

A man with large, white, feathered wings is shown in a dramatic, low-key pose. He is shirtless, with his arms crossed over his chest, and his head is bowed. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the texture of the wings and the contours of his body against a dark background. The overall mood is mysterious and sensual.

# *Fallen Angels*

## Celtic Fire: Solstice Seduction

BRONWYN GREEN

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Celtic Fire: Solstice Seduction

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### **Warning:**

**Warning:** This book contains sexually explicit content which is only suitable for mature readers. This story has been rated *Total-e-burning*

**Fallen Angels: Celtic Fire**

# **SOLSTICE SEDUCTION**

**Bronwyn Green**



## *Dedication*

To Brynn – my very own Angel

I'd also like to thank Matt, Michele, Jen, Mary, Marti, Mary, Cheryl, Margaret, Jule, Manda, Mom, Cait and my lovely editor Claire. I'm so grateful for all of you.  
It really does take a village.

## *Trademarks Acknowledgement*

The author acknowledges the trademarked status and trademark owners of the following wordmarks mentioned in this work of fiction:

Taco Bell:	Taco Bell Corp.
John Lennon:	Yoko Ono Lennon
Imagine:	Yoko Ono Lennon
New Kids on the Block:	SM Productions
Britney Spears:	Britney Spears
How the Grinch Stole Christmas:	Theodor Seuss Geisel

## Prologue

Guns, razor blades, pills, ropes... The options for suicide were limitless. If one was human. Hell, even the vampires had sunlight and holy water.

Taliesin sighed and scrubbed his hand through his hair in frustration. In the beginning, his banishment from Heaven had seemed a lark. As a fallen angel, of course he'd missed his connection to the Divine. It was a throbbing ache that never truly abated, but over time it had dulled.

Humans had quickly filled the void—practically revered him as a god. For a while it had been enough. With his harp, he'd wandered the length and breadth of Britain, performing in the halls of great kings. Legends of his bardic skill still survived today. It was good to be remembered, he supposed. Of course, he had been the one to suggest writing everything down. It often seemed that the most wildly artistic among humankind needed the most guidance.

He'd been more than willing to guide while some of his fallen brethren preferred to thwart. Some had even hated the humans. They'd refused to have any contact with them or worse, sought to harm them. Taliesin merely looked at them as entertainment during his exile. He'd come to enjoy many of them, revelling in the creativity with which their Maker had gifted them.

He'd shared arcane secrets with Cerridwen, advised Arthur and Merlin and seduced Morgan Le Fay...or perhaps she'd been the seductress. It had been centuries ago. He'd imbibed with Byron and Shelley and served as inspiration for Austen. He'd watched Michelangelo, Rembrandt and Waterhouse create masterpieces. He'd listened as Mozart composed his Requiem Mass and while Lennon wrote Imagine. He'd been a sounding board for Tolkien and had read all of the drafts of all of Yeats' work and Neruda's as well.

Now the world was filled with talentless hacks. Faced with the Britney Spears and Paris Hiltons of the world, what was the Angel of Inspiration to do? Well, the Fallen Angel of Inspiration, anyway. Providing inspiration for the humans had been easier in his angelic

form. Maybe that was part of the problem...perhaps if he still held his place in Heaven, he would never have had to be tortured with the feeble musical attempts of the New Kids on the Block. Another thought occurred to him. Perhaps the Divine Being had noticed that he'd been enjoying his banishment on earth and now saw to it that songs by those Simpson girls remained painfully lodged in his head. Maybe the real punishment had just begun. More than ever, he longed for the comforts of Heaven and reconnection with the Divine.

It wasn't simply that he was disgusted and bored. If he was honest with himself, he'd admit that he was lonely. He never thought he'd grow attached to the humans, but he had. Well, some of them anyway. But their lives were over in the blink of an eye. The pain of losing them year after year had become worse with every death.

