words out. The request would be cold, meant to keep himself at a distance while appreciating the longed-for view. He couldn't do it. He wanted to be there when Sage came.

Joe rose and crossed to Sage. Eye to eye, Joe detected insecurity, hurt and shame. Joe had caused those things. He'd been so concerned with saving his own skin that he hadn't considered Sage might have taken a chance. A real one.

Sage hadn't moved, but the wariness tightening his eyes and making his negligent smile appear strained tugged at Joe's heart. He hadn't meant to hurt him. Hadn't even thought he *could* hurt Sage.

Humbled, a little scared, Joe wrapped his fingers around Sage's wrists. He pulled them from the pockets with little resistance and held them loosely against the door on either side of Sage's head. His eyes narrowed but he made no effort to stop Joe.

Joe unwound his fingers, kept his eyes locked on Sage to gauge his reaction as their palms slid together and he linked their fingers. Sage's lips parted with a surprised exhale and his chocolate eyes darkened. He read hope and hunger in them, trepidation to act and confusion. Sage's gaze darted over Joe's face, clearly trying to read his intentions. Joe wondered what he saw, but he was about to put the mystery to rest anyway.

This moment between uncertainty and desire in Sage's body language fascinated Joe. How could a man this gorgeous, this sexually confident and industry savvy be insecure about *him*?

"Joe?"

Sage's thready question held all the insecurity Joe sensed. It went straight to his heart. And that's when he knew he wasn't getting out of this entanglement with Sage in one piece. He'd give himself completely, leave himself open to the pain Sage would deliver by leaving when the security job ended. It would hurt like hell, but Joe also knew this had been building since the day they'd met—in a men's room of all places.

The relationship wouldn't end for Joe. He'd remember this man, this moment for the rest of his life, but damn if he wouldn't accept Sage's comfort now to remember back on when he left. And he would leave. Guys like Sage always left for the next conquest; loving deeply, using it up, and tiring.

"Joe," Sage said, softer, almost defeated as his gaze dropped. "I never took you for a tease. Don't do this to me."

He could have pushed Joe away easily enough. Instead, he let himself be blocked, fingers locked and palms pressed. Like a broken wild animal tired of the cage and waiting for release.

"I've never been called a tease before," Joe murmured. He eased closer, his hip brushed Sage's, nudged the thick ridge Joe hadn't had the pleasure of touching. Yet. Their chests grazed together, almost more a sensation of heat than physical contact, but enough to recapture the hope in Sage's eyes.

Sage and hope were sexy together, he decided.

He covered Sage's mouth with his own, softly absorbing the warmth and holding still in a

sweet capture of breaths and lips. Sage's fingers tightened in his and Joe squeezed back. Sage pressed into the kiss, deepening it, and pushing his chest forward into Joe's.

Chest to abs, hips to thighs, they lined each other. Sage's body reached for his while tethered by linked fingers and hands held to the door on either side of Sage's head.

Sage fell back, breathing deeply. "What are you up to, Joe? What do you want from me that I haven't already offered?"

He didn't know how to answer. Joe wanted exactly what Sage had offered, but he wanted the truth of it, not the illusion. Not some fly by night, weeklong romance or a crush that would wither. He'd live the dream a little longer. Pretend that Sage had meant every word the same way Joe did. Loving forever instead of a flash of heat, sex and emotion.

Joe didn't think he could quite confess what he felt, though. It might be more power than he wanted to hand over.

He dragged their hands downward to the small of Sage's back and freed one of his own. "I wanted you to jack off for me. Reciprocity. But I decided I'd rather participate in my own way. Hope you don't mind." Joe nuzzled a sweet spot under Sage's ear.

"Hot again." Sage gasped when Joe flicked the sensitive spot with his tongue.

"Again?"

"Hot. Cold. Hot again. You're killing me," Sage rasped.

Joe kissed the underside of Sage's jaw where it creased to his neck. "You'll live."

Sage jerked sharply to the side. "I mean it, Joe. Don't jerk me around. I want too much from you. This isn't a game for me."

When had the tables turned? Joe wondered. He sank against Sage. "You've never been a game."

"The hell I haven't," Sage growled, suddenly pushing Joe off.

Joe stumbled backward a few steps. His chest felt cold where Sage had been. "What are you talking about?"

Sage ran a hand through his hair, pressed his lips.

Whatever he needed to say, he didn't want to. "Say it," Joe insisted. Even if it hurt, he wanted to know.

Sage gave a frustrated grunt. "I'm falling in love with you, and you're playing me like a puppet master."

Sincerity radiated from Sage. He might have to confess, but Joe didn't. He charged forward slamming against Sage's chest hard enough to bounce. "You're *not* a game. Not even close."

Sage's arms came around him, pulled up Joe's shirt and rested his hands against Joe's bare back. "How do I make you love me?" he whispered.

Joe noticed the slight wince. Instinctively, he knew Sage hadn't meant to reveal the question. Did Sage know what he was asking? Did he understand that Joe's kind of love kept going? That it didn't end in a week, or a month or a year, but deepened and left a mark on his heart?

Because Sage looked like a man in the agony of what Joe feared. He looked like he wanted more than a fling. Joe caught the fluttering butterfly of hope.

"Let me show you," Joe breathed. "Not here."

He took Sage's hands and led him from the observation room to his office. Understanding, Sage helped Joe unroll the mats, then pulled a backpack from around the back corner of the couch. He kneeled and removed his tool belt, putting it where the other bag had been. Sage unzipped the pack and dug around in it with his back to Joe, who kicked off his shoes, loosened his pants and shucked his torn shirt while he waited somewhat nervously for Sage to turn around.

Finally, Joe squatted down behind him, taking Sage's back and ass against his body. With one hand on Sage's abdomen, Joe brushed several strands off the back of his neck with the other and pressed his lips to normally hidden flesh.

"What are you doing?" Joe asked.

"You're going to think I planned this. I didn't. You never gave me any reason to think you'd be interested, but my brother packed this bag," Sage said.

"Mm-hmm." Joe kissed his neck again, lightly rubbing his lips on the spot afterward.

"He packed supplies. It just makes me look pretty confident," Sage said. His voice hitched raggedly as Joe dared to reach lower, coasting his fingertips over the swollen ridge he found.

"Aren't you?"

Sage turned his side into Joe's body. "Not with you."

Soft buzzing filled the air and Sage swore, grabbing his cell phone off his hip. He glanced

at it. "Ferrah." He tossed the phone to the couch. "She can wait. This can't."

"She's calling you?" Joe asked, surprised. Joe was protocol contact, not Sage.

"I'm sure it's personal." Sage dragged a hand up Joe's thigh. "I'd rather be hearing your personal requests."

Sage's brown eyes glittered with purpose. He opened Joe's fly the rest of the way and reached inside.

"We did me." Joe stayed his hands. He'd never do everything he wanted to do to Sage if he let Sage keep touching.

Joe hooked his fingers into the empty belt loops of Sage's jeans and fell back on the mat. Sage landed on top.

"I like this view," Sage said, a wicked smile touching his full lips.

Joe reached up behind Sage's neck and pulled him down for a kiss. He opened to Sage, hungrily taking the kiss he wanted even when their teeth clicked against each other and Sage's tongue tickled the roof of his mouth.

Joe held him close and rolled, ending only partially sprawled on Sage's larger frame. Joe caught Sage's lip between his teeth and tugged. He burrowed under Sage's shirt, lifting it as he scraped the muscled terrain with eager fingers.

"I like this view better," Joe said. Freeing the material, he tossed it to the couch, not even caring where it landed.

He traced Sage's bottom lip with the tip of his thumb before succumbing to the desire to taste him again. Gently, he tugged his chin down, opening him wider for the broad, sweeping possession.

Sage's hands stayed busy, roaming Joe from shoulder to ass, then diving beneath Joe's slacks to cup his ass in both hands and squeeze gently. Joe groaned, dragged his lips to tease Sage's neck. He wasn't without his own tricks, and lightly tickled Sage's armpits.

"Joe," Sage panted.

"Don't cry uncle yet." Joe rolled his hips.

He scrapped his teeth on his shoulder. He smiled when Sage shivered, relaxed and lifted his arm over his head so Joe could better reach the soft skin.

Sage's cock flexed into Joe's pelvis.

"What are you doing to me?" Sage moaned.

“I want you to remember me,” Joe said, his voice husky with desire. He didn’t want to be relegated to a name in a list of conquests Sage kept, or be *that guy* he’d fallen hard for on a job once. He wanted to stand out. Not a fuck. A man who had made love to him, who’d given Sage everything he had freely, knowing the cost to follow.

He wanted Sage to feel the difference between mindless sex and what they were about to share.

“How could I forget you?”

“Let’s make sure, shall we?” Joe sank lower, flicked his tongue on the upper inside of his arm before gently nipping it. Joe’s fingers tracked downward over his ribcage and he transferred his attention to the snug nipple he wanted to taste.

