

ELLORA'S CAVE *Legend*



THIEVES AND LOVERS

*A Witch's
Thief*

TITANIA LADLEY

A Witch's Thief

Titania Ladley

Book 3 in the Thieves and Lovers series.

The witch...

Isobel's magic and immortality are being held hostage by Falcon Montague (aka Robin Hood). Only if she persuades her imprisoned former lover, Lancelot Fridwulf, to return to Falcon's employment will he reinstate her powers. But Lance has sworn off a life of crime. When Isobel makes conflicting pacts with several men she becomes entangled in her own web, for death will be her fate if her powers aren't restored within a fortnight.

The thief...

Now that Lance has been released after a horrific year in a dank cell, he vows to become a law-abiding citizen. But he walks straight into the arms of the beautiful witch Isobel, who begs him to steal her bauble back from his old friend, Falcon. In exchange, she and Nikolai—both Lance's former lovers—will enjoy a triad reunion of untold passion. Still, things are not as simple as they seem. Danger, debauchery and deceit are certain to put Lance back behind bars...this time for life.

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A Witch's Thief

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A WITCH'S THIEF

Titania Ladley

Dedication

To Dan: I'll love you for always. You became the thief of my heart from the moment you asked, "Hey there, beautiful, wanna chill down your six-pack in my cooler?"

Author Note

Dear Reader,

In *A Wanton's Thief* and *A Gypsy's Thief*, books 1 and 2 of my Robin Hood Thieves and Lovers series, I brought you the separate fiery love stories of Falcon Montague (aka Robin Hood) and his partner in crime John Lawton (aka Little John). You were afforded a brief glimpse of the orphaned waif Lance in book 1, and then again a short hint of his character as an older man in book 2. After receiving many reader inquiries into Lance's story, I felt it best to rewind and give him his due before completing the series with Lorana's finale. Therefore, though it is a standalone and will be labeled as book 3, *A Witch's Thief* falls on the timeline between books 1 and 2. In *A Witch's Thief*, you will be taken back to the time of Queen Mary of England in yet another adventure of chivalry, magic and all-consuming love, this time between Lancelot, the witch Isobel, and Nikolai, the man they both cannot live without. Enjoy!

Chapter One

Sherwood Forest

Autumn, 1557

Pebbles crunched beneath the mare's hooves, the sound breaching the eerie stillness of the night. An owl released a startled screech of protest. It rustled the leaves of a gnarled oak, took flight and soared across the full, ringed moon.

Isobel Fitzjames held a gasp captive within her throat. Her heart galloped in her chest and sweat pooled between her breasts. She had recently been stripped of her magic by that wily thief, Falcon Montague—or Robin Hood as those in English society referred to him with disgust. Aye, stripped of her magic, apart that is, from when she's in Lancelot Fridwulf's company. And damn it all to Hades, Lance most definitely was not present. Therefore to be devoid of her powers for the first time in hundreds of years gave her immense cause to worry, particularly tonight as she traveled unescorted.

She scanned the clearing and attempted without success to calm the hackles rising on the back of her perspiring neck. Where was that bastard, Vychan? Had the queen's favored knight duped her after all? She gulped. Mayhap she had been lured into a trap?

"Good evening, milady." The ominous voice of the soldier rang familiar just as she prepared to dig her heels into her mount and flee.

She tightened her grip on the dagger held beneath her cape and whirled her mount around. "Vychan, is that you? Show your face at once or our agreement shall be annulled."

"Aye, Isobel, 'tis me." Vychan stepped out from behind a lofty pine, his mammoth frame unmistakable even by the dark of night's gloom.

Isobel caught a glimpse of his steed's silhouette behind him. The regally outfitted beast had been tethered near a stream. The narrow snake of water appeared visible only

at intervals as the overhead tree limbs swayed in the midnight breeze and allowed spears of intermittent moonlight to glitter upon its surface. A thick ray of lunar light flashed to the left as a sudden gust of wind tossed branches and sent shadows scurrying. It was there in that fleeting moment that she learned he'd been lax in his judgment for she could not mistake the shimmer of his sword nor the bulk of his bow, both left behind and secured to the saddle.

Apparently he thought of her as no threat. Her mouth compressed. If she had possession of her powers, she could easily make him rue that assumption.

She eased out a quiet rush of air from her lungs. "I have the first half of the gold." She reached down and caressed the bulging bag of coins dangling from her saddle. The cool, heavy weight of it rested reassuringly against her thigh. It was her only hope of righting the wrongs done her hence she would not relinquish the remainder unless given tomorrow's promised proof—the sight of Lance's handsome face. "Let us get this bargain underway before your beloved queen changes the rules yet again."

Vychan sauntered toward her. Twigs snapped beneath his fine warrior's boots. He halted his steps so near to her she could feel the heat rising from his armored body. She held her breath when his sweaty stench wafted up to smother her.

"Careful, milady, lest Her Highness catches wind of your words and misconstrues them to imply that you do not take her as *your* beloved queen."

She clenched her jaw and spoke through her teeth. "No one rules me, sir, whether 'tis Queen Mary or God above himself."

He trailed a finger down her leg. A disgusting gurgle of lust vibrated his knotted throat. "Were I to rule you, you would be begging for my...leadership."

She shivered, suppressing a wave of nausea and the instinct to kick him. "Get your filthy hand off me. I would rather die than allow your vile touch." Her fingers fondled the cool handle of her concealed weapon. The reflex overwhelmed her to whip out her dagger and slice his arm into ribbons.

Rein in your emotions, Isobel. That tempting action would only prevent you from ultimately reclaiming your magic and rescuing Lance from that hellhole.

Even in the dim twilight she could see that his scarred face screwed into a snarl. His beady eyes glowered up at her making her think of a rabid wolf. He licked his thin lips and scoffed, "Surely you jest. From what I understand, you prefer to be presided over by not one, but two men at once. And might I add there are many in Our Highness's army who I could recruit for such luscious—"

She had the blade against his throat so swiftly it could have been by the blessed force of her magic. But Isobel knew better. That despicable bandit Montague was mostly to blame for her current vulnerabilities and lack of powers.

And by the Druid gods and goddesses, she would see that he paid whether her immortality became reinstated or nay.

But first to get this lecherous brute back to the matter at hand. "The gold, you perverse lout. Does your queen not expect you to return with it this night?"

He stiffened. His eyes were wide now, glazed with a mixture of panic and resentment. "Aye, that she does." Though he nodded almost imperceptibly to prevent injury, she was able to catch the sheen of perspiration on his wide brow with the slight movement.

"Then I suggest you present me with the Crown's official receipt in exchange for my first payment." She pressed the blade deeper and drew a thin line of blood across his fat neck. "And posthaste, I might add. I grow weary of your antics."

Vychan hissed and stumbled backward out of her reach. It mattered not to her whether she had him within striking distance or nay. He was just as aware as Isobel that the queen awaited her payment even as she and Vychan spoke. He might be an oaf but he was no fool. To return without it could mean his own head.

He dabbed at his neck with the sleeve of his tunic and spat, his eyes damning her, his voice deep with loathing. "Bitch."

Isobel let out a melodious laugh. "Is that the best you can do?"

"Widowed harlot. Doxy." He spat again. "Witch."

Little did he realize he had the last as it should be, she would give him that—well, once she had her powers back 'twould be correct, that is. "Present the receipt without further ado or I shall withdraw my offer to assist the queen in capturing Robin Hood. And something tells me should this aborted state of affairs come to fruition, you would be held responsible."

Vychan growled and dug inside his armor. He withdrew a small folded parchment secured with the official seal of the Crown, stepped forward and held it up to her. "Satisfied?"

"We shall see." Isobel snatched it from his hand and guided her mount to the center of the clearing where the moonlight shone silver and bright. She slid her finger beneath the flap, opened the document and let out a rush of breath. There, scrawled in Queen Mary's feminine penmanship, was the authorized written security she so desperately needed.

She unwound the rope to release the gold and tossed the bag across the open space. Coins jingled. The sack hit the earth with a final plunk.

"It appears things are indeed in order. There you shall find half of the queen's charges for releasing Lancelot Fridwulf from prison on the morrow." She indicated the sack with a gesture of her jaw. "The remainder as agreed upon shall be paid in full upon Robin Hood's capture—provided that I witness Lancelot in truth walk free of those damned gates."

And subsequent to Lance assisting me in stealing back my powers from Montague, that wretched thief acquaintance of his.

She frowned. There was one dilemma, however. She must come up with a plan to maneuver the return of her powers from Montague *before* he could be taken into custody. If Montague should delay for even seconds too long in his persuasions with Lance to return to their band, Montague would be caught by Vychan and his army at

the outset. In that event Montague would surely see her as the mastermind behind using Lance in his capture and thereby refuse to return what he had stolen from her.

Her powers and her life.

Thus the order of events proved critical. She ticked it off in her head. Lance must first make contact with Montague and agree to become a member of his League of Thieves once again. Only then would Montague reinstate her powers and immortality. Finally, once her powers were restored, she would conjure a spell to prevent Montague from repeating his thieving, underhanded act on her. Aye, she would see that he never duped her again. The bastard could go to hell for all she cared, or better yet be apprehended and forced to endure what Lance had in the past year. Oh to have Montague brutally punished for even a day would be well worth all the trouble and fortune she paid for Lance's release.

"Very well." Vychan plucked up the gold. He glowered up at her, his dark eyes gleaming like those of a serpent prepared to strike. "But I advise you not to forget, milady, that your payment comes in the form of more than mere coin. You will only be free of your complete debt once you lure Robin Hood into our trap. If this is not accomplished, your lover will be thrown back in his cell. Do you comprehend?"

"And you will not gain Robin Hood in your custody unless your queen first releases Lancelot as agreed, and pardons him from his crimes forever. Do *you* comprehend?" She didn't await his response. Isobel spun her mare around and galloped back toward her manor.

The swift pace dislodged her hood and plastered it upon her shoulders. Her long tresses were unleashed and flew behind her in a wild mass, while the night air reached within her bodice and cooled her warmed flesh. She sighed and urged the beast to leap over a narrow stream. Thank goodness Nikolai would not be about when she arrived back at the keep. He was not set to return home from his latest pillaging excursion upon the seas until the morrow. He would have throttled her had he known that during his

absence without his protection and escort, she had endangered her newly mortal life by bargaining with the Crown for Lance's release.

She maneuvered past a thick copse of cedar trees and burst out at the foot of a great tor. There she espied home, Moorland Hall. The grand stone castle left her by her late husband, Lord Wrothington, loomed against the silver light of the moon and welcomed her into its strong, soaring walls.

"Yah!" She dug her heels into the mare's flanks and urged it to climb upward toward the manor she now shared with her lover, Nikolai. The drawbridge lowered and the beast's hooves clopped on wood before the fortress was once again sealed from the dangers of the outside world, perils that seemed much more pronounced and menacing now that she had been rendered vulnerable without her powers.

Isobel heard the chains of the drawbridge groan and her guards shout at one another to verify that it had been secured. She closed her eyes and forced her pounding pulse to calm. She might be void of her magic but leastwise for the moment she was safe once again.

Still, worry plagued her.

She knew that more so than with Nikolai's return on the morrow and having to confess her recklessness during his absence, she had more cause to be apprehensive where Lance was concerned. She and Nikolai had been barred from visiting Lance during his year of incarceration. Nary even a letter of correspondence to him had been allowed, and strangely no matter the steadfastness of her attempts, her magic had not been strong enough to see him released nor had it permitted them entry to see him.

And that had been the case even prior to Montague's mayhem. Her powers had begun to wane for reasons that eluded and perplexed her.

Lance most likely hated her and Nikolai and assumed they had abandoned him, therefore it would be quite a feat to convince him of their undying, continued affections. That didn't take into account the worst of the matter should he later learn of her deceit. She drew in a shaky breath and handed the reins to her stable boy. Oh aye, Lance

would not only throttle her alongside Nikolai, but he would surely see her beheaded if he ever learned she intended to use him as a decoy to assist the queen in capturing Falcon Montague, Lance's beloved friend and former partner in offenses against the Crown.

Chapter Two

The prison's rusty gate screeched open. Iron scraped against iron. Lancelot Fridwulf halted his steps and stared hungrily through the wide archway at London's blessed slums. "Free at last," he sighed to himself.

"Aye, someone's paid top gold fer yer release—and a half-score of years early at that." The guard grumbled and shoved Lance through the open portal. "Ye're one lucky bloke, that ye be."

Lance stumbled but he found the strength to aright himself despite having been shackled like a beast in his cell for much of the last few weeks. Iron groaned once again as the gate clattered shut behind him. He spun around and gripped the cool bars. "But wait. Who? Who was it that paid for my—" Lance cut his own inquiry off. He listened, breath suspended, as the sentry's heavy footfalls faded within the dank outer corridor of the reformatory.

"Bloody farthing hell." He tore his hands from the bars and released an exasperated rush of air from his lungs. With no surviving kin and few remaining acquaintances to speak of, he hadn't the faintest notion who could have been so generous.

Mayhap 'twas the queen's messengers who had visited him on a dozen occasions since his capture? He shivered and clenched his jaw. The beast Vychan and his men had plied Lance, repeatedly attempting to beat information out of him regarding Falcon Montague's whereabouts. Lance clenched his fists and pressed his lips together. By the mercy of God, he'd somehow endured the abuse and yet had remained loyal to his former colleague Montague in the process. However, the guard had made it clear when preparing Lance for release not an hour prior that the queen's sentries had passed on to him an ominous message. Should Lance reestablish association with the outlaw it could mean Lance's death in the future. He was no fool. With every broken bone and lump

upon his skull, he'd come to know the importance of his life and its direct relationship to Montague and his infamous League of Thieves.

He shivered at the memory of the soldiers' cruelty, fists pummeling his face, hard-toed boots bruising his gut, the crack of bones and the excruciating pain that ensued. Nay, he must wash his hands of the rogue bandits. More to the point, he'd had his fill of Montague and that chaotic existence of crime even though he'd once worshipped the outlaw.

His brow furrowed. "Hmm..."

Could his bailer have been Montague by way of anonymity? After all, the persistent thief and his partner "Little John" Lawton had secretly visited Lance in his cell many times over the past year attempting to persuade Lance to rejoin their band. All it would have required was Lance's blessing and John's powers to *invisilate* or transport Lance out of the bowels of hell with nary a trace left behind. But it wasn't as if Lance were some immortal being such as Montague and Lawton. Even once rescued by them he would surely, if caught yet again, be hanged for returning to that life of crime and betraying his country. He never wished to see that darkness within the prison again, therefore now that he was a free man he vowed to walk in law-abiding shoes from this day forth.

Lance scanned the street, left, right, forward, then he let his shoulders sag in relief. Thank goodness Falcon was nowhere to be seen. He shook his head. "Nay, 'twasn't Falcon." Had the cunning fox paid for his release, Falcon would be eagerly awaiting Lance outside the gates and attempting to whisk him right back into his clandestine world.

He pressed a hand to his chest and damned the involuntary flutter that leapt there. Regardless of his staunch vow to the contrary, it seemed his traitorous heart raced at the exhilarating memories. He could not deny the truth of things. Quite simply put, his years with the League of Thieves had been the most exciting time of his life.

Get on with it. 'Tis over, laid to rest.

A puffy white cloud slid across the pristine sky unveiling the pale ball of the afternoon sun. Finally at will to do so, Lance stood there for a long moment, closed his eyes and indulged in the mild autumn heat. The energy of the sun's rays soaked into the flesh upon his face whilst the winds faintly ruffled the thin, tattered fabric of his shirt and breeches. He combed one hand through his straight, blue-black hair holding the greasy strands at bay from the brief blustery gusts. Damn it all to hell, he most assuredly could use a hot bath.

"Lancelot?"

His eyes popped open. He started at the familiar husky song of her voice. It had come from afar as if in a dream, echoing and mesmerizing all at once. "Isobel?"