Shivering Taliesin buttoned the top button of his jacket. Chile with Neruda would be far warmer than this backwater town in Michigan. He'd come here to hear a young poet, but the coffee house had burned down, so instead he found himself walking along the length of a nearby railroad track half-wishing for an oncoming train. Would this exile never end?

Tilting his head back, he closed his eyes. *I'm sorry, all right? I'm fucking sorry already. What the hell do I need to do to prove it?*

A blinding flash of blue-white light seared his eyes.

"You might want to consider not cursing when you address our Lord."

Taliesin stifled a sigh. "Hello Gabriel."

The angel walked at his side. "Haven't you tired of your banishment? Aren't you ready to come home?"

Taliesin stopped and stared at his friend. "Did you not just hear me? Isn't that why you're here?"

Gabriel smiled patiently. "Not exactly." Holding up his hand, he immobilised Taliesin as the railroad tracks began to rumble. "This is your last chance to figure it out, my friend."

"Figure what out?"

The angel shook his head, his eyes sad. Gabriel waved his hand toward Taliesin and he found himself standing in the middle of the vibrating tracks.

"Funny." He fought against the supernatural hold. "Release me, Gabriel."

"I cannot. If you are ever to regain your place within the Kingdom, you must learn what He sent you here to learn."

Rage flooded Taliesin's veins. "This isn't a fucking fieldtrip. He *banished* me."

The whistle of a not-so-distant train sounded, and the ground beneath his feet shuddered. He attempted to use his few remaining angelic powers to break Gabriel's hold, but the angel had done something to nullify them. *Bastard.*

"Release me!" he demanded again.

Gabriel merely held his gaze. "Heed what you're here to learn."

"Yes, do be cryptic. It's always so helpful."

As the engine drew closer, the blinding headlight pulled his focus from the angel. The painful, metallic squeal of brakes split the quiet night drowning out his thundering heart. The engineer had obviously seen him, but there was no way he'd be able to stop in time. Taliesin sighed. He might be immortal, but immortality didn't mean getting hit by a train wouldn't hurt. Someday, Gabriel would pay for this.

## Chapter One

Emerson Matthews watched her patient through the two-way mirror, and he gazed right back. Obviously, he knew he was being observed. Stretching out his long legs he leaned back in the chair and stared as if he could bore a hole through the glass. He shoved his shoulder-length hair from his face in irritation—chestnut coloured waves she itched to drag her fingers through. At this distance it was impossible to discern the colour of his eyes, but she had no trouble making out his high cheekbones and gorgeous mouth.

It was impossible to look at him and not imagine how his lips would feel against hers. He pushed up the sleeves of his knit shirt to reveal beautifully sculpted forearms. With his broad chest, she couldn't help but wonder what he looked like beneath his clothes. She'd bet his legs and ass were as tightly muscled as his arms.

She sighed. Getting worked up over a patient was number one on the no-no list for therapists everywhere. She'd clearly gone too long without sex and it was affecting her work. The slightly less rational part of her brain insisted that she was merely experiencing the logical response to being confronted with the single most gorgeous man she'd ever seen. No matter what he looked like, she needed to get her mind out of his pants and help him. *Focus, Emerson. Focus.*

She reread the scant information on his chart. Having attempted suicide by train, Taliesin No-Last-Name was brought into St. Mary's Psychiatric Facility late last night by the local sheriff's department. The train operator insisted that he'd hit the man, but the guy didn't have a scratch on him. Even his clothes were fine. He'd complained of a headache, but that was it. He'd also initially demanded—loudly—to leave. But that wasn't going to happen, not until he'd been thoroughly evaluated. Adjusting her glasses, she turned the knob and opened the door.

The man rose to his feet with a loose-limbed grace and offered her his hand as he read her name tag. "Dr. Matthews. I'm assuming it's too much to hope that you've come to release me."