Joe tormented it with soft sucking kisses, getting lost in the pliant muscle against his lips, the turgid nub on his tongue, and the harsh breaths Sage couldn’t mask. Hands cupped Joe’s head, moved down to knead his shoulders.

Joe blindly unbuttoned Sage’s jeans and dragged the zipper down. He slid down further, burying his face in the softer flesh beneath Sage’s sternum, licking the area and closing his eyes as he absorbed the fragrance he’d barely captured in the bead of shower water. It bathed his face with body heat and flesh and shuddering gasps each time Joe applied his teeth in open-mouthed bites.

“Making me crazy,” Sage groaned.

Joe’s own breath rushed past his lips, only serving to drag in more of the scent that was Sage with each new inhale. He wanted this man. He wanted his love if Sage actually had it to offer. He wanted his devotion, if Joe dared to ask for it. He wanted Sage. All of him.

Lower still, Joe tugged down faded jeans and red boxer-briefs, stopping when his hip revealed a small tan birthmark in the shape of a small dragonfly-like image. Winged and in flight the mark was both beautiful and unusual. Joe kissed it, taking care to run his tongue on the inside of his hipbone. Dragging the jeans lower, Joe unveiled a proud, dark cock and plum-brown head peeking from uncircumcised skin.

Sage tried to lift him back up, but Joe resisted.

“Please. If you go down on me, I’m going to come,” Sage rasped. He kicked his jeans the rest of the way off, now fully naked to Joe’s gaze.

“Don’t come,” Joe commanded. “I just have to taste you first.”

He skipped the rigid proof of Sage's arousal to lick the hairless sack at its base. Breath stuttered out of Sage's lungs and his hand fisted in Joe's hair. Joe's eyes watered slightly, but it was well worth the punishment. Taking the sack in his mouth, he stroked the hidden testes with his tongue, rolling them and humming with pleasure.

"Fuck! Fuck! Gonna—kill—me!" Sage's hips lifted and his thighs opened even wider.

Joe dragged his nails from ass to inner thigh, wiggling out of his own pants awkwardly, then pinning Sage's thighs under his arms when he grasped the impatient dick and forced the cock head to emerge. Joe licked the moist tip amidst renewed swearing from Sage. With more than a little delight, he sucked the head into his mouth rhythmically.

Sage barred his teeth. His face contorted into rapturous agony as Joe tried to get him to the absolute brink of bearing. Joe did want to taste him. Wanted it passionately. He wiggled a digit into Sage's tight clutching hole. Sage shouted, bucked and shot into Joe's mouth. He swallowed, enjoying the flavor as it passed his tongue, then pumped the still emptying cock in his fist to get every last drop.

"Oh shit, Joe, I'm sorry," Sage gasped raggedly.

Joe smiled. "Don't be. You were amazing."

Sage propped himself up on his elbows. "*I* was amazing?" He laughed then. "Come here."

"Not finished." Joe ducked down, burying his face in Sage's balls. He slid his hands up Sage's body, stroking the line of muscle at his waist, thumbing over his hipbones and rubbing the packed ridges from abdomen to chest, all the while petting Sage's scrotum and perineum with this tongue.

Sage's body relaxed even though his thighs twitched when Joe seemed to find a nerve a little too sensitive after climax.

"I don't know what you're doing, but don't stop," Sage begged, the words sounding pulled from him.

Joe worked his way back up, paying special attention to the birthmark. "What is this?" he said, kissing it.

"What is what?"

"This." He kissed it again. Joe pushed one hand under Sage's hips to cup his ass. With the other, he absently teased the muscles under Sage's pectoral then up to gently tweak his

nipple.

“My nipple,” Sage answered.

Joe laughed. “Not this,” he said, tweaking it again. “This.” Joe dropped the nipple-tweaking hand to elevate himself and rubbed his lips over the image again.

Sage glanced down. His eyes narrowed. “You see something there?” he asked cautiously.

“Of course I see it. Birthmark or something. God, it’s sexy as hell,” Joe murmured, moving on to nip at Sage’s abdomen.

“Joe.”

Joe mumbled affirmatively.

“Joe,” Sage said again.

“What?” he asked, annoyed at the distraction. He wanted to finish worshipping Sage’s body—taste, smell, feel all of him—before Sage decided he had finished with Joe.

“You see my mark?”

“Yeah,” Joe grinned. “It’s cute. Looks kind of like a dragonfly, but sexy.”

Sage laughed.

Joe didn’t get the joke. He didn’t have time to either. Sage hauled him up and wrapped him tightly in his powerful arms, chest still spasming with amusement.

“What’s so funny?” Joe asked.

His world flipped when Sage took him to his back and kissed him, reached into Joe’s pants and firmly rubbed his yet insatiate cock. It wasn’t how he wanted this to happen, but damn if Sage’s hand on his bare weeping flesh didn’t feel incredible.

When his lips began to feel bruised with the force of Sage’s kiss, Joe protested. He really didn’t want to come in Sage’s hand. His *ass*.

“Sorry.” Sage didn’t look sorry. He looked pleased.

“Yeah, I can tell. Want to fill me in on the joke so I can wrestle your tight ass down and climb on top?”

The boyish grin Sage wore died in favor of lust. “Fuck, that’s hot.” He groped off to the side and pressed a tube and a condom to Joe’s chest. “Wrestle now. I’ll explain later.”

“Good choice.”

Chapter Nine

Sage usually topped, but the prospect of staid, controlled, unreadable Joe losing himself in Sage's body provided too great a temptation. Besides, Joe's expert mouth had taken care of his urgency for the next ten minutes or so, he thought with a smile.

His valiant cock tried to rise. Joe's recovery kisses had gone a long way toward renewing interest and his body still tingled as he rolled off. He searched Joe's face as he put on a condom and lay the lube nearby. He seemed distracted, tense when he hadn't been seconds ago.

But when Joe looked up, he smiled and crawled toward him. Sage savored the view of flexing shoulders, lean tapered stomach, and swaying cock as Joe approached, then eased between Sage's legs.

Still propped on hands and knees, Joe bent to kiss him. He teased, nibbling along the bottom edge of Sage's lip and pulling away when Sage would lift to meet him.

"Uh-uh," Joe said, a secret smile playing with his lips like a doting lover.

He bent, Joe's mouth barely heating Sage's in ticklish contact. Sage raised his head only to have Joe retreat.

"Uh-uh," Joe said again.

When he bent a third time, Joe's breath slipping through Sage's parted lips to warm the tip of Sage's tongue, Sage wrapped an arm around his torso and hauled him down. One of Joe's elbows buckled. Their bodies came together and they both groaned like weary travelers finding familiar beds.

"Kiss me," Sage entreated, moving to capture his tempting mouth.

Joe dodged, laughed. "Uh-uh."

"Please? I want to participate."

“My turn to learn you,” Joe said, his eyes serious. “I want to remember every expression, every texture.”

“Sounds like a goodbye.”

Joe’s smile turned sad, but he didn’t answer. Sage wanted to ask what his silence meant. Another hot, skimming kiss distracted him. He’d ask later, if he hadn’t been driven mad at that point.

Sage closed his eyes, feeling whatever Joe wanted him to feel—the flickering kisses, the edge of teeth at the whiskers on his chin, the rasp of Joe’s cheek against his coupled with heated breath against his ear, the goose bumps that climbed his arms as a result, and the feathery strokes of Joe brushing hair off Sage’s temple.

They were almost-touches. Nothing but the whisper of sensations that hinted made him turn his face into them and always Joe stayed out of reach. Like his thoughts. Sage had never wanted anyone more. He’d never experienced an inability to use his senses, and he couldn’t shake the feeling that it was important. That Joe was more important than Sage had come to realize, and that if he didn’t proclaim his feelings soon, Joe would be taken from him.

He felt the dry burn behind his eyes. Unfamiliar, and yet, as recognizable as the pain clogging his throat and the fullness busting in his chest for this man. Joe. God, he needed him.

Joe’s lips brushed across his eyelids. His tongue touched the moisture Sage hadn’t known was there.

“Joe,” Sage’s voice broke.

“I know,” Joe whispered. “Soon.”

His weight settled on Sage. He cradled Sage’s head and fingers smoothed over his brows. Gentle touches trailed down the side of Sage’s neck to his shoulder where lips followed. Sage’s arm lifted and flickering licks darted inside his upper arm, sending shockwaves to Sage’s nerves, straight to his nipples and groin.

“God.”

“You’re a feast,” Joe murmured, his breath huffing on the recently moistened skin and renewing the march of goose bumps.

Sage’s cock had come to life again.

“But you know that,” Joe said, seeming to finish the prior thought with a touch of sadness.

He opened his eyes, not understanding and needing to see Joe's face.

Joe settled over him, his chin resting on Sage's sternum. His hands roamed up over Sage's ribs and palmed his nipples, eliciting a sharp inhale from Sage.