Immediate lust spiked in his loins and he glanced over his shoulder in search of his former lover, pleasantly taken aback by the unexpected turn of events. But he must be imagining things for he saw no one. Besides, she and Nikolai hadn't shown their faces to him during his entire incarceration. Why would they begin now? Why would he *want* them to begin now given their betrayal? Furthermore, what wench possessing all of her faculties, and most especially the prim Isobel, would seek out a newly released prisoner?

With a shrug of regret and an inward scolding chuckle at himself for being so unrealistic, Lance closed his eyes once again and indulged in his first moments of independence. After a long instant of peace he finally started up the street in a random northerly direction. Perhaps being a trifle paranoid he concluded that rather than dally any longer it was best to move on, as far from the prison as possible before the guards learned his release was some sort of mistake and came after him.

His worn boots clomped on cobblestone as he spied a tiny bakery ahead. He moaned. His mouth watered at the vivid recollection of warm buttered sourdough melting on his tongue. A dog barked in the distance over the faint sounds of the nearby rushing Thames and the activity along its many warehouses and wharves. The city

bustled with pickpockets, comely courtesans and street vendors struggling to sell their wares, some secondhand property stolen by thieves such as himself.

Nay. A thief he would be no more. Lance had learned his lesson. He wanted a better life for himself and he would have it.

So with a spring in his step and a new, brightly lit path to the unknown looming ahead of him, Lance crossed the lane and distanced himself from the prison forever as he followed his nose toward the enticing aromas of baking victuals. His stomach growled and his mouth watered again as he drew nearer detecting cinnamon and ginger. But he hadn't gotten more than two score of feet into his escape from hell when a hand upon his elbow and the same alluring voice halted his stroll.

"Please, Lance, might I have a word with you?"

Lance cut a glance at the hand. The satiny, pale fingers were curled around his arm in a tight grip, and though the hand proved small to look upon, its copious warmth suffused Lance's blood like that first thirsty swallow of good warmed spirits on a cold winter's night.

"What the devil—" His words lodged in his throat when his gaze shifted up and settled on the heart-shaped face framed by long wisps of golden tendrils escaping the hood of her cloak. She would undoubtedly be a tempting vision to behold for any man, but for one who hadn't had this very woman—any woman—writhing and moaning beneath him in over one long year, he found himself hard-pressed to stifle the instant tingling of his cock.

"Do you not recall? I am Isobel Fitzjames." Her golden eyebrows were inverted in insult. Eyes the very color of shamrocks glittered unwaveringly at him from behind fringed, dark-brown lashes as she did a delicate curtsy. The mesmerizing pools had a sleepy squint to them, and Lance recollected with famished interest how they were natural, not the look of a woman truly just risen from an afternoon slumber.

Nay, they were the bedchamber eyes of a ravenous vixen.

He ran an appreciative look down her voluptuous, petite frame, the outline of which remained discernable despite the flapping black cloak that had been meant to conceal it. Vivid images of the compact little body curled against him in the afterglow of lovemaking had him clenching his groin to fend off a new wave of relentless desire. Ah yes, he saw it in his mind's eye as if it were only yesterday...one slim, milky leg thrown over his, the soft swell of breasts snuggled to his side, the small hand currently latched around his arm, instead stroking his cock to steely hardness while she sucked at his nipple.

And Nikolai behind her, touching Isobel, touching Lance...

Their stormy and passionate affair had been but a few months' time, yet even after more than a year away he had not been able to cast her womanly talents out of his memory, nor Nikolai's firm, manly touch.

Lance crossed his arms over his tightening areolas unintentionally dislodging her hold from his elbow. "How could any man forget you, madam?"

"As your most recent mistress, I would have been quite insulted had you done so." She caught her plump bottom lip between straight white teeth and looked furtively around before settling her jeweled gaze back upon his face. Her sweet voice rang low, direct. "However, before this day is out I would be most delighted to refresh your memory in the event you have forgotten the...extent of my charms."

He imagined her pinkened mouth pressed to his lips as she had done many times prior to his imprisonment. Or wrapped around his stiff shaft and bringing him to an explosive release. Lance groaned at the erotic images, the warmth, the sucking sensations, the almost unbearable swirl of her moist little tongue circling the head of his rod. His knees trembled. He clenched his fists and tightened every muscle in his body to stave off his rising manhood. Christ, had they not been standing on a London street in broad daylight he might have sworn the depraved remembrance of her mouth upon his tool was real once again. But Lance knew better. He'd simply been locked up far too long while in his male prime.

Unless 'twas some of her witch's magic she wielded upon him?

Her cryptic proposition regarding her "charms" echoed relentlessly in his mind. He shook his head to clear the wicked thoughts and focus on her intent instead. "Pardon me, but what do you—"

Lance sucked in a lungful of air when she parted her cloak revealing that long-coveted, delectable body he'd oftentimes devoured in the past and dreamed of whilst imprisoned. Mm, but flesh and curves certainly prevailed over a convict's empty fantasies. Her hips remained as lush as he recalled, and her bare breasts were so very full and large there could be no possible way to forget her.

"You are a man in need, Lance, this I know." She trailed a slim finger down her creamy hued chest and buried the tip in her deep cleavage. When she stepped closer he caught the heady aroma of feminine arousal entwined with rare wildflowers, a distinctive fragrance that could only belong to Isobel Fitzjames. Her pupils dilated and she coyly fluttered her eyelids. "And I am your woman prepared to slake your lust at a bargain price."

Bargain *price*? He blinked, suddenly understanding. His heart sank. Apparently in his absence she'd transformed for the worst. Perhaps Nikolai had left her? Perhaps she'd fallen on harsh economic times? Whatever the case might be it appeared she no longer conducted herself as the high-class, widowed mistress he'd once known but as a harlot soliciting her goods in exchange for a hopeful shilling.

"Ah, so you've turned doxy on me." His heart ached to even voice it. 'Twas such a shame, what had been and gone, what now was. What never would be again. "Well I do thank you wholeheartedly but as much as I am in need of a woman following a year in prison, I shall regrettably have to pass on your tempting proposition. Sorry love, but though I wish it with all of my being, I haven't a coin to my name. Not yet anyway. Perhaps another time?"

He brushed a regretful touch along her delicate jaw and slim neck. Silky. Warm. Yielding and generous just as he remembered. He fought the urge to slide his hand down and cover her heaving breast.

She lifted her shoulder and captured his hand there, holding his fingers enslaved where he could feel the erratic thump of her pulse in his palm. Her eyelids fanned down over her cheeks and she let out a wistful sigh before growling, "I am no doxy and you well know it."

Even though her flesh caressed his like the finest of the queen's silks, enticing him to further explore, he gathered his strength and dislodged his hand. "Whatever game you play with me, madam, I've already informed you that I haven't a coin to my name to pay up on your 'bargain price'. Unless you are in the market for a loan..."

"Nay." Her eyes clouded over with insult he did not comprehend. What was she about after such a lengthy silence, and now offering bargain prices and her charms and services if a concubine she was not?

"Oh Isobel, despite your stark neglect of me, I missed you so, truly I did. But you must understand my life has changed so very much. 'Tis difficult to explain my hesitation and confusion at your ambiguous proposition, which has strangely come after hearing nary a peep from either you nor Nikolai during this long year past."

She made a choked sound of protest but no words spewed forth. He studied the storm of emotions brewing in her eyes and marring the perfection of her lovely face. Lance shifted his gaze and stared over her slim shoulder to break the spell of her beauty. It took every droplet of meager strength he possessed to focus on that new path to a righteous life he'd vowed to acclaim not moments ago. But despite the temptation she presented his gut twisted with a hunger a woman's wiles could not appease. Food. His priorities, morals and entire life had been sorely altered. 'Twas obviously time to put the chapter of Isobel and Nikolai behind him, as he thought he'd already done in prison during that soundless year void of even one visit from them.

He set his hand to his rumbling stomach. "Now I do apologize with much, much regret but I am in dire need of sustenance. I must be on my way. Farewell, my darling."

Even as he longed to demand an explanation for their painful silence during his incarceration, he managed somehow to spin on his heel and start back up the street. Yet his prior good spirits were spoiled by a sense of disappointment and an aching need to swallow his pride and return to her. For a moment he'd thought her truly interested in him again. Ha, what a fool he'd been. But no woman in her right mind, whether past lover or newly turned courtesan, could possibly desire an ex-convict sorely in need of a bath and a shave, and unable to recompense, bargain or nay, for his pleasures like a responsible gentleman should.

"Please. Do not go," he heard her say in a breathy voice.

Lance skidded to a halt scarcely foiling a painful collision when she suddenly appeared before him in the blink of an eye. Ah, she apparently had wielded some of her witch's craft in order to swiftly halt him. Her cloak had been drawn closed around the perfection of her body though she'd left it agape just enough for him to view one tantalizing breast. She tweaked the rosy nipple bringing it to life and snaring Lance's libidinous needs in the process. Her other hand slid the lower portion of her wrap slightly open so she could caress herself between her legs. The move gave him an enticing view of long, smooth inner thighs and a golden thatch of silky curls perched over glistening womanflesh.

He swallowed a lump of disbelief at her bold public display. Blood rushed faster through his system. His pulse beat loudly in his ears, its tempo in perfect time with her fingers' dance upon her swollen jewel and the bloom of her womanly lips surrounding it. God help him, he couldn't look away if his life depended on it.

She moaned and pursed her mouth, that pink, moist bit of tongue flickering out to beguile him further. "I repeat I am no doxy, and though you deserve throttling for that horrific assumption, as in the past you do not, nor will you ever, require a coin to bed me."

A dark cloud floated over the sun, graying the atmosphere. A squally breeze blew in and tunneled around them. It stirred dust until Lance could no longer distinguish his surroundings. His shaft fully hardened to unyielding stone while his sac tingled, begging for release. She was all his eyes could behold, the only thing visible to him, a stunning porcelain-skinned vision wrapped in her witch's black cape.

Though she had always been an irresistible, enthralling woman possessing magical powers, he had never before experienced this almost palpable energy that at present surrounded her and enveloped him in the process. Suspicious, Lance agonized that he merely dreamed of her image and hadn't been truly released from prison. Intent on the truth, he ignored the commands of his body and instead made a verbal demand.

His heart pounded at this unexpected turn of events. His voice rumbled like thunder as he spoke. "Damn you, tell me this instant, why have you come? It makes not a farthing bit of sense, especially given your absolute absence over this last year. I am filthy and at my very worst. If not for coin you could not possibly be interested in me otherwise, despite our past. What is this intoxicating mayhem all about? Is this some sort of cruel magic you wield? Do I dream?"

"Nay, 'tis very real." Her voice caressed his ears in a raspy, soothing tone. "The truth is... 'Tis I who bartered for your release."

He gulped. "You? You are the one?"

She lifted the hand that had been exploring her vulva and pressed her warm palm to his cheek sending a tingly vibration deep into every bone of his body. Even with the strong enticing scents of the nearby bakery somewhere beyond the cloud that encircled them, he didn't have to inhale to detect her spicy woman's scent. It permeated his senses nearly bringing him to his knees in worship.

"Aye, 'twas me. And I am aware it has been far too long for you. I shall bathe and shave you, and feed you scrumptious foods and sate your long-simmering lust between my thighs. And Nikolai will return this eve and we shall all be reunited." He shivered when she rose up on tiptoe and brushed her lips across his jaw. The heat of her bare

breasts scalded his chest through the thin fabric of his shirt. "Come. 'Tis all you need do. Come with me, my love."

My love? After an eternity of utter silence?

He stiffened, fighting her allure and the unthinkable promise of her words, cruel words of comfort and bliss. Words that could easily tempt any man, much more so a man who for far too long had been deprived of all that she delectably offered.

"Why would you care? Why would you suddenly negotiate for my release from prison one long year later? Moreover, *how* did you accomplish such a feat? I've not heard from nor seen a trace of you since they took me away that night when you, Nikolai and I were abed."

Her nostrils flared. The energy of her instant ire struck him like a coming storm, powerful, heated, dangerous. "*Why would we care, you ask? Firstly, we have* both attempted to lobby for your release. But they would not hear of it nor would the queen or the prison sentries allow us to visit with you. We missed you desperately. We longed to see you and ensure that you were well, but they would not permit it." Her voice lowered to a scant whisper. "And secondly, though they have been partially restored at the moment, by some means after your arrest my powers had been rendered weak, practically useless."

He cared not about her magic, but the fervor of her proclamations rang somewhat true and gave him a niggling of hope. Dare he believe her?

Nay, not yet.

There was something quite peculiar about this situation, and he would get to the bottom of it before giving in so quickly. Lance lowered his voice despite the steady roar of her witch's cyclone that continued to circle them.

"While it would fill me with great happiness to believe you, it stands yet to be proven. In the meantime, I shall query again. How were you able to execute my early release? The guard informed me gold had been paid, but I'm certain the queen would as soon see me beheaded as to accept riches in lieu of my bandit's guilt against the

Crown in abetting with Robin Hood. What is this all about? Why have you come now? Answer me, Isobel."

"Because I need you."

He shuffled his feet and took note that she'd avoided answering the inquiry as to how she'd been able to obtain his release. "*You need me?*" he croaked with incredulity.

"Mmm." She nodded and rose up on her toes to nuzzle her nose against his chin. Her lips were soft and warm as she moved lower and pressed familiar butterfly kisses along his neck while her ample breasts nestled into his ribs. She purred, ever the alley cat in heat. Her hand slid into his breeches and she wrapped her warm fingers around his fullness. He attempted to suppress a series of hisses and grunts as she stroked his rising erection with adept precision. But try as he might to ignore it, she'd already cast her spell of carnality upon him.

Lance shuddered at the sheer ecstasy of being fondled in broad daylight by a supple, willing woman after so long without. His eyes crossed and his lids shuddered closed. He could smell her womanhood rising up to tempt him, almost taste its rich, creamy flavor on his tongue. Hot liquid fire melted in his lower abdomen while a droplet of his seed oozed out and coated her palm.

She knelt and stared up at him with wide, loving eyes. Her hand drew down his garment and his staff sprang free. She ran her tongue around her lips and moistened the plump pillows. Her gaze devoured his cock, and she bent forward and opened her mouth to welcome him in.

Lance stiffened, holding her at bay. His face flamed with shame and remorse. "Nay, I am not yet fit to be tasted. I am in dire need of a bath."

Her cheek nuzzled his length and sent his loins up in flames. "You need not worry. The tingle to your bones that you experienced moments ago when I bathed your face with my woman's nectar? 'Twas a full-body cleansing via my magic." She inhaled deeply and her eyes rolled back behind half-closed lids. "Mmm, and now you smell of clean lye and manly flesh. You are most definitely fit to be devoured."

She did not allow him time to respond but instead closed her hand around the base of his shaft and took him into her mouth. A shocked groan of ecstasy erupted from Lance's tight throat. His body shuddered against her sweet assault. Wet heat enveloped him, alternated by cool swathes of air each time she pulled back to swirl her tongue around the bulb of his rod. The cyclone continued to spin in the periphery, cocooning him in her irresistible witch's aura. He twined his fingers in her silky strands and held her head between his hands while he watched her go to work on him, and listened to her slurps and moans. Still he warred with his pride though it appeared to become entangled somewhere in the cobwebs of his righteous mind. Truly he should halt the assault this instant, for he didn't trust her motivations. But she sped up her ministrations and stroked him with her small hand and her mouth in one practiced motion. After so long without while dreaming of this very thing, he could not muster the strength to deny her or himself. Racked by temptation he finally closed his eyes and let his head fall back with a growl that drowned out the rush of the winds and her lusty song of hunger.

Just when he thought he would collapse to his knees and explode in her throat, she halted her movements. She rose, smiled angelically at him and trailed a finger along her lower lip to wipe clear the moisture that had gathered there. "Come, you must be famished. We shall finish this at Moorland Hall."

