

Changeling Press

Belinda McBride

~ BAD ANGELS ~

BURN

# **Bad Angels: Burn**

## **Belinda McBride**

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Following an auto accident, Rex Clark lays near death in the rocky wilderness of the Trinity Alps. Just when it appears that things can't get worse, *she* shows up. Anahita... the succubus. She's been his frequent companion, and the bane of Rion's existence, for well over a century. But it seems that this time she's come to help.

From the frozen villages of the Inuit to the cities of America, Dr. Noemi Gastineau has seen it all. When a fallen angel shows up at the reservation clinic with an injured Sidhe, Noemi takes everything in stride. Yet within hours, she's swept into an enchanted world she never imagined existed. So why are the men so temptingly familiar? And why is she suddenly so afraid?

A fallen angel, a Sidhe, a human and a succubus. Never mind the demons, these four are about to catch fire! The question is... who will survive the burn?

## Prologue

Who knew that ice could burn like fire?

Miles beneath the surface of the Earth, she lay slowly waking. Panic came hard and fast; her eyes were glazed and frozen. Ice had invaded every orifice of her body... nostrils and ears and mouth, preventing her from seeing, hearing... screaming. Hell wasn't fire. No. Hell was ice.

She burned. Demon fire licked her skin even as the ice held her captive in its grip.

Her frozen body convulsed, and long stored energy exploded from her innermost being. Above her, the slowly thawing permafrost buckled and groaned, the very landscape altered and shifted. Trees fell, lakes drained, and animals fled for safety.

Above, an old woman stood; she was heavily cloaked in skins and furs. Her bright brown eyes gleamed like polished obsidian in her deeply creased face. As though she was much younger, the woman rode out the Earth's pains, waiting patiently as water began to bubble from a sheet of ice. As soon as it touched the frigid air, the water froze into formations that were the expression of nature's finest art.

The agonized shift of ice sounded like a scream in the old woman's ears. Pain and fear resonated through the air. Before the imprisoned creature came forth from the grip of the glacier, her energy burst through the air, swirling in a red, turbulent cloud. She was desperate... starving.

Before the old woman's eyes, the creature's spirit vanished, seeking a path to the energy it needed to live and to survive this torturous rebirth. Ahnah looked across the great chasm in the ice and faced the demon that stood leering at her. He also waited for the rebirth of the ice-bound creature. He'd been the one to send demon fire down to awaken the creature.

She supposed he looked pleasant to most people. Even handsome. But Ahnah gazed at him with knowing eyes, and saw only twisted malevolence. He was a parasite who delighted in the taking of others. And he waited for the powerful female who was locked in the ice beneath their feet.

“She’s not for a cannibal such as you, Kelet.”

The demon grinned and waited. His human façade melted until he crouched on his haunches, clawed fingers scratching impatiently at the surface of the ice.

For long hours they faced one another there in the frigid, whirling winds. It was a long walk home, and would be longer since the cold was creeping steadily into her bones. But Ahnah knew her responsibility to the Fallen. She’d long heard stories of the star-colored woman who’d crashed into the ice, fleeing from the great monster that pursued her. It hadn’t been Kelet, but another. One who’d tortured and twisted the angel into an unwilling mockery of herself.

She’d fled to save others. That’s what Ahnah had heard. She’d fled to escape the dark ones who wished to use her, to consume her soul. The wise woman reached into the folds of her clothing and drew out an amulet on a leather cord. It was her most powerful medicine, whalebone carved by the skilled hands of her grandmother’s grandmother. It carried the power and magic of every woman who’d owned it. She smiled inwardly when the demon’s power wavered slightly in the presence of the sacred object.

He frowned and looked down in bewilderment, shaking his clawed hands, which slowly became the same color as the gray and white landscape. For the first time, fear showed in his eyes.

Ahnah watched without pity as the ice grew up to trap the demon’s feet into place. “You should not have come to this place, Kelet.” The demon wasn’t a stranger to her; normally she’d accept him as part of Nature’s balance and allow him to live. But now, today, the stakes were too high. She showed no mercy as the ice slowly grew to claim his body.

Time stretched out meaninglessly, and Ahnah waited without becoming weary or afraid. In time, the Fallen's spirit would return to her body, well-fed and healthy. And so the old woman waited, her back hunched to the wind, her careful gaze on the broken, crumbled crater in the ice.

\* \* \*

Anahita shrieked in pain. She screamed in long forgotten fear, and her starved, frightened essence escaped her corporeal body. Her spirit broke from the glacier even as her panicked body remained entombed.

In desperation she fled, searching instinctively for what she needed. Without physical eyes to guide her, she perceived bright dots of energy on the Earth below. Any would serve as food, but none would be enough.

Lights flashed and then died out quickly... too quickly for her to capture the energy that was being released. She cast her senses further, over the continent, over the ocean.

On the horizon, three lights glowed brighter than most. They very nearly lit the sky with pure, unadulterated energy. That energy would be hers if she could only capture it.

Swiftly, she arrived and hovered over those three beacons, bathing in their glow, and allowing the energy to fill her, shape her, to give her form. She could very nearly see now, though her sight was not through her eyes. Three forms were lying on the ground.

Three male forms with energy that was raw and very nearly limitless.

Not really knowing what she did, the creature cast herself over all three, instinctively drawing her power to the cradle of their manhood, drawing them to arousal. One cried out in fear... and pleasure. His dreams had been erotic; his body was primed for release. The energy that escaped at his rapid climax soaked into her, filled her, and tamed the insane hunger just a bit.

Again she drew him to release, spreading her essence to include the other men. Mindlessly, blissfully, she fed, deaf to their cries of fear and pain. Deaf and uncaring.

She fed, and as she fed, one male found the strength to break her hold. He was a gleaming light in her mind's eye. He was beauty and light and goodness.

He was knowledge. And Anahita knew him.

Horror lanced through her. She loosened her grip, and a second male slipped free. His light was as bright as the first, and she retreated in her fear.

She was nearly sated; her mind coming slowly to grips with what she was... what she had become. She remembered what she had once been.

Knowledge.

It tore through her, thrusting her away from her prey like a stray dog under the boot of a farmer. She withdrew, casting a single, lingering glance on the third of the men. His taste was different than the others. Perhaps it was a bit sweeter because it was freely given. This one knew that sacrifice led to great rewards.

His flavor was that of life and growing things. It settled warm inside her, spreading like a comforting blanket. She let go and rose, allowing her body to call her back to its icy grave and all-consuming blackness. As she settled back into that frozen shell, she carried a seed... a memory. And that memory would grow to overtake the darkness that had threatened her soul all those many years ago.

In some way, Anahita knew that the circle had been closed, and she had been saved.

\* \* \*

The Fallen shivered in the frigid wind, her ice-seared eyes opened to see an elderly female hovering above her body, looking at her in concern. Beyond her were a hard gray sky and an ice-locked landscape. The woman helped her rise, quickly wrapping her feet and her body in warm furs. She looped something around Anahita's neck. Automatically, her hand settled over it, and the object gave her great comfort.

The woman spoke, but it was no language that she'd ever before heard. Yet the meaning was clear. "Don't be afraid, little one. Let your old mother take care of you." Every instinct that Anahita possessed told her the woman spoke true, and that she was finally safe.



Together they walked away, two stooped figures bending against the ice-laden wind. They quickly vanished into the coming night, leaving behind a frozen figure that slowly vanished into the ice where Anahita had lain for so many years.

## Chapter One

"Fancy meeting you here."

Rex Clark lay as comfortably as possible, given that he lay on a rocky embankment, one leg twisted into an improbable position. He sighed, feeling his unwelcome arousal growing in spite of the unremitting pain that lanced his body. He was like a Pavlovian dog that way; a touch of red made him think of her, and thoughts of her drained the blood from one head, relocating it to the other.

"But really, I'm not in the mood right now." His unruly cock denied his words, growing thick and heavy inside his torn jeans. He gasped at the sensation of her touch as it trailed over his groin.

Over the decades, more than a century now, she'd become a familiar presence. She'd initially taken her pleasure from both him and his angelic lover, Orion Hunter, but eventually she'd weaned herself away from the angel. Perhaps she sensed his unwillingness to contribute to her cause. Rion Hunter was normally an even-tempered man. He was as kind and angelic as his origins would suggest.

However, he didn't like the succubus. And she didn't like him.

On the other hand, she clearly found Rex willing and quite tasty. In the beginning, she'd been voracious, nearly draining them both on the occasions she managed to track down the Sidhe and his lover. In time the succubus had learned to temper her appetite. While Rex was more than able to survive even her most powerful attacks, she'd frequently left him crippled and weak. Now feeding her was like donating blood. He felt a bit tired for an hour or so afterwards, but Rex's unlimited energy quickly restored him, leaving him good as new.

It wasn't bad, except for the fact that Rion went quietly hysterical every time she managed to track them to a new country, a new city. In Rex's opinion, they should be

chasing her rather than fleeing. Other than giving him a series of blissful, draining orgasms, she really didn't do any harm. He'd never seen any evidence that she was in league with other more dangerous demons. From the beginning, she'd been a lost soul in dire need of their help.

Plus she gave really good head.

So as the red haze began to form over his body, concentrating at his groin, Rex wasn't really frightened. He did wish that she'd wait for a more opportune moment, perhaps after he'd healed from the numerous fractures and internal injuries that currently afflicted him.

"Tell me, lassie, can you hear me?"

He'd lapsed back into the old Highland Scots accent, too tired to pretend to be anything other than what he was. The charms that were tattooed onto his skin hid his extra, less human, features from mortal sight, but he no longer had the magical energy to hide his natural glamour. Even with the wings and tail hidden, most humans would notice the coloring and sheer charisma that marked him as "other." The magic required skill and constant energy to maintain. So Rex lay, praying that he would remain hidden from human eyes until he recovered enough to make his way to the road, or until Rion came for him.

Both prospects seemed unlikely at the moment. Especially if *she* decided it was time for a snack. In that case, Rex might end up taking a dirt nap on a permanent basis. Immortal didn't mean indestructible, just harder to kill, and he didn't think he could survive the loss of his remaining energy.

"I hear you, Fae."

He blinked in surprise. She'd been chasing and feeding off him for over a century, but she'd never before communicated. He had to be hallucinating.

"Dreaming."

Oh. That. He was unconscious. "I'm not Fae, lassie. I'm Sidhe."

There was a slight pause as she processed that information. "Same difference."

He snorted with laughter, and then gasped against the pain. He didn't think the Fae he was acquainted with would agree. Uppity creatures.

"Your energy is poor."

Did he detect a trace of concern in that monotone voice? "I do believe I'm dying, lass."

She said nothing, but he felt something ripple through the red haze of her presence. Early on, she'd very nearly manifested a solid form when she'd visited them. Now she was merely a haze floating over his body. His poor, broken body.

"You are immortal."

"True, but I can be killed."

"You are injured?"

"Badly, lass." He tried to shift, to find a more comfortable position. "I'm out of fuel. There's nothing left to keep me healing. So if you don't mind... no sex today."

"I didn't come to feed. I felt... you."

He felt a sensation... soft and shivery. It was almost as if she touched his skin, his face.

"I didn't know you could be killed."

"Or you'd have done it earlier, eh?"

"No."

He sensed her feelings. Anger. Confusion. Guilt.

"Perhaps if you could tell Hunter..."

"I can't. He's not asleep."

Now how would she know that? She hadn't visited the angel in decades. In fact, the succubus had been the main source of contention between the men. Rion was afraid of her, angry that Rex allowed her to feed. Rex felt pity for the succubus. Not fear. "Would you keep me company then?"

"Yes."

Rex rolled his head to the side, looking at the beautiful wilderness that was just out of his reach. He knew he was asleep... or unconscious. Otherwise, she wouldn't

have had entry to his mind. But still he looked about, admiring the steel-blue waters of the river that was just yards below where he lay. Wildflowers swayed in the wind, and butterflies danced over the brightly colored blossoms. It was a beautiful place to die.

The scene was marred only by the stench of burning rubber and oil leaking from his wrecked car. To his relief, the spilled gasoline had already evaporated. Rex didn't want to test himself against fire.

"Maybe you could call him. You have a phone, don't you?" He grinned at the idea. She was a succubus, an insubstantial spirit that existed to feed on the sexual essence of men. She'd have no idea what he was talking about, but it was fun to tease her.

"Phone?"

"Yeah. Everyone has one nowadays. Surely you have cell phones in the demon world?" His phone was up by the roadside, crushed into tiny pieces.

She didn't answer. In fact, the red haze was dissipating. He really didn't want her to go. Beautiful as this spot was, he really didn't want to die here. Not alone, anyway. Even a succubus was better than no company at all. "Hey -- you aren't leaving me now, are you?"

She didn't answer.

\* \* \*

This was the moment of truth.

Rion Hunter had finally completed the process of creating a work of art. He'd carefully chosen the wood, shaped the body and painstakingly created the instrument piece by piece. He'd combined old world techniques with modern tools, and every instrument that came from his hands grew closer to mastery. He knew he'd never create that perfect instrument, but hopefully, it would be perfect for his client.

Carefully, he began to tighten the strings, allowing them to ease in and out of tune as they stretched along the neck and down to the face of the elegant instrument. With a few final tests for tune, he strummed a chord, and then began to deftly pick out "Romanza." The classical piece poured forth like music made liquid and sound made

into light. He sighed, knowing that this time he'd gotten it right, from the mother-of-pearl tuning pegs to the golden ash body.

He picked up his phone to call his client just as it rang, causing him to jump a bit. "This is Hunter." His soft voice remained hoarse and raspy after all these years, always reminding him of who he really was, and what was no longer his.

Rion no longer sang with the angels, but the music he made now was of a different sort. Now he gave voices to inanimate objects, and wasn't that nearly as wonderful as having the most angelic voice in Heaven?

Maybe it was.

"Hunter? Orion Hunter?"

He went still. Rex was the only one who used his full first name. It showed up on his driver's license, his fake passport and birth certificate, but no one else called him Orion. Only Rex. "Yes. That's me."

"Oh."

There was a long silence on the phone, and finally Hunter held the receiver out, looking at the caller display. It read *Caller Unknown*. No surprise there.

"Hello? Are you there?"

"Yes." It was a woman's voice. She sounded a bit confused. Sleepy. Automatically, he went into caution mode. Usually, he might be impatient, but her use of his name was spooky.

"How can I help you?"

"Kokabiel, you must help him."

Shit. Double shit. He blinked hard, his heart racing in his chest. Of course it was an unknown caller -- she probably wasn't using a phone! No human knew his real name, the one that was secret.

"Who is this?" he whispered.

"He's hurt. I can't see him, but he says he might be dying."

"Okay... okay, can you tell me where? It's Rex, right? Can you tell me where he is?" Hunter was up, pacing the workshop. Rex had gone out that morning. He was

driving into the city looking for rare plants for the garden. Shit! Rex had the car! He glanced outside at the sunlit vista. If he flew, he'd be seen, and he didn't have Rex's skills at magic. He managed to keep his wings hidden and toned down his coloring, but that was pretty much the extent of his skill.

"Reux is sleeping."

Hunter fisted his hand and rested it against his forehead... thinking... thinking... She knew Rex's name as well.

"Was it a car wreck? Is he on the highway?" His chest hurt from the pace his heart raced.

"I'm looking."

Was she a psychic? A seer of some sort? Instinctively, Hunter knew to let her do her thing, but he had to know more. "Are you there? Or are you seeing him some other way?"

"I'm asleep."

"You're asleep." A cold certainty came over him then. It *was* her. The succubus. Dread ran over his skin. Hatred. Something else he didn't want to name. "What did you do to him?" he whispered.

"Nothing. I felt his distress. I took no energy, but I can't share mine. Not at a distance." She sounded dispassionate. Matter-of-fact. She wasn't worried about Rex's well-being, not really. She was concerned for her food source. That's all. "His car is up there. Near the road, but hard to see. Someone hurt him, Hunter. They hid the car." Now he heard a trace of venom in her voice. Maybe she wasn't as detached as she seemed.

Scary thought. With her abilities, she could make a man orgasm to death. He didn't want to be on her bad side.

Up there. That was helpful. He set the other information aside. There were plenty of people out there willing to hurt Rex and Hunter. Some of them were even mortal. They'd deal with that later. "Who are you?"

"He's hidden himself from those people, but he doesn't want to die alone."

Her soft statement seared his heart and devastated his soul. Rex was everything... his world. If he lost him...

"Where? Please, tell me where..."

"Under a bridge. On a hill under a bridge. The flowers are orange and red... and blue. A small river... boulders... That's all I can see through his eyes, Hunter. I'm sorry."

And somehow, he suspected that she was sorry. A hint of sadness crept into her voice. After all, she'd been Rex's frequent companion since the 1860s. No matter how far Hunter ran with his lover, she'd found them. He'd finally managed to shield against her, but Rex -- damn Rex insisted that she wasn't evil. He insisted she needed them.

"How did you know my name? My real name?" Hunter knew he should be running, looking for a vehicle to take him to Rex, but he stood frozen to the floor. Half-remembered images from dreams long past flooded his mind. A woman with hair the color of stars, her face dancing with laughter... twisted with fear. Arms wrapped around her body, holding her back as they...

"Anahita."

He blinked, coming from the near trance state he'd fallen into. The memories drifted from his mind like cobwebs. "What?"

"Anahita. When I sleep."

"Anahita? You're Anahita?" He vaguely remembered that name; Rex had mentioned her long ago. But there was no answer. "Hello? Are you there?" As he expected, the phone was dead. And Rex lay dying somewhere. Hunter wasted time looking at the phone, trying to call back. But the phone showed that no call had come in since yesterday when Rex had called from the grocery store. It had been his night to cook...

Had he imagined the phone call? No. No.

Hunter moved with speed and deliberation, locking the workshop and gathering up a few important items he'd need in an emergency. When he was satisfied, he



stepped outside. The neighbor had a decrepit station wagon he could borrow. Surely fate would smile on him, and he could coax the heap into starting.