"I don't know that, but you make me believe it," Sage said. He stroked Joe's biceps to his shoulders and sifted his fingers through Joe's short brown hair. It was soft and fine, and that it had fallen to partially obscure one bright green eye, and sparked possessive tenderness in Sage's gut.

Joe's half smile flipped Sage's stomach.

"Make love to me," Sage said.

"I figured you for a top."

Sage grinned. "I am."

"And you want to bottom with me. Why?"

He looked at Joe in disbelief, having said he was falling in love. He hooked Joe under the arms and hauled him up his body so they were eye to eye and Joe wouldn't be able to ignore it this time.

"Because, Joe," Sage began. He touched Joe's lips and Joe drew one finger between them. Sage's breath caught and he paused to remember what he wanted to say. "I'm in love with you."

A look of hopeful wonder softened Joe's expression. "You're in love with me? Are you sure that's not your dick talking?" Joe parted Sage's fingers and flicked his tongue on the vee between them.

"God, you're distracting." Sage took his hand away, needing to get the words out in a way Joe couldn't misunderstand. "It's not my dick talking. Can I have a kiss now?" Sage asked.

"Yeah, I'll kiss you."

Joe's lips fitted over his perfectly. Smooth, full, moist, Sage couldn't help but open for him. Joe accepted the invitation, tangling his tongue with Sage's.

Sage touched every part of Joe he could reach, paying special attention to his spine. Coming to his ass, Sage grabbed him with both hands and flexed his hips.

"Who's distracting now?" Joe said on a breathless laugh.

"I want you."

"And there's so much I want to do to you," Joe confessed.

“Keep saying shit like that and I’ll let you top next time.”

“You asked me to make love to you. That’s what I’m doing. So get out of the driver’s seat,” Joe said. “Making love is not rampant sex.”

“I know that, but you have me in knots.”

Joe clamped his teeth on Sage’s bottom lip. “Good,” he said around the morsel before letting it go. “Tell me again.”

“Anything.”

“You want me inside you?”

“Yesss,” Sage hissed, his eyes falling closed.

Joe slid down to torture a nipple. He nipped it. “You like what I’m doing to you?”

Sage groaned, a nearly hysterical laugh squeezing in his throat.

He slid down further, suckled Sage’s abdomen, the underside of his chin touched with moisture from the tip of Sage’s cock. He dipped his head, sucking the head like a lollipop.

Sage may have whimpered. He hoped not. It stole man-cred points to cry for an orgasm like a girl. But he was about to if Joe didn’t hurry up and take his ass. Sage would cry like a three year old with pulled pigtailed any minute now.

“And you love me?” Joe asked. His thumb smoothed over Sage’s hole, wet, slick and cold.

“God, yes!”

“How much, Sage? How much do you love me?” Joe asked, his voice dropping to sexy, rough tones.

Hot breath teased Sage’s balls. Joe’s thumb pressed in, slid out and replaced with two fingers, plying the tight muscles with consistent pressure.

“Enough to let you be the first man to top me.”

A third finger joined the others and Sage pressed into them despite the slight sting.

“Enough to keep trying to convince you,” Sage said. “Enough that if you don’t fucking take my ass now—”

Sage swallowed his words. In one swift move, Joe lifted Sage’s ass to his lap, forcing his legs wide around Joe’s spread thighs. In another instant, Joe slammed inside.

Joe grunted. “You all right?”

“Hell, yeah.”

“Look at me,” Joe commanded. He rose up on his knees, elevating Sage’s lower body. Joe’s fingers bit into Sage’s hips, but he didn’t care.

Sage did, locked eyes on the blazing green passion in Joe’s as he began to move. Rocking at first and picking up speed, Sage got lost in the decadence of pleasure. Joe rode him, brow furrowed in concentration as he stared into Sage’s eyes. Sage couldn’t break the intimate visual bond and didn’t want to.

Joe’s thumbs hooked around Sage’s hipbones and though both rubbed and bruised, the left hip heated with unworldly pleasure. It spiraled from the spot into his groin, wrapping an invisible fist around his cock.

“What is that?” Joe asked.

Flicking his gaze over Joe’s body, he saw the signs of sharp arousal from pinpoint nipples to fully flexed chest muscles. A golden glow touched Joe’s abdomen. Light-threads seemed to pulse, feeding down to where their bodies joined. The same spiraling glow touched Sage’s body, wrapped around his cock and rippled up to the tip, circled his balls and massaged.

Sage groaned.

It didn’t stop there. It circled Sage’s thighs and charged around his hole and up the length of Joe’s cock. As he watched, it traced almost invisibly around Joe’s thighs to a sweet hidden spot that made Joe shudder and grunt with divine pleasure.

“Oh shit,” Joe gasped.

His eyes rolled back and his mouth dropped open. Joe’s body curled in on itself, a slave to the sensations they both felt. Sage watched, enraptured by lust, at the sight of Joe flexed and pounding into him with the force of a man enslaved to Eros.

And then it took Sage too. Pumped inside and out, prolonging the edge of ecstasy for several heart-stopping moments before plunging them both, shouting over the edge in abdomen-clenching spurts as Joe and Sage hung on to each other for dear life.

“Holy fuck,” Sage murmured into Joe’s hair as they collapsed together.

“That was amazing,” Joe agreed. He pressing his lips to Sage’s damp chest then pushed up on trembling arms. “That light. It came from your birthmark.”

“Yeah, ah, that was a first for me,” Sage said grinning.

“That doesn’t happen every time?”

“No. Never,” Sage shook his head. “Didn’t know that could happen.”

Somewhere under the flung shirts, Sage's cell buzzed lazily. No way would he let Ferrah intrude on this moment. The phone could stay there.

"Should you get that?" Joe asked.

"I don't think I can move."

Joe laughed with him. "I know what you mean."

He rolled to Sage's side, looking up at the ceiling too. Sage reached over his head to play with Joe's hair. "You aren't surprised that light coiled out of my birthmark?"

"You're a faery. Why should it surprise me?"

"Just like that?" Sage asked, turning his head to look at Joe's profile.

Joe faced him. "Gold light came out of your birthmark, sucked off my cock—which didn't need any help, by the way—and pounded my empty ass. Did I need more proof?"

The raised brow of disbelief made Sage snort. "No, I guess not."

"Glad that's settled."

* * * *

Joe hadn't intended on falling asleep, but as surely as he had snuggled up to Sage's side and Sage's hand rested on Joe's bare ass, he had. Something filtered just out of sight. A wisp, nothing more.

Reluctantly, Joe lifted a hand off Sage's chest and rubbed his eyes as he squinted into the dark of early morning. The blurry double vision stayed with him like grainy projector footage on cheesecloth.

Sage stirred, mumbled and rolled. Liberated, Joe got up to splash water on his face and the double vision disappeared. He shook his head and went to do it anyway, just in case he had sleep smogging his vision. When he finished, he came back to the mat. Joe stretched out on his side, cheek propped on his hand as he watched Sage.

He almost couldn't believe Sage loved him, but making love had left no doubt in Joe's mind that he did. It freed Joe to explore the depths of his own feelings. It couldn't be possible to fall in love with someone so quickly. Yet trapped in a bank, twenty-four hours a day until the job was done, meant a lot of getting-to-know-you time.

He carefully brushed a dark strand off Sage's cheek, admiring the high bone structure and dim luminescence of his skin. There were a lot of great ways he could wake Sage up. Did he dare presume on their foundling relationship? Did they have a relationship?

Joe inched closer, tenderly kissed his cheekbone, his temple. His vision blurred, so Joe closed his eyes, preferring to feel anyway. Barely touching him, Joe skimmed his fingers from the base of his throat downward, stopping to rub Sage's abdomen.

"I want you again," Joe whispered.

Sage turned toward him, but slept on. "Love Joe," he mumbled sleepily.

"Love Sage," Joe murmured against his lips, finding Sage's unconscious confession more than a little endearing.

Sleepy brown eyes opened. Sage's smile moved on Joe's mouth. Then it stole his breath with a sweet, answering kiss.

Joe kneaded Sage's abdomen with coaxing fingers. "I think if I had a body like yours, I'd be standing in front of a mirror all day jacking-off," Joe teased.

Sage's expression darkened. "You like my body."

Joe's hand strayed farther down, cupped his balls. "I'd be a fool not to."

"Anything else? My face, maybe?" Sage asked, growing more tense and unhappy by the moment.

"Sure," he answered uncertainly. "You're handsome. A walking wet-dream."

Sage sighed heavily. "Do you like my cock, Joe?"

"You know I do." He grasped it, giving it leisurely pumps. Sage's expression grew distant. Joe didn't understand, wasn't he saying the right things? Finally confessing how much he wanted Sage?

"How about my ass? Did it feel good to take my ass?" Bitterness charred Sage's words.

"I love your ass. It's hot and tight, squeezing my dick like it wants to hold on forever," Joe agreed.

Though they were still face-to-face, a shuttered disappointment had snatched Sage's smile and dimmed the peace in his eyes.