Lance gawked at her. His entire groin throbbed, but despite his body's need for fulfillment his previous suspicions resurfaced. He readjusted his breeches to cover himself. "You are up to something, witch. What kind of cruel jesting do you subject me to?"

At his sharp tone she stumbled backward with a gasp. The wind tunnel died down and he could once again view the city around him. She swiped her mouth with the back of her hand, her eyes narrowed and wielding green, glowing daggers at him. "You fool. You dare to lop off the hand that feeds and pleasures you, the very woman instrumental in your prison release only moments ago? The one who once loved you?"

"Loved me? After such deafening silence?" He swallowed a lump of ire that threatened to erupt. "And what of Nikolai? He too has been absent. It seems you've chosen each other over me even though we three were once as one. Isobel, for the love of God, I do not understand. What...what is this all about?"

"We did not choose one another over you and our triad. I've already explained they would not allow me to see you or contact you in any form. Moreover, I've identified my reasons. I need you, you bastard." She spat it out, throwing back her shoulders in indignation as if to indicate he should know that particular need without being afforded an explanation.

"I apologize but save for a possible tumble—which you could obtain from Nikolai or even any willing bloke on the street—your 'needs' evade me. While we shared many memorable moments of 'love' in the past, your sudden and overt generosity perplexes me. Though 'tis obvious my current state of post-incarceration is hardly fitting a lady's attentions, the fact is I am a changed man. I am not the same man who once held you and Nikolai in high esteem."

She crossed her arms under her breasts. The move thrust the mounds upward so violently that Lance feared—hoped?—they might pop right out of the wrap. Her head fell back and she released a melodious tinkle of cold laughter. The motion forced the hood of her cloak to slip off and come to rest upon her slim shoulders. Thick luminous tendrils of gold were revealed from whence they escaped the upswept mass at the back of her head. Despite the remnants of a wanton glint in her eyes, had there been a tiara perched on the crown of her head he would have sworn her to be an innocent princess rather than the iniquitous siren who had just had her mouth upon his tool bringing him to utter euphoria.

"Do you truly think I would offer my love or my...generosity if I were not intending to receive something in return from you, my handsome Lancelot?"

The endearment laced by her sensual, hoarse voice had an intoxicating effect on his organ despite the trace of venom that poisoned it. It was as if she'd doused his cock

with hot whiskey and licked every droplet from his entire length. Indeed, she'd once performed that particular licentious act on him and rendered him breathless.

Lance drew in a lungful of air to cool his ardor and aright the corrupt path of his thoughts, only to be inundated by her intoxicating scent. He must remember his quest to begin his life fresh and unsullied. "While I am indebted to you for your hand in my release and intend to repay every coin, what could I, a convict of only moments ago, possibly have to offer you anymore?"

"Robin Hood," she replied with the lift of a shoulder as if the answer should have been obvious.

"Robin Hood?" he echoed, setting his hands on his hips. Visions filled his head of Isobel and Falcon fucking. Despite the instant quickening in his loins, something about the image had him talking through his teeth. "What the devil? You claimed to not have turned doxy yet you imply such nefarious things. Have you gone daft in my absence?"

"Nay." Her golden brows furrowed while the fire in her eyes intensified. She strolled forward and planted a hand on his chest. Another spill of heat lit his blood and ignited anew in his groin when her warm palm moved in a circular motion over his nipple and brought it again to tingling life as she spoke. "You are well aware I am, always have been and always will be in full control of my senses. What I wish is for you to befriend him once again."

"Nay. Be that as it may, Robin Hood can no longer be my friend." Lance now suspected that given her hand in his prison release, he risked being thrown back in that horrid cell if he did not cooperate with her. But how could he? The woman asked something of him he could not allow to be fulfilled. "I once worshiped him but the hell I've recently endured has certainly taught me to remain on the righteous side of the law."

"Righteous or nay, I require your assistance. You see my love, your friend has stolen something of mine."

Lance gritted his teeth, aware now she'd not spoken of wanting Robin in *that* way for herself, or of a simple rekindling of Lance's friendship with the outlaw. However, she was up to something. "I've already informed you he is not my friend. Furthermore, given that I have been indisposed for what seemed an eternity, your misfortune should be none of my concern."

"Oh, but 'tis your concern."

He let himself cup her small jaw, all the while fighting the urge to cover her plump mouth with his. "How, my stunning wench, could it be?"

"Because in exchange for the fortune I've paid to integrate you back into society, as well as a veritable feast I will feed you, a clean bed and the...charms of both Nikolai and myself, you are going to steal back the item that Falcon seized from me. Thereby that will make it a matter of interest to you." She winked but humor did not sparkle in her eyes.

His hackles went up. He snatched his hand back as if burned. If it killed him, by God, he would not pilfer and plunder again. He would remain grounded by the newfound hope of a law-abiding life. Goddamn it all to hell, he would. "Nay, my apologies to both you and Nikolai but 'twould seem you have solicited the wrong man."

The stunning beauty of her face was clouded over by the murderous gleam in her eyes. "Fine." Isobel yanked her cloak closed so that it completely concealed the perfection of her frame. She tossed her next words over her shoulder with a snarl as she whirled and marched toward the prison gate. "Then I shall visit that vile warden, demand my funds be returned and see that you are thrown back in your filthy little jail cell."

Chapter Three

Christ Almighty, it cannot be. It seemed the sand of his freedom slipped through his very fingers, grain by precious grain. "You wouldn't."

"I would," she shot back over her delicate shoulder. Several shimmering ringlets escaped the pins and cascaded down her slim back. They bounced wildly with each provocative step she took in distancing herself from him.

Away from him and toward the prison gate.

Lance thought to run in the other direction, certain he could have it both ways, freedom from incarceration and accountability to boot. But what if the warden *did* find him and return him to prison? Nausea roiled through his gut. Panting in indecision, his gaze fell reluctantly to her swaying, retreating hips as she neared the iron entrance. The wind picked up and wrenched the remainder of her hair from the confines of its restraints releasing its full length. Thick locks of spun gold tumbled down her back and whipped wildly about her waist as if she were some defiant pirate pacing proud upon her vessel's deck.

Goddamn her to hell, she looked so delectable.

Are you daft? Do you truly want to return to prison? She has offered you her wiles – and Nikolai's – among many other enticing effects for which you have done without for so very long. And all you are to do in return is retrieve a bauble from Falcon? You are foolish if you do not come to an amicable agreement with her.

The queasiness instantly fled as if the strands of her rich hair had stroked and calmed his nerves in a medicinal fashion. Seemingly cured, he instead imagined tangling his fingers in the silky thickness while burying his cock to the very depths of her wet center. Ah, and Nikolai would be watching or pleasuring her from behind as before. *Holy Queen Mary.* Lance's shaft engorged with blood once again at the evocative

images of the three of them in past intimacies. Aye, he could have it all, freedom, a willing wench writhing beneath him, Nikolai's added attentions upon them both, succulent food and a heavenly hot bath. He had only to speak up and halt her before she reached the portal...

His gaze shifted to the prison gate then back to her. He barked out her name. "Isobel."

She spun around, now mere inches from the threshold to hell. "You spoke, my dear Lancelot?" she inquired mockingly. One eyebrow bowed up in anticipation. Ironically, it made him think of the wing of a falcon.

Falcon. Robin Hood.

"Please, I..."

"Was there something you required of me, my love?" she asked sweetly.

"Aye, 'tis your victory. I require your offerings. All of them." He sauntered toward her, never removing his gaze from the ornery gleam in her eyes. "Frankly, I'd be a fool not to."

"Ah, I knew I hadn't erred in financing your release." She drew open her cloak again and revealed that luscious body of hers by way of dangling a prize. With a twitch of her lips she added, "But if memory of our passionate lovemaking serves me correctly, I would wager we are both victorious. Nay, all three of us."

"Mm, a bath, a hot delicious meal," he agreed and swept her ample chest with a hungry look, "and a tumble in bed will most definitely be a triumph for a weary convict. Thus grant me these tempting things and, as you wish, I shall retrieve your precious property for you."

She strolled toward him, away from the prison entrance, her wicked smile widening into tender appeal as she neared. Her perfect breasts bounced and her nipples tightened to tiny rosebuds not yet bloomed. He licked his lips vividly remembering the sweetness of the peaks and the aroused knots tickling his tongue.

As if to read his depraved thoughts, she tweaked one crest between the tip of a finger and thumb and purred, "Hmm, a meager penance to pay for the ecstasy we shall bestow upon you. Come along, thief." She approached and slid her warm hand into his. "'Tis time for you to steal our hearts once again."

He nodded and furrowed his brow as a thought suddenly occurred to him. "Wait."

Her hand did not leave his but she turned to him, proud, braced for conflict.

"'Tis no secret between us — you are a witch."

She lifted a mocking, lovely brow. "Aye, that 'tis verily so. What of it?"

"Why can you not perform a spell of some sort," he asked, lifting his free hand and gesturing in the air, "to burgle back the bauble yourself?"

"Because your 'friend', my dear Lancelot, has thrown up some sort of shield preventing Nikolai and me, or anyone we send in our stead, from breaching his manor." Flames lit her eyes. She pressed her lips together and spoke so faintly under her breath Lance could barely discern her next words. "Hopefully you are not barred as well."

"So, with all that effort Falcon has put into it, 'tis a most valuable bauble then?"

"I did not say either way. You merely assumed."

He chuckled. "You play games with me, my little gorgeous siren."

"Nay. I do not." She tugged his hand, her cape parting when she drew him into her arms. Her breasts branded his ribs while her breath fanned his neck. She had her head tipped back, her eyes holding his hostage, promising him coming bliss if he would but cease his questioning. "Nevertheless you shall see. Your entertainment will come in a much more exciting form than simple games."

Isobel reached up to him, her warm nakedness beneath her cape further blanketing him. She wound her arms around his neck and closed her mouth over his, supple wetness tasting of honey and sin. His head began to spin, his cock to fill with blood. Every curve and angle of her body molded to him like armor. Her feral scent

surrounded him and filled his lungs with the very essence of her sex while her hungry mouth pillaged and plundered his. Her lips remained sealed to his, yet he heard the echo of her distant voice, mesmerizing, chanting some strange mantra in an unfamiliar language. Then in the time it took him to close his eyes, the cloud spun around them once more and he found himself swept up into a realm of wildflower-scented nothingness.

When next he came to awareness his aching muscles were being soothed by the heat of a steaming bath. Isobel stood over him nude, goddess-like, feeding him juicy, tender meat fit for a king.

He scrutinized his surroundings while he chewed and rubbed a hand along his newly smooth jaw. As in the past her chamber was lofty and richly furnished, and he saw that she'd turned down the linen sheets on the massive raised bed near the open veranda door. Fragrant candles were lit here and there, upon the hearth's wide mantle and the heavy oak bedside tables and on a low dresser within reach of the bath.

Wedged in the corner, her velvet-swathed witch's altar smoked with an assortment of pungent incense and herbs. Flames whooshed and crackled in iron structures while carved wooden bowls overflowed with various stones—jade, amethyst, onyx and obsidian. A scattering of rich jewels, locks of hair and bones completed her sorceress's chantry.

The light of the many candles competed with the waning glow of the late afternoon sun slanting through the terrace doors. It swathed her in an ethereal radiance as she spoke. A breeze drifted in and stirred her tresses along with her sultry scent. "There. You are bathed at last and your hunger has been appeased." The flames on the tips of the candles danced, almost as if to support her claim.

"Much obliged, darling." He sighed and leaned his head back against the wooden rim of the tub. Ah, what heaven after so long in hell. Though she had already cleansed him with her magic outside the jail prior to her oral talents upon his tool, there could be nothing in this world quite like a sultry purging of the body and soul by a hot bath.

Isobel set the spoon aside. Water sloshed as she dipped a sponge in the bath and drew up liquid. She lifted it and squeezed so that hot water trickled over his shoulders and chest.

Curiosity got the better of him. He finally asked, "So Nikolai... Where is he?"

"He will be along shortly," she rasped, petting his damp brow with the soaked depurator. Steamy liquid sluiced down his temple and neck. "He is due to return from the sea this night. But until then..."

She released the sponge in the tub and captured his gaze with her beguiling stare. Her hand glided down her flat abdomen and she pushed one finger through her glistening folds before dipping it into her cunt with a hiss of passion. He caught the musky whiff of her juices when she removed the coated, moist finger and slid it into his mouth. He'd almost forgotten the unique, sweet taste of her cream. It burst on his tongue and made his mouth water.

While he sucked, she whimpered. "We shall not wait for him as I'm sure you are near to bursting. 'Tis time to slake your long-simmering lust. Rise and take me to bed."

He gripped her wrist and tugged her closer. "Nay. I cannot wait that long. Get in the bath with me."

She stared at him for a long moment then her mouth curved up in a slow-blooming smile. "You are more wicked than I recall."

"And you," he growled, sweeping her curves and flawless body with a probing gaze, "are more beautiful than any ex-convict could ever wish to sample."

"I am yours to do with as you may," she whispered and leaned down to capture his bottom lip between her teeth.

He freed his flesh and jerked her nearer. "Aye, you are mine. Already my manhood stands as stiff as the very iron gates you protected me from. Now get in. With my loins near to exploding, I haven't the patience to dry off and cross to the bed before I taste you. I'm hungry once more, but this time my palate desires to sample your succulent slit rather than more of the roast duck and bread you've already served me."

"Your mistress hears, and she obeys." She tossed her long hair over her shoulders and climbed in, settling her feet on the bottom of the tub near his hips. Water sloshed onto the slats of the sleek hardwood floor, but Lance was not to be distracted. For all he cared, the bloody tub could tip over. Nay, nothing short of a monsoon could stop him from having her now.

She positioned herself over him almost defiantly and perched her pearl mere inches from his mouth. Though the water had yet to bathe her center, her woman's lips were already slick with a glaze of her nectar. The potent aroma of her excitement had him sniffing deeper. He leaned closer to draw more of her into his lungs and blew on the little bud until she moaned and it blossomed larger, emerging from the protective curls and petals of her apex.

Isobel danced her hands over her hips until they reached her nymphae. She pulled herself apart and arched her lush pelvis closer to his mouth. "Taste of me then. Pleasure me before I die of want."

"I'm certain it will be more my pleasure than yours," he vowed in a low tone.

Lance was desperate to ready her and ultimately get inside her, so he wrapped his arms around her thighs and yanked her nearer. He closed the space between her fragrant womanhood and his watering mouth and delved up and down, through silky curls and petal-soft folds until he found her nub. Salty sweetness burst in his mouth while warm rigidity caressed the flesh upon the tip of his tongue. He would never forget the shuddering of her body or the tortured, strangled cry of ecstasy that erupted from her pursed lips when he pushed further still and sank his tongue into her sopping wet cunt.

Chapter Four

Isobel twitched against his mouth. The initial oversensitivity of her hard nub caused her to start to pull away but instead she gave in to the madness and plunged headlong into his talented ministrations. She thought to conjure up a quick spell to transport them to her bed, but she was loath to for it had been an eternity since Lance had claimed her there with his gifted tongue, and months since she'd made love in a bath. Nikolai oftentimes lived at sea making their intimacies few and far between in the year since Lance had been incarcerated. But Nikolai had learned of Lance's freedom and had resolved to forego his next pillaging quest in order that the three could relive their lusty history.

She shivered. Early in their past three-way courtship with Lance, Nikolai had made no pretense of his rabid desire to watch her making love to Lance...nor of his penchant for both sexes. She had been aware for some minutes that Nikolai had arrived home. He hid watching them, and it warmed and wetted her center to an agonizing state of want. Even now she could feel the heat of Nikolai's gaze on her naked flesh while Lance pleased her between her thighs.