Swinging the pack onto his back, Hunter broke into a run, determined to steal a car if that's what it took.

## Chapter Two

"So anyhow, we moved on to Michigan after that. There just weren't enough trees in Nebraska. I can't survive without forest or something. Don't get me wrong, there's beauty there -- it's just a different sort." Rex sighed, glancing over at his patient audience. "I hope I'm not boring you."

The red fox lay about three yards away, panting and basking companionably in the sun. One furry ear flicked as he stopped speaking. "You want to hear more? I mean, it's been an awfully long life, hasn't it? So if I have to go, it's not really that big a loss."

But it was. He wasn't meant to die this way, and how would Hunter get on if he did? Life was good. He wasn't ready to leave just yet. It made him sad.

The fox stopped panting and tilted its head slightly.

"You hear something? A car maybe?" Rex couldn't move enough to look upslope from where he lay. He'd done a swan dive off the roadway to get away from the guys who'd been beating him. It wasn't that he'd been afraid of them, but he was rapidly losing his glamour as blood smeared the runes on his skin, and his power had leached from his body, along with his blood. What would they have done if they'd seen what he truly was? Going off the embankment had seemed the lesser of two evils at the time. If they'd seen the wings and tail, they'd have hunted him down and shot him. Probably stuffed him like a trophy afterwards.

He wasn't afraid of the fall.

True to his motto, it had been the landing that hurt.

The fox rose and stretched in a long, cat-like stretch, licking his chops. "On your way, eh? Well, thanks for keeping company with me." He grinned as the rusty-red creature shook its glossy fur and trotted away, hopping lightly over the rough rocks on the ground. Well, the company had been good while it remained.

She'd never come back. He hadn't expected her to, but he'd hoped. It had been a long painful day and anything would have helped pass the time. Now the day was ending, and the sun would be going down, and Rex simply didn't have the energy to charm a fire out of mid-air. The night would be worse than the day. It could get damned cold up here in the Trinity Alps.

He lay with eyes closed, listening to the music of the river as it flowed. Across the rocky gorge the mountains climbed from its banks, black with fir and pine. Huge boulders lay where they'd fallen centuries ago. The place was rough and rugged and so incredibly wonderful. He'd been meaning to come here and vanish into the forest for a day or two, just to recharge himself. Rion understood his need for the wilderness. In fact, the angel had probably memorized the location of every forest in North America planning their next move.

That had been part of the arguments. Rion wanted to flee from the succubus. Rex wanted someplace to stay, to sink his roots and build an existence. He didn't understand Rion's fear of the creature. To an immortal, she was fairly harmless. And he didn't think jealousy was at the root of Rion's uneasiness with her. It was a puzzle. After so many decades together, some of Rion's mysteries still remained.

"You just can't stay out of trouble, can you?"

Rex opened his eyes and smiled. Rion hovered in the air just yards above him. He'd dropped all his glamour so, in spite of the jeans and hiking boots and the backpack that dangled from his hand, he was all angelic glory. His normally auburn hair gleamed like the red of blood, and his ivory skin reflected the waning light of the day. His blue, blue eyes... they were the color of the blue on a peacock feather. He wore a tank top to give his snowy-white wings room to spread.

Beautiful.

"Are you here to take me to heaven?"

Rion frowned, and then gave a strained smile. His landing was innately graceful. It was the sort of grace that could never be taught, it was simply part of him. Years ago,

when he'd first fallen to Earth, he'd been clumsy like a colt, but even then there had been beauty in his awkwardness.

In seconds he was at Rex's side, running a gentle hand down his cheek. The skin of his hands was now rough and calloused, but still so light and sensitive. Rex sighed as Rion ran a thumb over his dry lips. Turning away, he dug into the pack and brought a bottle of water to Rex's mouth.

Rex swallowed, choked and drank a bit more. At the back of his mind, Rex was grateful that he was on a slope; he'd have never been able to cope with sitting up to drink.

"Did *she* tell you to come?"

"Shhh..." Rion looked him over, evaluating Rex's injuries. His face became bleak.

"I told her to call you on a cell phone. Silly thing was I didn't give her your number."

"She called." Rion's voice was huskier than usual. "Now I need to get you out of here. I can fly you up, but there will be pain." Pain was an understatement. Just the least movement of his arm sent Rex into paroxysms of agony.

Rion held another bottle to his lips, this one contained whiskey. It was from Rex's private stock of good Scotch. He frowned at the waste, but let the fine spirits trickle down his throat, coughing a bit at the burn. "Trying to get me drunk? I won't be so easily taken advantage of."

Rion just gave him a look. Next he brought out a blanket and wrapped it over Rex's body. "We've got to get help for you."

"Rion, love, if even one doctor checks my blood or requests an X-ray..."

"I know. But you need stitches, and you've got several bones broken. I think you'll heal, Rex, but you'll heal slow and bad if you don't get help." He urged another drink on Rex. "I've got another car above. We'll head to town."

Town was over sixty miles away on narrow, winding roads.

"We can just head home. Really, Rion." Their home town wasn't a complete hole in the wall. It did have a clinic.

"The walk-in clinic closes at five. We won't make it."

Rex was too tired to argue. Pain had a way of sapping the humor out of a man, and when Rion carefully lifted him into his strong arms, he very nearly cried with the pain. He moaned, cursed himself for a weakling. Moaned again. He finally resorted to short, shallow breaths that took some of the pressure off his ribs. His leg hurt so badly his mind seemed to abstract that body part from the rest of him, allowing him to view the pain from a comfortable distance.

Maybe that was the whiskey.

The angel did his best to make the short flight comfortable, but by the time he gently settled Rex on a pallet of blankets in the back of Neeley's old station wagon, Rex was seeing the world through foggy vision. He spared a glance at the wreckage of their car at the side of the road and then looked into the face of the man who loved him. "I knew you'd come. Thank you."

Rion's eyes filled with tears which he blinked away. Rex wanted to reach up and wipe the silvery droplet dry as it traveled down his face. Instead, he let his own eyes slip closed as the darkness took him.

\* \* \*

Rion couldn't remember feeling this helpless. Not ever. And frankly, his memories stretched back a very, very long time. The old car chugged along; its temperature gauge was slowly rising, and the sun outside was steadily dropping. Every bump in the road brought a soft gasp from Rex. Every sharp curve rolled him slightly, and Rion grieved to put the Sidhe through such pain.

He had so many questions, but he stayed quiet. The time would come for answers soon enough. For now, Rex needed help; help that was well over an hour away on a rough, little-used highway.

He drove through a small town that catered to fishermen; businesses renting poles and cabins studded the roadside. A small store that doubled as a tavern

advertised “Live Bait” in red neon. Rion drove slowly, an idea forming. He carefully read every sign at the side of the road, finally finding the one he was looking for. “Willow Ridge Reservation: Seven Miles.” He made the turn.

They had a clinic there, and with luck, it would have emergency services.

The road grew marginally worse. The two lanes narrowed to one in some places, and the fading light made it a challenge to avoid potholes and dips. Once, Rion had to pull off the road to let a pickup truck pass. He flipped on the headlights in the fading light and continued. It was the slowest seven miles that he’d traveled in his life.

As luck would have it, the clinic was on the outskirts of the town that formed the heart of the reservation. And there were lights on inside.

“We’re at a clinic. I’ll be right back, Rex. I’m getting help.” He twisted to look at Rex, to make certain that the Sidhe had pulled his glamour back in place.

He was trying. But his left wing shimmered into view like a hazy mirage. “Rion, the blood’s interfering with some of the marks.”

Rex’s charms were powerful. He painted the magic runes on their skin every two or three weeks, and unless they were washed away or otherwise defiled, they held their magic. Drying blood over a charm would certainly interfere with the magic of the tattoo. So could an open wound.

He took a deep breath, drawing patience into his mind. Rion carefully wet a rag from a bottle of water and got out of the car, opening the back door so that he could sit next to Rex. Gingerly, he pulled the blanket away. The Sidhe’s clothing was in tatters, blood matting the fabric.

“It’s the one on my left shoulder... the front.”

“This isn’t good, Rex. You’ve got an abrasion on it.” Rion carefully wiped around the wound. “Okay, the mark is still there, but it’s still bleeding a little.”

“Just pay attention. Wipe the blood away if you need to.” Unfortunately, Rex’s right arm was injured; he couldn’t do it for himself.

Rion paused, looked at his lover’s face. It hurt to the core to see Rex like this. His friendly, open face was swollen and battered, tight with pain. His gleaming brown curls

were matted with blood. Over the years, he'd allowed them to grow to waist-length, and then sheared his hair close to his head before letting it grow again. Rion always preferred Rex's hair as it was when he'd first met him, an overgrown, unruly mop of curls that spilled into his eyes.

The way it was now.

The light was dull in his beautiful hazel eyes. His smiling lips were puffy and swollen; bruises marred the perfect warmth of his skin.

"This damage isn't from the wreck." He stroked a finger along Rex's cheek, the only uninjured spot he could find.

"No. It was a truck full of high school boys."

"Gay bashing?" No matter whether they lived in a city or in the country, certain people took exception to men who took same-sex lovers. They'd only encountered it once or twice, but it was still a frightening possibility.

"Nah, I think they were just mean bastards. I flagged them down for help. They thought it was funny to pretend to be Good Samaritans, and then beat the shit out of me." He swallowed hard. "I'm not healing, Rion."

He knew. By now, the small cuts should be gone. The bruising should be yellow and green -- ugly, but a sign of healing.

"You will. It's just slow because you're so badly hurt. It's good, really. The bones need to be set straight." Normally, they'd heal, but severe fractures still needed setting. Truthfully, Rion was baffled. Why wasn't he healing?

"Looks like the two of you need some help."

Rion was so startled that he slammed his head into the roof of the car, bringing an awkward smile to Rex's face.

"My friend is hurt. Badly, I think." He backed out of the car door and looked at a small figure in a white coat. She was pretty, plump, and clearly Native American. Her dark hair was pulled back in a braid; she wore round glasses that echoed the shape of her face. "Are you the doctor?"

"No, the night doc isn't here yet. She's running a little late. I'm Cynthia. I'm it for now." The little tag on her scrubs stated that Cynthia W. was an RN. Her calm competence eased the panic that had followed Rion for hours now.

She pushed past him and looked down at Rex. "So what happened to you?" She flicked a pen light over his eyes, checking his pupils. "Looks like someone doesn't like you much."

"Car wreck. Then a truckload of guys that didn't like my looks." Again, he gave that lopsided grin that pulled at Rion's heart.

"Okay. Well, let's get you to an exam room and get started." She backed out of the car with much less effort than it had taken Rion. "I'll get his X-rays and blood work started. That'll speed things up once Doc Gastineau gets here."

Over her shoulder, Rion caught Rex's expression.

"No tests, please."

The nurse looked at Rex, and then turned back to Rion for confirmation.

"It's against his religion."

"Oh." She was annoyed. She turned back to Rex. "You understand that we can't treat you if we don't know what's wrong."

"Yes, he knows." That brought her back around to Rion. "Please respect his wishes. As Rex has often told me, there were healers long before there were centrifuges and electricity."

She sighed. "I guess that's true enough." She spared a dark look for Rex. "It's just so much easier." Cynthia headed back into the double doors of the clinic. Within a moment, she was back with a gurney. "I'll need your help to move him. I think he's too busted up to put in a wheelchair." She lifted a bundle from the gurney, producing a cervical collar. She crawled into the back of the car, deftly securing Rex's neck. After several moments of manipulation, they managed to move him onto the gurney. Rion was impressed with her skills at moving the injured man. She must have read his expression.

"I was an EMT before I was a nurse. Did ambulance duty for years."



She moved Rex into an exam room and busied Rion with paperwork. "Can I at least examine him?"

Rion nodded absently. He dug into his wallet and produced a credit card. They had no health insurance. Since when did an immortal need health insurance? He scanned the other boxes on the form.

Spouse? No. Next of Kin? None. Rex's mother had vanished over a century ago. Domestic Partner? He nibbled the pen. They'd never filed, not seeing any need to. Now he changed his mind. As soon as possible, they'd get it taken care of. He checked the "no" box and moved on to the health history. It was every bit as mystifying as the rest. Rion had never heard of most of the conditions listed on the paper.

"Is it all right if I take his vitals?"

Rion looked up and caught Rex nodding. "Yes, that's all right, just no invasive diagnostics or treatment."

She grumbled something and turned away, pulling a thermometer from a drawer.

Rion jumped when a buzzer sounded.

"We lock up after dark. It's either a patient or the doctor coming in."

"Doesn't she have a key?"

The nurse shot him a look. One that made him feel much smaller than he really was. "Yes, she has a key. The buzzer just lets me know she's here. I don't like being taken by surprise."

The little nurse bustled out the door, and Rion got up, pulling a rolling stool to the gurney where Rex remained. He ran a gentle hand through the Sidhe's sticky curls, and then traced the arched line of his dark eyebrow. "You're a mess."

Rex didn't open his eyes, but gave a crooked smile. "Your touch feels good. Don't stop." His lips were still dry and parched. Rion gently stroked his eyebrow, trailing his finger down to his jaw.

"What treatment can you safely take? You're dehydrated, they can help that."

"Just bone-setting and stitching, if need be. If we were in the Other Place..." Rex broke off, swallowing hard. They hadn't been to his Sidhe home in over a decade now. He opened his reddened eyes, and the sadness there was painful to see.

"I'll take you there, Rex. You'll heal there, won't you?"

"Aye. But the nearest gateway is far from here, Rion. And now we don't have a vehicle that can make the trip."

"We shouldn't have settled so far away from a portal."

Rex brought up a hand and weakly rested it on Rion's cheek. "You're so beautiful... even when you hide yourself..." His hand slipped away, and Rion clasped it, holding on tightly. "In hindsight, it wasn't a good idea, to move so far, but the portals are so few, and we can't keep hovering near them."

There was one in the Wasatch Mountains, and another in the dark heart of San Francisco's Chinatown. The last one they'd used had been in the empty plains of Nebraska. Rion knew there must be others.

"Do you remember, last time we were home..."

"Carly." Rion smiled and finished for him. Carly had been Rion's first lover. She'd taught him about lovemaking. She'd also taught him that sometimes it was better to remember pain than to forget it through bliss. Her particular gift was to bestow forgetfulness on those in pain. Her particular curse was that her lovers tended to forget her once they left her presence.

She'd been their sometime lover, and Rion thought she loved them merely because they remembered her.

"I'll take you home, Rex. I'll rent a car and we'll get you there." Gently, he kissed Rex, tasting salt and dirt and the tang of blood on his lips.

The Sidhe started to take a breath, and then it caught on a cough. "Damn." He swallowed. "Broken ribs, I'd say."

"Isn't it nice that you can diagnose yourself?"

Rion straightened at the new voice. When Rex's eyes went wide, he turned, and nearly froze in his tracks.

"I'm Doctor Gastineau. My nurse tells me you refuse diagnostics and treatment."

Under her white coat she wore form-fitting blue jeans on endlessly long legs. Her white lab coat was parted to reveal a deep red, scooped-neck blouse. A heavy necklace of intricately worked silver rested around her throat, draping down to her chest. She was lean, but curved in all the right spots.

It was her face, though, that held his attention. Jet black hair was pulled back in a severe braid similar to Cynthia's, but her face was stark in its beauty. Not a trace of makeup touched her skin, yet she glowed, her honey skin flawless. Her dark eyes followed the high slope of her cheekbones. Her full red lips were meant for laughter and kissing, but now were set in a stern expression. Rex's hand tightened in his, until his grip was nearly painful.

"Nothing personal, Dr. Gastineau. It's the way he was raised."

She simply pursed her lips and moved to the side of the bed opposite Rion. "You aren't his registered domestic partner. I'm very sorry, but the patient will have to speak for himself."

"He's correct. I'll accept a physical exam and bone setting. Stitching, if it's needed. I was raised in a family of natural healers; I'll attend my own treatment once I'm home."

Saying nothing, she merely checked his pulse and began to examine him, drawing grunts of pain as she probed for various injuries.

"Cynthia, we'll need to cut away his pants." The shirt had fallen into tatters and pulled easily from his body. Rion stood back as the nurse cut away Rex's tattered jeans. His remaining tennis shoe came off easily.

The break in Rex's left leg made him swallow hard. The bone hadn't broken through, but the bulge of the break against his skin looked freakish and painful. Dr. Gastineau carefully examined the injury, her fingers gentle, though her expression was serious.

"This is bad. I'd really prefer to see what's here before I try to set it." She stood up and folded her arms. "You were right about the ribs. At least two on the left side are

fractured. Your left clavicle is probably broken as well. You're bleeding internally. You may have a minor concussion, though your pupils are equal."

Rex swallowed hard, nauseated from the pain of the exam. "Then go ahead and strap the ribs and arm. And set the leg as best you can."

"Look, Mr. Clark, you're in bad shape all around. You really need to be on fluids. Hell, you need to be in the hospital having surgery. I can do so much, but you're making me work blind here!"

For the first time, Rion could see stress around her lovely eyes. He frowned in a bit of surprise. Lovely, yes, but not as mind-numbingly beautiful as she'd been when he'd first seen her. He wondered if stress had affected the way he'd initially perceived her.

"Rex, it's just your leg, surely an X-ray wouldn't be so bad?"

Or would it? Would the lower part of his spine show? His tail? The break was below the knee.

Rex looked weary. Shock was setting in. "Doctor, it's like asking a Catholic to use birth control -- or a Mormon to drink a beer."

"I know Mormons who drink." Cynthia had seemingly had enough of the standoff. "Let's go." She released the brake on the gurney, getting it ready to move.

"Doesn't he have to sign a consent first?" Rion remained in the room, watching the women maneuver the gurney. Finally, he followed, relief warring with fear.

"I'll have to ask you to stay back from the X-ray suite, Mister..."

"Hunter. Orion Hunter."