"What's wrong?" Joe asked, desperately wanting Sage to look at him with unfettered adoration again.

A calculated smile replaced the light-hearted one. "What do you want to do to me? Or do you want me to do something wicked to you? Hmm? C'mon, Joe, what's your fantasy? Whatever it is, this body is yours."

Joe's hand on Sage's cock stilled. Sage's closed over it, using both to jerk his cock

forcefully.

“What’s happening here?” Joe asked.

“Oh God, Joe, I love the way your hand feels on my rock hard dick. You’re a master. Fuck, yeah!”

“Sage. What the fuck?”

“Can’t live without you. No one fucks like you. I’m your bitch. Oh, baby. Make me come like only you can,” Sage mocked. He pumped their hands harder.

Aroused but confused, Joe stared at Sage’s face as it contorted with pleasure and hurt.

“Do you want me, Joe? Do you want my cum all over your chest?”

He did, devil take him. “Yes.”

Sage flipped him to his back, straddled him. With both their hands, Sage pumped himself roughly. He arched his back, throwing himself into fucking their hands. He bucked his hips with each rhythmic grunt and Joe could only stare at his beauty.

Long hair falling back, hard jaw line and sinewy neck, every muscle in Sage’s body rigid for the purpose of either fucking or absorbing thrusts, were displayed for him. Joe’s cock ground deliciously on Sage’s ass with every downward return.

“You’re a fucking *god*, Joe. I shoot cum just looking at you,” Sage snarled.

Even in Joe’s sexual haze, the words scratched at him. Whatever Sage meant to do, this couldn’t end well. He *did* want Sage, though his cold-hurt screamed for balm more than Joe’s passion needed sating. He bucked hard, knocking Sage off-balance with an additional side shove.

Sage released their hands and Joe rolled, grabbing Sage’s shoulders and trying to wrestle him to the carpet.

“Stop it,” Joe panted. “Just stop it.”

“It’s what you want, isn’t it?”

Sage sat up easily. Joe wrapped his arms around Sage’s shoulders and hung on when Sage tried to shrug him off.

“What. Is. Wrong?” Joe snapped.

“I’m your fucking fantasy, designed to attract.”

“You do attract me. You *are* a dream come true,” Joe said, injecting calm where he didn’t feel it. His heart tattooed urgently with something akin to panic. He scrambled for words Sage would accept, yet didn’t know where to start.

Sage started for him. “Your fuck-puppet for a week.” He scowled but stopped trying to shake Joe.

“What? God, you’re a piece of work, you know that?” Joe’s words only lightly scolded. He softened them further with kisses to Sage’s jaw and neck. “If all I wanted was a fuck, I’d have offered my cock in the men’s room the first day we met. Or any other time after that when you offered.”

Sage dropped his forehead on Joe’s shoulder. “Just now you said—”

“I said I want you. That I love you. You’re worried about whether or not my feelings are superficial?”

“Aren’t they? If you can’t resist, how do I know you’re sincere?” Sage asked.

“Because I did resist. Because even with you grinding my cock with your ass, and promising to spray my chest with seed in spectacular athletic form, I still stopped you.”

Sage wrapped him in a tight body press. “You *did* do that.”

“Yeah, I did.” He chuckled into Sage’s shoulder. “Never figured you for insecure.”

“Now you’re talkin’ shit,” Sage growled. He sat up. He still held on to Joe, though, and that made Joe’s smile broaden.

“Right. And you don’t ask for directions.”

“Fuck directions,” Sage said.

“And you’re always right.”

“Damn straight.”

“I’ll let you keep believing that for now,” Joe teased.

Sage smiled, a mixture of embarrassment and playfulness that made Joe hot and cold all over. Desire to banter fled.

Joe leaned back, grabbing Sage’s pack and holding it out. He gave Sage a jaunty grin. “If I were your fantasy man, what would you want to do to me?”

“If?” Sage asked, his voice catching.

He fell on Joe, taking them to the floor. Sage’s brown eyes filled his gaze and tender lips plied his like a fragile prayer. Joe let go of the pack in favor of tangling his fingers in black satin hair.

Sandpapery whiskers rasped on his chin, catching and shushing in morning growth. The wet flick of tongue on the seam of his lips tempted him. Sighing, he touched the tip with his own.

A meeting of velvet desire tempered with profound love.

Sage's wandering touch left a path of heat on Joe's skin to mirror the burn of lust he built with slow kisses. Sage pulled back, looking down at him. His cheeks flushed and his brown eyes sparkled beneath heavy, coal lashes. A black curtain of hair fell around them, blocking out the rest of the world. It filled the scant distance between them with inexpressible emotion that Sage conveyed with his heated gaze, subtle smile, and the minutiae of expression Joe lovingly searched. Sage loved him. Deeply.

"You say a lot without speaking," Joe murmured.

"I do, huh?"

"Yeah." Joe reached inside the curtain.

He touched the small reappearing indent at the corner of Sage's lips. Smoothed the pad of his thumb up the slope of cheekbone where the skin had flushed and tightened through arousal. Dragged the side of his forefinger across Sage's parted lips, enjoying the intimacy of finding trace moisture and knowing firsthand what pleasure that mouth could give.

Sage flared his nostrils, holding still through Joe's private examination.

Joe cupped his cheek and drew the course of one slashing eyebrow, then to the outer corner of his eye, marveling at the gossamer skin that was so different from the rougher stubbled jaw. Whoever had created him had created a masterpiece. And yet, it was the eyes of the man and the spirit of the man that made Sage's physical form irresistible for Joe.

"You speak volumes," Joe said.

Sage opened his rich brown eyes. "What am I telling you?"

"You love me," he answered simply.

The indent by Sage's lips deepened as the corners pulled up and his eyes naturally sparkled when he smiled. "Yeah, I do."

Joe rested his fingers on the edge of Sage's jaw. He met Sage's gaze directly. "The man behind the eyes cut through my defenses. I see *you*, Sage, and I love you too."

Joe's green eyes burned with sincerity. Looking up at him the way he was, Sage couldn't imagine ever thinking Joe looked average. Joe's tousled light brown hair, kiss-swollen lips, his stern no-nonsense glances, and easy smile were far from average. And the way he thought, the things he noticed, the compassion he showed at the risk of his ego, were more precious than Sage

had known love could be.

With Joe's lean physique stretched out beneath him and their cocks firmly lining each other, Sage could think of a very demonstrative way of proving it.

He groaned as Joe's words sank in and then tried to capture the essence of them from the source as his mouth sealed over Joe's. Its promise and blessing overpowered the weight of any curse, Sage decided.

Joe returned the kiss with equal fervor. He kissed with a supplicant bottom lip, which begged to be suckled and nipped. Sage didn't restrain.

He touched Joe everywhere he could reach. Not enough, he left Joe's mouth to tongue the shallow well between his collarbones, to nip their winged length and rub his lips over a tight, pert nipple.

It teased his lips and Sage had to taste him. The pinched nub gave him a rigid pebble to abuse and Sage sucked hard, rapidly flicking it with his tongue.

Joe made a sound akin to a gut punch as he began to writhe. His fingernails bit into Sage's scalp, holding him to the bud as moans became guttural cries.

Wrapping an arm around Joe's waist, Sage explored Joe's ass with the other. He massaged the firm rounded cheeks, traced the crack and tapped the sweet hole.

"Bite it," Joe begged.

Sage's teeth gently sawed Joe's nipple. Moving to the other, Joe's complaints ceased when Sage scraped his teeth on the untouched pectoral in an open mouth hold and began a wet assault to the puckered point.

Sage's hands trembled as he held himself in check.

"Don't hold back," Joe begged. "Just take me."

He didn't want to hurt Joe and there hadn't been time to adequately prepare him with play. But God, he wanted to.

"You won't hurt me more than I'm aching now."

"Lube," Sage rasped. He dragged his pack over and dumped the contents. Snatching up a condom and the lubricant, he frantically sheathed his cock and squirted a little too much cold gel on Joe's ass in his haste.

Joe's hips leapt. "Fuck!"

"Sorry."

“Fuck. Me. Now,” Joe clarified.

Sage hooked Joe’s knees with his forearms and brought them to his shoulders. He grabbed Joe’s hips, butting the tip of his cock against Joe’s hole.

“Yes, I’m ready,” Joe answered the unspoken question.

He thrust sharply, penetrating Joe in one long, mutually painful stroke, causing them both to gasp. But with the pressure to his cock came the wrapping furnace of Joe’s body, which streaked pleasure through him to demand that he start moving.

Yet he held. Joe’s sphincter spasmed at the base of Sage’s cock. Sage’s balls drew up, already prepared to shoot their contents. His ass and thighs tingled with the effort to regain control before he either came too early or did some serious damage to his lover.

Joe moaned softly, staring up at Sage. Sage caught a flash of an image. He saw himself through Joe’s eyes, body taut, muscles straining so hard they trembled and the look of possessive concern keeping him steady. The feeling of Joe’s intense love slammed into Sage with stunning force. Then the vision faded.