And gods and warlocks alive, she couldn't wait until Nikolai joined them.

Lance's hands and callused fingers were everywhere, kneading her spine and breasts at once, brushing her anus and intensifying her ecstasy. His famishment drove him to an animalistic tempo. He tugged her down into the water and reached between their bodies to stroke her pearl while his mouth claimed hers in a devastating kiss laced by her own creamy juices. He had always been an expert lover, and it pleased her to learn he'd not grown out of form during the solitary time of his imprisonment.

His large hands spanned her hips beneath the water and guided her cunny in a circular motion around the tip of his shaft. Frissons of pleasure bombarded her core

forcing her to break the kiss and gasp. She gazed deep into his eyes, knowing what would come, loving the glaze of sexual lunacy in the dark pools. It wasn't until Lance slammed her down upon his cock and speared her to her very womb, that she dragged her stare from Lance's and located Nikolai across the space of the room.

Nikolai had already disrobed, his tall, lean frame flexing with his movements as he stroked his rising manhood. The corners of his wide mouth quirked up in a mischievous grin and he held up a finger to his lips in a bid for her to keep his presence a secret. Wild lust glittered in his eyes. It made her quake and foreshadowed what pleasure awaited her.

"Isobel, oh God help me, I've so yearned for your passion." Lance's groan sounded muffled as he nipped and licked her neck, shoulder, collarbone, earlobe.

She panted and clenched her inner walls around his length and girth to stave off the coming climax. Sorcerers on high, she could barely speak. "And Nikolai? Have you missed him as well?"

He propelled himself upward, once again burying his shaft to her womb. "Aye, to have back what we three once had would prove to be the ultimate homecoming gift."

Water splashed onto the floor while his ardor fanned the rising flames in her loins. She kissed Lance deeply and moved her attention back and forth between him and Nikolai while she tasted the delicious concoction of sweet wine, the foodstuffs she'd fed him and her own elixir on his tongue.

Isobel hadn't counted on Lance being even more handsome than she recalled, nor had she expected him to be so very virile and strong despite his squalid living conditions. She had decontaminated his body inside and out upon her first spell-touch of his skin, but it had been he who had infected her from the moment she'd looked upon him. Lance had stepped from the prison gates into freedom's embrace, manly and stalwart with a jaw darkened by heavy whiskers and hair nearly as long as Nikolai's. Her breath had caught in her chest and her woman's core had awakened with a need so

fierce and rare, she had bared her nakedness in public, acting in wanton manners even her magic could not tame.

It was then, right there along the wharves of London's busy Thames, that she had realized she'd been in love with him all along. With them both. She pulled back and chewed on her bottom lip remembering that epiphany as it had struck her with a Druid's force. Knowing her heart now, she must endeavor to keep them all together even in the face of the deceit and the dilemma she found herself shrouded in.

But first things foremost.

She reclaimed his lips and looked into his black, fathomless pools while his tongue did wicked things to her center by way of her mouth. Heat spiraled downward from her tongue and coiled deep and heavy within her loins.

"It pleases me to hear you declare such wonderful things. Your homecoming gift then shall be...Nikolai. He is here," she whispered against his moist lips.

"Here? Now?" Lance's head came up. He did a visual arc of the room. She knew by his glazed expression the moment his gaze fell upon Nikolai, proud and masculine, filling the space of the alcove with the lean ribbons of his muscles flexing beneath bronzed skin that glistened by candlelight. "Nikolai," Lance breathed huskily.

"Welcome home, Lance." Nikolai nodded and strode forward naked, his large arousal a veritable sword standing erect from a nest of golden curls. "Ah, seeing you and Isobel there together like that...mm, 'tis a most pleasing sight for my tired pirate's eyes."

Though Isobel had many times experienced the pleasure of espying Nikolai's unclothed form in the previous months, she looked now at him through Lance's eyes. His magnificent body with its wide, brawny shoulders and strong corded legs spoke of his seafaring occupation and prowess. He wore his sun-kissed, fair locks in long strands tamed only by a single thin rope at his nape. Gold loops shimmered at his earlobes and his dark-blond brows, arched now in mock arrogance, were set over eyes of the bluest skies that shone stark against his golden-brown complexion.

"Aye, likewise for these hungry former convict's eyes." Lance slid his dark gaze up and down Nikolai in an appreciative sweep. It finally came to rest upon Nikolai's manhood. Lance licked his lips. His cock engorged and twitched inside her. "A most pleasing sight, indeed."

Nikolai chuckled then redirected his attention to Isobel. "Good evening, my love. I see you've at last succeeded in bringing our old lover to us." He approached the bath and leaned over Lance to plant a delicious, wet kiss upon Isobel's lips. "How did you achieve such a feat in my absence?"

Her blood stirred anew despite his probing inquiry at her obvious deceit. She pulled back to find that Lance had helped himself to Nikolai's rod and closed his hand around its bulk. Lance stroked Nikolai just as he had many times in the past, even as he thrust into her center.

Isobel gathered her voice—she could barely speak with her two lovers so near, so intimate. She replied with a nod, "The queen at last agreed to a hefty payment in trade for his release. And Lance has agreed to retrieve my 'property' in exchange for food and a bit of...leisure with me."

"I do amend that leisure to include you both," Lance murmured in a thick voice fraught by arousal.

"No arguments here, my man." Nikolai slid Isobel a furtive look that said he knew there to be more than a "hefty payment" to Lance's release, and that he was well aware she had been up to something during his absence. But he let it drop in lieu of their long-awaited reunion with Lance, and due to the distraction Lance's ministrations presented. He made a pretense of attempting to get into the bath with them, though Isobel was aware by the ticking of the muscle in his jaw that Lance's fondling was nearly Nikolai's undoing.

Nikolai paused and made a disgruntled face. "Hm, it appears the bath is a trifle small for the three of us. Darling? Might I ask that you do your thing," he wiggled his fingers indicating her magic, "and pop us over to the bed?"

"Certainly." Isobel closed her eyes and mentally constructed the spell before speaking it. "Powers of mine that doth remain, gather and do my behest. Banish all loneliness and memories of pain, follow our newfound quest. Lance and Nikolai, myself and our love, immediately lay us abed. This I command you, oh force of mine, by the powers of sacred stones and brine."

The candle flames on her altar whooshed upward and released an explosive hiss. Within the blink of a black cat's eye, the trio landed upon the soft bed, limbs now dry and entwined. Nikolai lay tucked behind her, his cock snuggled against her buttocks. Lance reclined on his side facing her, his hand tangled in her hair and his mouth open on hers, tasting her with such fervor, she thought she'd die of want. He groaned in unison with Nikolai, who just then slid down and spread the twin flesh of her rear apart.

Isobel tore free of Lance's kiss and arched into Nikolai's face. His tongue speared her anus just the way she liked it, slow and gentle, while Lance wedged his cock between her thighs, probing for her damp center. Four strong hands worshipped her everywhere, tweaking her nipples, stimulating her nub to pebble-hardness, kneading her sensitive skin.

"Take me. Now," she begged Lance, their gazes locked. "Both of you please."

"How can I not after so long?" He pulled her over on top of him so that her knees straddled his hips. His granite-hard shaft rested along his rippled abdomen, the lavender-tinged head glistening and emerged from the foreskin. She positioned herself so her slick labia pressed atop his warm length. Nikolai shifted so that he knelt behind her and between Lance's legs. The scent of candle smoke, salt from the sea and pungent herbs wafted over to entwine with the aroma of their trio of sweat and spicy excitement.

"Love me. Please. Both of you love me like never before." Isobel held up her hair and closed her eyes. A chant of love and happiness ran through her mind.

Nikolai's warm breath fanned her shoulder and neck. A quiver of pleasure suffused her spine. He gripped her hips with the span of his big hands and lifted her forward so

that her damp canal perched over the head of Lance's cock. An explosive moan escaped Lance's throat. He breathed heavily when Nikolai reached beneath her and urged her higher.

She soon understood what had spurred Lance's sudden excitement.

Isobel looked down to find Nikolai's hand wrapped around Lance's shaft so that he could guide Lance's spear to her entrance. He fondled Lance in a manner only a man would know, with the perfect rhythm and pressure, nearly bringing Isobel to release each time he briefly brushed her folds to borrow lubrication.

A warm hand pressed against her upper buttocks. "There, love," Nikolai murmured in her ear. "Take him inside you now." And he plunged her trembling body down upon Lance's manhood.

"Ah!" Lance growled. His eyes rolled back in his head. His body stiffened and he reached up, filling his hands with her tender, tingling breasts.

Isobel shuddered, fighting to keep control. Her woman's cream dribbled out and bathed his groin, wafting up in a fragrance so enticing it made her mouth water. Lance thrust upward and pulled back in repeated motions that increased in tempo. It showered her with a barrage of lust and urgency to match his own. Unfathomable need assaulted her center and stung her nipples where Lance pinched and pulled. Moist skin slapped against moist skin amid the heavy breaths and moans of Nikolai behind her. He gave her rump a few light slaps, adding to their lover's song. The sea breeze grew in intensity, groaning through the open door and stirring the thickness of her hair and the fragrances and flames upon her altar. Her powers coiled tighter inside her, threatening to explode. The range of sensations proved so intense she wondered how much more she could endure before letting go and screaming out in utter surrender.

Yet she didn't want their long awaited reunion to culminate that quickly, to end before Nikolai had the opportunity to join with them.

Still, it had been too long for Lance—he was losing his own thin thread of restraint. He grunted and writhed beneath her, finally letting go of her engorged breasts to dig

his fingers into her thighs and guide her up and down on his rod. The extra force was too much for her to fight. Pleasure gave way to ecstasy, to near euphoria.

She leaned forward, slapped her hands on either side of his head and attempted to subdue his movements if only for a score of seconds. "Lance...Lance," she panted.

His movements ceased. His eyelids rose. "Aye, my love?"

"I understand it has been an eternity for you, but I would plead that you rein in your passion for a short time, at any rate." She paused briefly when he blinked. Isobel couldn't stifle a grin. "Do not forget there are *two* here who wish to share with you."

Her heart thundered within her chest and ached at the glazed, unruly desire and emotion that glittered in his soul, through his eyes. Ah, she'd missed him so, and she could see by the rapt expression that he had missed her as well. His pupils were dilated, further darkening his eyes, and for a moment she thought him under a spell. He shook his head as if to awaken himself from the enchantment and captivity of intimacy.

A slow smile of understanding teased the corners of his moistened mouth. He peered around her shoulder. "My apologies, Nik. I did not intend to neglect you. However, she is much too tempting a siren to resist."

Nikolai's laughter was a deep rumble of delight that carried to her ears and did her heart good. He had rarely laughed with such zeal, not since that horrid day of Lance's imprisonment. His hands branded the length of her back as he spoke. "Think nothing of it, Lancelot. I am well aware life in jail can turn a man mad. But do not tell me you have already forgotten my penchant for standing vigil over your dalliances with her?"

"Forget? Bah. 'Twas all I could think of. Our trio lovemaking in all its techniques haunted every minute of my incarceration."

"Please, let's not taint this eve with horrid memories." Isobel bent and kissed Lance while Nikolai shifted so that he lounged with his head propped on a fist to Lance's left. "Instead, let us focus on our pleasure and joy at our reunion."

And then, once all carnal needs are met, let us go seek out Falcon Montague and demand that my full magic and immortality be returned to me.

"Not a single complaint here," Nikolai replied.

"Nor here." Lance toyed with her nipple and moved inside her.

Her insides stirred much like the stoking of flames. It increased in temperature when Nikolai tangled his hand in her hair and drew her down for a kiss. His tongue was warm and wet and tasty, but he did not stop there with the assault. He guided their kiss to Lance, breaking the seal just enough to draw Lance in to the wicked triangular madness. It was the fevered mating of mouths wrought with the desperation of lovers long denied. Aye, they could each please one another disjointedly and without discourse from the other, but there existed no replacement for the joining of three. Truly, they were as one, a completed puzzle only in the presence of all.

It was why in Lance's absence that her relationship with Nikolai had turned tepid. She saw that now, recognizing it for what it was, yet she rejoiced in the totality of the truth. Never again would she allow the three of them to be parted.

And regaining her magic was the one thing that could prevent it.

The kiss went on for an eon it seemed, while Lance adopted a more measured pace as he slid in and out of her passage. Moans and grunts kept time with the wind and distant sounds of the ocean's tide slapping against the rocky shore below the manor.

Lance broke free first. He panted as he rasped, "Come over me, man. It has been too long... Let me taste of you while she rides me."

Her loins quickened at Lance's iniquitous request. A spill of her woman's nectar escaped her cunt.

Nikolai forced out an unintelligible animal response. His stunning eyes were glazed over with the enchantment of their consuming passion. He pulled in a long breath, went up on his palms and knees and walked his hands over Lance's head so that he was positioned at just the right angle.

Isobel sat up to accommodate him with more space while Lance's shaft remained inside her. She dragged her nails along Nikolai's long, muscled back. On all fours, he groaned his approval and poised his glistening tip at the corner of Lance's mouth.

Lance turned his head and wrapped his left hand around Nikolai's cock. His other hand reached down and squeezed her bum, urging her to move and stroke him off. She planted her hands on Lance's muscled chest. The soft hairs tickled her palms as she gained the leverage she needed. At the very moment she started moving her pelvis in a dance upon Lance, he took Nikolai deep into his throat.

"Oh, Mother of God." Nikolai's eyes were clamped tightly shut.

Isobel detected his attempt to maintain control and prevent choking Lance. The linear cords of Nikolai's muscles flexed and shifted beneath the smooth, tanned surface of his flesh. His body trembled, his firm buttocks tightened. Isobel knew what he wanted, what he needed. She rubbed her hand over one tight mound, gliding her palm down and behind him to give his sac a single gentle squeeze of forewarning. Then she found the taut ring of his hole with her fingertip. He jerked against the circular motion of her finger with a grunt of satisfaction, all the while restraining himself from shoving his cock deep inside Lance's throat.

But she wanted more, to taste what Lance tasted, to feel the silk-covered hardness against her tongue. Lance seemed to read her mind. He reached up, hooked his hand around her neck and dragged her head down and around Nikolai's hip even as he continued to orally pleasure Nikolai. There was barely enough space for her to join him, but they'd done this before and all three knew just the correct position and angle to allow them all to simultaneously enjoy one another.

Lance guided her head around to turn her face cheek-to-cheek with his, toward the head of Nikolai's shaft. She let go of Nikolai's buttocks from behind and instead reached for his ballocks from the front and fondled the tight pouch. He growled his appreciation.

Nikolai briefly pulled his erection back, allowing Lance a moment to speak. "There, love. Afford yourself a sample. It is so very delectable, and feels so good in my mouth." Lance continued to hold the base of Nikolai's rod with his hand, and it was with that control that Lance guided Nikolai's tool to her parted, welcoming lips. She inhaled the

scent of sea and man and that of fresh lye soap. Their breath mingled as one, their lips side-by-side in hungry waiting while huddled beneath that intimate space of Nikolai's body.

She flicked her tongue out and licked the bulbous head before circling around the soft flesh. Salt and a pleasant faint bitterness burst on her tongue.

"Ah, yes," Nikolai growled.

Lance shoved his cock deeper inside her, heating her core and moistening her folds. He then moved his tongue in the same manner as she, though in the opposite direction, thereby meeting with hers at intervals. They took turns sucking and licking the length of Nikolai's shaft, their attempts growing more hungry and insistent. She pumped her hips and stroked Lance with her slick canal. He arched up in response and filled her to her womb, stimulating that sensitive spot deep inside her. Nikolai moved his pelvis in short strokes, taking whatever mouth he could acquire.

The muffled moans of Isobel and Lance sang in unison with Nikolai's alternating grunts and tortured groans and cries of "Mmm", "Ooh" and "Aye, suck me harder."