The doctor stood very still for a moment. "That's an unusual name." Suddenly she was in motion again. "Cynthia, go ahead and get him to sign off on the X-ray." The nurse nodded, but Rion didn't miss the hidden anger on her face. She didn't like the doctor.

They vanished into the X-ray suite, leaving Rion standing in the hall alone. In exhaustion, he leaned back against a wall and sighed, relieved that someone else was taking charge, even if only for a few moments.

## Chapter Three

Noemi really hated disturbing him; the poor man had literally fallen asleep on his feet. He was leaning against a wall, and visibly jerked at the sound of her voice. “Rion? Mr. Hunter?”

The eyes that fluttered open were impossibly blue, deep and haunted. Odd, normally white men with blue eyes didn’t seem mysterious to her. But he was. And his love for the other man was painfully obvious. It made her aware of the little hollow spot in her chest where a heart should live. Not the beating muscle, but the warmth of love for others.

It had been many years since Noemi had felt love for another. She’d been too busy surviving. First it had been the death of her mother, and then medical school.

And then other things.

A slight twist of guilt ran through her; the reservation wasn’t considered federal lands, but her ethics as a doctor still demanded that she obey the wishes of the patient, even if their wishes put them at further risk. In her opinion, her patient wasn’t in the proper frame of mind to make medical decisions for himself, and legally, his lover didn’t have the right to sign off on a procedure.

“Mr. Hunter... let’s sit down.” She led him to a lounge with a little round table. It was actually for staff use, but she didn’t want to bother taking him back out to the waiting room.

He sat, his face heavy with exhaustion and fear. God! But he was a gorgeous man. Even with shadowed eyes and a weary face, he was as near perfection as she’d ever seen. His oval face was sculpted, with high cheekbones and a strong jaw balancing each other. His nose was straight and strong. He probably had the most beautifully kissable lips that she’d seen on a man.

She blinked, shocked at the arousal rising in her belly, ashamed that she was lusting for this man who was already so clearly in love. He looked steadily at her, waiting for her to speak.

"I've stitched up the cuts that needed attention, and did butterfly bandages on others. I've also strapped his ribs. He'll need to keep his arm in a sling... maybe six to eight weeks for the ribs and the collarbone."

He blinked, and she realized that he was still shocky himself. Now Noemi began to worry in earnest. How would this man manage the drive to a motel? The nearest she was aware of was at least twenty miles away, if they were even open.

"Mr. Hunter..."

"Rion. Call me Rion."

"Rion, he really should have a surgeon look at that leg. I understand his objections, so I've agreed to set it, but it's going to be incredibly painful."

Rion turned his head toward the exam rooms. His profile was straight and classical. His dark red hair was pulled back in a thick braid that dropped just past his shoulders. When he looked back at her, she blinked in surprise.

"What are you asking?"

"He passed out. I'm asking your permission to put him on an IV and get him sedated before I try to set the leg. He's broken both the tibia and the fibula."

"You bullied him into an X-ray that he didn't want. Now you want me to give you permission to do something else he's refused?" He lifted an elegant, arched brow. Noemi flushed with embarrassment.

"He's in shock. Shock can kill, Rion. I just want to support his health the best I can. I do respect his beliefs..."

"Do you?" Rion stood, and though she was fairly tall, he towered over her. "If he's unconscious, let's get the leg set. When he wakes up, ask him again about the IV. If you explain what's in it, he'll probably accept it. But don't try to talk me into taking his choice from him."

Noemi stood, feeling fatigue flow over her. It was early to be so tired, but she hadn't adapted well to sleeping during the day. And now she was wrestling with an uncooperative patient, his obstinate lover, and her always difficult nurse all at the same time. She reached up and fingered the amulet that she wore on a leather loop around her neck. Even under the nubby fabric of her shirt, it brought a familiar sense of comfort and safety.

This night felt off. Strange.

"Can I come in while you do it? He might want me there afterwards."

Good, the man wasn't afraid to witness pain. She nodded and led the way out the door to the small room they did minor surgical procedures in. Cynthia had cleaned up the mess left by cleaning and suturing the man. Noemi stood next to him, briefly checking his pulse.

He appeared to be sleeping, but she wasn't sure.

"Mr. Clark? Rex?"

Impossibly thick, dark lashes fluttered open. She glanced up at the other man and noted that he was similarly gifted.

Why was it that men always had the best hair and lashes? Well, they had male pattern baldness too, so she shouldn't complain.

"I'm going to set your leg. Before I begin, I want to ask again if you'll take something for pain."

"No. Thanks." His dehydration had her nearly as concerned as the leg.

"An IV? Saline only, for the dehydration. No medicine."

"It's just fluid, Rex. Nothing else."

She watched as their gazes locked. So much communication there.

"Okay. Just saline."

She didn't bother to call the nurse. Noemi expertly inserted the needle into his arm, starting the life-giving hydration. Okay. One more hurdle out of the way. Cynthia would be pissed, but frankly, she was a bit rough with needles in general. Noemi would rather do it herself.

Briefly, she explained the procedure and the risks, and had Cynthia join her. "I won't put a plaster cast on right now. There's a risk of swelling, so we'll use a boot instead."

At last, there was no more busy work, no more prep. Rion stood at the patient's head while Cynthia stood ready to help. Noemi took a few deep breaths and touched the patient's hot, swollen leg.

She worked in silence, and for the most part, Rex tolerated the pain quite well as she manipulated the bones into position. Now that his face was clean, she saw that his skin was tanned and brown, though he'd gone sickly pale. His bruises and injuries stood out in stark contrast. His companion was white as a sheet.

Finally she finished, but continued manipulating his leg. She kept one hand steady under his muscled calf, calling up every reserve of energy that she had.

Normally, Noemi would never use healing on a patient in front of others, but Cynthia had left the room, and Rion was focused on his lover. She didn't dare channel all of her energy to the injury, just enough to assure herself that the nerves and vessels were cleanly joined.

At the moment, it was the best she could do.

"My leg burns." Rex loosed his good hand, reaching down toward his leg.

"I'm sure it's just the circulation returning. The pain will let up soon." She turned and found Cynthia waiting with the splint, a speculative expression on her face. Had she seen? Noemi set that concern aside as they began bracing his leg.

"Not bad burning, not really. It's just odd."

She didn't look up at him. He really shouldn't have felt anything, they never did. From the corner of her eye, she saw Rion watching her work. He was astute. He came off as naïve, but Noemi was uncomfortably aware that he saw far too much. Had they noticed her funneling energy into Rex's wounded leg?

Once they were finished, she and Cynthia easily transferred him from the gurney to the bed in the other exam room.



"When can I take him home?" Rion hovered anxiously, his attention divided between the doctor and Rex.

Noemi glanced at a clock. "It's pretty late. I'd like him to stay overnight and check him before you leave."

He nodded, looking around for a chair. Oddly, it was the nurse who took pity. Cynthia was usually slightly hostile to men in general, white men in particular. Noemi had experienced her own share of trouble with men, but she didn't carry a chip on her shoulder like Cynthia did.

"There's a cot in the break room. I'll bring it in if you'd like."

Rion started to protest, but the nurse was out of the room, quickly returning with the folding cot. She set it up and turned to the supply closet, pulling out a pillow and blankets. "Here's an extra in case he gets cold."

"Thank you." Rion's voice was soft and harsh and melodic at the same time. Noemi wondered if he'd had an injury to his vocal cords. He ignored the cot and pulled a chair close to the bed, reaching up to grip Rex's hand. The patient was again seemingly unconscious.

"Did he tell you what happened?" Noemi paused by the door, looking back at the two men. Her throat felt tight and her chest ached. Watching them made her feel lonely. As Noemi had spent most of her life on her own, loneliness had become a comfortable companion. This feeling was not so comfortable.

"Car wreck. And then some people stopped. They pretended they were going to help him, and then jumped him instead. I found him down the embankment of Highway 7, nearly to the river."

She winced. Those canyon walls were brutal. He was lucky he'd survived the fall.

"What caused the wreck?"

"He probably swerved for a rabbit or something."

"Fox." Rex's voice was harsh and sleepy. "He kept me company till you came."

Noemi smiled as she left. He'd swerved for a fox. You never knew who that fox or coyote might really be... a shifter or a trickster, or maybe just a fox. You never knew. She shook her head and closed the office door behind her. She'd make a call to the sheriff to report the accident, and then try to catch a nap before her late night patients started.

\* \* \*

Rion lay on the cot, looking up at Rex, and oddly enough, down at himself. He was clearly not awake, but even for a dream, this seemed strange.

He looked at himself in detail, seeing the long, muscular body with a subjectivity that did not belong to him. At the same time, he watched Rex's still form; his limp hand lay over the side of the bed, the slender fingers still blood-stained. As soon as he got Rex home, he'd give him a sponge bath.

When he saw himself again, Rion knew what was off about this dream. He was seeing himself through the eyes of another. He wanted to be angry, to curse her and run. That was always his reaction to the succubus.

"Thank you. Thank you for finding him." That statement cost him a great deal. His pride stung, and fear still tinged his perception of the succubus. Anahita. He remembered who she was now; she was the Fallen who'd truly fallen, and locked herself into an icy grave to save others from her dangerous needs.

For all these years, no one had known the true fate of Anahita.

"That night all those years ago, when you first attacked us... you were breaking free, weren't you?"

Before his eyes, she began to take a red, shadowy form, just as she had all those decades before. She didn't have features, but somehow, she seemed to look at Rex with longing.

"I was called forth... by a demon. He took my place in the ice."

"You killed him?"

"No..." Her voice trailed off. The form turned to him once again. "I was saved."

"You were saved once before, when you first fell."

She didn't answer, but Rion felt the heat of her anger. Literally. It crawled up his arms and face like invisible flame.

"I have no words for how he used me." And the story became vivid in Rion's mind. The fragile, confused angel had followed her rescuer. He'd ignored her when it suited him. Dyffyd had left her alone when he'd gone to harvest the dead from the world's battlefields.

Alone and unprotected, she'd fallen victim to the rapacious attentions of the men who'd inhabited the medieval landscape she'd emerged in. Rather than take Anahita to the Other Place where his people resided, Dyffyd had left the broken angel alone on a tiny, poorly provisioned farm while he was gone. Instead of seeking magical assistance from his people, he'd dealt with her wings by keeping their stumps burned to prevent them from growing back.

No wonder she'd become succubus.

"I was reborn to another protector."

"You are still truly Fallen, Anahita. You embraced evil by choosing to become demon kind."

"The choice was not mine, Kokabiel. I have never embraced evil."

Her attention was now fully on him. The heat that engulfed his body was no longer anger, but something else entirely. Something he rejected, and yet embraced. It had been years since he'd felt her touch, and like an addict, the moment of submission to the drug was the sweetest pain imaginable. He didn't want to want her, but he did, with a fiery need that rivaled any sensation he'd ever experienced. It was a need he'd fought all these years, even when he woke at night to find Rex deeply in the grip of her embrace. He hated that he felt this way.

"You've missed me." He closed his eyes, his chest rising rapidly. "Open your pants, Kokabiel."

"Rion. My name is Rion."

Even as he denied her, his fingers followed her bidding. They trembled as he fumbled over the buttons, but soon he lay naked beneath her touch. He knew she had

no physical substance, yet he luxuriated in the familiar drag of her fingers on his belly, the sweep of her tongue across his achingly tight balls. He closed his eyes tightly, feeling tears trickle from the corners, running down his cheeks to pool into his ears.

Why? Why did he crave her so much? Why did he welcome her, even as his mind sought escape? The beating of his heart signaled his mounting arousal, but something else as well. Panic. His lungs pumped, his belly and chest heaved as though he'd been running. It was his conditioned response to her.

Her mouth melted over his cock, finding places that he didn't even know existed. She tested the weight of his balls; a shadowy finger rimmed his ass.

"He fucks you here." He gasped at the sensation. "I should be angry, jealous. But I'm not. I wouldn't know which to be jealous of." Her kisses ran up his inner thigh. Her hands stroked his flanks, and then the wet heat that pressed over his shaft was no longer her mouth.

His hands sought a grip on smoke. She was over him, fucking him, but he felt only air under his hands. She rose and lowered herself, and his hips bucked to meet her. He felt phantom hands on his skin, the whisper of kisses on his lips.

"You have missed me."

"Yes." The admission was painful. She was fucking him, extracting confessions of his need while Rex lay unconscious just feet away.

"Don't feel bad, Rion. This is for him."

He remembered that sensation of longing he'd sensed from her. "Do you love him?" he asked.

Their hips churned together, and she did not answer. Rion gripped the side of the cot, and in his mind he saw her above him, her delicate, beautiful face twisted with unmet need. Because truth was truth. She was a succubus, a phantom who drained the sexual energy from men. Her physical needs would never be satisfied.

"Do you love him, Anahita?"

She didn't answer. She drove him to a harder pace, and all of Rion's focus shifted to the fiery hot grip on his cock. It had all changed again; he was being pumped in a

vise-like hand, heat and pleasure coiling into his ass. His balls went tight and his back bowed. White-hot streams of his semen spewed onto the bare skin of his belly.

It didn't stop there. As before, she coaxed him on, long past the point of satisfaction. Another climax roared through his body, and his hips pumped and thrust into her ephemeral grip. Rion shuddered, dragging his gaze to look up at where the shadowy form hovered over his body. He was limp, drained from the two powerful orgasms.

As he watched, she drifted closer to Rex. "Please... no, Anahita... he's not strong enough!"

He felt the sensation of her tolerant amusement, which was surprisingly reassuring. Rion lay back, and watched in wonder as the succubus suddenly became luminescent. The light from her form grew and intensified, and gently rained down on Rex like a shower of rainbow-colored energy.

"You can take, but you can feed others as well."

"One does not need to be perfect to be... beneficial. That is nature's law."

Slowly, the light display came to a gentle end. Rion rose weakly on the cot, trying to see his partner in the dim light of the exam room.

"Let him sleep. He'll grow stronger with rest."

Rion reached for Rex's hand, feeling it warm and alive in his own. The form of the succubus began to dissipate.

"Anahita..."

Lips brushed against his. "Sleep, angel. He will survive this night."

She floated like mist to the top of the room. "I've missed you too, Kokabiel."

The loneliness in her voice squeezed his heart. "Thank you, Anahita." There was no answer. "Thank you."

## Chapter Four

The sun had no business shining so brightly this early in the morning. Rex tried unsuccessfully to turn away from the light, but failed. A soft hand held his chin in a firm grip, forcing him to face the burning sun. He made some unintelligible noise, and when his lids finally opened, they felt as though they'd been peeled off his eyeballs.

"Sorry. I'm not sure if you have a head injury, so I need to wake you."

"Fine." He wasn't sure if he sounded surly or drunk. Probably both. "Take it easy!" She probed the tender bruise around his eye, chasing away the last remnants of sleep. A muffled groan a few feet away told him that Rion was stirring.

"I don't think any of the bones in your face are broken."

The back of his bed began to rise, and Rex relaxed, letting the machinery do the work, bringing him to an upright position. From here, he could see that Rion was sleeping on a cot. He'd turned to his side, his back to the light. Odd, Rion was usually a light sleeper. Now he was out like a log.

A light fragrance filled the room. "Here, it's chamomile and wintergreen tea. Since you won't take drugs for pain, I thought maybe you'd take this instead." He reached for the Styrofoam cup with his good left hand, amused to see that it still trembled slightly. Thankfully, the tea was cool enough to drink. He sipped, and winced as Dr. Gastineau leaned over him, daubing a fragrant salve onto his abrasions.

He sniffed. "Lavender and wintergreen..."

"...in a base of healing oils," she finished for him. "One of the reasons I chose to work at this clinic is that we are encouraged to practice alternative medicine. Cynthia has a wonderful knowledge of local plant lore."

Once she finished with the salve, Rex sipped the tea again. "But lavender and wintergreen aren't native to this area."

"No, but I expect they are part of your medicine kit."

That was certainly true. "You aren't local either."

"I'm First Nations. From Canada."

That explained her slight accent. And the subtle differences in her appearance. She was taller than the local Native Americans, and her face was more angular. Even the tone of her skin was a bit different.

"What tribe?"

She shook her head and smiled slightly. "I was adopted by an Inuit woman who raised me in her culture. I expect my origins are Cree or Huron, judging by where she found me." She pulled up the rolling stool and sat, observing Rex as he finished his tea. "Once she passed away, I left the villages for college."

He emptied the cup and she took it from his hand, setting it on a rolling table.

"So tell me more about the accident. Incidentally, I called it in to the county sheriff."

Rex had that sinking feeling... hours of questioning, having to think quickly and evade the full truth. He didn't look forward to it.

"I know you think it isn't necessary, but this isn't the first time I've ended up with patients that came here after an... accident involving you people in the county." He looked at her with a frown, so she continued. "I've been here about three years. In that time, I know of about a half-dozen cases in which local high school students have suddenly acted violently out of character. Girls as well as boys."

"That could be alcohol. There isn't a lot for young people to do around here -- except getting drunk and fucking, I suppose."

She smiled, and Rex was momentarily stilled by that smile. It softened her face, brought light to those dark almond eyes.

"That's why the reservation has so many youth programs: drumming and dancing, traditional language. They do their best to keep them engaged here."

"Has this happened to any of the reservation youth?"

She shook her head. "It happens to the kids off res, and I end up with the mess." She rose and tossed his cup into a waste can. "I think you can probably sleep safely. I won't wake you again. Can't promise Cynthia won't, though." She smiled again, and suddenly Rex remembered that first moment that he'd seen her. She'd been vibrant with an otherworldly beauty. If he hadn't had Rion to compare her to, he might think she was one of the Fallen. Now he could see that she was simply a beautiful human woman.

He noticed that she was looking past the bed at where Rion lay sleeping.

"How long have the two of you been together?"

Automatically, he went soft inside. Thoughts of Orion did that to him. "A very long time. I found him in a muddy field and he followed me home."