“Wow, is that how you see me?” Joe asked. Lust filled his eyes and he pushed his hips into Sage’s.

Sage answered the unspoken request, drawing out and riding back in. He shifted, lowering himself until they were face-to-face, then proceeded to fuck Joe with the urgency they both felt.

He reached between them, taking Joe’s cock, stroking in time to the punishing rhythm he’d established, and hitching his hips to peg Joe’s prostate with each glide. Orgasm built high and sharp.

Joe’s mouth popped open. His neck arched and he closed his eyes in rapture. Hands stroking Sage’s chest found and pinched his nipples.

“Too soon,” Sage complained as orgasm shivered to the forefront.

“Need you to come with me,” Joe panted. “Come now.”

Sage rocked harder, feeling his balls slap and bounce on Joe’s ass. Joe’s thighs stiffened in telltale preparation. He rammed harder, rubbed Joe’s cock head slit and the nerves at the underside of the flared crown roughly until Joe’s head tossed and his great open-mouth gasps almost wheezed.

The velvety clasp of his lover’s body and the abject desperation to come in every plane of

Joe's body undid Sage. Orgasm took him shouting into its throes as he mechanically gave over his body to the plunging drive to see it to completion. Hot cum hit Sage's chest as Joe's cry echoed his own.

Sage tingled with aftershocks, pumping twice more before regaining his senses. Joe's legs slid off his shoulders. Sage collapsed on him, covering his mouth for a searing kiss when words failed him.

They broke, panting for breath and chuckling against each other's lips.

"Yeah," Joe said nodding.

"Wow," Sage said seconds after the thought formulated.

"I heard your thoughts," Joe said.

"That's never happened before."

"Two firsts. Yay me," Joe quipped. "I was in your head, seeing with your eyes for a few moments."

Sage nodded. "I think we traded visions."

"I look pretty fucking hot."

"Your ego is showing," Sage teased.

Joe trailed his hands up and down Sage's spine. It felt good, soothing as he caught his breath.

"So that's what you see?" Joe asked finally.

"Usually I see what other people are thinking about when their emotions run high. I see how they see themselves or what they see themselves doing. Kind of like a living daydream."

"Then why do you keep thinking about the Zodiac stones?" Joe asked. "Every time I touch you, I see them."

"I thought that was you," Sage said with dawning horror. "Shit!"

Understanding dawned on Joe's face. "Shit!"

Chapter Ten

Joe missed Sage's heat the minute he slipped away, but they were both running to clean up and grab pants. Someone nearby felt stressed enough about the stones to project to Sage. And for some reason, since the magical cock-stroking, ass-riding light threads, Joe could see it too when he touched Sage.

"How close do they have to be?" Joe asked, jamming his feet into his shoes while he closed his pants.

Sage tossed him a shirt. "Close."

He had already dressed, apparently choosing to do without a shirt. Cum still slicked his chest.

Joe grinned and motioned toward Sage. "You might want to clean that up first."

He looked down then gave Joe a wicked grin. "What, this?" He dragged a finger through it, brought it to his lips and sucked it off. "Mm."

Joe's felt it like a direct lick to his balls. "Later, swee' pea. Hurry up."

Sage jogged to the bathroom and Joe slapped his jean-covered ass as he passed. Clean, but still bare-chested, he came out and strapped on his tool belt. Joe handed him his cell.

Sage flipped it open as they crouch-ran to the protocol's main door. He hit a series of numbers, sent, and then hit another ten digits before holding down the pound button. Joe heard an answering round of clicks and a steady, low beep through the open doors of the observation rooms. Sage scowled and hit another series of numbers.

"What did you do?" Joe whispered.

"Remote lock. It changes the bank exit codes. Whoever is in the bank with us won't be able to leave."

“I sense a *but*.”

“That sound you hear means there’s interference with the code I entered,” Sage said.

“We’re not alone,” Joe concluded.

“We don’t know that yet.”

“Shouldn’t you just call the police?” Joe asked.

“And say what, my boyfriend and I were having sex when we felt something?” Sage snorted. His gaze skimmed Joe warmly. “I mean, I definitely felt something.”

Joe grinned. “Tell them we heard an intruder. Or that the alarm isn’t setting.”

Sage cracked the protocol door and looked across the darkened floor. Joe dropped into silence. Sage closed the door again with a muffled click.

“Call the police. Any doubt at all is reason enough,” Joe insisted.

“I don’t hear or see anything out there. The alarm not resetting doesn’t automatically mean an intruder. It means something is interfering with the programming. We still should have heard the bank alarm if there’d been a break in,” Sage said.

Why the Rambo shit? Joe waved toward the observation rooms. “What about those? You spent so much time setting it all up, why can’t you just go to the monitor?”

“Because the remote code doesn’t change the protocol locks in case the staff needs to reach safety. Tonight, we’re the staff. I thought I’d try to protect us first, set up a secure front.”

Sage hadn’t bothered to look at him. His head turned looking up and down the office hall and back toward the observation rooms. His gaze darted and his body bunched in preparation for flight.

“Now what?” Joe asked. He’d never felt so out of the loop, but when it seemed they had an intruder, it was vitally important to know everything Sage knew.

“*Now*,” he began, distracted and moving a crawl. “We check out the cameras. See if we have something to worry about, or if I programmed something wrong.”

Joe snorted. “You didn’t program wrong. And what about your faery-senses? They can’t be wrong too.”

“If we aren’t alone, they’d pin-point our location from all your questions. Do you mind?” Sage snapped quietly.

“Fine. Keep your cell handy for the police. I don’t like this.”

“Noted. C’mon,” Sage said, returning to his crawl.

“Can’t we *walk* over there?”

Sage shot him a withering look.

“What? What did I say? We’re in here. They’re out there.”

“We *think* there are intruders,” Sage stressed. “Probably they’re out there, but if they aren’t, do you want them to have an easy shot?”

“Well, when you put it that way,” Joe muttered.

A second later, he wasn’t complaining. Crawling behind Sage, Joe had the perfect view of the perfect ass. He knew exactly how tight that ass was and how it felt to pound it. He also knew the owner of the ass would let him back in there, and that was enough to have him stacking wood all over again.

“Do you see anything?” Sage asked.

“Not nearly enough.”

“You’re staring at my ass aren’t you?”

“And wondering when I can get you on your knees naked,” Joe agreed. He laughed nervously.

“Sex talk helping you forget why we’re crawling on the floor?” Sage asked. He didn’t blame him. Being shot at or stumbling across a criminal didn’t rank high on his list either.

They reached the observation room. Sage rose to his feet, helping Joe up. Not done yet, he wrapped his arms around Joe’s waist and held him for a savoring kiss.

“Avert the crisis, capture the culprit, nail my ass. In that order,” Sage said.

Joe pulled away, moving to the monitors and flipping views. “I don’t see anyone.”

Sage checked alarms. “I still see the stones and flashes of the safe.”

“How could they get by all the security you put up?”

Sage brought out his cell and entered some numbers. Listened, and did it a few more times. “They couldn’t,” he said with a frown.

Joe sighed loudly. “You aren’t helping.” He reviewed the footage again.

Glancing at the clock, he noticed they only had another hour before employees arrived for work. Any footage after that point would compound the complexity of the search. They still had to admit the protocol office workers and fit their badges with new security code access too.

A shadow flickered at the edge of one screen. “Whoa! Got something,” Joe said.

Sage’s hard chest brushed his back. “Let’s see.”

“This isn’t right. It looks like the footage we saw earlier.”

“This is live feed?” Sage asked.

“Supposed to be. Look, there’s the foot and the door on this screen.”

“We’ve been looped,” Sage said, stonily.

He slammed his fist on the console surface. Joe felt the vibrations through his palm and odd, sick flutters mimicked the sensation in the pit of his stomach. “How long?”

“After the change to the view-hold times. And I know how he bypassed the security alarms.” Sage held out his cell. “Remember the calls I got?”

“Ms. Rudnick.”

“The second call wiped the record of the first one and initiated a virus. It downloaded and must have decrypted my security codes,” Sage snarled. “And the bypass installation started the day I started here. I had thrown something down and figured I had tripped a wire. I hadn’t, someone *knew* when I would begin working on the security system and triggered a circuit from the main panel.”

“English?”

“I got fucking hacked.”

A cold lump formed in the back of Joe’s throat. “Can we call 9-1-1 now?”

“We’re in lockdown. Alerts to the outside have been blocked from the mainframe virus. The hacker shutdown phone access and killed cell access. All I have is the short distance wireless I set up for the internal bank systems. It feeds directly from the observation rooms.”

“My office has internet. We could try that,” Joe suggested.

“Tried that from the security board. Access is blocked. They’re here, right now if those visions mean anything, and we’re about to get framed for the heist of a lifetime.”

“By whom?” Joe asked.

“The only person it makes sense to delete the phone records for. Ferrah.”

“There’s only one way in or out of this building. If they haven’t left, they’re going to need to in less than an hour,” Joe noted.