Isobel thought it to be the most erotic, wicked encounter they'd had yet. With the intoxicating barrage of stimulation—the delicious flavors on her palate, Lance's wet mouth in contrast to Nikolai's hard manhood sliding along her tongue, perspiring skin slapping and gliding over wet flesh, the musky scent of their secretions filling the room, the escalating volume of their love—Isobel knew the culmination of their reunion neared its peak.

"I cannot hold back any longer," Nikolai warned. His body stiffened. His breath caught in his chest for a few seconds before he howled in ecstasy. The deep, resonating sound echoed in the high-ceilinged room.

Her head brushed Nikolai's abdomen when he thrashed in pleasure, his seed spilling into her mouth, salty-bitter, thick, wet and scrumptious. She pulled back and offered the last of it to Lance. He drank greedily and stroked his hand faster and harder along the base of Nikolai's cock.

Isobel closed her eyes tightly and sat back up and rode Lance's rigidity. The pleasure was there, just within reach. His large shaft filled her to the core with each plunging motion he bestowed upon her womanhood. Her breasts bounced, the nipples aching and tight. She could almost reach the pinnacle. Vaguely, she noted that both of Lance's hands gripped her hips now. There came a shift of the bed, a brush of skin to skin, another set of hands on her buttocks lifting her up, slamming her down, urging her closer to bliss. Then a strong hand pressed her forward—Nikolai's hand, she was sure of it. He was behind her now. The spread of his fingers opened the flesh of her bum.

And then his long tongue speared her buttocks. It was as if she possessed another sensitive nub there. Fire snaked through her rear and lashed deep inside her core, meeting with Lance's rod. Her inner walls clamped around him and soaked Lance with her elixir. She twitched and mewled out a witch's song of pleasure. Lance responded with his own guttural reaction, digging his fingers into her flesh. The veranda doors slammed shut and opened even as Nikolai tongue-fucked her deeper, faster, harder. Gale-force winds whipped into the room and lifted her hair, spinning around the three lovers. She heard the candles sizzle and fire whooshed higher with the feeding of her powers. Then it was there, the pure, beautiful rapture suffusing through her system.

Isobel held her arms up and screamed. Colorful beams of light shot from her fingertips and bounced from wall to wall. She chanted a mantra of thanks to the Druid gods and goddesses for bestowing such wonderful blessings on her as these two powerful, handsome lovers. Then the final thrust of bliss took hold, firing into every inch and hair of her body. She rode Lance, drawing out her pleasure, his pleasure, even as Nikolai continued his sweet ministrations on her from behind. Lance filled her with his hot seed, twitching and groaning beneath her. A final lift of power and pleasure surged through her then she collapsed, sprawled over Lance's heaving chest.

"I am so delighted that you are back." She kissed Lance, reaching behind her to fumble for Nikolai. Her hand threaded in his silky, long hair. She tugged until he stretched out next to Lance.

Isobel sighed. Ah, her two princes, virile, handsome, so very masculine and dominant. She was an extremely lucky woman. Only one thing kept her from possessing the perfect life now...the reinstatement of her full powers and her immortality. She clenched her jaw. Damn that Montague! Her magic had surged during lovemaking, but even now in the immediate aftermath, it waned. No more. She would get it back if she had to murder the wily bastard.

Exhaustion overtook her and she could see it did her men, as well. Lance pulled her down between them and they snuggled together as one. But before the clutches of drowsiness dragged her under, she had to secure his commitment.

"Lance?"

"Hmm?" His eyes were closed and his thumb grazed lazily over her upper arm.

"Do you still promise to retrieve my item from Montague this night?"

He threw an arm over his brow and chuckled. The sound was deep, soothing. "Darling, after that amazing dalliance, how can I refuse you anything?"

"Let him sleep, love," Nikolai rasped in her ear. He drew her back against his warmth and tucked her into the curve of his body. "Prison is a trial neither of us can fathom. Besides, I am bone-weary from my sea travels myself. We all need rest."

Isobel trailed her finger through the crisp dark hair on Lance's chest. She rolled a nipple between her thumb and forefinger, delighted when he hissed.

"Aye, I will give you that. But Lance has made a pact with me. I have fed and bathed him, and shown him more pleasure than any ex-convict could ever hope to achieve within an hour of release. Is that not so, Lance?"

"Bel, do not press him. Give him time to —"

“’Tis quite all right, Nikolai,” Lance interjected in a sleepy voice. “I am a man of my word. I will retrieve her precious bauble from the infamous bandit Robin Hood just as promised. Although I hope she will allow me just two short hours to first bask in her soft bed and arms before embarking on that arduous task.”

“Certainly I will.” Thank goodness he had agreed without prodding her for further information. She petted his arm and chest, kissed his shoulder. “Now sleep, my love. Sleep.”

Isobel laid there long into the early hours of dusk listening to their quiet breathing. She planned, she plotted and she prayed to the Druids that her plan saw the light of the morrow.

Moreover, she fretted... Should she fulfill her agreement with Montague made with him by that one messenger who was finally able to penetrate the magic protecting his keep? Or should she obey the bargain with Vychan and the queen? Vychan’s plan would entail first luring Montague to Vychan’s location so he could take the brigand into custody. But she would have to devise some plan to finagle it so that she’d gotten her powers reinstated by Montague first. If she did not then Montague, no doubt out of time constraints or more likely due to spite, would not return her powers to her once he learned of her ruse—the cunning bastard.

In that case, mayhap before going through with Vychan’s orders, she should instead hold true to her pledge to Montague and meet with him between here and his Wyngate Hall ahead of their encounter with Vychan? She, Lance and Nikolai could depart slightly earlier, rendezvous with Montague first, encourage Lance to rejoin his band and in so doing get her powers and immortality reinstated *before* luring Montague to Vychan’s planned ambush location. Then Vychan would proceed to apprehend Montague and thereby leave Lance as a free man. Only then would her life be back to normal. She would have the best of both realms—her powers restored, sweet revenge on Montague *and* Lance’s safety and freedom as well as Nikolai’s continued devotion.

And yet should Vychan discover her alteration of his orders it could mean Vychan's wrath. Her heart hammered at the mere thought of it. She could lose everything. Everyone.

"If you do not do exactly as I say, meeting up at the precise time and location I have bade, and manipulating the outlaw into rendezvousing with you there before I make myself known," Vychan had snarled at an earlier meeting, "I will throw your precious Lancelot back into prison and let him rot until the end of days."

She flipped over and turned her back to Lance. *Oh, God, I just don't know.* Mayhap with some rest, her mind would be sharper and she would be more apt to make the best decision. If only she had her magic back in full, she could simply solve the problem with the flick of her wrist.

Isobel stifled a growl of hatred. But she did not have her complete magic and that was *his* fault.

To hell with Falcon Montague and his bastard League of Thieves!

Chapter Five

The overhead blanket of the deep-purple night sky was broken only by the blink of white lightning on the horizon. The vague rumble of distant thunder foreshadowed the coming storm and temporarily drowned out the hoofbeats of their three mounts. A fresh breeze laden with the sharp scent of approaching rain hung heavily in the air and cooled her perspiring neck. Isobel tangled her fingers in her steed's mane and drew up slightly on the reins. Her stomach pitched and tossed with apprehension. Indeed, 'twould be a storm not only of nature, but of Lance's temper when and if he ever discovered her betrayal.

Yet she would hardly be able to blame him for his rage when the time arrived. After all, in order to seal his promise to assist her, she had knowingly and intentionally deceived him, leading him to believe her stolen token to be a bauble. Guilt grated on her nerves like a pebble in her boot grinding against her instep. In truth, it was her magic and her life she would beg Lance to demand from Montague instead. Why had she not told Lance the truth?

Isobel followed Nikolai's mount and thought on that question. She supposed it was more due to her pride than anything. To beg Lance to save her immortality had seemed overly selfish given he didn't have life everlasting as she did, or would once Montague reinstated her powers. She had assumed given the near-death hell Lance had just endured in prison, 'twould have been tantamount to begging a starving lion to kill for her and demand he hand over the prey without relinquishing one mouthwatering morsel to him. It had seemed quite self-serving even amid her waning health and powers. But it was more the fact that she would be forcing Lance to choose between his longtime friend and her that had the self-reproach eating away at her like one of her caustic witch's brews.

Her gaze wandered across the space as they traveled, devouring Lance from boot to plumed hat. He sat erect in the saddle looking energized and well after much nourishment, a hot bath to ease his aching muscles, rest and their invigorating lovemaking. His long hair escaped the headdress and streamed over his shoulders in a cloak of black. What profile she could discern in the intermittent darkness was wrought by a determined expression, the lips compressed, the eyes hard, the nostrils flared. A wave of warm desire flooded her womb at the memory of their fierce and urgent joining. Against the dark backdrop of Sherwood Forest he exuded the image of a god, able-bodied and heavily cloaked with a formidable air of power and a gleaming, jeweled sword strapped to his hip. Despite his year dispossessed in prison, his body bespoke commanding strength. Isobel shuddered. She only hoped he did not use that strength as punishment against her when he discovered her treachery and selfishness.

They crossed a narrow babbling creek and entered a small copse. Isobel peered over her shoulder, aware she'd allowed Nikolai to veer them slightly off the path Vychan had bade them take in order to lead Montague into Vychan's trap. In her private conversation with Nikolai prior to their departure this eve, he'd done his stalwart best to confirm her previous thoughts that they must rendezvous with Montague *first* and convince Lance to rejoin their band in exchange for Montague's return of her powers and lifeline. Then and only then would it be safe for Isobel to allow Montague to be captured.

Isobel had agreed in the end knowing it was their only option. It made the most sense. It ensured her an honest exchange with the bandit – though either way she chose did not allay the dishonesty she wielded against Lance. He would demand to know why she had lied to him and used him to attain her own goals, and why she had led his respected former partner in crime into the queen's snare.

But no explanation, she was certain, could prevent him from walking right out of her and Nikolai's lives once he understood the full impact of what they had done.

She clamped her lower lip between her teeth and urged her mount up a small embankment to the plateau of the grove. *But I love Lance. I cannot live without both of them, yet I cannot live without my magic, either. What am I to do?*

"This way," Nikolai said in a hushed voice. He waved Isobel toward a large mass of brush. Distant lightning briefly illuminated his handsome face. His eyes shone with encouragement, love and the knowledge of what they had planned together. Nikolai was just as guilty as she, and yet Lance would not hold him nearly as responsible. After all, Nikolai did it simply because he loved her and he did not want her to die.

Aye, what that damn Montague had not given her the opportunity to explain before he had vanished with her lifeblood in his hands, and what she hoped Lance would understand, is that if she went a fortnight longer void of her immortality and without her full powers reinstated, she would die.

* * * * *

A whistle rent the forest. "I am here." Montague's deep voice came from the direction of a cave at the far end of the clearing.

Lance smiled and opened his mouth to speak. But his expression transformed from initial delight to suspicion. He barked, "Falcon? Is that you?"

Montague moved forward on his mount just enough out of the mouth of the cave to allow him to be sporadically illuminated by the escalating flashes of lightning. Wind howled, and somewhere in the distant forest a wolf cried in warning. Isobel stifled a shriek at the ominous picture the man made. As his name Falcon implied, his brawny length was surrounded by a dark Lincoln-green cloak spread about him like the wings of a raptor in flight. Beneath its protection he was clad in a deep brown leather jerkin, a codpiece secured to his waist over black braies and knee-high riding buskins. A longbow fashioned with iron-tipped arrows jutted up behind a feathered woodsman's hat tipped upon his fair head at a most arrogant angle. It shadowed his handsome

features but did little to hide the glow of his piercing forest-green eyes through the black mask that stretched across his strong-boned face from temple to temple.

When silence met Lance's inquiry, he jerked his glare to Isobel. "What the bloody hell is this all about? You informed me that our destination was to be his manor, Wyngate Hall, and that I would breach his walls to retrieve your trinket without his knowledge. You led me to believe he was unaware of our approach. Why is he here?"

Isobel could not speak. She swallowed a lump of shame.

"Answer me, milady. *What the bloody hell is this all about?*" Lance roared.

"Shh, shh," Nikolai hissed, glancing about to reassure himself they were alone. "Keep quiet, man, or you'll give our location away to Vychan."

Lance whirled his mount and rounded on Nikolai. He growled through his teeth. "Ah, so you as well? You are a part of this—this trap or whatever 'tis? What is this all about? I demand to know at once. And what does the queen's puppet Vychan have to do with this?"

Lance gazed over Isobel and Nikolai's shoulders. He gave Falcon Montague, or "Robin Hood", a withering stare, and Isobel knew he wondered as did she where Falcon's sidekick "Little John" Lawton lurked. "Montague, confess your indiscretions. What are you—all of you—about?" Lance demanded again, leaping from his mount.

Isobel and Nikolai dismounted as well. Their boots snapped twigs and stirred up the aroma of pine needles and leather.

"If you recall, John *invisilated* me to your cell many, many times over the last year," Falcon replied. He crossed gloved hands over the horn of the saddle and spoke as if they resumed a recent conversation. "Yet you continued to refuse our assistance—from the onset 'twould have been a small feat for John to merely *invisilate* you out of your filthy jail cell and into the arms of freedom. Still, you professed your need to pay honorably for your transgressions and shed yourself of a life of thievery, thereby turning your back on your friends and the poor folk we fight for."

Thunder rolled in with angry volume. A jagged white streak snapped overhead and a strong gust of wind yowled through the trees. Tiny cool droplets of rain began to pitter-patter on the overhead leaves and mist Isobel's hood and cape. She shivered, not at the dampness, but at the discourse that built between them all. She should never have made up the cockamamie diversion plan that Lance would break into Montague's manor to retrieve the "object" he'd stolen from her. Why hadn't she simply told Lance the facts? It was very apparent things were not going as planned, and she should have known 'twould be this way. In truth, she hadn't felt it fair of her to pressure Lance by way of guilt into helping her to attain her needs and her life. Making her goal a simple bauble had seemed far less...dire and easier and much less selfish to attain than saving her life. And that is why she supposed, along with the certainty that he would have refused to rejoin the League of Thieves at all costs and further complicate her goals, that she had not bequeathed him with candor.

'Tis why, in part, she stood here watching her witch's life practically pass before her eyes.

Falcon continued his lecture. "Therefore given the fact your prior loyalty and expert talents have been sorely missed, we—that is, John and the old wizard Lorcan and I—thought the best tool to refresh your memory as to where your true heart lies would be to dangle your former lovers in front of you and hope they nudged you back in our direction. We do, by and by, apologize for using Isobel as a tool in the process, but your stubbornness left us no choice."

Lance removed his hat and folded his arms over his chest. He glared at his lovers, and his stunning handsomeness struck her, leaving her breathless for a moment. But his ire overrode it. She let out a pent-up rush of air.

"You. You both." Lance seared Isobel and Nikolai with blazing eyes that had her perspiring along the back of her neck despite the cooling winds. "I cannot believe you would betray me thus and unite with them."

"But Lance, we—" Isobel began, only to be interrupted by that cad, Montague.

"They only wished the best for you. They desired to see you released from prison and back in their lives. Now put that aside, man. Listen here. Time is of the essence if you hope to remain free. The old wizard Lorcan has finally succeeded, at my dear wife Salena's continued badgering, to provide you protection against any future capture and incarceration – that is, if you agree to rejoin our party."

At mention of Falcon's sweet, kind wife, Lance tumbled into the comforting memories of his childhood and emergence into manhood.

Ah, yes, Salena. I do so miss her. She was such a wonderful, beautiful ray of purity amongst all the unlawfulness and –

"I'm aware you respect and miss my wife," Falcon said, interjecting Lance's thoughts.

Raindrops fattened and pelted the sword strapped to Lance's hip with a song of *ting-ting-ting*. He thumped his fist against his thigh. "You are well aware I detest it when you invade my thoughts. Cease your antics now, man, or I shall race out of this God-forsaken forest and never return."