She didn't laugh at his joke. Instead, she continued to stare at the angel, and an expression came over her face that twisted Rex's heart. Stark loneliness. It shook him.

"The two of you are very lucky to have found each other." She looked away, and that moment of pain fled her face as though it'd never been.

"We are. I wasn't looking for him. I wasn't looking for the love of my life. It just came, and happened to be this man."

She took a deep breath, as though she'd stopped breathing and had forgotten to begin again. "Like I said, lucky." Her hand came up to the front of her blouse, and she fingered an object under the fabric. He supposed it was a medicine pouch or something else that gave her comfort.

Without another word, she turned and left the room, flicking a switch on the wall, and leaving them in darkness.

\* \* \*

The house was a welcome sight.

It was small and low; Rion had to duck under some of the doorways, but Rex loved it. The cabin was made of rough honey-colored planks that had grown dark with age. He'd planted every type of flower that grew easily in this region. Old rose bushes flanked the porch, and hummingbird feeders studded the eaves.



Inside, the rough floor creaked under Rion's feet as he carried Rex to the plush old sofa. He'd obligingly lowered his weight to the minimum he could manage, but even that simple trick was nearly beyond his skill. If it wasn't for the inked charms on his skin, his wings and tail would be hanging out for all to see.

"I would give much for a bath, Rion. There's blood and all sorts of garbage caught up in my hair."

"That might be a challenge. Let me get the water started."

Rex lay back and absorbed the good vibes of their little house. It wasn't the croft in Scotland, but it had its own charm. Over the years, Rex had grown accustomed to the idea that home was wherever he found himself sleeping in Rion's arms. There was great comfort in that knowledge. There was a bit of loss as well, for Rex was a steward of the Earth and the green things that grew. He craved the wild places as well as the domesticated farm lands. He wanted to stay put and tend to a forest of his own.

This little home fulfilled some of his needs, but it was a poor substitute for the acres that had once been his. Technically, they were still his acres, and the last they'd visited, the charmed croft was still sturdy and standing, hidden in the mists by a powerful charm. Someday Rex wanted to go home to the cottage in Scotland.

It was late. They'd meant to leave the clinic early in the morning, but as she left to go home from her shift, Dr. Gastineau made them promise to wait for the sheriff. He'd shown up midmorning, and taken over an hour quizzing Rex on the accident itself, the fight, and the identities of the young men who'd attacked him. Rex "forgot" the plate numbers on the back of the truck, and couldn't exactly remember the color of the vehicle. One of the boys had looked far too much like this good-natured man who was questioning him so thoroughly. It had been a relief to see the sheriff on his way out the door.

In truth, Rex was worried. Very, very worried. While he hadn't expected to heal overnight, his healing was nearly as slow as a human's would be. The break in his leg ached fiercely. The cuts and abrasions stung and burned.

"I don't know that you can manage the tub just yet, not with the ribs and collarbone being injured, but I can help you with the shower." Rion stood there with a towel around his lean hips, and Rex gave an obliging leer. He was grateful to see an answering smile on Rion's face. His angel was taking this whole thing very hard.

They struggled with his clothing for a few moments, finally freeing him of the loose scrubs that he'd worn home. It was a spare set that belonged to Dr. Gastineau. Oddly, both men were reluctant to ruin the clothing. Though they were clean when he'd put them on, Rex could smell her scent on the garments, sweet and earthy-green, like wildflowers.

Once he was undressed, Rion checked the running water, and then moved Rex under the stream, his broken leg outside the shower curtain. Rex held his arm tightly to his chest, breathing through the pain.

In spite of the awkwardness and discomfort, having Rion wash his hair was a blissful luxury. Rex sighed as his lover carefully scrubbed away the blood and bits of twigs, dirt and broken glass. He then balanced with one hand on the shower rail as Rion gently washed the rest of his body.

Rion was on his knees, soaping his legs when Rex laid a hand on his head. "Are you going to suck me?"

He asked half in jest, but there was nothing Rex wanted more than to feel Rion's hands on his body, his mouth on his cock. It was probably the primal need for reassurance, the knowledge that life goes on even after catastrophe.

In answer, Rion laid his head on Rex's lower belly, his arms wrapping around his hips. "Not here. You might fall..." He sighed as Rex sent his tail exploring, stroking the angel's back, wrapping lightly around his body.

They remained like that, steam rising in the air, holding onto each other as though time had no meaning. Rex let his weight rest against the tile wall and closed his eyes, feeling the water beating down onto his face, washing away the fear along with the blood and dirt. Rex felt his cock go heavy and long.

"You're strong enough to keep me from falling, Rion." He held onto the shower rail with his good hand and steadied himself with his tail around Rion's hips. That tail took a suggestive journey between Rion's legs, stroking his balls, putting pressure against his anus.

"Suck me, Rion. Please."

When the other man wrapped his strong, hot mouth over Rex's cock, he didn't know whether to laugh or cry. Here he stood in a wet, slick shower with the use of one leg and one arm. Rion wrapped a steadying arm around his hips, holding him perfectly still. The other hand came up, slick and soapy, pulling at his balls in a soothing, arousing rhythm.

Soap. Rex pulled himself out of bliss just long enough to find a bar and slick up the tip of his tail. He teased Rion's erect cock, caressing until the angel moaned, and the vibration of the sound very nearly brought him. That was okay; he wanted it to be fast. He didn't have the stamina for slow.

He found Rion's hole and carefully entered with the tip of his tail, matching the rhythm that the angel was setting with his mouth. Rion moaned again, and Rex gasped in answer. "Oh fuck, Rion... oh shit..."

Rion let his cock slip from his mouth. "No foul language, Rex."

Rex saw a little smile as the angel went down on him again, his tongue licking and probing, circling the eye of his cockhead. His tongue fluttered under the glans, and Rex thrust forward, nearly falling in the process. He felt the answering tension in the other man.

"I can't..." Rion gasped, "I'm so close... can't use my mouth..."

"Hand..." Rex was at the gasping stage himself. Rion's muscular ass was frantically bearing down on the sensitive tip of his tail, which felt sinfully exquisite. His strong hand pumped Rex hard, and he sent a finger up Rex's ass, lightly fingering the gland there. He kissed, he licked, and when Rex stiffened in climax, Rion cried out at the same time, his hot seed spattering on the floor of the shower, swirling into the water.

Looking down, Rex saw his own semen shining on the angel's cheek and lips. He wanted to fall to his knees, he wanted to take Rion in his arms and kiss him. He wanted to taste himself on Rion's beautiful mouth.

Instead, he stood on one shaky leg, still clasping the shower bar for dear life. Rion held him tighter, feathering kisses on his still-thickened cock, his thigh and his hip. When he stopped, Rex was jolted from a near stupor of pleasure.

"Rex, what is this?" Rion's hand smoothed over his hip, over a small injury that he'd not noticed before. "Are these teeth marks?"

Rex twisted and looked down. The mark was faint, but yes... it could very well be a bite. "Is the skin broken?"

"Just in one... no, two spots. It's not a deep bite, but it's badly bruised." His hand skated over the injury. Rex flinched at the pain that light touch brought.

That's when Rex remembered the moment that the encounter had shifted in a frightening direction. He'd already been a bit rattled from his car spinning off the road and hitting a boulder. He'd been standing by the steaming car, wondering what to do next. A pickup pulled over, four young men had spilled out. They'd shuffled around guy-style for a few moments, scratching heads and discussing what to do.

That was when one of the smaller guys had looked at Rex, his smile slowly pulling away from sharp teeth, eyes glowing ominously.

The others had looked at Rex then, and one of them had backed away from his friends, confusion and fear on his face. As Rex watched, his eyes had slowly grown cold and hungry. Unlike the others, he'd fought the change, but he'd failed.

And one of those boys had bitten him.

"They were possessed, Rion. Damn." The bite wasn't as toxic as the bite of a full-fledged demon, but bad enough. The venom had spread through Rex's body, inhibiting his ability to heal.

Rion stood and turned off the water, reaching out for towels. He gently towed off Rex's body and hair. "We need to get you to a gateway then. You need to go home. Do you think you can bear a trip? I can rent a van... We'll make a bed in the back."

"Yes. Yes, Rion, that might be a very good thing to do." Rex could see that his compliance frightened Rion even more.

He didn't want to say it, but the demon that controlled those boys had tasted him. Tasted him and would want more. This was a threat more real than any they'd ever faced from the succubus. When Rion lifted him, carrying him to the bedroom, he didn't argue. When the other man fussed with his sling, he bore the pain and simply loved him. Rex blocked out every other concern. There'd be time enough for annoyance and fear and planning later. Right now, he just wanted to love Rion.

He allowed the angel to settle him in their bed and arrange the covers just so. He gratefully drank the tea that Dr. Noemi had sent home with him. Rex didn't complain when Rion gingerly applied the salve to his cuts and bruises. As the angel worked, the anxiety slowly left his eyes. But Rex could still see worry there.

"Talk to me, Orion." He lay back against the pillows. Rion had dropped his glamour, and as he moved around the room, his huge feathered wings raised a slight breeze. Rex watched appreciatively as Rion's deep red hair played over his naked hips like a sheet of liquid silk. He'd learned to manage the glow of his presence without the use of magic, so he wasn't illuminating the rapidly dimming room. Nevertheless, he was a stunning sight.

Rex had released the hold on his glamour as well. He idly stroked the tip of his tail in his good hand. His wings were neatly folded behind his back.

"The succubus. She told me that you were injured."

"I knew that. She used the phone, didn't she?" He chuckled at the idea, that a bodiless demon had used a modern day device to communicate.

"She's never talked to me before." Rion turned back to the bed, and Rex swallowed, taking in the sculpted abs, the classic body. He was fairly certain the Greeks had taken their model of male perfection from Orion's form. He blinked and dragged his gaze back to the angel's face.

"Anyhow, she... talked to me."

"She talked to me as well. It was a bit strange."

"That isn't all, Rex. She said that she wasn't close enough to give you energy."

Rex sat up at that, wincing at the movement. "She can give as well as take? I didn't think a succubus could do that."

Rion blushed slightly, and Rex could see there was something else they needed to talk about, but he didn't want to interrupt the flow of his thoughts. Whatever Rion had on his mind, it was important.

"She said she was asleep. And she said that when she's asleep, she's Anahita."

"Anahita." It took a moment for that to register in Rex's mind. "Anahita?"

"Yes, when she sleeps."

Rex's mind went numb for a moment. "But Anahita is a myth... a fairy tale!"

"You told me she was your uncle's ward. That's awfully close to home for a myth, Rex."

Rex's thoughts raced. Anahita. The shame of his uncle... He'd never told Rion the rumors of how Dyffyd had treated the fragile angel. Yes, he'd been a hard man living in a hard time, but still, he could have found help for Anahita if he'd asked. Rex had never understood the cosmic joke of a hardened Sidhe soldier taking stewardship of one of the fragile and emotionally volatile Fallen.

"But wait... She's Anahita when she *sleeps*? Does that mean she's someone else when she's awake? Are we dealing with a host as well?"

Rion shook his head. "I doubt it's a host body. She was a Fallen like me. Her body would be immortal. I believe that she may have two distinct personalities."

Rion sat down on the bed, his back to the headboard, his great feathered wings carefully arranged behind him. His weren't quite as portable as Rex's wings. "There's something else."

Automatically, Rex reached out to clasp his hand, sensing that Rion needed reassurance.

"I told you she can share energy."

"Yes, and it depends on proximity. In the gully, and even here at home, she's too far."

"Yes, but she was close enough to feed you energy at the clinic."

Damnation. Once again, too many thoughts crowded his fatigued mind. "You could know that only if..."

"I let her feed on me. And then she passed that energy to you."

Rion was whiter than his normal shade of pale. "You were awake for it?"

He nodded.

"Rion, you hate her. You're afraid of her, and yet you did this?"

"For you, Rex." He swallowed, and a myriad of emotions played over his face. "I... I might be wrong about her. She did not seem malicious. In fact, I asked her outright if she loved you. She wouldn't answer, but she does, Rex."

Rion averted his gaze then, trying to hide the naked fear and jealousy from Rex. He failed. "I believe she truly loves you."

"Rion. Oh, Rion." He wanted to gather the angel into his arms and give him all the comfort that he possessed. "You are undoubtedly the most courageous, selfless man walking on this Earth." He brought the angel's hand to his lips, kissing his knuckles.

Rion slid down, into the safety of Rex's one good arm, allowing himself to be weak, just for a moment. The time would come very soon when Rion would have to be strong. For now, Rex had one good arm to hold him with. He rested his chin on the top of Rion's head.

"If she was close enough to help me while we were at the clinic, she must live on the reservation."

"Or in the town nearby." Rion spoke against the skin of Rex's chest, his breath whispering over his nipples. It felt good to have him so close.

"Rex, what was your first impression of Dr. Gastineau?"

"When I first looked at her, I thought she was the most beautiful woman in the world."

"Same here."

They lapsed into a thoughtful silence.

"But then I saw that she was just a normal, very pretty woman."

Rex nodded in agreement. "I thought maybe she was Fae or Sidhe, but when I probed, she was completely human. She does have that edge of power that some gifted human healers carry, but still, she's human. Besides, Anahita was fair-skinned and blonde. Dr. Noemi is First Nations."

"From Canada? When did she tell you that?"

Rex picked up a strand of Rion's long hair and began to run it through his fingers. "She woke me after midnight in case I had a head injury. You were asleep."

"Anahita's alter ego would have been asleep. That rules out the doctor, she was working. But what about the nurse?"

"She feels normal, completely human. Though her antipathy toward men is powerful. I'd guess she just ended a relationship on a very bad note. She made me glad Dr. Gastineau was doing all the work."

Rion turned his body a bit toward Rex, lying closer.

"There are other women on the reservation, Rion. And in the town. If you think we should, we can seek her out." Now that his lover was changing his mind about Anahita, Rex wanted him to initiate their next move. For the sake of Rion's peace of mind, this had to be his choice.

"I'm still afraid of her, Rex. I wanted her so powerfully..." He broke off for a moment, gathering his courage for the next confession. "I feel like an addict must feel, knowing that something is dangerous, but needing it so completely. At the same time, the very thought of her just terrifies me."

"She's never done anything to hurt us, Rion. After that first night, she's never overwhelmed us again. And she left you alone when you denied her."

"True, but my feelings for her are..."

"Phobic," Rex supplied.

"Yes, that is a very apt description."

"The succubus is Anahita. You and Anahita are both fallen angels."

"We might have known each other."



"Perhaps Patrick knows something about her." Rex wanted more of Rion in his arms, but the pain was too much. He shifted slightly and immediately Rion moved back, lying on the pillow so their heads were close.

"Patrick knows me, but he's shared little of my past. He's hunted her for years, so I doubt that he'd have anything he'd be willing to share."

"No, our avenging angel isn't particularly forthcoming, is he?"

Fatigue was rolling over Rex now. He was warm and safe; the tea had taken the edge from his pain. Rion was close by, watching over him. When he woke later, he'd put together some charms against the demon, though it probably believed him to be dead. Nevertheless, he'd feel better with a little protection on the property.

He remembered his talk with Dr. Noemi, about the youth in the area acting out of character, becoming temporarily violent. "There's a demon living around here, Rion. These people will need our help."

"Our priority is to get you to safety. Once you are healed, we can deal with both Anahita and the demon. Or we can turn it over to Patrick."

"Sounds like a plan. Azrael can come in and take out the demon. Of course, he might take out Anahita as well."

Both men grew very quiet at the image that comment conjured. Rex sighed, his ribs protesting at his attempt to breathe deeply. He didn't like that idea at all.

"Rion, don't you think it's odd that in all these years, Azrael has never managed to hunt down Anahita? Yet she's always nearby."

"Maybe he really doesn't want to kill her."

"It would be nice to think that Patrick might have a little compassion in his heart. Not likely, but it'd be nice, wouldn't it?" Rex liked the dark angel, in a rather odd sort of way.

"Yes. Yes it would."

When Rion leaned over and kissed his forehead, he smiled slightly and allowed himself to drift off to sleep.

## Chapter Five

Rion was tired and weary, but unable to sleep. The light in the room shifted as the day passed, and he lay very still, listening to the birds outside, and to the sound of Rex's slightly strained breathing.

He listened to the sound of his own heart, and knew that he desperately needed to get Rex to the Other Place. He didn't know as much about demon-kind as the Sidhe did, but he knew enough to realize that the bite would grow corrosive. Rex would heal... eventually. But if the demon found him again, it would latch onto him in a desperate, parasitic need.

A Sidhe could sustain the blood needs of a demon indefinitely. Rex might not die, but he'd become a pale, mindless husk. What the succubus did was minor in comparison.

He should be up right now, making arrangements to travel, but Rion lacked the fortitude to rise, to risk waking Rex. He couldn't leave him unguarded while he used the phone in the other room.

Tomorrow. They needed to go by tomorrow.

He rolled onto his side and watched the Sidhe sleep. Rex had seemed a bit better after the succubus had shared her energy, but now he was pale again. His beautiful face was tight with pain. Rex sometimes smiled in his sleep, but now, he frowned. Rion trailed a finger through a tightly coiled curl, wondering if it was pain that brought that frown, or something else. Rex was an active dreamer, often working out puzzles and problems in his sleep.

What was going on in his mind?

His skin seemed hot... much hotter than it should. Rion didn't have any way to check his temperature. Since when had either of them had a fever? He rose carefully

and brought a cool washcloth from the bathroom, folding it and laying it over Rex's forehead.

He didn't know how to help Rex. He couldn't take him to the walk-in clinic. And with Rex in this condition, there was no way he'd be allowed onto an airplane. He'd have to rent a vehicle and drive to San Francisco. Rion was on his way to the phone when he heard a light tapping at the front door.

He didn't like being jumpy and suspicious, but right now, caution was imperative, so he peeked out the living room window before answering the door.

"I didn't realize you made house calls."

Dr. Gastineau stood there, a smile on her face. In spite of his uneasiness, Rion was glad to see her. Relieved.