"Why don't we talk a bit first?" Trying to place his slight accent, she gestured to the chair behind him as she sank into the one opposite him. He didn't bother to hide his annoyance as he sat and stared at her while she straightened the forms on her clipboard. His eyes were grey. Definitely grey. God, he was gorgeous. *Focus.*

"Despite what it likely says in your file, I wasn't attempting suicide."

She glanced at the chart. "I'm not sure how else to interpret standing in front of an oncoming train."

He crossed his arms over his chest. "I was pushed."

"By whom?"

He shifted uneasily. "A friend."

"Some friend," she muttered.

His lips curved in a bone-melting grin. "Yeah. He can be a real bastard."

Emerson stared at him trying to remember where she'd been going with that line of questioning.

*Train. Death wish. Right.* "The engineer's statement doesn't mention anyone else."

Taliesin tilted his head back and stared at the ceiling. "It wouldn't. My friend is rarely visible to humans."

*Rarely visible to humans.* It was going to be a long night.

Emerson glanced out the window behind him and watched as huge fluffy snowflakes drifted to the ground. She might as well get comfortable. It wasn't like she had anywhere to go—besides, she'd volunteered for the three weeks prior to Christmas, just so she could get time off over the holidays to spend with her family.

She studied the man across from her. He looked completely lucid, but his comments so far belied that. "Let's start with a history," she said turning to a fresh intake sheet. "Name?"

He shifted in his chair and she tried not to admire the way the worn fabric of his jeans encased his legs. "Taliesin."

"Last name?"

"I don't have one."

Emerson tried not to frown. "What about your parents? What's their surname?"

He leaned forward, elbows on his knees, a lock of hair partially covering his eye. "I don't have parents in the strictest sense of the word."

Emerson fought the urge to brush his hair aside and see if it was as soft as it looked. "You're an orphan?" she asked. Perhaps she'd follow in Angelina Jolie's footsteps and adopt him... Okay, this was inexcusable. She was a professional, for God's sake. Obviously she needed to get laid and quickly. This inability to focus was interfering with her job.

"Not exactly." He stood and walked to the window.

She tried not to groan. His ass was as perfect as she'd imagined it would be. Clearing her throat, she asked, "Age?"

"Not sure."

She studied his reflection in the window pane. If she had to guess, she'd say late twenties to early thirties. Time for a different tack. "I've noticed you've got a bit of an accent. Where are you from?"

"Lots of different places." His lips curved in a sad smile as he stared out the window. "But I spent my formative years in Wales."

That was an interesting coincidence. Her grandmother was from Wales. Of course, her sister, Beckett, would tell her there were no such things as coincidences, but Emerson didn't buy into it. There were no mystical forces guiding hers or anyone else's life. If God existed, and that was a huge if, as far as she was concerned, He sure as hell didn't care about any of the people he'd supposedly created. If He did, He'd actually bother to answer prayers.

The pain of loss clogged her throat, but she pushed it away and stood, nearly colliding with the man she was supposed to be evaluating. Taliesin placed his hand under her elbow to steady her.

"Are you all right?" he asked, concern darkening his eyes.

The warmth of his body seeped through her blouse, and she wanted nothing more than to sink into him and forget. He stared into her eyes as if he could find the answers to the mysteries of the universe.

She swallowed hard, her mouth suddenly dry. "I'm fine," she managed and stepped back.

"You look upset."

Forcing a smile she shook her head. "Nope. It's all good."

"I could help you – if you'd let me."

The patient offering to help the therapist – well done, Emerson. Way to keep your own emotions in check and focus on the person in need.

The door to the intake room opened and Molly, one of the interns stuck her head in. "Hey Emerson? It's time for group – you coming?"

"I'll be there in just a minute. Can you get Thomas to help you set up the instruments?" Grateful for the interruption, she turned back to Taliesin. "Why don't I show you to your room so you can get settled in, and we'll pick this up later?"

"Music therapy?" he asked, ignoring her question, his eyes bright with interest.

She nodded.

"I'd like to come along, if that's all right."

Taliesin stifled a grin. He'd like a hell of a lot more than that from the prickly therapist, but he'd settle for this. For now.