"My apologies, dear chap," Falcon replied with an arrogant snuffle. He flipped up the collar of his cloak and hunched beneath its woolen protection. Next he readjusted his plumed hat and yanked it down to ward off the rain. His glittering eyes were barely discernible beneath the rim, his long, flaxen hair streaming around his shoulders and chest. "But 'tis sometimes difficult for me not to hear those thoughts in question when you are practically shouting them out from across a short space."

"Hear this. I do not have the luxury as you and John do of immortality and various powers, and consequently I cannot halt my thinking processes. I obviously have very important matters on my mind. Therefore if you would be so kind as to, at the very least, refrain from commenting on them, 'twould be greatly appreciated."

Lance scoffed at himself. *Oh, you must jest. Falcon cannot refrain from anything, such as manipulating an honest lady by stealing her bauble for his own gain.*

Falcon crossed his arms over his wide chest, mimicking Lance. His leather jerkin squeaked with the arrogant move. His gaze shifted to Isobel and he arched one eyebrow. Good, he'd heard Lance's silent judgment.

"A fair enough assumption," Falcon conceded, once again in response to Lance's thoughts. "For you, anyway. However your comment regarding Isobel being an honest lady is an entirely different tale."

You cad.

"I beg your pardon?" Isobel said to Falcon in an affronted, high-pitched tone.

"A cad I might be to some, Lancelot, but I do not jest, and I most certainly *can* refrain when I so wish."

"How dare you read my mind again?" Lance retorted, his voice booming across the clearing.

"Ooh!" Isobel screeched, causing her mare to toss its head and snort in protest. She stomped her foot on damp leaves stirring up the musky scent of earth and rain. "I see the way of it now. You are a mentalis wizard. Well, you stay out of his thoughts—everyone's thoughts. That is deceitful and far from chivalrous."

"My apologies, Lady Fitzjames, I typically attempt to respect the fairer sex and refrain from invading their wayward thoughts. But truth be told, 'tis you who has committed deceit within that witchy mind of yours...against a man you claim to love. You see, since you have brought Lance to me," Falcon said matter-of-factly with a disdainful bow while continuing to sit upon his steed, "then the bargain is nearly fulfilled by your own devious plans. He need only accept my offer of employment before the queen's men arrive."

Nikolai had been standing aside with his fists clenched. He finally spoke up, his jaw clenched, his nostrils flared. He leaned toward Montague. "Nay, 'tis you who has conducted yourself with dishonesty. Stealing a lady's much-needed powers from her for your own gain and backing her into a corner not of her own construction."

The truth of what Nikolai claimed sliced through Lance's gut.

"Hold your fire one goddamn minute," Lance interjected, lifting up both hands. "What's this of powers? Do I comprehend correctly? You have all brought me here as an exchange in a bargain—my agreement to become one of your rogue partners again in barter for the return of Isobel's powers? Her *powers*? But Bel, you have been casting your spells and such all day and eve."

She pressed her lips together seeming to suppress the urge to scream at Montague for persuading her to join in his debauchery. "Aye, but Montague arranged it so that I could only perform in your presence."

"'Twas Lorcan's doing, actually," Montague mumbled.

Lance angled toward Isobel. He was unable to help himself. He gripped her upper arms and shook her. "So 'tis true. You thought to trade me and, with a bit of luck, my oath to return to the League of Thieves—and all for selfishness, for your magic?"

"Well, aye, but—"

Were they all daft? "How *dare* you?" Lance demanded of the woman he thought he'd loved. When she only stared up at him in horror, he released her as if she'd suddenly infected him with the fever. How could he love a woman who betrayed him so, and all for her own self-seeking gain?

Isobel's arms seared where Lance's hands had branded her. She whimpered at his sudden discharge of her and the scathing tone to his voice. It rumbled and echoed over the intermittent roll of thunder. Rain poured harder, faster, wetter, colder. White vapors erupted from his open mouth and flared nostrils. If she didn't know better, she would think that in all his rage, it also escaped from his ears.

She raised her chin a notch even as a tear stung her eye. "I am truly sorry. Were I to be faced with Montague's trickery again, I would simply live the rest of my days void of powers."

Lance scoffed. "Such a horrible sentence, especially when compared to life behind filthy bars. How could you? I thought you both cared for me."

"But I do! 'Tis why I lobbied for your release. I could not bear to think of you locked up in that hellhole being treated like a beast. I love you, Lancelot. I love both of you, and I don't want to be without either of you." Isobel closed the space between them and placed her hand on Lance's forearm.

Lance flung her hand aside so violently, she heard a crack in her shoulder. "Do not touch me. And while you're at it, I demand to know why you've weaved me into your witch's lair, only to cut my manhood down to a stump and trick me into becoming a thief again? I agreed to retrieve your 'bauble', a simple enough one-time feat, but to trick me into risking my life again and returning to that sordid way of existence, to always have to look over my shoulder and worry I could be put behind bars again or killed—why, that is unfair and plain selfish of *both* of you to expect that from me. It negates my release in the first place and puts me right back where I was."

"Lance, let me explain. I think once you hear of the root of all of this mayhem, you will understand." That from Nikolai, who until this moment had apparently been allowing Isobel the majority of the reins. But now, judging by his enraged, scarcely controlled expression, he would not hear of Lance's wrath upon Isobel one second longer.

Lance whirled on Nikolai, his teeth bared, hands fisted, eyes blistering with ire. "Nay, you can all go to hell. I cannot think of one single excuse that could possibly explain why anyone should be allowed to dupe a loved one in such a fashion."

Nikolai clasped Lance's elbows and shook him. "Silence. You are jumping to high conclusions. There is a very good explanation for—"

Lance howled and flung Nikolai's arms aside. He clenched his teeth and tackled Nikolai to the ground.

"Lance, no!" Isobel shrieked.

"Bloody hell," Montague grumbled. He leaped from his mighty Friesian and crouched beside the tangle of limbs and pummeling fists. "That is enough."

When they continued to snarl and roll and choke one another, Montague hovered his hands over their heads. Isobel had seen various forms of magic in her time, but never had she witnessed colorful twin rays shooting at will from a man's eyes. But more so than that astonishing occurrence were the seeming results. Their bodies slumped, Nikolai sprawled atop Lance.

Ah, clever and truly unique. A sorcerer's calming talents via the eyes. An endowment to be envied by any practicing witch, Isobel most definitely included.

Isobel knelt at their sides. The storm raged overhead while rain poured down, soaking through her cape and chilling her to the bone. Yet she did not notice, did not care. She needed to be assured this change was temporary and had no lasting affects.

"What have you done to them?"

"Just giving them time to think about this, to see that they are only making it worse."

"Nay, I have made it the worst it can be. 'Tis all my fault." She sniffled and started to reach for them but Montague held up a halting hand.

"Wait." His eyes beseeched her, twinkling like two large gems in moonlight before looking down upon the two men frozen in time. "I am not certain if your temporary witch's powers will hinder the spell, therefore please do not touch them yet. Let me complete this so that we all might come to some sort of mutual agreement."

Isobel could only nod. What else was she to do? They must speed things along. Vychan most likely neared.

Montague's eyes snapped upward, spearing her with shock through the slits of his mask. "So 'twas not a ruse Nikolai played upon us? 'Tis true, Vychan is near?"

Och, he'd read her thoughts again.

"Aye." A tear finally rolled down her cheek. It was hot in contrast to the rain, but it did little to warm her heart. "My apologies to you, Mr. Montague, but I have betrayed you as well. I have led you into the queen's trap in exchange for Lance's release from

prison. In fact, if your capture is not completed by Vychan and his men this night, Lance will be forced to return to his cell. And I cannot have that."

He blinked, his body neither flinching with alarm nor tightening in deserved anger. "You love him that much, to put him in the position to sacrifice an old friend for his own freedom and your magic?"

She understood his words were born of sarcasm, but she also heard the tenderness and understanding beneath the caustic tone. As convoluted as her plan now sounded to her own ears, he had found the kindness not to blame her, for he knew he'd had a hand in her predicament.

She crumpled to the wet earth and sobbed. "I am sorry. I am so sorry to you all. I should have simply minded my own affairs and accepted my fate. Oh, Gods in the heavens, what have I done?"

He reached across Nikolai and Lance. His hand was firm and warm upon her slumped shoulder. He held it there in silence until she raised her damp face and met his gaze.

"Nay, I am the sorry one. 'Tis *I* who started this entire debacle by stripping you of your powers in order to have him back. Ah, but the stubborn chap refused to be rescued by John and me on several occasions whilst we visited him in his cell, instead taking the route consisting of paying his penance, which I must admit is the most honorable thing I've ever witnessed in all of my centuries of life." He shrugged. His wide cloaked shoulders and white puffs of breath reminded her of a lion crouched and prepared to attack at any moment, so in contrast to his kind tone of voice. "At any rate, as with you, my intentions were good but my execution flawed and selfish. I've known and adored Lance since he was but a lad, and I merely missed my good friend and felt responsible for his incarceration. I longed to have him back riding with us once again—he is quite the skilled bandit, you know?" Falcon added a rueful grin that made the corners of Isobel's mouth twitch in spite of herself.

She sighed. "It looks as if we are both to blame, and here," she added, nodding down at them, "we have hurt those we love the most. Please, let them loose now. I shall simply accept my fate and move on, as should you."

Falcon set one hand on Nikolai's head.

Nikolai's body trembled. He planted his palms on the soggy earth and raised his head. "Nay, you wily fox. We cannot leave it as is. What you do not realize is that Isobel is withholding one dire fact from you. Without—"

"Nikolai. 'Tis over. As I have said, I accept my fate. The important thing is that we need to get both Lance and Falcon away from here before Vychan arrives and apprehends them both."

"Nay. I will not hear of it. I refuse to give in to that madness." Nikolai shook his head vehemently. His narrowed gaze sought Falcon's. "You are called Robin Hood, the infamous bandit who steals from the wealthy to provide for the destitute, a most honorable cause, I do admit. But 'twould seem in this instance you've done the opposite without being aware of it. You see...Isobel must have her powers and immortality reinstated within a fortnight or she will die."

"What's this you say?" Falcon demanded on a gasp.

Nikolai climbed off Lance's still form and swept Isobel into his arms while both remained kneeling. Though the warmth and security of his solid body proved comforting, she could not allow it. She pushed against him and said, "Nay, Nikki. I will not do this to him any longer. I was wrong—we were wrong. I see now how important it is to Lance to remain law-abiding. I do not wish to die, but I...I will accept my destiny for him. Falcon can keep my magic and Lance can remain free and uncorrupted."

A strangled moan erupted from Lance's throat. His eyes were unblinking against the downpour. Falcon touched his shoulder and Lance sprang into movement.

"You will die?" Lance came up on his haunches before her. He held her face in his hands. "You will *die* without your magic? That is what this has all been about?"

"Aye." Nikolai sat back on the damp ground and propped an arm on an updrawn knee. He let out a rush of air through pursed lips, combed a hand through his soaked tresses and snared Falcon with his cerulean gaze. "You departed hastily the night you stole her lifeblood from her. Thereafter, the shield you or your wizard friend erected around your keep would not allow either of us, nor any messengers we sent, save for this last one to summon you here this night, to breach it and inform you of the dire situation. So you see, we had no choice but to go forth with seeing to Lance's release and deceiving him, for we could only succeed in attempting to draw you out this eve, and only with promise of presenting him to you. 'Twas, from our view, the only alternative."

Falcon cleared his throat. "My apologies to you all. But no harm, no foul. I shall simply call upon Lorcan to assist me in reinstating her."

"What more can we say at this disastrous point but 'apology accepted'?" Nikolai got to his feet. "Now, you must hurry. Vychan is near. I can smell his stench and feel the evil chill in the air."

"Hm, let us hope John arrives soon." Falcon rose and scanned the wooded surroundings. "Without him to *invisilate* us out of here and to Lorcan's location, we could be facing trouble..."

Lance gathered her close. Though his garments were cold against her cheek and breast, the warmth of his heart permeated her soul. "Had I known... Oh, Father of Christ, had I known it was a matter of your life or death I would have stolen the entirety of the queen's coffers for you."

She cupped his handsome face and kissed him, fierce and hungry. The relief that flooded her system at his understanding and forgiveness was worth more than the gift of life her restored powers could ever give her. "'Tis all right, love. It has been a mad mess and none of your doing. What is important is that we are all back together and I shall have my two—"

The drone of the arrow rent the air seconds before Isobel's eyes snapped wide and pain lanced her side. She jerked and the air was forced from her lungs in a groan. A thick wetness welled up in her throat, and she coughed against the rising discomfort even as she continued to behold Lance's surprised gaze. Isobel didn't realize the full impact of what had happened until she looked down and saw the crimson stain soaking her gown beneath her cloak.

Lance's face swam before her vision. The dizzying drum of hoofbeats sounded scarcely before Vychan and four of his soldiers burst into the clearing. "Halt! You are all under arrest in the name of Queen Mary!"

She grappled for a hold on Lance's shirt. He caught her against the wall of his chest. "Isobel? Isobel!"

Her breathing became ragged and gurgled while her vision narrowed into a pinpoint. Nikolai scrambled to hold her from behind, she knew by the familiar warmth and the thick emotion and urgency in his faraway voice. "Oh God, Montague, can you not do something? Quickly!" he barked.

She sucked in her last breath and whispered to Lance, "I'm s-so sorry, my love..." before she gave in to the cold darkness of death.

Chapter Six

“Wake up, darling, wake up.”

“Isobel, can you hear us?”

She came to by the sting of gentle pats upon her cheeks and the blessed sounds of both Lance and Nikolai’s concerned voices to her left. Gradually, she became aware of a tingly heat-cold sensation and the press of a large, warm hand at her right side.

The storm had ceased, its rain now a cool mist upon her face. Isobel inhaled, wondering where the blockage in her lungs had gone to, and relieved that it had miraculously vanished during that dark void of nothingness. Another easy breath, deeper this time, and she detected the unfettered, woodsy and unfamiliar scent of a man.

“How do you do, my stunning witch?”

Her eyelids rose slowly to fall upon the source of the deep, sensual backwoods English lilt. There, seeming to hover above her like a rugged archangel, kneeled the ethereal sight of a darkly handsome giant shrouded by lunar light. The full moon hovered over one of his shoulders and a sprinkle of stars scattered the sky beyond forcing their way through waning gray clouds. His eyes were an azure blue discernible even by the dim lunar light, and his powerful body dwarfed hers making her feel slight, feminine, safe.

“W-who are you?” she croaked.

He smiled rakishly, his teeth a stark white against the olive tone of his complexion. He wore upon his head a woodman’s feathered hat almost identical to Falcon’s. His blue-black long hair escaped the headpiece and streamed behind him in the breeze stirring that unique aroma again, emphasizing rather than softening the fine-boned, masculine structure of his arresting face.

"I am known as Little John, or John Lawton if you wish. You might have heard of me in relation to the infamous scoundrel, Robin Hood?"

"Scoundrel? Eh, you can go straight to hell, my supposed soul-brother." That from Falcon. He hovered somewhere behind Lance and Nikolai, therefore she could not see him, but his added chuckle told her his comment was of the good-natured sort rather than ambivalent.

Isobel glanced about the forest clearing noting Vychan and his soldiers were frozen upon their mounts. Apparently Falcon had used his catatonic eye beams on all of the soldiers and their beasts at some point immediately following her loss of consciousness. John must have arrived shortly thereafter.

"This man has saved your life, darling," Nikolai offered, leaning down to kiss her. The gentle brush of lips smoldered the coals of desire that had previously vanished during all the danger and excitement of her shameful, devious plans.