"Well, I doubt he'll let me do much, but I had the night off and decided I'd check anyway." Rion stood back to let her enter. He saw her eyes flick around the room, taking in the antique stringed instruments displayed on the walls, and the various pieces of art and carpentry he'd dabbled in over the years.

"Are you musicians?"

"We both play some, but I make custom instruments." Seeing her look of admiration brought an odd sense of pride to Rion.

"And the landscaping? I saw a garden... that would be Rex?"

"Yes, Rex takes care of the gardens. He also helps me choose the wood for the instruments I make; he's got an uncanny sense for growing things."

Instead of letting him lead her to the bedroom, Dr. Gastineau sat on the sofa, staring in admiration at the finely crafted furniture that filled the room. She looked at him, and for a moment, Rion was transfixed.

"How is he?"

Rion sat in a large chair facing her, finding it difficult to look anywhere other than her exotic face. She wore jeans again today, and a loose cotton tunic with elaborate embroidery on the cuffs and neckline.

"He's asleep, but I believe he's developed a fever. I don't really know what to do."

She nodded and Rion felt grateful that he could share his worry. "I'm sure he has a secondary infection starting. I've got my kit in the car, and I'm sure we'll come up with something to prevent him from being too sick." She looked at the guitar sitting next to Rion's chair. "Do you sing?"

It was an innocent question, but he flushed a bit anyway. "Not much. I used to, but lost my voice."

"That must have been difficult."

She was clearly curious, but Rion knew this was forbidden territory. To avoid answering, he picked up the guitar and began plucking a simple melody, keeping one eye on the doctor. The music seemed to ease her a bit. She sat back, looking a bit more relaxed.

"Mr. Hunter..."

"Rion, please."

She smiled shyly. "Rion. I need to talk with you about something. You might think I'm crazy..."

He started to set the guitar down, seeing that she needed his full attention.

"No, please don't stop. I enjoy listening."

He took up the guitar again, playing softly, without any real thought.

"Did Rex mention that there have been other incidents involving young people in the area?"

"Yes, he did."

She sighed and looked away, watching birds arguing at a feeder outside the window. "I've been here three years, and I've never before seen anything like it. It's almost as though they are normal one moment, and then the next..."

"Possessed?"

"Yes. Exactly." She flushed a bit. "I know that isn't very scientific of me, but I can't think of anything else to describe it."

"Have you seen it happen before?" He continued playing, running through a series of chords.

"Not personally. I've had it described to me. They say the kids are normal one moment, and then their eyes... their very faces change."

Rion stopped playing and returned the guitar to the rack. She was coming dangerously close to the truth. What she said next changed everything.

"Rion, I know that Rex isn't human. I would guess that you aren't either."

He froze, and to his surprise, Rex was there in the doorway, listening. He was supporting his weight on a wooden staff that Rion had carved for hiking.

"What do you mean?" His mouth was dry, and the words had a hard time coming out.

"I mean that more than once, I saw... features that no human could possibly possess."

Rion rose and crossed to Rex, who was pale with illness and pain. "You shouldn't be up, Rex." He started him back to the bedroom, but the Sidhe resisted. Rion submitted for the moment, helping him into the chair he'd vacated. Rion hovered, not wanting to leave his side. Finally, he just settled on the floor next to the chair.

"What did you see, Dr. Gastineau?" In spite of his weakness, the Sidhe sounded in control. He also sounded slightly dangerous. They'd never before been outed. In all these years, no one had ever suspected. Rion had never even wondered what would happen in that eventuality. Suddenly, he was afraid for the beautiful doctor.

Her breathing was coming quick, and Rion could see the pulse in her neck. She was afraid too. Afraid of what she'd seen, what she suspected.

"Before you woke, I saw... wings. They vanished and I thought it was my imagination. But they came back. Wings like a butterfly, or a moth."

Rex gave an abrupt little laugh. He ran his hand through his hair; the curls went messy, and then fell back into place.

"Wings."

"And a tail." Her voice was hushed. "I'm not afraid of you." But she was; her hand closed convulsively over the amulet she wore under her clothing. "You are something other than human, but you aren't evil. Not like the thing that attacked you."

Rion felt his lover go still in surprise. The room went silent. Even the birds had fled from the feeders. The very wind outside had gone silent.

"What do you think it was that attacked Rex, if they weren't humans?"

"Demon. It was a demon that attacked you, Rex. It was the same demon that I've been trying to catch up with for many, many years now."

\* \* \*

Dear God, why had she said that? Both men were looking at her as though she'd gone loopy. And really, what proof did she have? The phantom wings could have been her imagination. She had been keeping unusual hours the past month and was fatigued to the bone.

When the two men exchanged glances, she wanted to cringe in embarrassment.

"Rion, would you do me a favor? Would you start some water boiling? And bring my herb case?"

She watched the tall man rise with unearthly ease. He wasn't right either. They were both too... *other*. It was something she'd never before encountered, and in her lifetime, Noemi had encountered much.

They didn't speak again. Rion simply moved quickly around the kitchen, gathering cups and putting them on a tray, along with a ceramic tea pot. When he returned, there was a selection of tea along with the hot water. She nearly stifled a laugh as the redhead gravely offered her green tea, or oolong.

Rex dug into his herb box and pulled out a muslin bag, measured various herbs into the little bag, and then set it in his cup to steep. "Why don't you tell us more about this... demon, and why you are following it?"

Noemi picked up the heavy mug and cradled it in her hands, letting the heat of the tea warm her hands. She hated being cold, even just a little. It was a by-product of growing up in a land dominated by ice and wind. "My foster-mother called it Kelet.

That's what the Inuit call a demon type creature. She had defeated it years before, when she'd found it stalking me. Kelet found her alone one day. She'd given me her most powerful medicine, and had no defense against the creature. I found her in the snow, bright red blood all around her body. She lived long enough to tell me that the Kelet had defeated her."

Noemi gripped the amulet, feeling the warm flow of magic in her hands. When she'd seen the otherworldly features of Rex, she'd placed the amulet on his bare skin. It hadn't injured him, but it had stripped his glamour. She could barely look at him now without recalling that shocking beauty.

"This Kelet -- demon -- had lost its original body and had developed the ability to travel from person to person. It had taken the body of a trusted friend when it attacked her. It came for me then, but I had Ahnah's magic to keep me safe. It fled, and I've pursued it since."

"And you followed it here." Rex winced as he drank. His hands trembled.

"Rex, you can drop your glamour. It's taking too much energy." He apparently didn't trust her, as nothing changed in his appearance. So she continued. "Anyhow, yes, about three years ago I tracked it to these mountains. The reservation had an opening for a doctor. I applied and got the position. The reservation is a place of power. In the past three years, the demon has never struck within the boundaries of the reservation, nor has it targeted the Native youth. And as far as I can remember, it's never targeted a local like you. Always tourists or truckers. It only attacks people who are passing through."

"It must have been pleased to find Rex at the side of the road."

She looked from man to man. "Your glamour is powerful. I don't understand how it saw through your disguise."

Rex sighed. "It didn't. At some point during the fight, it bit me. Before it could figure out what I was, I dove over the hillside. But I was too injured to use my wings, so I tumbled down. It was enough to discourage them -- for the moment, anyway."

So he was afraid it would follow him. She gnawed on her lip, thinking the situation over. "If the demon knows you're here, we can draw it out."

"No." Rion sounded quite adamant, which surprised her. He seemed to be the more submissive of the two. "Rex needs to heal. The demon will wait."

"No, it won't. You have to understand, if it realizes who I am, it will run!"

"I'm sorry. I'm taking Rex somewhere safe. Tomorrow. He isn't strong enough to take on a demon. Neither am I."

"Is that why you always run?" Noemi nearly clapped her hand over her mouth in chagrin. Where had that come from? She didn't even know what these men were, much less how they'd lived. They were both staring at her as though she'd said something much more shocking than she had.

"What exactly are you anyway?" Rex's voice was thick with suspicion.

"I'm a doctor."

"And..." Rex's eyes were far too sharp.

"I'm a demon hunter."

She watched their reactions; Rion showed skepticism and Rex showed interest.

"And how many demons would you say you've successfully... killed?"

"Lots. And no, I'm not giving numbers."

Both men were quiet, again exchanging a meaningful glance. She wondered exactly how long they'd been together, to have developed such a sense of harmony.

"We've met demon hunters before. They aren't usually human."

Rex picked up Rion's point. "In fact, most humans aren't aware that we exist. Any of us."

"Most humans weren't raised in a tribal society with a shaman and a wise woman guiding their education. Most humans haven't been stalked by a Kelet."

She could see she'd scored a point. More importantly, Rex wasn't looking good. His color was fading fast. She rose and checked the temperature of his forehead. It wasn't overly hot, but for a creature that had probably never experienced a fever before,



it could be fatal. "Rex, I need to know what you are, and what I can safely use to treat you. I don't like the way this fever just spiked."

He gusted out a breath, wincing against the pain in his ribs. "Fine. I'm Sidhe. I've never taken human medicine before, but most plant-based medications should be fine."

"Rex!" His lover was not pleased.

"Sidhe, as in Fairy?"

His smile was a bit cynical. "No. Sidhe is the blanket term for all Other. I'm sort of like a brownie or pixie rather than one of the Fae."

"Like Jack in the Green?"

Rex smiled at the reference to the old folk character. "Yes. Exactly."

She turned to the other man. If Rex was one of the less glamorous Sidhe, she wondered what in hell the other man was. Because as Rex's glamour faded, his beauty began to shine through. And those wings...

"Okay then. Rion, here are my car keys. I have a black bag in the back of my car. When you bring it in, we need to move him to the bedroom." She checked his pulse as Rion quietly left the room.

"What's really going on? You shouldn't be this sick."

"Demon bite. Since it was through the host it shouldn't be as venomous as through the demon itself."

"Well, damn." That certainly wasn't good.

Rion returned with her case and without a word, gently lifted Rex in his arms, carrying him through the arched doorway to the bedroom. Thankfully the Sidhe was wearing only a pair of baggy shorts; they rolled down easily so she could look at the bite. She did her best to ignore his slim, muscular hips and the sexy "V" that ran down his belly. Ignoring his thick, uncut cock took even more effort.

She straightened up, looking at Rion. "Where were you planning to take him?"

"To my people," Rex answered, cutting off whatever Rion was going to say.

"Can they heal this? I don't think it's mortal, but you'll be very sick for a long time. My guess is that the poison will eventually filter through your body, but since demon venom is designed to cripple their victims, it'll be a long haul for you."

Rex lay back, his good arm over his eyes. "There are those among us who can heal."

"Plus, he'll be safe with them. The demon will be able to follow us, but it won't be able to cross into the Other Place." Rion sat on the edge of the bed, retrieving a damp cloth from the headboard, and placing it over Rex's forehead.

"Is it a long trip? No airline will allow him to board this way."

"I was going to rent a van or a car."

"I can drive you."

Their distrust was obvious, and frustrated her. "Look, you don't need to show me this magical place, just accept a ride. He's going to need medical support, Rion. And if you need me to watch your back, I'm pretty good in a fight."

She opened her medical bag and drew out a syringe. "I'm going to treat you as though you've been bitten by an insect, with a simple antibiotic and a poultice for the wound itself. If you'd like, I can give you something for pain as well."

He shook his head.

"Look, Rex. You need all your strength to fight the venom. That means we don't need anything else in the way. Not infections, fatigue or hunger. You've got to eliminate your other weaknesses to give your immune system the best chance possible."

She swabbed his hip, and when he didn't object, smoothly gave him the injection. Glancing up at Rion, she saw that he looked pale, but approving.

"All that crap about not taking medical treatment? That wasn't about religion, was it?"

"His wings and tail could show up on an X-ray. And I don't know what the blood work would show." He rose and retrieved the slowly drying cloth, taking it to the bathroom and re-wetting it. When he draped it over Rex's forehead, the Sidhe didn't move.

"Will it come for us tonight?"

She bit her lip and looked out the window. Her sharp eyes caught subtle charms on the property, disguised as wind chimes and sun catchers. Good, but possibly not good enough. "I'll stay tonight and stand watch while you sleep."

He paused and then nodded, relief plain on his face. She followed him from the bedroom, watching as he went into the kitchen and started pulling food from the cupboards; a touch of normalcy in his disrupted life. "He's all I have in this world, Dr. Gastineau."

"Noemi. Call me Noemi." He nodded and turned to the refrigerator. "And surely you have family? Friends?"

"Yes... and no. We do move a lot. His people have taken me into their hearts. Still, without Rex, I don't know what I'd do. I don't even know who I'd be."

She stood back and watched, and then looked around the small, cozy house.

"You'd be Rion Hunter, the man who makes beautiful musical instruments."

He smiled as he quickly put together sandwiches. "I'd prefer to be Rion Hunter, the carpenter who is also Rex Clark's lover."

She sat on the sofa and accepted a sandwich. "And just how long have you been protecting him?"

"I don't protect him. Not at all. If anything, Rex has taken care of me all these years." He still hadn't answered her question, so she waited. "I came to the Earth in the 1860s."

Noemi froze, sandwich in her hand. Carefully, she set it back on the plate. "You came to the Earth -- over a century ago? Where exactly did you come from?"

He shrugged and took a bite of his sandwich. She watched in fascination as he slowly chewed his food. It seemed that once Rex had chosen to trust her, this one followed suit.

"I don't really know. Another world, maybe another dimension. All I know is that I fell from grace among my people, so I was cast down to Earth."

Noemi sat, her mind racing... partly in fear, partly in fascination.

"So you are..."

"An angel. A fallen angel, to be exact."

"It is said that demons are the offspring of the Fallen." Her throat was tight. Noemi sat her plate on the table and reached for the talisman around her neck.

"I have learned over the years that not all demon-kind are evil. Not all Sidhe are good. Good and bad is a choice we all make, and we, as individuals, are solely responsible for our decisions."

The talisman pulsed with its normal, steady pulse, giving no hint of the great power it held. Odd as it might seem, the angel was speaking the truth.

"Tell me, when you hunt demons, do you go after the incubi? The succubi?"

"No, they are fairly harmless. They feed off excess sexual energy. Of course, some cultures believe that male sexual energy should be held in by withholding orgasm. So the succubi are greatly feared among those people."

"Such as Taoists?"

She nodded.

"Vampires?"

She shook her head. "Rarely. Most find enough willing donors that they don't need to resort to predatory tactics."

"So what sort of demons do you hunt?" Rion was settled in the big easy chair. Earlier, she'd been struck by his unearthly beauty. Now, she was growing uneasily aware of his raw male sexuality. He had one leg drawn up; his jeans were old and worn, offering a glimpse of pale skin here and there. A dark blue tank top displayed muscular arms. Tiny tattoos looked like calligraphy at the top of his shoulders.

"What do you look like without the glamour?"

He blinked, startled at the abrupt shift in the conversation. "I don't change in appearance that much. Rex can alter his age, even his size. I just try to tone it down."

She continued to stare, fascinated to the point of being rude.

"I hide the length and color of my hair. Other things as well."

"I hunt... evil demons." She returned to his question. "I hunt those that would hunt me first."

"And why do they hunt you?" His gravelly voice was soft. She wondered what it had been like in that other place he'd come from. It had undoubtedly been exquisite.

"Ahnah said that my energy is unique."

"Rex mentioned something about that."

Noemi blinked. "Have you been messing with my head?"

His brows went up in surprise and he gave a grin. "No, Rex has that particular skill set; I don't. I think maybe you're just tired and overwhelmed. You've had some interesting stuff thrown at you today."

That was certainly true, but generally she handled herself better than this. Now she was acting like a schoolgirl with a crush. When the angel turned his head to glance into the bedroom, his perfect profile made her heart race. When he shifted in his chair, offering a glimpse of a very nice package, Noemi's gut clenched, and her pussy gripped on nothing.

She couldn't even remember the last time she'd had sex. That's how insignificant it had been in her life. And now she was going all horny over a gay Adonis. One who was most likely immortal. Life was strange.

"May I see?"

He slowly turned his head, looking straight at Noemi. "Did you see Rex?"

She nodded. "Butterfly wings and a tufted tail. Pointy ears."

He smiled, his eyes soft with love. "Once, he tricked me into chasing him in the forest. My wingspan was too wide to follow him. He trapped me and made love to me in the trees."

Now why would that bring tears to her eyes? Noemi looked down at her untouched sandwich. She lifted it, took a bite and chewed, not tasting what she ate.

She glanced up, and nearly choked. Before her eyes, Rion was changing. Not so much changing, as becoming more. His skin was more alabaster; his hair grew long and

vivid red. Those eyes became deep as an ocean. And then behind him... wings. Great feathered wings of shining white.

Noemi set the plate down and stood, walking carefully to where he sat. His face was the same, but it glowed with an unearthly light. She reached out and ran her hand down his bare arm, feeling the muscles tighten under his fair skin.

"My skin is so dark against yours." She again felt that loss of lucidity. Noemi looked up into Rion's deep eyes and for the briefest moment... knowledge washed over her. Knowledge, but still, it was a mystery.

"They burned your voice away."

His throat worked as he swallowed. In her mind, she could see a white-hot blade being forced down his throat. A woman nearby struggled... screamed... and was lost.

"He wanted what you had... your position, your power... even your wife."

"My... wife?"

She ran her palm down his arm to his forearm, feeling the corded muscle there. She then grasped his hand. Noemi looked up into the face of the angel. "I am so sorry."

He looked shattered.

As quickly as it had come, the moment passed. She blinked, and without warning, nausea rolled over her. Blazing heat pierced her skull.

"Bathroom..."

He guided her in the right direction, and Noemi found herself collapsed on a cool tile floor, losing the meal she'd barely eaten. There was a cool touch on her neck, and Rion was there, holding her hair back as she retched. Tears ran unchecked down her cheeks.