“Too exposed. We have more coverage behind the teller’s desk or easier access to jump her on the other side, hidden from the elevator dock. Stay close. I want to get a good look out there so we don’t get jumped.”

Sage led off, feeling fairly confident that the protocols office hadn't been accessed without their knowledge since no one had come upon them yet. The outer bank provided very little of that same hope.

"Explains why she wanted you on site. You really pissed her off."

He glanced at his phone, watching it as he moved forward. The thief had to unlock the bank doors in time to slip out and seal them, trapping Sage. But any change in the locking system would still feed through his wireless and he'd see it.

"I'm sure the prospect of setting me up makes the theft sweeter. With me on site before and after the time of theft and designer of the security software, I'm a natural suspect," Sage said.

He slipped into the main bank with Joe quietly latching the door behind them. It reassured him to see Joe holding still, pressing back to the wall when Sage did. The large central skylight poured starlit night into the main lobby, skimming off the tellers' counter and making the upper balcony level fill with lumbering desk-shaped shadows against felt privacy walls.

Sage held, letting his eyes fully adjust. Listening. The phone display showed no change and he still saw stones. Now black gloves lifted them, and there was an instant blinding flash of wave-swept beaches and midday sun.

"She's imagining her take," Sage whispered.

Joe's hand settled on his back. He inhaled sharply. "She's confident, I'll say that much."

He looked back at Joe. "She has every reason to be if she pulls this off. God, Joe, I'm sorry. If I'd just let you assign Debbie to me, you wouldn't be in this mess." He also wouldn't have known that faery magic didn't *have* to fuck up his romantic future. But prison would.

"Nah, you don't wish that. She had sex toys to use on you."

"I know. I saw the whole thing." Sage shivered. "I saw one image of her popping a red apple out of her ass, doggie style. I think it's put me off fruit."

Joe inhaled sharply. Sage clamped a hand over Joe's mouth before he could laugh. Joe's eyes watered and his shoulders shook.

"Shh," he said, sending Joe a wink. "Ferrah's in the safe room. Even a great hacker needs inside information for some of the systems I set up. She had help. I doubt she's here alone."

Joe nodded and Sage lowered his hand. He rose up on the balls of his feet, ready to progress across the short distance to the central elevator dock. Joe stayed him with a hand on his

arm.

He didn't say anything. He didn't have to. Sage could read the tender caution there. He put his hand over Joe's and squeezed his fingers, then together, they sprinted for the side wall. Sneaking past the elevator dock, they sank back into the shadows close to the building exit.

Detecting Ferrah an entire floor away meant her emotions ran extremely high. Nerves, possibly, which didn't feel right. Ferrah had always been somewhat self-controlled. It was why he'd been with her in the first place. Her thoughts ran toward sex, but were otherwise dormant of emotion. That she thought of beaches and Zodiac stones now, and sharply enough to transmit so distantly, felt out of character.

But he'd gotten the cell phone call. And the hack. She alone had the resources to hire someone with that technical know-how.

The image of pink ballerina slippers clapping together at the base of a beach loungeer stuttered that thought to a halt.

"Debbie?" Sage muttered.

The soft swish of mechanical elevator doors slid open. Tiny, brunette Debbie sashayed around the corner.

"Debbie?" Joe barked. "What are you doing?"

Dazed, she cocked her head to the side and blinked at him, then turned her attention to Sage. "Oh, hi."

Ballerina shoes faded, but the sun-drenched beach intensified. Sage clutched his head from the sting of imagined sun in his eyes. His knees cracked against hard marble, shooting new waves up pain up his thighs. The vision developed, adding him on the beach as a naked volleyball player for her benefit. The lumbering cock she gave him alternately pounded his thigh and slapped his chest like ridiculous pornographic animation. Debbie wore nothing but her pink slippers and the three Zodiac stones on her belly as she panted and grunted like a woman in the throes of orgasm. Vision-Debbie watched him spike and dive for the oversized beach ball yards away.

From a distance, he heard Joe calling, but the vision blared louder, brighter, more intense than any he'd ever had, making his senses ache from the twanging tuning fork to his psyche. He heard his own roar of pain as a deeper vibration lost among the others until sight, sound, smell, taste, and feeling gathered like a great tolling bell into the blaring vision and exploded in shards

to take him with it.

“Sage!” Joe made a grab for him but the simple act of grazing his shoulder shared a vision so strong it knocked him backward.

The steady clip of high heels came toward him. He looked up the long nylon encased legs, passed the leather miniskirt, to sneering fuchsia lips. “You aren’t good enough for him, mortal. He thinks he loves you, but he’s wrong. No matter. He’ll get over you soon enough.”

Sage sagged on the floor, panting. Debbie blinked owlishly.

“Debbie, use Sage’s belt to bind his hand behind his back before the little darlin’ regains his senses,” Ferrah commanded.

“Debbie, don’t listen to her.” Joe shouted.

“She can’t obey you when she must obey me.”

“The stones are yours. Why are you taking them?” Joe asked, stalling. He tried to stand, but Ferrah raised a hand and his body obeyed her. Joe crumpled to a kneeling posture.

“Because they aren’t mine, you fool, they’re my late father’s. The Zodiac stones are faery stones.”

Sage groaned, shook his head. Debbie pushed him to his side as she tightened the belt.

“Which means?” Joe asked, his glance darting to Sage. *Wake up! Wake up!*

“They cannot be freely given or they lose their power, and daddy tried to bequeath them to me. Regaining them by magical trickery is the only way to unlock the power of the thirteen.” She smiled.

Joe looked for the bodyguards. “Where’s your back-up?”

“Waiting like good little boys. I hardly need them to incapacitate you,” she scoffed.

Wake up!

“There are twelve signs in the Zodiac, not thirteen, moron,” Sage garbled drunkenly.

“I’m the thirteenth, half-breed. You have no understanding of the faery world. Psychic energy is the final element binding them all together. An unending pattern in unequal parts. I will be at the center.”

Sage’s gaze met Joe’s.

“A binding kiss for your new mistress, Sage? Yours by choice or yours by misfortune, either way, I’ll have you and my crown.”

“Fuck that,” Joe snapped.

Ferrah laughed. “A shame. You’d have made a fine royal concubine too. I like a challenge.”

Joe’s climbed to his feet again. His head exploded with loud orange daggers.

Sage kicked out, knocking Debbie to the ground. Her head thumped on the floor. Her body went limp. “Can’t command the mind of the unconscious,” Sage panted from a mocking grin.

Kissed.

Sage squirmed from the belt holding his hands. Writhing caused his jeans to dip on one side. The small faery-shaped birthmark caught Joe’s eye and hope shivered through his body as he remembered the last time he’d touched that mark. The memory sparked recognition at her words and images of golden threads spiraling outward in *an unending pattern in unequal parts with a kiss at its center.*

“Hold, half-breed,” Ferrah snarled.

Her attention fully on Sage, Joe dove for her, taking her to the ground. “Sage, give me your hand.”

Sage rolled, swinging his arm around and clasping Joe’s.

“Wretch! Unhand me,” Ferrah wailed.

Bodyguards rushed toward them.

“Stay back or I’ll kill her,” Joe threatened, closing his hand on her neck.

All three stopped.

“Back up,” Sage ordered them.

“You came so close to succeeding didn’t you, Ferrah?” Joe whispered. “I bet you could almost feel the power, the seat of the crown on your temples.”

Vision strong and sharp came from her. Something shimmered between Joe and Sage, wound golden threads about their clasped hands, over their wrists and infused unearthly fortitude. Her vision vibrated against Joe’s chest, water beating an impenetrable drum, and forcing it back upon itself with magnified rhythm.

Ferrah cried out. She pushed at them, but Joe and Sage held her tightly. The three bodyguards stumbled, looking around the bank as if they were lost. Or finally freed from a stupor.

The glass doors swung open as the morning manager began his day.

“Go outside and call the cops. The bank is being robbed,” Joe yelled.

Sage’s shoulders drooped as power drained from him, seeming to use everything he had to keep the more powerful, full-blooded faery magic at bay.

“Hold on, Sage. Let me help. Share the gift.”

Joe felt the power surge up his arm as the energy balanced between them. Instead of taking him over or weakening him, the drumming ceased into a peaceful, untouched surface. Sage turned his head, looking at Joe with wonder.

Beneath them, Ferrah whimpered. Her psychic vision faded to nothing but the reality of mortal man.

Joe looked down at her, waiting to see if there was more when Sage suddenly chuckled beside him. “I think we blew out her speakers.”

He blinked, cautiously looking away from the faery that seemed more witch-like than any childhood story he’d ever heard. “What the fuck are you talking about?”

“Feedback energy. Could you feel it bouncing off us? It blew itself out.”

Joe grinned. “Is that Rock n’ Roll faery science?” Joe asked.

“Could be.”

Sirens blared outside and the entry swarmed with black suits and raised guns. “It’s over,” Joe said.