"Aye, your gallant knight," Lance agreed, taking a turn at a kiss for himself. She stifled a moan when his tongue traced her open mouth and dipped between her lips to spar with hers. He lifted his head and stared deeply into her eyes. "He has disencumbered you of the deadly arrow, healed you with the touch of his hand and brought you back from the brink of death. For that I am most grateful."

She shifted her gaze to John. Gratitude beset her. "Thank you, sir, for your generosity. I am most appreciative and forever in your debt."

John stared back at her with humble directness. His voice held a strange trace of seeming exhaustion. "'Twas my pleasure, milady."

"Isobel, darling," Lance said, petting her hair. "Would it be wrong of me to request a favor of you?"

"A favor?"

"Aye. Having ridden with them for the majority of my life, I'm aware that when John performs his *invisilation* travels and healing by touch, it saps his immortal energy."

Isobel had never heard of such extensive sorcerer's talents. She thought to never admit such a fact, but clearly her magic was of the most elementary sort. She studied John. Indeed she noted a vague sheen of perspiration upon his brow, as well as a peaked look about his eyes. At closer inspection, she also detected excessive tautness to his body, as if he fought to hold himself aright.

Compassion assailed her. She raised her hand and cradled John's warm whiskered cheek in her palm. "Without a doubt, Lance is right. You do not look well. What ails you, my chivalrous knight?"

"Healing you, it has drained him," Lance blurted out. "A kiss, Isobel. A kiss is all he needs. 'Twill energize him enough for him to be on his merry way."

Ah, she understood now. Using her own powers always did the opposite, revitalizing her with each spell she cast. However, apparently this giant of a man John had been plagued by the reverse.

"If I were in possession of my powers, I could fix your ailment with but a fleeting spell. But since your wily friend here stripped me of my magic—which he did promise to eventually restore with the help of Lorcan—then a mere kiss is the least I can do for a stranger who has saved my life."

She sat up and wound her arms around John's strong neck. He gathered her close and murmured something unintelligible. Their eyes met and melded emerald to sapphire with a gaze of mutual respect, appreciation and baser attraction. His body trembled with exhaustion. He collapsed from his haunches to his knees but did not let her go, nor did his eyes leave hers.

"Thank you," he whispered.

"No, 'tis I who should thank you. I owe you my life. And a kiss..." She lifted her mouth to his. A sigh escaped her throat and her eyelids fluttered shut when their lips met. His mouth was soft and dry, gentle and hungry. As she yielded, so did he. Their bodies were merged together as one. Lost in the carnal web of it, the curses and moans she heard from all three onlookers were but distant hums. John tasted of sweet wine,

and it was with each passing second of sparring tongues and rising heat that she became intoxicated by his prowess and some other force she had never experienced before. John stood and dragged her up with him, never removing his mouth from hers. Her woman's center nestled over his hardening cock...aye, the most enormous shaft she had ever encountered. Her core wetted with ardor, fanning out in all directions, rising hotter and more intense with each passing second.

Then she became steeped in a combustion so powerful, so euphoric, that it tore her from John's grip. She stumbled backward, as did John. He wiped his mouth and looked at her in wonder.

"Lorcan alive, that was the most invigoration I have ever received from any kiss." He blinked and looked at her as if she'd just grown horns.

Mayhap she had. Leastwise, she *felt* as if she had. Isobel ran her hands down over her tingling breasts and hips. Her body zinged with fire and she sensed strength within her like never before. Aye, the sizzle of her restored powers practically singed her soul.

"I have my magic back," she said in marvel. Her fingers traced her lips where they still ached deliciously. "The kiss...it gave me my magic back."

"And I feel stronger than ever," John replied, his eyes wide and disbelieving.

A sudden boom sounded overhead followed by a whistle that transitioned from high-pitched to dull. A cloud of lavender smoke appeared, and as it dissipated Isobel saw the most astonishing sight. A mumbling old man in a black monk's robe staggered out of the mist and onto the earth.

"Aha! So my spell worked," he said in a gruff voice as he dragged his slight feeble form off the ground with the help of a crystal staff.

"Lorcan. I had a feeling you would be arriving soon." Falcon crossed his arms over his wide chest and beamed.

"Lorcan," Lance said with a nod of respect. "Good evening. It has been too long, I must admit."

The old man nodded. "Ah, Lancelot, my young man. Aren't you looking as fit as a fiddle, and that even after your long prison ordeal." His garment and long silver hair and beard swayed ghostlike with his body even though he did not move his feet. He stood there gripping the rod in one gnarled hand, the tall crystal glowing like a colossal icicle hung before a blazing hearth.

"I thank you most humbly, sir. And might I introduce you to my partners, Isobel and Nikolai?" Lance gestured with the sweep of hand.

Isobel shuddered when Lorcan's assessing gaze sliced in her direction. She attempted to stifle a gasp. She could see now that his eyes were all white save for the lone black pupils in the centers, and though the mystical spheres exuded heat, they brought to mind two coal-dappled globes of packed snow.

"Aye, I have been watching very closely in my looking glass. Two most fitting, beautiful persons and a good match to your...unique desires."

"Whilst you speak of desire, old man, might I ask what sort of spell that was?" John stretched and flexed his burly arms over his head. "Gods of all men, I feel like I've been given a new soul."

A gold and emerald medallion hung about Lorcan's neck and dangled to his chest. One wrinkled hand stroked the pendant absentmindedly as he spoke with a chuckle. "Mmm, 'twas a newly concocted charm I brewed up moments ago when I saw your predicament." He narrowed his white, glowing eyes and wagged a crooked forefinger. "Blast it to hell, as the deities of the divine supernatural are my witness, I vow I will best that damn Desmona yet."

Lance sidled up to Isobel and draped an arm over her shoulders. Nikolai mirrored the move on her opposite side. Contentment and love bloomed behind her breastbone at the protective gesture and wordless pledge of commitment. Her throat ached with the overwhelming emotion of it.

"Desmona is a sorceress enemy who thwarts Lorcan at every turn," Lance explained out of the corner of his mouth. "Though the old man often speaks in

indiscernible riddles, from what I've been told she has been a thorn in his side for lifetimes."

Falcon nodded, his sensual mouth thinned. "'Tis true. I have witnessed her antics and Lorcan's subsequent grief for centuries."

"Eh, far be it from her to think she can outfox this old wizard. 'Tis rubbish for the fiend to even assume it for a spell's blink." Lorcan growled it as if Falcon were this Desmona. He hobbled over to Falcon and held out a bony hand. "Here. For the two who need it the most."

Falcon received the items in his palm but closed his fist before Isobel could ascertain just what he held.

Steam puffed from Lorcan's mouth and nose. Behind him, the soldiers remained affixed in time, unmoving. "Now. My business is complete on this most recent folly." His black-clad form started to glow and float toward Isobel. She caught the odd scent of him, ale laced with ginger. "Young lass, I must be on my merry way. Now that your life is restored, that is. And your powers, for which I owe you an explanation. They waned prior to this entire fiasco in part because of Lance's absence. You see, as bequeathed by the universe, the three of you were meant to be as one, and when Lance was taken from you, your powers began to go into a state of famine as did your relationship with Nikolai. Falcon merely held hostage what little of your magic remained. So you see, not only did you require Falcon to return what he had taken, but you also needed Lance's freedom in order to live."

Isobel stared at the old man, letting his words soak into her consciousness. Everything was starting to become clearer. Her pulse raced with the wise wizard's proclamation that she, Lance and Nikolai were destined to be a triad, that they could only exist in harmony as three. "Ah, I see."

"However, I must apologize... There was an additional contributing factor once I gave Falcon the means to temporarily withhold your remaining powers in order to get our Lance back. They then diminished further simply because I had been working on

another spell, which you will understand shortly. Falcon holds the key within his hands." His white eyebrows drew together. "That Desmona has turned me into such a daft old dotard, and at times my powers become a bit...fragmented and can take much longer than planned."

"'Tis all right," Isobel replied softly. "I am just thankful to have the three of us reunited, and Lance and my magic returned to me. As you must know they are both very much a part of me. I missed them so."

Lorcan smiled fondly at her. "Aye, aye, 'tis real and proper. By the by, I am much obliged and humbled by your understanding. Now. You take care of our dear Lance—nay, covet both of your passionate lovers."

He winked at her and began to hum an ancient Gaelic tune that Isobel did not recognize. Winds swirled around the party of five, raising their cloaks and hair. Lorcan's small body lifted upward and began to fade then glow again. In one bright flash, he was gone. In his place the cloud of lavender smoke whirled and gradually dissipated.

John strode forward and clapped Falcon on the back. "Well my old chap, how about we pop on out of here ourselves and see if Salena is ripe for some triad lovemaking? The witch's kiss empowered and excited me like never before. Therefore methinks I could use some of Salena's attentions right about now. Hm, what do you say?"

"I concur. But first we must ask something of Lance."

Lance stiffened. "Pardon me?"

"I will get right to the point. You have been sorely missed. We most humbly request that you rejoin our band." When Lance opened his mouth to accept, Falcon cut him off with a wave of the hand, apparently assuming he would reject their offer. "Hear me out my good fellow, hear me out. Now, given your recent release from prison and your reunion with Isobel and Nikolai, you would not have to engage with us on a full-time

basis. We would be most appreciative of as much of your time and talents as we were gifted."

"I...I am most—"

Falcon sauntered closer. Lance caught that familiar scent he'd known since childhood, that of pine and fresh seasonal air. "Ever since you were tried and sentenced, Salena's heart has been breaking for the child she raised as her own, a lad orphaned shortly after our marriage, working his tiny fingers to the bone at an inn—and what a pity, solely for food in his belly and a dry roof over his head. Thus she longs to have you back for visits to Wyngate Hall and reinstated into the family. And that spell Lorcan just spoke of? 'Twas at Salena's insistence. She requested that Lorcan concoct some sort of protective device to keep your past year of hell from occurring once again."

"What's this device you speak of?"

Falcon plucked a ring from his hand and held it up. It consisted of five intricately entwined thin silver bands encasing many tiny stones of various colors. He thrust it toward Lance. "Truly, 'tis more a trinket than a device. Here. Lorcan has blessed it with a spell. You need only wear it to prevent further punishment or capture by the Crown, and to ensure your immortality. 'Tis yours if you should be so kind as to accept it. Leastwise do it for your adoptive mother's sake."

Immortality? Lance stared at the bauble. The jewels glittered, enticing him to accept. It would be so very simple to place it on his finger, ride once again with Falcon and his band of infamous thieves and never fret over incarceration or death again. He bit his lip in indecision. Could he tolerate living forever? His gaze lit upon Isobel, so stunningly beautiful and loving. She had been reinstated with everlasting life, but what of Nikolai? How could Lance in all good faith go on into eternity with Isobel but be forced to watch Nikolai pass away when his time came?

"Take it man, please," Nikolai urged. He moved to stand at Lance's side while drawing Isobel with him. "'Twould solve our problem of Vychan and the queen forever in your pursuit. 'Twas hell without you."

Falcon held Lance's gaze and presented another ring. "Not to worry. There is one for Nikolai as well."

He had read Lance's mind again, but this time Lance did not care. What Falcon offered them was far too precious to become indignant over.

Nikolai's eyes widened. "What's that you say?"

Isobel shrieked and clapped with delight. She crossed the short space, snuggled her breasts into Lance's chest and reached out to pull Nikolai into the embrace. Her eyes beseeched them both. Even through their clothing, Lance detected her warm womanhood pressing into his hip. His staff twitched and filled with blood. Ah, the wicked witch.

She kissed them both stirring embers that had been banked for hours. "Both of you must take the rings offered. Do you not see what this means? I have my immortality back, and now we can all *three* live together into eternity. Never to fret again over death or incarceration or having to part when nature takes her course upon your bodies. Aye, 'tis a grand solution. Please, accept the generous offer." She winked at Lance. "Moreover, you gave me your promise."

"My promise? What in the devil did I promise?"

"That in exchange for food, a bath, a warm bed and my...charms, you would retrieve the thing Falcon took from me."

"But that has already been returned to you," Lance pointed out.

"So very true, and yet not," Isobel conceded. "I've had those powers since birth. It has been much like being in a prison of my own without them. To have you captured again and returned to that Hades would be far worse than 'twas being without my magic. Please, I beg of you both. Accept the rings and Lorcan's safeguard that abides

with it. Please, for me, for the three of us as a whole. And for the poor who count on Falcon and his men to provide for them.”

John shuffled his feet and sighed. “Don’t be fools. Lance, you are well aware deep inside yourself that to ride with us once again would bring you inordinate gladness. ‘Tis you, ‘tis your destiny. You *are* a member of ‘Robin Hood’s’ band of thieves, and we need you just as much as you need us. You well know you cannot change that fact whether behind bars or riding free through Sherwood Forest.”

Riding free through Sherwood Forest.

Lance shivered with merriment at the recollection. Ah, what heaven to hear the pounding of hooves beneath him once again, the shouts of the queen’s men in pursuit, the zing of arrows passing by his ears, the jingle of gold coins meant for the poor townspeople ahead who had been stripped of their meager wealth by that very queen. He had already made his silent decision to rejoin with them, but ‘twas the ring that had him hesitating.

Did he truly want to live forever?

“Lance?” Isobel asked, stroking his jaw.

“Hm?”

“Your decision?”

Lance released a pent-up breath he hadn’t been aware he’d been holding captive in his lungs. Glee slammed through him. He could have it all without further threat, Isobel, Nikolai, his dear friends and everyone’s safety and contentment. No prison.

Forever.

So there he had his answer. He swept Isobel up into his arms and whirled her about. “Aye. Aye, I accept—if Nikolai does as well.”

Nikolai nodded. “You can bet your arse I’m accepting.”

Isobel giggled and threw her arms around Lance’s neck and waved Nikolai to her. “Oh, thank goodness.”

"Here," Falcon said with a grin, offering the ring to Lance as he set Isobel aside. "Put it on. Now. Before you change your mind. And before I set that damn Vychan and his men free."

Lance plucked the ring from Falcon's fingers. His hand shook and his heart raced at the new path his life had taken. When he slipped the cool silver band on his finger, it flashed and lit up the forest. Warmth and the most intense feeling of serenity washed over him leaving no doubt he was protected as promised.

She reached for Nikolai and tugged him closer. He slipped his ring on. It glowed just as Lance's had. Lance saw by the rapturous expression that passed over Nikolai's handsome face that he experienced the same sensations.

Isobel's arms slid around their necks, her mouth kissing one then the other. Lance could taste Nikolai on her lips, just as he always wanted it to be. Isobel then reached down and simultaneously closed her palms over Nikolai and Lance's garment-shrouded shafts and stroked. Her boldness witnessed by Falcon and John sent wickedness streaking through Lance's blood. A tingle of desire arrowed straight to his loins as if Lorcan had beset him with a bolt of magic.

Isobel's voice sounded muffled as she continued to explore their necks with her lips, their cocks with her hands and bring them to stony life. "Begone with you, Montague and Lawton. The three of us, we shall be along at Wyngate Hall in our due time."

"And we shall hold you to that. Ah, but we must get you from here before I release Vychan and his soldiers. John?" Falcon said on a chuckle. "Let us *invisilate* these three back to Moorland Hall, and then ourselves to Wyngate Hall where my most delectable wife awaits us."

"No arguments here. I think after watching these three, I have a penchant for you, Salena and I to do much more than just...mingle. What say you, thief? Are you in the mood to bestow some triad love upon Salena?"

"Mm, a most grand idea," Falcon agreed.

John set his hand upon Falcon's shoulder and gestured for Lance, Isobel and Nikolai to join hands with them. Falcon's eyes narrowed and beams shot from their depths and zapped the sentries and their mounts. Vychan started to shout, but his words were cut off.

The five immortals were gone, vanished into nothingness.