She adjusted her glasses as she considered his request. Later he'd slide those naughty-librarian frames from her face and pull the clip from her hair, freeing the deep red tresses. Idly he wondered how long it would be and how it would feel sliding through his fingers. She tucked a stray lock behind her ear, and he shoved his hands in his pockets before he was tempted to find out the answers to both questions.

He'd planned on leaving the mental health facility as soon as he'd arrived, but then he'd gotten a glimpse of Dr. Emerson Matthews. True, he'd always had a thing for red heads, but this was more than her hair colour. There was something about this woman that called to him on a primal level. Despite her capable, determined demeanour, he sensed a wounded soul. For reasons he couldn't fathom, he wanted to wrap his arms around her and promise that he'd make everything better.

As he'd waited for her to finish her observation from behind the two way mirror, he'd cursed Gabriel. Had he done something to make him want this woman – this *human* – beyond reason? Taliesin had never been opposed to sleeping with human woman. Besides the act of creating, sex was as close as to the Divine as the fallen could get.

He'd been overcome with lust plenty of times in his endless exile, but he'd never wanted more than sex and companionship. For instance, he treasured the time he spent verbally sparring with Jane and reading her drafts of Northanger Abbey. He hadn't been able to get enough of Janis Joplin. While not the most beautiful woman he'd ever known, he'd loved watching her compose and perform. She'd also been insatiable in bed. But, inexplicably, he wanted so much more than that from Emerson. He shook his head. Some

kind of Angel of Inspiration he was. He couldn't even verbalize what it was he wanted, which again made him wonder if Gabriel had something to do with this.

Emerson shifted, drawing his attention back to her petite frame and her bottomless blue eyes. He wondered if she realised she chewed her lower lip when she was deep in thought. The full lower lip he'd give just about anything to taste. The same one he'd like to pull between his teeth and nibble.

Smiling gently, she nodded toward the door. "The music room is this way."

Taliesin fell into step beside her, shortening his strides to match hers as they navigated the thickly carpeted hallways. He'd prefer to walk behind her and watch the gentle sway of her full hips, but thanks to Gabriel he was a patient in a mental facility. Openly gawking at his doctor's ass—no matter how gorgeous it was—wasn't going to win him any points. It also wasn't bound to convince her he wasn't crazy, and that was something he needed to accomplish if he hoped to do more than imagine how sweet she tasted.

The gentle rhythm of a drum and some other percussion accompanied by a strumming guitar drifted from the open door at the end of the hall. He wanted to touch the instruments almost as much as he wanted to touch Emerson. Glancing at the woman next to him, he knew which was more likely.

Emerson motioned him through the door. The young woman who'd interrupted them earlier sat with a djembe between her knees and played a gentle accompaniment to a young man with an acoustic guitar while an older woman shook a set of carved maracas. Emerson smiled and guided Taliesin through the door.

The boy with the guitar eyed him suspiciously before looking back at Emerson. "Who's the new guy?"

"Hey Robbie," she said. "This is Taliesin. He's going to sit in with us today."

Robbie nodded at him before continuing to play.

"How's the song coming?" Emerson asked the boy.

He shrugged. "Meh. Writer's block."

"There's no such thing," Taliesin responded. He glanced at Emerson. Her brow furrowed and her eyes narrowed on him. She reminded him of a mama bear ready to protect her young.

The boy scowled at him. "What would you know about it? You play?"

Taliesin gestured toward the piano. "You mind?"

Robbie shrugged and began playing again. "Whatever."

Taliesin sat at the bench and listened for a minute to catch the melody. He had to admit, the kid was good. Damn good. Playing counterpoint, he subtly prodded Robbie in a slightly different direction. After a few moments, the boy took it and ran with it like he'd hoped he would. Still playing quietly, he watched as Robbie stopped and scrawled the new phrases in a notebook, while Emerson crossed the room to stand behind the boy, in perfect glaring range. Taliesin winked at her and continued playing, satisfaction growing as he listened to the emerging brilliance. With the satisfaction came the regret. This was what God had intended he do—inspire. But on a global scale—not one on one in a mental hospital. But he'd made his choices and he'd been dealt with accordingly. Pride and superiority didn't sit well in Heaven.