“Not for us. Never for us,” Sage said, squeezing Joe’s hand.

Chapter Eleven

Joe lifted his wine glass. “To our first date.”

Laughter nearly made Sage sputter ruby droplets. He swallowed carefully. “The first of many, I hope.”

“I think we can arrange that.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah,” Joe said. His eyes twinkled as he took Sage’s goblet and put both on the coffee table. “Unless you’re seeing some other faery.”

Sage rolled his eyes. “Think there’ll be an end to faery jokes soon?”

“Not a chance.” Joe’s arm draped against the back of the couch, and he tangled his fingers in Sage’s hair.

“How many more dates until I can get you into bed?” Sage asked.

The flush of color to Joe’s cheeks and the way his gaze darted away made Sage smile. He would enjoy explaining to Joe just how sexy he was. Sage hoped it took a long, long time to convince him.

Joe licked his lips as though feeling Sage’s gaze on them. Joe stood, slipping between Sage’s knees. Nesting his other hand in Sage’s hair, Joe pulled Sage’s head back and bent to receive his lips.

He teased them, holding Sage captive by his hair while Joe lipped gently and lightly scraped his teeth across Sage’s bottom lip.

“You want me to beg?” Sage asked. He groaned when Joe’s tongue flicked unsubstantially between Sage’s parted lips.

“Maybe later.”

Torment for torment, Joe's mouth settled over his. Sage unzipped Joe's fly and reached inside, feeling the hot silk of skin too far from his palm. Joe groaned into Sage's mouth, forgetting to nibble and finally satisfying Sage's hunger for a true kiss.

After fumbling with the belt, he finally unbuttoned Joe's pants and released his prize. Sage dragged down the inconvenient pants.

"Let me?" Sage asked. It had been too long since the elevator. Already his mouth watered for the firm glide of cock on his tongue. He wanted to fill his mouth with Joe and drive him to distraction until he lost himself.

"I want to satisfy you," Joe said.

"God, you do."

"That's not what I meant."

Joe reached for Sage's shirt, wadding it in his hands as he tugged it up and over, baring the bronzed masterpiece of Sage's body. Then he pulled off his own, anticipating the heated glide of their bodies, skin to skin.

"I know," Sage answered. He sculpted Joe's ass in his hands, following the curve of his lower back to the sweet wrinkle where the firm globes met his thighs. "Everything you are satisfies me until I feel like my chest is going to burst with it."

Joe kissed him suddenly, ardently. Sage watched him and the way his eyes closed so tightly they scrunched. So many hopes passed between them in that kiss, and Sage, too, closed his eyes to devour every one of them.

When Joe pulled away, it was to rest his cheek against Sage's. "I love you. The first day I met you, I thought you were a conceited prick looking to get laid. I would have missed so much if you hadn't bothered to wake me up." Joe shook.

His breath rasped lightly over Sage's ear. Sage trailed down from Joe's buttocks to cup the backs of his thighs, skimming his palms to his knees and back up.

"When I think of how easily I might have lost you to my pride—"

Sage scraped his nails on the inside of Joe's thighs, relishing the gasp it elicited. "I'm not going anywhere. I knew you were special from the moment I saw your sparkling green eyes."

Joe gave a short, breathy laugh and lifted his head so he looked at Sage. "You and the damn sparkling eyes."

"Fuck you," Sage murmured. "I love your sparkly eyes." He wrapped his arms around

Joe's hips, pulling him close and tight. Joe's cock prodded Sage's shoulder. "I love your smile and your wit. I love that you hold your own when you know you're right. I love your intelligence and intuition. I love you. Don't bother leaving me for some other guy. I'll just track you down and bring you back."

Joe's smile curled up in a goofy semblance of its usual ease. "Nah, you're the only faery for me."

Sage groaned at the bad joke. "You'll pay for that one."

He grabbed Joe's hips, holding him at just the right distance, and then pulled the plump cock head into his mouth. Joe's fingers closed tighter in Sage's hair. Sage couldn't stop the smile or the hum of pleasure as he took more, swallowing Joe's cock and slowly drawing off it again.

Joe's back arched, bowing his hips forward as he gave himself up to Sage. He loved the way Joe's eyes closed in passion and his mouth opened in silent cry. He took Joe faster, stroking Joe's balls with one hand and holding his hips steady in the other. Sage's eyes locked on the every nuance of his expression, watched color flood up his neck to his cheeks, and Joe's hips began to move of their own accord in the last stages before orgasm.

Sage loved every second of his uninhibited reactions, down to the minute wrinkling of Joe's brow and the consuming ecstasy that contorted his face into a small orgasmic death. Sage took all of him, greedily devouring him with eyes and mouth until finally—finally Joe couldn't stay silent and cum shot in thick salty spurts down Sage's throat.

Opening his eyes, Joe stared down at him, cradling his face as though he were the most precious of gifts. It humbled him, made his chest ache to love him more, better, longer than a lifetime would allow. And when Joe kissed him, he heard the catch in his throat and threw himself into the embrace.

Joe broke off first. "My turn."

"The bedroom? I need stuff," Sage said.

He looked about as impatient as Joe felt. With a wicked grin of his own, he reached out of sight by the couch and pulled up a familiar pack. "Remind me to thank Dill."

"I'll do it for you," Sage countered, already reaching into it and extracting a condom and lube. Sage held the lube lightly. "How did you know to stop, Ferrah?"

"I guessed." Joe dropped to his knee, snagging the condom from Sage's fingers. He tore

the package with his teeth while he relieved Sage of his pants. Then using his lips, Joe rolled the condom down Sage's shaft.

Sage grunted as heat swallowed his cock.

"You're squeezing lube onto the couch," Joe said, chuckling.

"What? Shit. Sorry," he apologized. "I'm tied to the faery world and I didn't know how to stop her with all the mind-control bitchiness."

"Something she said about the faeries needing the lack of balance, thirteen stones, unequal designs. Then she wanted to bind you with a kiss. It made me think of your birthmark," Joe reasoned.

"Which resembles a faery and no one but another faery, or apparently you, can see."

Joe leaned in to nuzzle Sage's balls. "And that golden light thread which spiraled as we joined. I'd kissed it. The kiss made up the center of the spiraling, unequal and unending design."

"When we locked hands, shared the energy," Sage's voice cracked as Joe sucked one sack into his mouth and began stroking it with his tongue. "It balanced the power."

Joe's lips slid off. "The antithesis of where she said faeries find their power according to Ferrah."

"Feedback," Sage said, stunned at the way Joe put the pieces of the puzzle together.

"Blown speakers," Joe agreed.

Sage caught him around the waist, hauled him to his feet and turned his ass into Sage's cock. Putting his hand on Joe's back, he pressed him down so that he bent at the waist and it forced Joe's ass harder against Sage.

"It's about fucking time," Joe breathed. He grabbed the discarded tube and handed it back to Sage, who liberally coated his hole.

Instead of sliding immediately in, Sage covered Joe's body with his, reaching around to help Joe plant his hands on the back of the couch before stroking back up his forearms. Sage stopped to lightly tease the bend in Joe's elbow while he placed kisses on the backside of his neck.

Joe shivered. He rubbed his ass against Sage's cock, nestling it in the cleft.

Sage groaned. "Tease."

Enjoying the smooth muscles of Joe's body, Sage took his time stroking up to his shoulders then down his ribs. He teased Joe, acting like he'd circle his waist and take Joe's cock,

but skimmed back up his body, fondling the trembling muscles of his abdomen. Higher he went, finally trapping Joe's nipples in a pinching grip.

"Sage, you asshole, fuck me already." The words fell far short from stinging.

"Really? You want to rush this?" He kissed the length of Joe's spine.

Detouring one hand south, Sage rubbed and plucked the puckered hole, alternately pressing in and stretching out. Joe's trembles became low moans. He hitched his hips back to take more. Sage pushed the back of Joe's thigh, encouraging him to lift it to the couch, spreading his ass.

"God, what a beautiful sight." Sage nipped his hip, then laved a soothing tongue over the spot. Reaching between Joe's legs, he captured the gently swinging balls. Sage smiled with pleasure than his man was already hard for him again.

"Sage!" Joe bellowed with a tinge of annoyance.

He laughed and slapped Joe's ass. "Okay, okay, I'm just admiring the view."

"Admire it *later*." Joe caressed his balls, bumping against Sage's fingers.

Lust shook him to the core. There was so much Sage wanted to do with this man, to this man. Their fingers tangled and together they wrapped around Joe's dick. Sage lost it. Positioning himself at Joe's hole, he thrust forward, burying his body until his balls bounced on Joe's ass.

Joe grunted, but held steady and took Sage's hand to the tip of his cock to show him how pre-cum seeped in anticipation and pleasure for Sage's unexpected penetration. It was all the confirmation he needed.

Sage pulled out and shoved back in. Sensual friction coursed down the length of his buried cock to tremble his balls. Joe's body absorbed each thrust and shivered over Joe's weeping shaft.