Chapter Seven

Isobel attempted to suppress the urgency brewing within her, but her efforts were for naught. She shoved Nikolai backward until his naked body fell upon the bed. His glorious cock, swollen and veiny, bounced upon his tight abdomen. Without removing her gaze from his rod she waved Lance over, indicating he position himself behind her. Her center warmed. Moisture spilled out between her legs at the anticipation that seized her.

"This year past has been an eternity," she murmured. "At last I shall have you both without all that worry hovering over our heads." She climbed onto the bed and straddled Nikolai's hips. Her soaked folds slid along his cock before finding the perfect halting position at the tip.

Nikolai hissed then reached up and filled his palms with her swaying breasts. "You purr much like a cat that has just snared the elusive bird."

"Two birds," Lance agreed, dragging his hands down her back. He explored her with tender, talented care causing gooseflesh to prickle on her skin.

Isobel clamped her eyes shut to slow down her rising ardor. She could feel her newly returned powers simmering inside her, quivering her soul, threatening to erupt in a tumultuous explosion. Uppermost in her mind were her fierce lovers, yet she became distracted by the knowledge that her manor bustled with many servants just outside the door who might become privy to their thunderous lovemaking. Therefore to enable their privacy, she drew on her new, much stronger magic and conjured up a quick spell to transport them to Nikolai's secluded castle on the Irish coast. 'Twas their favorite remote locale, and prior to Lance's arrest, the three of them had frequented it often.

Oh aye, and their reunion with Lance would be the perfect occasion to indulge in a naughty rendezvous in such a romantic, clandestine setting.

She chanted out the brief spell. Flames upon the altar spat and sputtered. Isobel breathed in the sudden scent of sea salt mixed with the fresh aroma of another coming rain. Visions of the vast clifftop stone structure formed in her mind's eye drawing the three bodies forth and sending them through her spell's path to their destination. Three hawks soared overhead in the night sky while the rays of the waning moon behind them in London gave way to dawn. They approached Ireland in serene silence just as dawn crested. They approached in serene silence. Orange and pink beams slanted across the crag's edge casting shadows behind the keep's walls. Dewdrops glittered on the hillside magnifying the vivid green of the foliage and the various hues of the autumn wildflowers dancing in the breeze. Far below the top of the cliff, foamy waves slammed against the shore and rocks. And further out upon the glistening choppy waters of the Irish Sea, lightning brewed yet again flashing within a roiling cloud of dark gray upon the horizon.

Another mighty storm approached.

With the quick blink of an eye and the snap of her fingers, a fluffy bed appeared at the cliff's edge. She set them down upon its soft mattress. Behind them the castle glowed like gold by the rising sun's radiance, its enormous structure outlined by the stunning countryside beyond. In the distance behind her she could hear the rumble of thunder, and several score of feet below, the rush of the tide added a tranquil ambiance. She now lay pinned beneath Nikolai, their heads at the foot of the bed. Lance stood above them, his feet firmly planted on the earth and his hands kneading Nikolai's back. Isobel's long hair spilled over the edge of the bed and brushed Lance's manhood each time he swayed near.

"What the devil...?" Nikolai's eyelids fluttered open and he glanced about. A bright grin spread across his handsome face. "Ah, I see you're back to your old witch's tricks. A fabulous choice, nonetheless. I've always loved our visits to Ireland."

"Mm, some of the best lovemaking of my life," Lance growled. He kneeled on the grass and ducked his head between Nikolai and Isobel to begin a playful nipping of her neck and face. His mouth covered hers, tender yet ardent. She opened for him, tasting of the ale he'd had in her chamber before their departure. One of her hands tangled in Nikolai's thick strands, while the other reached up to release the tie holding Lance's dark length of hair. It fell in a long cascade around her face and beams of dawn's light filtered through its swaying mass.

Heat simmered in her core, rising in spikes each time Lance's tongue flicked over the tip of hers. She pulled Nikolai down and turned to kiss him, but her need for more overwhelmed her. She drew their lips to hers, together, three soft, wet, hungry mouths merging as one. Nikolai remained atop her but she needed him closer. She spread her legs further and welcomed him to her entrance while tongues darted and chased.

Thunder drew nearer, clapping just out to sea. Behind her closed lids she saw the flash of lightning, felt the cool sprinkle of rain upon her naked flesh.

"We should go inside," Nikolai murmured into their mouths.

"Mmm," Lance agreed.

"Have you two forgotten? We're immortal. No amount of lightning can strike us down. Now please, no more talking," she begged, circling her pelvis just enough to capture the head of Nikolai's shaft and force it inside her. A jolt of desire assailed her center at the very moment another rumble of thunder sounded overhead. "Aye deeper, my love. Deeper."

Nikolai braced himself, the picture of pure ecstasy painting his face. "Ah, but you do so bewitch me, just enough to tempt me to stay even if I were still a mortal."

"Christ, just do it. Fill her up. Give it to her." Lance tangled his fingers in Nikolai's hair and yanked his head up. They kissed, their strong-featured faces reunited in manly desire after that lengthy year without. Their heavy breathing fanned her cheek, and the entwined masculine aroma of her two men filled the space around her, overpowering the strong scent of coming rain.

Nikolai rocked forward, slid further inside her and buried himself to his groin. He grunted into Lance's mouth even as he plunged time after time into her soaked canal. Her slick walls stroked him in turn as she began to move in rhythm with him. The bed shook and squeaked. The winds picked up in velocity and flung large droplets upon their perspiring skin.

A coil of fire tightened inside her, threatening to spring free. Isobel suddenly experienced a yen to taste Lance's cock. She reached above her, over the edge of the bed until she located his shaft. It stood as tall, erect and sleek as his mighty thief's sword, and it felt much like the unyielding stone of the castle.

She gave it a gentle upward tug. "Rise, darling. Let me taste of you."

There was no need to coax. Lance broke the kiss and stood up, his magnificent, corded body silhouetted against the coming storm. His thigh flexed when he propped his knee on the bed. He fondled his sac and then gripped his rod, stroking in quick jerks as he sat back on his haunches and positioned his manhood within reach of her mouth.

She turned her head, keeping the tempo of her hips in an upward thrusting motion. Her hand again closed around Lance's erection and she delighted in the feral growl that escaped his throat when she guided him into her mouth. His head fell back as if in worship of the darkening skies when she circled her tongue around the head and slowly filled her throat with him just as she had outside the prison gates. He tasted of salt and clean flesh, smelled of ale and soap. She devoured both men, welcoming them into the orifices of her soul. It had been too long since she'd had them this way, unfettered and free of worry, and she experienced a sudden wash of gratefulness to Falcon, John and the wizard Lorcan for their parts in gifting her with everlasting life, happiness and deep-seated love for both men.

And the forever he had gifted Nikolai and Lance with via the rings.

"Oh yes," Lance hissed through clamped teeth. But he howled when Nikolai rooted at the corner of Isobel's mouth and took a turn on him. Lance could barely speak, his

face was contorted so in ecstasy. "Bloody hell, you both know how to suck a man's cock off."

Isobel had the perfect angle to add more to his rising pleasure. She kept her hips moving in slow rhythm with Nikolai's thrusts, and moistened her finger by slipping it in Nikolai's mouth. Her hand nudged Lance's legs further apart. She gave his buttocks an appreciative caress until he relaxed and allowed her in. She found his ring with her damp finger, delighting in the guttural sounds that erupted from his throat when she toyed with the hole. He widened his legs further allowing her added access. But she knew Lance too well. He would only want it deeper when and if the time was right.

She continued to pleasure him there just on the outside, while Nikolai slid in and out of her wetness. The gust of wind and the distant rumble of thunder made a most carnal song coupled with the moist sounds Nikolai's rod caused when he moved inside her. Skin slapped against moist skin while bodies moved together in rhythm. But a grunt of warning from Lance had Nikolai holding her hips up with the spear of his manhood while he concentrated on sucking Lance harder. Then Lance stiffened. His breath caught. He tangled one hand in Isobel's hair and the other in Nikolai's. It wasn't until she heard Nikolai swallow in gulps and saw the excess oozing from the corner of his mouth that she realized Lance had reached his peak. Looking up along Lance's muscle-bound body and into the ecstasy glazing his eyes brought her such joy that tears stung her eyes.

With a staccato of short breaths, Lance finally removed his shaft from Nikolai's mouth. Nikolai began to move inside her again, this time more urgent and forceful.

Her release hovered there just out of reach. It was almost as if Lance and Nikolai were in league with one another to draw out and delay her release until insanity overtook her. Lance walked around to the side of the bed. His damp hair streamed down his wide back while his corded muscles flexed with each lithe move he made.

Nikolai held himself within her slick walls. He ducked his head and nipped along the side of her neck, distracting her from Lance's movements. She fisted the sheets. Her

back arched upward. Fire raced through her blood. But before she could field that sweet torture and catch her breath, Nikolai rolled over so that she came above him.

He held her gaze for a long moment. His eyes glittered with happiness and adoration. "I love you," Nikolai said in a quiet, humbled tone. "Both of you. Very much."

"Mmm, my sentiments exactly." Lance's tenor came from behind her. She peered over her shoulder and saw that he knelt close to her bum and between Nikolai's spread knees. His hands slid around her midriff, cupped her breasts and rolled the sensitive nipples between his fingers. She nearly came undone. The tingling centered at the twin tips sent a double shaft of desire straight down to her aching loins, adding to the heat at an almost unbearable level. She clamped her muscles around Nikolai's rod to draw forth the coming ripple of pleasure.

Nikolai grunted. His jaw tightened. "Do it, Lance. Now before I explode inside her."

Lance chuckled softly. In his euphoric, temporary insanity, he'd apparently forgotten their torture, that is, until hearing the desperate tone of Nikolai's gruff order. Lance combed his fingers through her tresses and tenderly stroked until her hair hung over one breast. His hands did a slow slide down her sides and gripped her hips. She shuddered when his mouth found the nape of her neck, steeping her in the clean scent of him and the warmth of his breath upon her flesh. Moist kisses trailed over her shoulder, across her upper back and down her spine until he reached the top of her crevice. He nipped and bit her rump, working his way to the center. One large, hot hand gently pushed her forward so she sprawled over Nikolai.

That was when she realized what Lance was about. She heard the sound of his kisses and moans of appreciation, felt a stirring in her womb that had Nikolai moving again, this time in upward thrusts.

"Ah, so beautiful, so very tight and delicious," Lance murmured, his breath searing her hole.

She cried out when he speared her ring with his tongue. The sensation proved mind-blowing, and coupled with the romantic setting and the attentions of both men, it was more pleasurable than she could have ever expected. Ah, indeed she had her magic back. But there was no magic like this, nothing as enchanting and all-consuming as this, as their trio of love.

Nikolai's hands laced over Lance's at her hips. Together they slid her up and down Nikolai's cock while Lance fucked her hollow with his slick tongue. "That's it, my love," Lance whispered. "Open up for me."

It had been so very long since she'd had both of her lovers inside her at once. Just hearing Lance's prodding words conjured up the sensation for her again of what it felt like to be filled by both men at once, front and back, three joined as one.

Isobel obeyed, relaxing her muscles.

"Aye, that's my lady," Lance murmured.

The bed shifted. The warmth of his body blanketed her back. One arm slid around her waist, the other reached behind her to guide his shaft to her opening.

Nikolai held her face in his hands. His expression was strained, almost that of a man on the cusp of losing complete control. "Are you ready?"

She nodded.

"Mayhap you should...cast a spell upon yourself to be certain?"

They had done this only twice in the past. While it had been pleasurable for her in the end, the means to get there had been difficult. Therefore she was aware Nikolai suggested that she magically protect herself from any possible discomfort Lance's entry might temporarily cause. But judging by the excitement and the yearning to be touched within her center, she knew pain would be the farthest sensation she was about to experience.

"Nay, I want it. I want it now. Lance." She caught his gaze over her shoulder. "Now. Please love me, fill me now."

He found her wet hole with his tip and softly, slowly circled her ring. She tightened her inner vaginal muscles around Nikolai, but with a deep breath, she gradually relaxed, opening her rectum for Lance's entry. With his passion just spent, his shaft was not fully thick and erect, and its half-taut state was like a gentle yet insistent kiss there. She concentrated, eased the last remnants of any tension and embraced the rising heat. Her cunt dampened, warm cream soaking Nikolai. He groaned in response, apparently having felt her body's lubricating reaction to her rising passion.

Lance gripped himself to assist in guiding his half-hard manhood. The softened head breached her dilated hole and wrought a harmonious groan from Lance and Isobel.

She released a slow breath and vaguely heard the rumble of thunder in the distance. "More," she pleaded.

"Bloody hell, you look so lovely," Lance murmured before nipping her earlobe. "And you feel like heaven around my rod."

"More," she repeated as gooseflesh shimmered from her scalp to her toes. The quickening in her loins grew heavier and hotter. "Please."

He filled his free palm with her breast and squeezed, further stoking the flames. His other hand tightened around his shaft. "You witch, so passionate and wicked," he said in a strained tone. "You've already got me hard again."

"Do not hold back. Take me, thief. Tame my witch's passion. Claim me, both of you, and consummate our new forever."

"Goddamn it, Lance, I cannot wait one second longer," Nikolai growled.

Lance chuckled softly. His arm tightened around her waist. "As you wish."

Isobel held her breath. At first her body's response was to tighten again, but she relaxed, ready for it. Lance pushed into her inch by maddening inch until he was buried to the hilt in her rear. The fullness in her core proved delicious. She had never felt so whole in her entire centuries of life, even accounting for their two similar encounters in the past. Something was different this time. Perhaps it was the knowledge that they

would have their committed triad evermore, that she would never have to say farewell to them in their deaths as she'd once feared. And now with that knowledge glowing in her heart, to have Nikolai kissing her neck with his hot breath fanning her flesh and his hard body beneath her, and Lance's warmth and strength covering her backside while being filled by them both, 'twas the most amazing carnal experience of her existence.

The stirring within her built. Nikolai slipped out and back in. Lance took his cue and, just as their shafts met deep within her, he pulled out. And so it went, a teetering movement that zinged within her like magic and flame. Their groans and grunts of pleasure filled her ears. Their arms cradled her, their hands set her flesh afire. She reached behind her and dragged Lance's mouth down to hers. Nikolai raised his head, and three mouths and wet tongues devoured one another.

The tempo built. Biting, nipping, sucking, murmurs of love and togetherness. Finally, she could bear it no more. Her body stiffened and her breath became trapped within her lungs. Intense pleasure and joyous madness flooded her center. Nikolai and Lance jerked and held themselves suspended at the very same moment. Hot seed spilled simultaneously in her womb and deep in her buttocks. The flood of her release coupled with the mixed sensations of hardness, slick movement and hot wetness inside her lower pelvis could never be matched before or again. Tears of elation poured from her eyes, wetted her cheeks and fell upon Nikolai's face. He kissed her face dry. Lance did the same, taking a turn on her other cheek.

It was with elation and a curve to her mouth that she shifted, silently easing herself from them. They collapsed in a tangle of limbs upon the bed. She opened her eyes and looked out across the choppy waters. A pastel rainbow stretched from somewhere inland out to the sea's horizon. The storm had bypassed land, but she could still see the edges of its ominous clouds lurking beyond the rainbow's farthest end.

Aye, with Nikolai continuing in his piracy, and Lance rejoining the League of Thieves, she was certain there would be more adventure and mayhem to come in their futures. But Isobel had her pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. Lance and Nikolai

now had their rings of protection and everlasting life gifted to them by the old sorcerer Lorcan, and she had her two lovers and her magic back forever.

What more could an immortal witch desire?

About the Author

Titania Ladley is a multi-published erotic romance author and registered nurse living in the upper Midwest USA with her husband and teen son. She has been published with Ellora's Cave since 2004 writing in various genres, including paranormal, historical, contemporary, male/male, gay/lesbian, menage, vampire, SciFi, and light BDSM. She also writes for Ellora's Cave under the pseudonym Roxana Blaze.

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