When it was finished, he helped her to her feet and guided her back to the couch. "I'll take first watch. You sleep. I think you need it." He gave her a smile so sweet, Noemi nearly cried. He gently covered her with an old handmade quilt that smelled of lavender. "I'll stay with Rex for now." He stood and turned off the light. To her surprise, it was fully dark outside.

An odd feeling blazed through her body, a partner to the lust she'd felt earlier. As she watched him leave the room, a thought blew through her mind.

It wasn't love at first sight. No, she'd been in his company on and off for a day and a night.

Love at first touch. Was there such a thing?

Noemi rolled onto her side and let her eyes drop closed.

She was so fucked.

## Chapter Six

To his relief, Rex was sound asleep when Rion lay on the bed next to him. He reached over and gently touched his skin. It was a bit cooler to the touch than it had been.

He slipped off the tank top that he wore, and then his jeans, letting them drop onto the floor. With a thought, he withdrew the wings and hair.

His arm still tingled where she'd touched his skin. He ran a hand over it, savoring the lingering feel of her touch. All these years and he'd never craved the touch of a woman. The times they spent with Carly were special, but their threesomes were fun and lighthearted. Once they ended, he and Rex walked away, and Carly moved on to her next lover.

But Noemi had moved him with a touch.

He lay naked on the bed, and in the moonlight, he could see the heavy length of his cock lying in the seam of his groin. He'd gone hard as stone when she touched him. Even the gripping fear that her words brought hadn't chased away the arousal. And when he'd held her in the bathroom, the feel of her in his arms was almost more than he could cope with.

He'd wanted to hold her close, to touch her, to taste her full red lips.

Rion glanced over at Rex, wondering if this was all some sort of effect caused by the demon. Maybe the doctor was a plant.

Or maybe she was fate.

Whatever the case, she frightened him like he'd never been frightened before. She made him feel safe.

And this time, he didn't want to run.

\* \* \*



Sometime around midnight, he heard movement in the living room. She appeared in the doorway, an image darker than the night.

"How's he sleeping?"

"Good. Whatever you gave him is helping." She moved toward the bed, stepping into a beam of moonlight. Noemi sat on the edge of the bed next to Rex, reaching down to check his pulse. Her dark hair had slipped loose of the long braid. Tendrils whispered around her cheeks.

She wasn't soft like Carly. She had an earthy vitality all her own. Now that he knew her better, her power was perceptible.

"It was penicillin. I didn't think he'd have developed a resistance to it." She glanced at her watch. "His heart rate is better, and his fever is still higher than I'd like it to be." She reached down and idly fingered a loose curl, moving it away from Rex's flushed cheek. "You should sleep now. I'll get you up around dawn so you can pack."

"Okay." He was still naked, covered by a sheet. To his chagrin, Rion's cock was hard. To hide his discomfort, he slid down into the bed, lying next to Rex. He could feel the heat emanating from the Sidhe's body.

"Why is he sleeping so heavily?"

"I imagine it's his way of healing." She stood and started from the room. "Rion, you made the right decision about him. We need to get him to his people quickly. Aside from the poison, something is testing the wards on the property."

"How do you know?"

"Can you hear the wind chimes tinkling? There's no wind out tonight."

Rion started to rise. "I should stay up then."

"No need. It can't cross. Whatever's going on with Rex, he's still got enough juice to power the magic of the wards. But when we leave, his magic will go with him. You should take anything irreplaceable with you."

He slid back into the bed, head on the pillow next to Rex. "The only thing irreplaceable is our lives. Everything else is just stuff."

"All right then. Sleep. Don't worry, if I need you, I'll call."

"But hopefully, you won't need me."

She gave him a cocky grin that made him want to smile back. "I think it's highly unlikely. I'm pretty good at this."

He watched her leave and lay back, thinking about the strange ways that life moved. Just when they were at their most vulnerable, this extraordinary woman stepped into their life.

Rion lay back, arms behind his head, and to his chagrin, knew that he was a little in love.

\* \* \*

When Rex woke, he had to pee.

Steady breathing told him that Rion was sound asleep, and he didn't want to wake him, so he grabbed the staff they'd left at the side of the bed and hobbled to the bathroom. When he was finished, he returned to the room, looking down at the angel.

Outside in the darkness, the wind chimes sang, and he gave a gentle nudge with his magic, sending it out to bolster the spot that the visitor was trying to breach. He hobbled to the kitchen for a glass of water and came to a stop when he saw her.

Noemi was sitting in Rion's big chair, legs crossed, eyes closed, clearly in a deep state of meditation. For a moment, he thought he saw an aura of red and gold.

"Is it you that's setting off the alarms?"

Her face was soft in the moonlight, her high cheekbones casting shadows over her face.

"No. I'm still inside. Just watching it for now."

"The demon?"

"Yes, but it's like a baby... or a servant. Not the real deal."

She was doing pretty much the same thing he'd been doing only she used a different technique.

"Go back to bed, Rex. You need rest."

"Think you can boss me around, eh, lass?"

Her full lips curved up into a soft smile. "I know I can lead you around, Sidhe. You have a handle. Actually, you have two."

He gave a soft laugh, and almost of its own volition, his tail wandered, the tip stroking her cheek. While its tactile abilities weren't quite as sensitive as his fingertips, he still felt the smooth warmth of her skin.

"You're breaking my focus. Back to bed, Rex."

He wanted to kiss her. He wanted to put his lips to hers, taste her sweet mouth, to touch her warm skin. He blinked, nearly lightheaded with the sensation. He stood there, fire racing through his veins. His cock was hard and ready, but he was unable to bend down to touch. Only his tail could move, and it stroked her neck, her throat.

She swallowed, and even that fascinated him. He played the tip of his tail over her lips, and then her eyes.

"Bed, Rex." Her voice was a touch husky now, and he could smell the rising heat of her body.

"There is much I would give to bring you with me, to lay you down between the two of us, Noemi Gastineau. And I don't know why that should be. Do you?"

Her dark eyes opened, yet she didn't look at him. "It isn't unusual for patients to become infatuated with their doctors." Her eyes dropped closed again.

"I'll bet you say that to all the men."

Her lips curled slightly, but she didn't answer.

\* \* \*

Try as he might, Rex couldn't sleep. His link to the wards told him that their visitor had left, no doubt seeking easier prey. Rion lay quietly, deeply asleep. Noemi was awake, though in a deep trance state, monitoring their safety at the same time she rested her body. It was a pretty nifty skill. No doubt her Inuit foster mother had trained her to do this.

When the red vapor began to manifest, Rex grinned. And then he frowned when Anahita settled over Rion's prone form.

"Am I suddenly not good enough?"

"You aren't ready."

He felt ready. His cock had responded to her presence immediately. Of course, it'd been ready since he'd had his moment with the lovely doctor in the living room.

With his good hand, he reached down, palming himself. That was when he realized that he was awake.

"Did you ask him first?"

"He agreed. He's doing it for you."

Rex snorted in good-natured ire. "What a martyr he is. I'll have to commend him for his sacrifice."

Next to him, Rion frowned in concentration, moaned. Shit! Rex could only watch. Even at that, he was seeing only Rion's form writhing in pleasure. Not that there was anything wrong with that, but if he was going to be a voyeur, he'd like a bit more of a show.

As though in answer to his wish, she became a bit more solid; she formed a red, vaporous body between Rion's muscular legs.

"Mmmm... nice..." Rex reached over and brushed his fingers over Rion's nipples, watching them grow erect. His tail snaked over and slid between Rion's thighs, tickling and stroking at his balls.

Rion's lean hips bucked; his cock glistened with pre-come.

"Hey, we're pretty good at this..." Rion was rapidly approaching climax, and the succubus shifted position, straddling his hips as though she were riding him. Her misty form lowered to his face for a kiss.

At that embrace, Rion cried out softly. Through the red haze of her form, Rex watched him ejaculate; his semen glistened on his smooth belly. Rex reached out. His hand passed through her insubstantial body to touch Rion, and he smeared his partner's seed onto his fingers, bringing it to his lips to taste.

Rather than renewing her assault as she usually did, Anahita paused, and Rex had the sense that she was watching him.

"No other man tastes the way Orion tastes." He savored the salty-sweet essence of his lover.

"He tastes of clouds and rain." Her voice was soft and winsome. "You taste of Earth and life. You are perfect together."

"But we'll never create life together."

"No, but you sustain life. You encourage it." With a stroke of her phantom hand, Rion was hard again, thrusting and spilling his seed once more. It was an emotionless act, and as his energy released, it soaked into the red mist of Anahita.

"You made love to him the first time," Rex observed. She shifted, her form hovering over Rex, and he felt that if he looked carefully enough, he'd see her eyes, her face. "You love him."

"Yes."

"I'm sorry for what happened to you, Anahita. For what happened while you were in the hands of my uncle."

"It was not your responsibility, Reux. He was trapped, as was I."

Her color suddenly shifted, going from dull and red to luminescent and glowing. Rex could see multiple colors break away and begin to shower from her body to his. It was as though he'd been caught in a rainstorm of pure energy. His body arched in ecstasy, and the climax ripped through him faster than his brain could process. A strangled cry caught in his throat, and for that moment, Rex felt no pain.

He lay panting, his heart racing in his chest. Next to him, Rion lay soundly asleep.

"I've always loved him, Sidhe, but I came to love you as well." She kissed him lightly on the lips, and then she was gone, leaving him sated, exhausted, and feeling much better than he had expected.

Anahita loved him.

Rex fell asleep with a smile.

## Chapter Seven

Rion winced as the SUV bumped onto the Golden Gate Bridge. The big vehicle actually traveled quite smoothly, but still, he glanced into the back seat to see Rex lying full length on the bench seat. He was white with pain.

"Nearly there, Rex. We're on the bridge."

"We are?" He struggled upright; Rex had always had a fascination with the bridges of the Bay. He wanted to leap from the Golden Gate someday and fly down to the shore. Frankly Rion hoped he'd never try; he suspected the air currents were more suited to his style of flight than the Sidhe's. Rex's butterfly wings always appeared a bit fragile to Rion. In truth, they were tougher than boiled leather.

In the driver's seat, Noemi glanced into her mirror, meeting Rex's eyes with a smile. "Can you give me a general idea of where we're going?"

"Chinatown."

She looked at Rion in disbelief. "Where on earth will I find parking?"

Rex laughed. "There's a motel that sits at the edge of North Beach and Chinatown. From there, Rion can carry me where we need to go."

It was nearly dusk, and a light rain was coming down. Noemi skillfully negotiated the city streets, finally arriving at the motel. She checked them in while the men waited in the car.

"I got a room on the top level. There's an elevator." Somehow, being up high seemed a better idea than being on the ground. Not that a demon was unable to climb stairs. But the Chinese believed that ghosts and evil spirits had difficulty with obstacles such as raised hearths and non-direct routes to their prey. At the moment, it seemed like a good precautionary measure.

They locked their few bits of luggage in the room. Earlier, Rion had moved his antique lute and guitars into a storage unit a few miles from their house, just in case.

He watched as Noemi stepped out onto the balcony of their room, her hand resting over the amulet she wore. She turned back, a grim look on her face.

"There are one or more demons fairly close by. You two will need to be careful."

"We will." Rion scooped the Sidhe into his arms and moved to pass her.

"I'll come with you."

Rion hesitated.

"You can tell me when to stop, Rex, but I can feel them, and you two are sitting ducks."

"She's right, Rex."

The Sidhe looked at her thoughtfully. Rion knew that this was one of the hardest decisions Rex had ever made. Could he trust this extraordinary woman enough to lead her right to the doorway of his people?

"When I tell you to go no further, you must obey. Do you agree?"

She nodded, and Rion felt relief spill over him. He also felt tension in the air, the faint presence of unsavory creatures. In moments, they were on the street, and he couldn't help looking into the exotic faces that surrounded him, wondering if one harbored an unwelcome rider.

They traveled deep into Chinatown and quickly left the heavily populated tourist areas, moving into the alleys where laundry fluttered high over the street. Haunting strains of Chinese opera drifted up from basement windows. The weak light of day gradually faded, and the fog came in. And yet Rex guided him with confidence.

"Stop!"

The voice came from the mist. It was soft and female and quite stern.

"Carly!" Rex called softly. "It's Rex and Rion."

"I know who you are. Stop anyway."

Rion came to an obedient halt, feeling the warm presence of Noemi behind him.

"Who is with you?" She slowly emerged from the mist, her long hair a tumble of gold that illuminated her space. She wasn't trying to hide her glamour at all. Rion glanced around, making sure there were no onlookers.

"This is Noemi... Dr. Gastineau. Rex is injured, she helped us."

Carly moved forward, concern washing over her face as she looked at Rex. "What happened?"

"I was attacked by a demon, Carly, bitten, as well. I need to enter the Other Place." Rex sounded weak, and in truth, it had been a grueling day. "Noemi has agreed to wait wherever we need her to wait. She senses demons in the area."

Carly gave the other woman a suspicious glance. "They've become aware of the gate here. We are preparing to seal it."

"Carly, I need to take him in. He's very sick."

The gateways to the Other Place tended to morph from place to place. Rex always joked that the streets in Chinatown moved at night, and in truth, every city that held a portal to the Other Place was similar. The entry masked itself somehow. Rion had never been able to locate the portals without Rex's guidance.

Carly looked from the men to Noemi and back. "She waits here. Rion, you can bring him over the portal, but then you must wait outside."

"Why?" Rion grew very nervous. The last time they'd been separated this way, Rion had spent a day in Edinburgh, and Rex had spent a year without him. Rex's aunt was a Mistress of Time, and used it with brutal effectiveness.

"I'm only following Brita's instructions. She says for you to return in the morning."

"Oh God." Rion's head dropped in despair, and Rex leaned his head into the angel's shoulder.

"What does this mean?" Noemi sounded hard. Frightened.

"Time runs differently in the Other Place. I'm afraid that I won't see you for a very long time, lass."

Noemi looked at Rion for confirmation. He nodded.



"So it'll be overnight for us, but longer for you?"

"Possibly. I don't know what my aunt has planned."

"She is not a cruel woman, Reux." Carly's voice was angry. She shot another look at Noemi. They were such a contrast. Two angry women, one light, one dark. If Rion wasn't mistaken, both women were jealous of the other. But it was Noemi who ended the stand-off.

"Rion, I feel something moving closer. You three need to go. Now."

"We can't leave you here alone!"

"Yes, you can. This is what I do, Rion. Now take him and go. I'll wait here."

"Fuck." Rex's voice was thready and weak. "Noemi..."

"Now!" She pushed Rion in the direction of the beautiful blonde that waited. "Rex, we'll be here at dawn, waiting for you."

Rion looked down at her hesitantly. She was bundled in a denim jacket with a scarf around her neck. Her black hair was loose and spilled in a dark sheen down her back. She glanced to the side, clearly sensing something.

"I'll be back in a few minutes, Noemi."

She gestured to Carly with her chin. "She's waiting. Go."

He went, feeling Rex's weight in his arms, and seeing Carly's bright image to his front. But his mind was with the dark beauty to his back. He glanced back to see her vanish into the fog, a flash of silver in her hand.

\* \* \*

Rion was as good as his word. No more than five minutes had passed when he returned to Noemi's side. He touched her lightly on the arm, and they began to move through the dank, trash-filled alleys. Above their heads, clothing fluttered on lines like ghosts in the darkness, and she shivered. The demons had begun to converge, but when she'd sent them the amulet's medicine, they'd retreated, readying themselves for another advance. With her knife, she could fight one, maybe two, but this felt like many.

None were major powers, but still, they could overwhelm her by sheer force.

Rion seemed a different man; gone was the crippling fear, the uncertainty. He moved with confidence now. He didn't speak until they reached the brightly lit streets. "Brita, his aunt, she guaranteed that she would return him in the morning."

"But how long is she actually keeping him there?" They passed the Golden Palace Restaurant; lights and the sound of many voices spilled from the popular eatery. Just a few doors down, Canto-pop music washed out onto the street from a movie store.

"She told me it will be many weeks. He will sleep through most of it, but she won't allow him to come back until he's fully healed."

"That's a wise decision, considering what we're facing back home." Noemi slowed as an elderly woman stepped in front of her. They didn't talk again until they reached the motel. Her stomach growled, and Noemi realized they hadn't eaten since breakfast.

Rion took her by the elbow and guided her into a small restaurant with a moon gate at the entrance. It was a bit less touristy than the restaurants they'd already passed. She noticed, with a smile, that he seated himself facing away from the roasted birds that hung on display. She'd hunted and prepared hundreds of birds to cook over open fires. They didn't bother her at all.

They ate quickly, keeping their conversation to a minimum. Absently, she noted that the food was excellent, but was more interested in the man across from her. He watched the room carefully and used his chopsticks with expertise.

"Have you spent time in China?"

"Some. Not as much as we'd have liked. Even with Rex's skills, we stood out too much. Hong Kong is a bit easier for us because of all the tourists."

"I've never been to China. I'd like to go, but..." She trailed off and shrugged. "I don't really know why I've never gone there."

He smiled and sipped his tea, and his gaze roamed the room, rarely settling on her face.

"Who's Carly?"

He blinked in surprise. "She's Sidhe, one of Rex's people. One of the first people I met early on."

His cheeks tinged with a hint of color, and Noemi immediately knew there was more to the relationship than that. She opted not to mention it.

"Odd..."

"What?" She took a sip of water, watching his blue, blue eyes.

"You remember her. She's a nymph of sorts. She brings forgetfulness to those who suffer. Most people outside the Other Place forget her soon after meeting her."

"Well, I'm not suffering, so perhaps I'm immune to her spell." How could anyone forget that incredible gold hair, that exquisite face? Noemi felt more than a pang of jealousy toward the other woman, and it wasn't all over Rion and Rex.

They rose and paid their bill, and then walked to the motel. Instead of taking the elevator, they slowly climbed the stairs. Once she unlocked the room, Rion carried chairs out onto the open balcony, allowing them to watch the streets below. Headlights haloed in the mist, and the pavement gleamed with moisture.