Together they jacked him while Sage picked up a rocking thrust. Heat zipped around Sage's balls. They drew up tight and his mind blacked with nothing but the rocking, rutting, slap of their bodies coming together for the unified purpose of finding home in each other's bodies.

A vision of them coming together as lovers well into their gray years shivered between them. Sage's heart sped, and he felt the answering *yes* from Joe.

The vision faded, bringing them back to the here and now. Joe cock had grown slick and he bucked back, slamming his ass into Sage's pelvis. The breathy grunts, like a man's first time, struck a possessive cord in him as cum streaked up Sage's cock. He pounded harder, fucking Joe

with all his strength.

A guttural gasp ripped from Joe seconds later, pumping hotly over their joined hands, and Sage emptied himself into his lover's body. He wrapped trembling arms around Joe's waist and fell to the couch, still embedded.

They lay there, Joe's sweaty back on Sage's sweaty chest, listening to their breaths gradually slow as they stared at the ceiling. Joe's body released Sage and he sighed, looking forward to the next time he would reach heaven in Joe's arms.

"This is forever," Joe said.

Sage couldn't stop the grin he wore. He nuzzled Joe's hair, catching some strands in his teeth playfully. "Yeah, babe."

"So you think I'll be that distinguished looking forty years from now?"

"You're hot even at seventy."

"Well, there's only one thing we can do about it then," Joe said matter of fact.

"What's that?" Sage nipped Joe's ear, already feeling the tightness in his belly that told him he'd be ready again after some lengthy foreplay. He couldn't wait to get started.

Joe's hands slid back, curling around Sage's hips. "See if you can still get it up at ninety."

**Read on for a short excerpt from
Mia Watts' second book in the
Faerily Imperfect series**

Faery Surprising

**Coming December 2009 to
Resplendence Publishing**

Flora Harper clamped her naked thighs together, successfully holding the throbbing, whirring *Beastmaster* in place. Not the *right* place, but it would get her there. She reached behind and unhooked her bra, flung it across the room and gasped when her rocking motion nudged the vibrator. Her eyes nearly crossed with pleasure.

“Fuck, yeah.”

This time she rocked on purpose, but to her frustration, the sensation didn’t repeat. She grabbed it, trying to make the damn thing submit. Instead, her palm grazed the panel of buttons at the base setting off the blinking fluorescent lights and an electrical monkey-crank version of “Pop Goes the Weasel.”

“I would go pop, if *you* would go round my bush.” One of the oddly shaped fingers at the base suddenly hit home, buzzing clit while the *Beastmaster* pumped its stupid, rotating, gel-formed head inside her.

Look at him go, George. Look at him go, an insane cartoon voice filled out the asinine image of stupid cock and clever clit teasing sidekick of porn.

“Stop thinking about cartoons, genius, you’ll never get there.”

If she could just...shut off...her brain...long enough to—to—to— “There it is, baby. There it is.” She caught the sensation, squeezing her eyes shut to hang on to it.

Her ears began to ring and her voice sounded like it was bouncing off bathroom tile. The tinge of male sweat teased her nostrils. That’s what she needed. It almost seemed real, especially when steam touched her cool cheeks. “Oh *fuck*! I’m going to come!”

“That’s it, honey. Ride your weasel.”

What the fuck? Flora’s eyes flew open.

Ian Tate, Dixon City’s newly acquired linebacker, stood over her with hands on the low-slung waist of his football uniform. Bare-chested and barefooted, his easy grin and blue eyes were all about seeing the *Beastmaster* chew an orgasm out of her.

Flora yelped, shot to her feet. Her toes curled on wet shower tile. “Not a-fucking-gain!” she bellowed.

Gelatinous George slipped out of her and hit the floor with a thud. Gyrating, neon-

flashing, purple cock squirmed toward the drain on dying chords of “the monkey chased the weasel...” as though it too was embarrassed by its naked exposure.

Pop! Goes the weeeeazel.

About the Author

Mia makes her home in Minneapolis, Minnesota where she divides her time between a job and spying on people. Mia enjoys long walks in Como Park, daisies, dancing in the snow ...(Delete prior sentence, meant for personal ad)...

Mr. Perfect may apply in person for a thorough evaluation and trial. All others will be towed.

www.MiaWatts.com

www.MiaWatts.blogspot.com

Coming throughout 2010 to
Resplendence Publishing

Mia Watts' *Faerily Imperfect* Series

Faery Surprising

Flora can't get anywhere on time. It could have something to do with the faery gift, which transports her at the most inopportune moments. Once, naked in the middle of a self-induced orgasm, she found herself relocated to a professional football locker room after a game. Still panting and completely frustrated, she's not amused when Ian Tate wants to finish the job. But he's willing to fight for her, if she could just stay in one place long enough.

Freeze Frame

Dill is a late-blooming, bitter lad. His talent didn't surface until his majority and then, only accidentally discovered. Dill can freeze time. It's a fantastic gift, but only seems to surface when he has something really important to say. Like, "Piss off" or "I love you". Now that he's found Mason Haliday, a man worth having, will he lose him to an inability to confess his heart?

Boiling Point

Fauna is the shy, second-born twin. She's never really understood her place in the family, let alone the two worlds she's supposed to be born of. With a mother who is wonderfully dim-witted, and all her siblings working through the trickery of the faery world, she has no interest in anyone magical entering her life.

She is a curious girl though, and as a curious girl, uses her invisibility to understand how the sexual components of relationships work. But when she finally gets a chance at her own, can she stay visible long enough for Cooper Blank to notice? And will she care when she realizes that the man who makes her heart go thump-thump is an Elemental?

Hitched

Willow, the youngest of five, has always been particularly *flexible*. She's even comfortable flitting in and out of both realms. Lately, her boy-toys from each realm have begun demanding more from her, but she's not convinced they are ready to handle sharing. Still, she might have a better grip on the situation if conflict didn't leave her as speechless as, say, a plank of

wood...literally.

Are you hot for teacher?

**Check out the *Hot for Teacher* Series at
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***Two Plus One* by Brynn Paulin**

College math teacher, Briony Swift, lives life on the straight and narrow. After all, one plus one always equals two. But when two of her adult male students visit her office one afternoon, she soon discovers that one plus two might be a new and better equation to explore...

***Body of Art* by Bronwyn Green**

Art professor Seth Granger has two problems—an absentee life drawing models and a case of unrequited lust. Luckily his troubles have the same answer—his colleague, Dr. Callie Sullivan.

The trick will be getting her out of her clothes and into his studio...and hopefully into his bed. However, she's intent on keeping her mind on her art and ignoring him. Now he just needs to convince her she should be his body of art.

***Sense and Sensuality* by Cara Hart**

Eleanor McLaren leads a subdued life. She hates parties, avoids social interactions, and she cannot talk to men. But within the shell of her timidity lies the heart of a siren. Afraid of her own boldness, she hides her desires. Especially from the man who stars in her dreams of passionate encounters and works in her department.

Eddie Harrington has never lacked for partners in his pleasure games. But for some reason, Eleanor is the one woman he can't get out of his head. She is definitely not the type he usually pursues. Then he sees her at a bar, looking like his wildest fantasy. And one night with her is not going to be enough. The man who never commits just might have met his match-until a mistake from his past forces her to choose between trusting him or walking away.

***Sex Ed* by Mia Watts**

Mina Lasky has a pesky crush on Biology professor, Derek Link. They've worked in tandem in

the same University facility long enough that even the sound of his voice makes her hot. It's time to put the fantasy to an end. Mina signs up to be his guinea pig in a female sexuality lab for those on the doctorate track. She hopes to work Derek out of her system while enjoying some much-needed sexual stimulation.

Dr. Derek Link has been itching to get his hands on the quiet, sexy Chemistry professor. He can't believe his luck when she signs up to be his lab. But one night isn't enough and Mina won't admit they can have something a lot more long term.

And when one of the students recognizes Mina, her heart isn't the only thing on the line. With her career in the hands of a blackmailer, and her heart begging to trust Derek, she's beginning to think the lab was a very bad idea.

Find Melinda Barron's *Desires of the Lamp Tales* at
www.ResplendencePublishing.com

Wish Me Up, Rub Me Down

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

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

Things will never be the same.

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

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

Aliya Baban and the Cave of Pleasure

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

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

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

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

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

To Rub, Honor and Obey

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

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

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

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

Smoke, Fire and Desire

Scientist Rhylie Dawson works hard, but when it comes to play, she's pretty reserved. Until her friends take her to the *Cave of Pleasure* in New York City. She's there to celebrate her birthday, and maybe, just maybe, get lucky.

What Rhylie doesn't know is the *Cave of Pleasure* is run by Pleasure Djinn, and they're eager to show her that there's more to life than just work. On stage in front of a bevy of male dancers, Rhylie is told to choose one for her special birthday dance.

She picks the fireman, and quickly learns that where there's smoke, there's fire, and a great deal of desire.

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