Robbie looked at him, his mistrust and hostility faded somewhat. "Wanna run it again?"

Surprise widened Emerson's eyes as she looked between him and the kid. Slowly she sank into a chair against the wall and continued watching, making notes in her files.

Taliesin nodded and followed Robbie's lead, enjoying the evolution of the song and the growing wonder in Emerson's eyes. After a while, she stopped writing, picked up a tambourine and joined them. Her enjoyment warmed parts of him he hadn't known were cold.

"Are you taking requests?" asked the woman with the maracas.

Robbie grinned. "Sure Maybelle, if we know it, we'll play it."

The woman smiled shyly. "It's almost Christmas. Can you play Angels We Have Heard on High or Hark the Herald Angels Sing?"

Taliesin smirked as he played the opening chords of Maybelle's first suggestion. He always did enjoy irony. Robbie joined in on the second bar and they all sang. Everyone except Emerson. Instead, she'd returned to jotting notes, a pinched look around her mouth. The pinched expression grew more pronounced when they started the second song. When they finished, he motioned for Robbie to hand him the guitar.

"What about you, Dr. Matthews?" he asked, drawing her attention away from her file folders.

"Beg your pardon?"

"Do you have any requests?"

She shook her head. "No. Please, play whatever you'd like."

"There's got to be something you'd like to hear," he coaxed.

"I can't think of anything."

"Okay then, I'll just play the song I've had in my head ever since I met you."

Her breath caught in her throat, and he wondered if she'd make that same sweet sound when he kissed her. That was assuming he convinced her that he wasn't suicidal or psychotic or any of the other psychiatric evaluations she might come up with in the meanwhile.

He strummed the guitar, noticing as she followed his hands with her eyes. He'd rather let his hands roam over her gorgeous, taut body. Her full breasts had his mouth watering to strip the soft looking white sweater from her and feast on her creamy looking flesh. He longed to feel her nipples pebble against his tongue.

Instead, he lowered his head and began to play, watching her through the fall of hair over his eyes. He didn't miss the way her gaze lingered on his lips. Either she was a lousy therapist, unable to hide her feelings, or he was having one hell of an effect on her. He chose to believe the latter—it made the seduction he had planned that much more likely.

Emerson caught her breath as Taliesin held her gaze and began to sing. His voice was low and a little rough. Ignoring the shivers shuttling down her spine, she scoffed at herself. She was in the midst of a common adolescent fantasy—the hot guy in the rock band singing only to her. As annoyed with her reaction as she was, she couldn't disregard the pleasure that wound around her.

She'd never heard the song he sang—something about being caught between the things you wanted and the things you needed. Didn't that sound familiar? Like now, for instance. She needed to be the consummate professional and help her clients, but all she wanted to do was drag the man in front of her back to her office and beg him to fuck her. What was her problem? In the seven years she'd worked in the mental health profession, she'd never experienced anything like this. And she'd come into contact with plenty of gorgeous men—clients and doctors alike.

She sighed. Letting him attend music therapy was obviously a bad idea—except for the connection he'd made with Robbie. She'd never seen the boy so open. Heck, he'd even smiled and joined in a group sing-a-long. That had never happened before. She glanced at

the young man. He stared at Taliesin as if he were a god. Of course, if he kept singing to her like he was, she might have to jump on the bandwagon with Robbie.

When the song ended, she added her polite applause to the group's more raucous cheering. Surprisingly, Taliesin actually looked a little embarrassed. He looked like he was about to say something to her, but before he got a chance, Robbie brought his journal to him to get his opinion on the lyrics he was working. Annoyance throbbed behind her left eye. She'd been working with Robbie for months and he hadn't trusted her with his journal and now he was showing it to Taliesin? She watched as heads bent close together, they spoke in quiet tones. Taking a deep breath, she tamped down her anger. It was more important that Robbie find someone he connected with, than it was for her to be the one. She really needed to get over herself.