"Can you sense anything?"

She cradled the amulet, and then shook her head. "I'm afraid they were tracking Rex's injury. The venom put a marker on him." She hesitated. "They seemed to react shortly after you left, and right before you returned. I believe they sensed the portal."

Rion folded his arms. "Carly did say they were going to seal the portal here. I suppose that's why. Someone here has some powerful magic." He turned his head and looked her over slowly. "Is that skill to track demons yours, or is it that amulet you wear?"

She shrugged and slipped it over her head, handing the small carved whalebone to Rion. He cradled it in his hand for a moment. "I feel power, but nothing else." He examined it, admiring the fine detail of the scrimshaw.

"If there is something malevolent nearby, it puts out a slight vibration. I honestly don't know if that's how it reacts for everyone, or just to me." He handed it back,

watching as she looped it over her neck. "Ahnah told me that it had the magic of all the women who had ever held it. It's served me well over the years."

He propped his legs up on the rail and sighed, looking up into the foggy sky. "One night. Just one night apart and already I feel so empty."

Impulsively, Noemi reached out and clasped his hand, holding it in her own. "But you aren't as frightened as you were yesterday."

"I stopped being frightened when you came to our door, Noemi." And when he looked at her, the breath stopped in her chest; her heart seemed to pause. His fingers tightened on hers, and slowly, he bent towards her, settling the gentlest, lightest kiss on her lips.

Noemi blinked. Her body immediately ran into sexual overdrive. As though responding to her unspoken need for him, he angled in a bit, his mouth slanting over hers. When his tongue gently urged her lips open, she gasped.

And it began. He was out of his chair, pulling her to her feet, and Noemi found herself enfolded in the most powerful embrace she'd ever known. He lifted her, set her on the narrow rail high above the sidewalk below, holding her steady and safe in his arms.

Rion pressed kisses to the corner of her mouth, to her lips, her jaw, and when he dropped to nibble and suck lightly at her throat, she wrapped her legs around his hips, urging him closer to her body.

She felt fevered and hot and desperately needy as he nestled in between her legs, rocking his shaft into the soft cushion of her mons. Her clit felt electric; heated fluid began to surround it. Her nipples peaked, the skin on fire as his hand skated over her breasts. She glanced at his face; he appeared nearly as wild and as desperate as she felt. His dark eyes blazed in his pale face, and the slight glow of his skin told her his glamour was slipping.

It had been so long... so long since she'd been touched.

Into the room... They should go into the room, but he'd wrestled her top off and, lifting her, was working at the fastening of her jeans. For her part, Noemi had pulled the

long-sleeved shirt loose from the waistband of his pants. Her hands roamed greedily over the taut muscle of his stomach and chest. She slipped to the concrete and wrested his jeans open, moaning slightly as the long alabaster column of his penis came into her sight. She ducked her head, taking him greedily between her lips, sucking hard, and then dipping her tongue into the eye, and she tasted the unique flavor of the angel.

"You're like clouds and rain." She reached up and pulled his jeans further down, reaching in to cradle his balls in her hand.

"Oh, Noemi..." His head fell back as she lowered her mouth to his cock. She trailed her tongue the length of his shaft, and then swallowed him as deeply as she could. His hands on her head, the tone of his voice guided her, and she began to remember how to make a man putty in her hands. She tasted him, sipped at him, and ran the tip of her tongue around the hooded edge of his glans.

And then she was up in the air once again, perched on the rail; Rion's silken hair trailed down her naked thighs. He nudged her legs further open, burying his face into her belly, dragging his tongue down the seam between her thigh and groin. She rocked back precariously as one hand opened her to his invasion. She cried out as his firm tongue dragged through her slick channel, catching and swallowing her juices.

"You taste like... fire... and heat..." His voice was more gravelly than usual, and before she could process what he intended, he stood, angling his cock into her opening. He paused and made her look up into his face.

"Yes?"

"Please... yes..."

She gave her permission, and he thrust, only his great strength holding her safely on the rail. He withdrew and thrust again, burying his length deeper, tighter into her body, and it hurt, dear God it hurt, but it was the sweetest pain Noemi could remember. When he continued to pump into her, she grew wetter, he moved easier, and the pain gave way till there was only pleasure.

Noemi wasn't a virgin, but sex had never been pleasurable before, and as the angel fucked her up above the sidewalks of San Francisco, she soared, her body suddenly a harmonic, beautiful instrument that he played so well.

"Noemi..." He thrust faster, harder, and shifted her position slightly, the head of his cock bringing delicious sensations to her sheath. Tension rose, and to her wonderment, Noemi realized that she was about to orgasm. She held him tightly, arms and legs wrapped around his neck and hips and she danced with him, finding that elusive rhythm that carried her up and held her on an endless high before finally setting her free.

Her body twisted against his, and she heard him groan as his body shuddered, his hot seed spilling deep inside of her. But it didn't stop, not just then. He kept her climax cycling over and over, along with his. Rion buried his head into her shoulder, and she felt hot tears on the skin of her neck. His body went heavy against hers, nearly limp, and for a moment, she feared that they'd both go over the rail.

He was whispering against her skin, a language that was old, as old as time itself, and while she couldn't quite hear him, she caught the guttural sound of a name. And that name didn't belong to Noemi.

Nor did it belong to Rex.

*Anahita.*

The name made her shiver as though someone had stepped on her grave. It made her wrap her arms around him fiercely, holding him tight.

She held him and stroked his hair as the angel came apart in her arms, his glamour all but gone. Silky long hair trailed over her body, and great white wings shielded them from curious eyes.

He lifted her, carrying her into the door of the room, and they lay together on the bed in silence, until they both slept.

## Chapter Eight

Dawn was still far away when they rose and dressed. Rion had to retrieve Noemi's shirt from the planter where it had landed below. Their laughter broke the silence of the still morning. Together they walked through the quiet streets, not speaking of what had passed between them, but on occasion, their hands brushed and their fingers linked.

They'd walked several blocks when Rion spoke. "I don't regret, Noemi, but I wish Rex had been with us."

She moved close and bumped her head against his shoulder, bringing a smile to his face. He didn't tell her, but he'd spent several days in the Other Place with Rex. Brita had put him back nearly when he'd entered, so Noemi hadn't noticed his long absence. The men had slept much, he'd watched the slow healing begin, and the sick fear of Rex's possible death had begun to fade away.

That left him thinking of the woman who was waiting outside. As hours passed into days, Rion had found himself missing her. He'd sat next to Rex as the Sidhe lay in a healing sleep, reflecting on the sense of strength that he drew from Noemi. It didn't lessen what he felt for Rex, rather, he felt more secure in his relationship with the other man. The sometimes hostile world didn't seem so frightening with her at their backs.

She'd handled that knife like she knew what she was doing. She might be a healer by profession, but she was a warrior by nature.

When the healers had come and awakened him, Rex had looked around the room in confusion, his eyes settling on Rion, and then continuing the search. He was looking for Noemi. She'd settled into his heart as well, it seemed.

He'd had sex with the woman, sex that hadn't been gentle or loving, but rather desperate and rough. He'd taken her where anyone could have seen them, and he'd been so shaken that he'd lost his glamour.

He'd hurt her, and yet she'd clung to him, clearly needing the contact as much as he had.

Had he been unfaithful to Rex? Perhaps, but his heart -- his conscience -- didn't ache as he thought it should. He was glad. He was grateful, and she wanted what he did; the three of them together. At least, that's what he prayed that she wanted.

Sometimes, Rion still prayed. He wasn't sure who he prayed to, but still, he prayed. And he believed that his prayers had been answered.

"It should be around here somewhere." They came to a stop, and Rion surveyed the dark alley they'd come to. Rats scurried away, but beyond that, they were alone. Noemi wore her hair in two braids on either side of her face; the absence of hair highlighted her exotic features. She pulled the jacket around her body tightly.

"Are you cold?" Rion wrapped his arms around her, enjoying the feel of Noemi's slender body in his arms. It felt good. It felt... familiar.

"I don't like the cold," she admitted. "Odd that I live in the mountains."

"I imagine your hunt takes you to some unusual places." She sighed and snuggled tighter. He felt the warmth and power of the amulet between their bodies. Her breasts were soft; he remembered the feel of their silken texture under his hand, the feel of her nipple between his lips.

He got hard.

"I want you again." He nuzzled her ear, worrying the delicate lobe between his lips, biting gently. He carefully backed her to the rough wall, lifting her to his hips so they were face to face. Her arms linked behind his neck, tugging at the braid.

"What happens to all that hair?"

"It's still there. I loop the braid up and it has the illusion of being much shorter than it is. Close your eyes when you feel it."



She closed her eyes, and he loved the way they angled up at the corners. He loved the slight downward curve of her nose. He bent and kissed her gently, feeling her lips turn up in a smile.

"I feel it." She bumped her hips against his. "I feel you here too." She broke off the kiss and nipped his chin. He'd just begun to kiss her seriously when there was a sound in the alley.

"So is this how you filled your time when I was gone?"

Rex stepped into sight, looking well, and moving without so much as a limp. Noemi was immediately all business. She dropped to the ground and moved to his side, probing the healed injuries. Rex gave him a look... that look, with one brow raised, a quizzical smile on his lips.

Rion returned the look with a slight nod. He stepped forward, watching as Noemi knelt to probe Rex's injured leg. She stood and shook her head. "This is just amazing."

"Oh, Rex." Rion breathed a sigh of relief. Once Noemi had completed her cursory exam, he wrapped his arms around the Sidhe, holding him gently. He kissed the unruly curls on the top of his head, and then he kissed his lips, landing soft, gentle kisses over and over. "I am so relieved."

"And I'm so grateful to see you again. It's been too long."

"How long?" Noemi stood to the side, watching them.

"A month, perhaps more since they woke me. The venom was very powerful." He hugged Rion once again; a press of hips gave a promise of carnal pleasure. "But seriously, it's been only hours for you two, and I find you spooning in a dark alley, like two youngsters meeting on the sly!" He stepped between the two, clasping their arms.

To Rion's gratitude, the Sidhe glossed easily over the awkward moment. He led them from the alley. In the growing dawn, Chinatown was coming awake. Trucks trundled up the hill, heavy with produce. Early morning traffic was moving through the streets.

"You two have been busy. The question is, am I invited to play?" His grin was roguish, but Rion read the serious question behind the smile.

"It isn't play, Rex. And whatever I do, you are part of." The smile fled his face, and he looked over at Noemi. She nodded solemnly.

"I can't believe this is happening, and so suddenly. It feels... out of control, but at the same time, it feels right." She moved closer to Rex as his arm slipped around her waist.

"Jeez, he's been complaining about my girlfriend all these years, and now, he just expects me to take in his woman." Rex rolled his eyes.

Noemi didn't look so humorous. "What do you mean?"

"Rex has a succubus. She's been following him since... well, a long time."

"A very long time," Rex added.

Noemi came to a stop. "A succubus? Seriously?"

"Yup. The only time she lost track of us was when we went to China that time."

"She would have known that her kind was unwelcome in that culture." Noemi looked thoughtful as she began to walk again. "So this is why you asked if I hunt succubae. You're protecting her."

"He's protecting her. I'd have been glad to see her gone long ago." Rion frowned. "But... truth be told, she saved his life after the accident. And she gave him her energy more than once while he was so sick."

"So, won't she get pissed now that I've entered the picture?"

The men looked at each other, and then shrugged, turning back to Noemi.

"She's very possessive of Rex, but she's never seemed to mind when we've been with Carly..." Rion broke off, a definite "oh shit" look on his face.

Noemi raised a brow. "Carly? I was wondering why she was giving me the look of death."

Rex's shoulders were shaking with silent laughter. "Lass, sex is to Carly what breathing is to the rest of us. I'm a fertility Sidhe, yet even at the full moon, I don't wreak sexual havoc the way she does on a daily basis!"

"I doubt she'll be angry if we stop coming." Rion still looked embarrassed.

"Good thing, too. I'd hate to see that woman angry! She can be damn dangerous if she wants." Rex shook his head.

"How?" Noemi hurried to keep up with Rex, who was moving quickly.

"Memory. She brings forgetfulness. She can make devoted husbands cheat, wipe the memory of home and hearth right away. Rion here is one of the few that managed to overcome her abilities. Don't know if it's because he's an angel, or something else."

Rion suddenly came to a dead halt in the middle of the sidewalk, mindless of the pedestrians that were beginning to spill out onto the street. "Rex, all these years..." His face had a look of wonderment. "The succubus... she fulfilled that need for you. I never thought of what you'd given up for me."

"What need?" Rex stopped as well, his hand dropping to Rion's, holding it tightly.

"Fertility. Reproduction. That need cannot be fulfilled between men. You have an elemental need for women."

"Orion, that's rubbish, and you know it. The only need I have is you."

Rion didn't move but he looked at Noemi. "At the full moon, his fertility peaks. And at Beltane and Samhain, it does more than peak, it very nearly drives him insane." He looked from Noemi to Rex. "She comes to you during those times. Either she's particularly attracted to you then, or you call on her to help you cope."

"Or both," Noemi added.

"The more I know about our succubus, the more I appreciate her." Rion looked at Rex with an uncomfortably intense expression.

Noemi watched the two men as though their discussion was a tennis match, her mind spinning at the bizarre content of the conversation. A sex nymph? A succubus? Sexual madness during lunar cycles?

"I had no idea that you suffered so much, Rex."

"I'm not suffering, Rion. You are my heart. Sometimes compromise needs to be made in love."

"But, Rex, you've allowed me to drag you all over, when all you've really needed was a place to settle. You've allowed me to pull you away from Anahita when you needed her so badly."

Anahita? The name bothered Noemi, but still, she couldn't pull herself away from their discussion. Wasn't that the name Rion had whispered in her ear? The name of Rex's succubus?

"Why, Rex?"

"Your fear of her was palpable... overwhelming. I couldn't let you go on like that, so I allowed you to keep me safe the best way you saw fit."

"But if you'd explained..."

"If I'd known myself, I would have explained." Rex reached up and stroked Rion's face. "I'd never have figured this out, Rion. It took your clear vision."

"Who is Anahita?"

"Noemi, you look as though you've seen a ghost." Rex turned to her and pulled her into his arms. "This is all a little much, I expect. Usually we're pretty normal."

"For a fallen angel and a Sidhe."

She smiled at Rion's wry comment.

"Anahita was like me, a fallen angel. She didn't have the support that Rex gave me in the beginning. She was badly used and abused. She was targeted by a demon that twisted her into a monster."

Rex continued the story. "She fled. She knew that she'd become a danger to humans, so she fled, and the myth says that she encased herself in ice. About a century and a half ago, she broke free. That's when she first found us."

"And Patrick," Rion added.

"Anyhow, she's physically close, since she had enough strength to feed me her energy."

"What do you mean? Sexual vampires are incorporeal. They don't have bodies. Proximity isn't an issue."

"Apparently this one does. Remember, Noemi, that angels are immortal. It is very hard to kill us. I would guess that Anahita survived her entombment and eventually escaped. She's alive and possibly alone."

"And really, she could be feeding off humans, and risk shortening their lives. Instead, she seeks me out, knowing that I'll recover quickly."

"You're the Holy Grail for a parasitic demon." Noemi looked at Rex, stunned at the revelation of his long-standing entanglement with a succubus. Noemi felt sick. She turned and began to walk up the sidewalk. However, Rion had a point. Anahita had helped Rex manage his elemental needs all these years. And she could simply have fed off unsuspecting humans.

She stopped again. "Rion, why are you afraid of her?"

"I have a theory about that as well."

She looked at Rex in question.

"Something terrible happened to Rion before he fell. He has terrible dreams, partial memories. Losing his voice... his wife..."

Rex looked sharply at Rion, who simply shrugged. "She had a vision."

The Sidhe looked back at Noemi and continued, "Anyhow, I believe that Anahita was part of whatever happened. She might have been one of those who tortured him."

"Or she could have been the woman he saw die." But Anahita hadn't died. Not if the story that the men told her was true.

It had taken twice as long as it should have, but they finally reached the motel. This time, they took the elevator, silently entering the room. She'd just set down her purse when Rex slammed into Rion, pinning the larger man against the wall.

"I have missed you."

They kissed hard and savage, teeth bared, bodies thrusting. She stood transfixed, watching. Noemi had never seen sexual displays between men before, beyond a few embraces on city streets. Now she watched in open fascination.

Suddenly, she was gripped around the waist, Rex's tail pulling her into the embrace.

"I tortured myself all those weeks, imagining you and me together, and even worse -- imagining you and Rion together. I dreamed about the ways the three of us would make love." His mouth came down on hers, hot and demanding, and somewhere in her subconscious, Noemi realized that this was the night of the full moon.

And she was glad.

He was hot, but it was the fever of lust rather than illness, and as though it were a wildfire, it caught, passing from one to the other.

Hands tangled in a mad dash to disrobe; Rex was pulling at her jacket while Rion was on his knees, unlacing her boots.

"Where did you two do it? How?" Rex's voice was harsh and breathless.

"Outside. He held me on the rail in front of the room."

"Fuck." Rex had her naked down to her bra. His head lowered to worry at her breast through the lacy fabric. "Fast? Slow?"

"Fast and hard..." She gasped as he bit down lightly. "He lost his glamour!"

Rex groaned into her tender flesh. Down below, Rion had her completely bare, and he buried his face into her dark curls, his teeth lightly catching her outer lips, his tongue stroking, drawing forth the hot fluids of her cunt.

Together, they fell on the bed in a frenzied tangle, all fueled by the lust of Rex's heat.

"Ohhh! I want you both! I so want to take you both!" He pushed her bra aside and caught her nipple between sharp teeth. Her body arched, and Rion pressed her leg up till it nearly met her breast. She was open to him completely, and he began a slow, firm circuit of her slit, dipping into her channel to kiss her deeply.

"Move there, Rion..." Rex had shifted, his head moving into Rion's spot, his tongue firm and quick on her clit. She arched, cried out as his finger slipped in, pressed lightly, and then began stroking quickly. Rion was now up top, kissing her quickly, gently, licking along the curve of her ear.

"May I, Noemi?" Rex looked up from between her legs; his question had a slight plea at the edge.

"Let him fuck you." Rion's whisper sent chills down her skin. She nodded, and Rion slipped behind her body, supporting her as Rex rose to his knees.

She hadn't so much as seen his cock, beyond when she'd treated him as his doctor. He was long and thick and uncut. He spread her thighs, pressing himself tightly between them. He ran his cock through the slick juices of her pussy, his head dropping back in bliss.

"Oh... fuck!" The expletive came forth not as pleasure, but dismay. "Ri, I could get her pregnant right now. I can feel it."

"Condom..." Noemi gasped the word. She wanted to laugh at the despairing glance the men gave one another. They'd probably never used them before. "In my purse."

With trembling hands, Rion found her purse and began frantically digging through it. Finally, in frustration, he turned it over, dumping the contents onto the bedside table. "In that white bag!" It was the bag she used for giveaways. Gods only knew why she'd taken it from her sample storage and brought it with her yesterday, but she was glad she had.

Rex grabbed the thing and clumsily opened the wrapper, hesitating as he looked at it. She began laughing hysterically; he had no idea what to do with it!

"Here..." She sat up, placing the prophylactic over the tip of his cock, carefully rolling it down. She hadn't had much opportunity to use one either. She wasn't even on birth control!

"Oh... Your touch feels so good... but I don't like this thing much!" He looked wryly at the sheath covering his straining cock. Noemi lay back in Rion's arms, hooking her feet around Rex's waist, pulling him close. He was instantly diverted, and immediately began to focus on Noemi again.

He parted her with his fingers, pressing in as he did so. He was thick and heavy, and it took several tries before he was able to fully penetrate her body.

"Okay, now I'm glad for it." He grinned. "I'd have gone off by now otherwise."

Behind her, Rion laughed. "I went a little faster than I'd planned!"

Whatever Noemi started to say was cut off as Rex lowered himself, his body covering hers, his mouth taking hers in a deep, intoxicating kiss. He was tight against her body, buried deeply into her flesh, and against her back, she felt Rion's cock sliding, their sweaty bodies giving him purchase to move.

Rex lifted, his hands clasp Rion's thighs, and they kissed deeply above her head. Noemi ran her hands over Rex's hot skin, catching droplets of sweat on her tongue as they ran down his neck. She met him as he thrust, enjoying the feel of their bodies slapping together, and the tickle of the sweat and juice that trickled from her body down to the bedspread. It was fast and hard and when she came, she clasped his ass with her fingers, digging into his skin with her short nails.

He cried out and flexed, his body stiff and rigid for the briefest moment, before thrusting frantically into her tight channel. She arched into another climax, the salt of her sweat stinging her eyes.

Noemi felt the warm spill of Rion coming against her back, and she luxuriated in that slick heat, his harsh cry in her ear. One by one, they went limp, finally slipping into a sated, panting tangle on the bed. Rex lay with his face buried in her breasts; Rion's arms came around her body and cradled his head, fingers twining into the dark brown curls.

Finally, Rex lifted his hips and carefully withdrew from her body. He slipped the condom off and tossed it into the trash. Then he was back down, face resting on her belly, his arms around them both.

"I would give much to be able to sink my cock into your sweet juices without that glove in the way."

Rion gently placed his palm over her forehead, tilting her head back to his. He feathered kisses along her cheek, her jaw, the corner of her mouth.

"And what would happen if I became pregnant with your baby, Rex?"



He nuzzled the valley between her breasts. "You'd have a half-Sidhe babe. Most are born completely normal to the eye, but are the gifted among the humans."

"And if it were Rion's baby?" She still remembered the sensation of him spilling into her channel, hot and slick. They hadn't even considered protection.

"The babe would then be Sidhe."

She looked up at the angel in surprise.

"It's true, Noemi. The offspring of human and angel produced the Sidhe." Rex's hand was now wandering her torso, running along the dip in her waist.

Rion shifted and she rolled, prompting Rex to move to the side so she was trapped between the men. Rex reached behind her, sliding his fingers through the slick spot where Rion had ejaculated. He brought his fingers first to his lips, tasting the fluid. He then painted it on her mouth, watching in delight as she licked her full lips.

"He tastes like clouds and rain."

Rex blinked in surprise, tasting his own fingers once more. "So he does, lass." He kissed her gently. "Just like clouds and rain."

## Chapter Nine

She was back in the ice, deep and cold. She was locked too tightly to shiver, but from deep inside her body, warmth blossomed, and the thaw began. It was just like spring, wasn't it? The sun eventually came out, bringing life to all that was frozen and dead.

"Anahita."

"Yes?" She had a voice. Before, she hadn't had a voice. That's when Anahita knew that she was asleep and dreaming of her time in the ice.

"Anahita. Do you remember the first time? You came to us... me, Rion and Patrick. You were so desperate."

She remembered. And she remembered how wrong it had turned out. "No, not Patrick. Azrael."

"Yes, Patrick is Azrael."

"And it was wrong. Not Azrael. Never him." She'd briefly touched Azrael, and they'd broken away from each other, knowing it was wrong.

A gentle hand stroked her skin, bringing the side of her mouth up in a smile. It was a dream, because she never felt, not really. She wanted and she ached, but she never felt the men she touched, she never tasted their kisses or the seed she coaxed from their bodies. She felt only the rush of power as it came forth. She sighed and luxuriated in the feel of Rex and Rion holding her tight, even if it was only a dream.

\* \* \*

"Anahita?"

"Yes."

"It's time." The voice was gentle. Sweet. It was like listening to a spring rain. Sad, but so sweet to the ear.

"Time for what?" She wanted to simply lie here, luxuriating in sensation.

"It's time to wake up, Anahita."

"No. Please."

"It's time to wake up and remember."

And she did.

Noemi Gastineau sat bolt upright in the empty bed, and she screamed until her voice was gone.

\* \* \*

"She's gone." Rion set the pink bakery box filled with *dim sum* on the cheap table by the window. Rex stepped into the room after him, a cardboard drink carrier in his hands.

"Maybe she's in the shower." But as he spoke, he knew it wasn't true. The water wasn't running, and her clothing and purse were gone. The key card lay on the dresser next to the television.

The room held the scent of their mingled sweat and sex and fading perfume.

"Maybe she went out to get something to eat." Rion's voice was tight. Rex shut his eyes, trying his best to sense demon-kind, but without charms and wards to assist him, he had no tools.

"Look. Here."

On the pillow where she'd slept, the amulet rested, looking lonely and abandoned. Rex picked it up, and immediately, the hum of power ran through his palm. He handed it to Rion.

"It feels different than when I held it yesterday. It's pulsing." He handed the carving back to Rex, who automatically slipped it over his neck.

"Rion. I need to tell you something." He pulled the chair out and sat, watching the angel as he paced the room, looking for other signs of their missing lover. Finally Rion gave up, sitting on the edge of the bed. He looked soberly at Rex.

"Noemi... She said something. Something... Well..." He folded his hands, and looked back up at Rion. "The night before we left to come here, Anahita visited." Rion's cheeks grew pink. He clearly remembered the visit. "Do you remember?"

"Yes." And in spite of his discomfort, Rex spied the angel's crotch swelling with arousal. Things were making more and more sense by the moment.

"Were you aware enough to hear us talk?" Rion shook his head. "Anahita made you climax. I reached down and took your seed on my fingertips. I tasted it. She watched, and then she said that you tasted like clouds and rain."

Rion looked at him in confusion. "Noemi said that. Twice."

"She said I tasted of Earth and life." Rex looked down at the floor. Fear had taken a spot in his heart. It felt like a cold, hard lump.

"Rex, how likely is it that Noemi would say the very same thing that Anahita did?" Rion's blue eyes were bright. Fear was there again, along with suspicion, and knowledge.

"Noemi and Anahita..."

"...are the same person. Remember, we were discussing the possibility of Anahita having a body, but being divided from within?"

"Yes."

"Well, she's Anahita when she sleeps. So when Noemi was sleeping, I took a peek into her mind. We were right."

"Oh God." Rion looked bleak. "What's happened then? Why did she run?"

Rex clasped the amulet around his neck, feeling the discordant vibration of power. "I don't know. Maybe she remembered something. Maybe she's afraid."

"Of us?" Rion shook his head. "I've spent decades being afraid of Anahita. Now all I know is that we need to get her back."

Rex dropped the amulet, letting it dangle from its cord. "You're willing to accept her, even with your history? Even with the history you don't know?"

Rion rubbed a palm across his face in agitation. "I don't know. I don't know, Rex, but we can't just let her run away!" He stood, pacing again. "What about you, Rex? She

might have been my wife! That's what she said when she slipped into that trance... maybe..."

"Maybe that's the source of your fear. Maybe you saw her apparent death, and your memory hasn't let go of that horror."

Rex stood, crossing the room to the angel, pulling Rion tightly against his body. Rion rested his head against the Sidhe's chest, taking what comfort he could.

"We were perfect, Rex. I never needed anyone else." He wrapped his arms around Rex's waist.

"Till her," Rex whispered.

"I'm so sorry. So sorry..."

Rex tightened his hold on the angel. "Do you think I've been unaffected by this? My need for her..." He swallowed hard. "My need for her is overwhelming. I love her, Rion, but that doesn't diminish what I feel for you. And I know that you love me no less for your love of Noemi." Rion nodded and sighed deeply.

"Anahita always seemed so needy. So pathetic. Noemi is strong and powerful. I can't fit them together."

"The Anahita I know has changed over the years, Ri. She's bewildered and frightened because she's fractured, but she's not a woman to take lightly." He lifted Rion's face to his and framed it in his hands. "We are not to be taken lightly either. She did not run from us, Rion. Anahita was awash in joy when I touched her."

"If I remembered my past we would know the answers. If only I remembered."

"And I'm afraid that's exactly what happened to Noemi. I believe she -- they -- remembered." Rex stood back a little, wrapping his hand in Rion's long braid. "And can you imagine the chaos in her mind?"

"Do you think someone did this to her?" Rion looked up, the pressure on his hair lifting his head slightly.

"I know someone did this to her. And I know what we have to do next." He let go of Rion's hair and stepped away, taking a cup of coffee from the carrier. He sipped and winced at the heat of the beverage.

"We're going to talk to someone who knows all about memory. Someone who can make anyone forget."

"Carly."

"Yes. Nobody knows about forgetfulness the way she does."

Rion let out a deep breath, clearly relieved. They had a direction to follow. Not a lead, but a start. "What about the demon at home?"

Rex shrugged. "It'll still be there when we find Noemi." He shut off the light, leaving the box of food behind. The room was empty but for the fragrance of sweat and sex and Noemi's perfume.

Rex closed the door.

\* \* \*

There were nearly a dozen steamer baskets of *dim sum* on the table in front of her, but Noemi was too nauseated to eat. Grease glistened at the corner of Cynthia's mouth as she bit into the tiny pork dumpling with a dainty twirl of her chopsticks. As the nurse's head turned, Noemi caught the slight red gleam that told of possession. How had she worked next to the woman all these years and not known that she'd been possessed?

As long as she was asking uncomfortable questions, how had she lived for so long and never been aware that she was really Anahita, one of the Fallen?

Noemi stared at her hands and felt the angelic glamour glide in and out. Anahita had never learned to hide her glamour, so a golden-red glow began to beam from her skin. She stared in fascination, wishing she could see herself in a mirror.

"Tone it down, Noemi. You want to get us thrown out?" Cynthia speared a pork bun and started on that. Across the table, Carly sipped daintily from her tea cup. Her hand trembled and she kept her head lowered.

Noemi's brain was overloaded with the convergence of two separate personalities slamming together, plus the return of memories long suppressed. She recognized the demon that had taken Cynthia. It was Kelet, who had called her from

the glacier so long ago. Kelet, who had killed her foster-mother Ahnah. He was the demon she'd unsuccessfully hunted all these years.

"So, Michael, the deal was I get to ride the angel out of this host." Kelet sat back in his chair, his voice harsh and ugly coming from Cynthia's mouth. Noemi sensed despair coming from the possessed woman. That's why the demon never rode the reservation youth; somehow, the real Cynthia had protected her people.

"That was *your* deal, Kelet."

The strange man made her want to cringe in abject fear. Tall and handsome, he looked like a gentleman to put one's trust in. His clothing was impeccably designed, made of the finest fabrics on Earth. Of course, none of it had been made on Earth. His short brown hair was impeccably styled, and cheerful blue eyes twinkled in a smile.

He was evil beyond measure, yet this one wasn't a demon. He was an *angel*.

She closed her eyes on a vision, and in that vision his face twisted with fury, a white hot blade of steel in his hand. Kokabiel's scream of pain rose and broke as they took his voice.

Rion. Rex. She held onto those two as her memories clamored in frenzy through her brain. Her lids drooped, and she slumped in her chair.

"Can't you do something about her?" The angel's voice was tense with annoyance. The Sidhe reached out and gently stroked her hair, easing the chaos in her mind. A moment ago, she'd known the woman's name; now it was gone. She was beautiful, and she brought peace to Noemi's frantic mind.

"I have another plan for her now. Sorry, Kelet. Find another body to ride. Just be glad she's out of your hair."

"This bitch killed my body!"

"This *angel* had nothing to do with it. You called her from the ice, and her guardian locked you into her spot in the glacier. I wouldn't have needed to drag the Sidhe into this if you'd not been so greedy!" He looked Noemi over in contempt. "Besides, you fucked up royally. You had Anahita right under your nose these past years. And then you let Reux and Kokabiel slip right out of your fingers!"

Kelet glowered from Cynthia's face, and the angel glared back. Noemi sat up again, staring at the golden vision of the Sidhe in front of her.

"Carly..."

The Sidhe's blue eyes filled with tears, and she looked away in guilt. She'd done this out of jealousy. Obviously, her feelings for the men were greater than they realized.

"Carly, I thought to keep Anahita for myself, but I don't care for these dark looks. She used to be blonde and fair." His gaze raked her over, from head to toe. "I want you to give her to Patrick."

"Azrael... Not Patrick." Why did she know that?

"That's correct, Anahita." His voice was smug. He turned back to Carly. "Azrael has been charged with hunting this one. He's failed repeatedly. I believe it is time for our avenging angel to prove his loyalty. You will deliver Anahita to him immediately."

"No, that will destroy him..." Carly's voice held an edge of panic. "You promised, Michael! You told me that if I helped you, Patrick would be safe!"

"I lied. Now, Carly dear, take this one to your precious portal, and deliver her to Patrick. He will know what to do with her. And if he doesn't do it this time..."

"No." Her blue eyes blazed with fury, and Noemi felt power rolling from the woman. Her vision hazed, and Noemi shook her head, trying to recover her scrambled thoughts.

"Your memory tricks don't work on me, remember? Now, Carly, Kelet has readied an entire flock of little demons all poised to flood your precious Other Place as soon as that portal opens again. They will bring more with them once they enter. So what will it be -- your entire world, or one recalcitrant angel?"

Carly bit her plush lip, looking at Noemi with a measuring eye. "If he kills her, it will destroy his soul."

"Aberrations like Patrick are without souls. Besides, you can simply make him forget."

Noemi felt her head grow heavy with pain and fatigue. Anahita was a frantic presence in her mind, keeping her on the edge of blind panic. Anahita remembered...



She remembered too much that Noemi simply didn't understand. Anahita knew Michael. She knew him well.

Suddenly, the succubus struck out with her power -- their power -- and Michael went rigid in his chair, his breath coming fast. He bucked and strained, and then he struck out with his fist, a vicious blow that knocked Noemi to the floor.

"Take her now, Sidhe!"

From her spot on the dirty floor, Noemi could see a stain spreading down the front of his immaculate slacks. Anahita... no... *she* was a succubus. She gathered her power and struck again, and once again, Michael's fist made contact with her face. This time it didn't hurt so badly. He was losing strength.

Obviously, a forced climax could be a powerful weapon.

Carly dragged Noemi to her feet, pulling her bodily to the back door of the restaurant. Every inch of the way, Noemi watched that face, and knew that it hovered just on the edge of memory. Anahita hated that face.

"You will sleep, Michael. And when you sleep, I'll find you!" She struck again, and his back arched. He shuddered and groaned. This time, even Kelet felt it. And why not? The demon was a male, even though he inhabited a female body.

A hand wrapped in her hair and Carly dragged her, half running as they stumbled through the back door into a filthy alley. They ran only a few steps when the Sidhe slammed her into a stucco wall... a wall that vanished as soon as she touched it.

Noemi stumbled and fell onto a damp floor, smelling mold and rotten vegetation. Rolling to her hands and knees, she watched as Carly uttered a brief incantation. The illuminated door was suddenly gone; nothing but a solid wall remained in its place.

"It's sealed. No one shall enter or leave this gateway again." The Sidhe collapsed on a rock, tears bright in her eyes. She covered her beautiful face and her shoulders hunched as she cried. "I am sorry, Noemi. I am so very sorry." She looked up at Noemi, and her grief was very real. "I'm sorry."

And then she vanished, leaving Noemi alone in the dark.

## **Belinda McBride**

*Belinda lives in the wilderness of the Siskiyou Mountains and at night, she runs naked with a pack of wolves...*

Uhh...

Belinda lives *near* the Siskiyou Mountains and shares her home with a pack of Siberian Huskies who like to pretend they're wolves. And she usually keeps her clothing on when she goes outside.

Belinda loves to travel, collect rare gemstones, make soap and spend precious time with her daughters. Her degree is in History with a Cultural Anthropology minor. On weekends, you will often find Belinda ringside at a dog show, comb and spray bottle in hand.

She invites you to visit her website at [www.belindamcbride.com](http://www.belindamcbride.com), or email her directly at [belinda@belindamcbride.com](mailto:belinda@belindamcbride.com).