Molly squatted by her chair. "Wow. The new guy is hot," she whispered.

Emerson scowled at her assistant who showed no repentance.

"I'm just saying," she whispered again. "And it looks like he's into you...or would like to be."

Checking her watch, Emerson tapped the face. "It's time for supper. I'm going to finish rock star's intake. Will you please have two trays sent here?"

He'd let down his guard once he'd begun playing, she hoped he'd give her more information if she kept him in that relaxed frame of mind.

Stifling a grin, Molly nodded as she gathered the rest of the patients, motioning for him to stay seated.

Emerson flipped back to his intake page and glanced up at him. He strummed the guitar absently as he watched her and a nervous knot formed in her belly.

"I'll provide the mood music," he said with a wink. "I trust you're taking care of the candlelight?"

How dare he wink at her? She hated guys who winked, but he managed to pull it off without looking like an ass. "Funny."

"Let me guess, you thought maybe I'd be more forthcoming in a room where I was comfortable and distracted by things I enjoy?"

She raised an eyebrow at him. "Funny *and* clever. Lucky me."

He laughed, delight evident in those dove gray eyes.

The more time she spent with him the more she wondered if he actually belonged in a mental health facility. But even the most seemingly sane person could have dissociative breaks with reality. She really hoped that wasn't the case with him. She was starting to genuinely like him. *Bad idea, Emerson. Bad on so many levels.*

A knock sounded and an orderly pushed a cart into the room.

Taliesin sniffed the air. "Turkey?"

Emerson lifted the lid. "Yep. Hungry?"

He shrugged and put down the guitar. "I could eat." As she passed him his plate, he leaned toward her and said, "I have a suggestion."

"I'm listening."

"Let's just have dinner like two normal people..." He eyed the utensils sceptically and then frowned. "With our plastic cutlery...so I can't kill myself."

Emerson laughed.

He looked at her in surprise.

"Sorry," she murmured. "You just look so...cute." She pressed her lips together. Cute was hardly a therapeutic evaluation. She couldn't believe she'd just admitted to her patient she found him attractive. As much as it pained her, she was beginning to think he might be better off if she referred him to another therapist.

"So you're turned on by pathetic?" he asked. "You're a complicated woman, Emerson Matthews."

She wished she didn't love the way he said her name. With that lilting accent, it was as if he'd caressed the words with his lips. She shifted in her chair as she imagined him caressing her body with that gorgeous mouth. "You were amazing with Robbie, today," she blurted, desperate for something to quell her imagination which was getting more carnal by the moment.

Taliesin smiled. "Thanks. He seems like a great kid. A little angsty, but a brilliant musician." He paused. "Of course, most brilliant musicians seem to be on the angsty side."

"Well, I've never seen him take to anyone like he did to you," she said, taking a bite of the instant mashed potatoes and gravy. "And he showed you his journal. That was a huge step for him. So what about you? What's your musical background? Do you play anything else besides the piano and guitar?" God, she was babbling. *Shut up already Emerson.*



He grinned at her and she felt her cheeks flame. With her fair skin, she probably looked like she'd gotten a second-degree sunburn.

"So is this what you're like on a date?" he asked.

"I don't date." She couldn't control her mouth where this guy was concerned. Frowning, she tried to adjust her professional demeanour. "I don't think that's an appropriate question for you to ask me."

"Why? We're just two normal people having dinner with our non-lethal silverware." He popped a bite of turkey into his mouth. "Why don't you date?"

Did it really matter if she answered his question? She'd all but decided that she needed to refer him elsewhere as soon as possible. "I spend most of my time here. Let's just say that the men I meet outside of work don't interest me."

He leaned forward. "And the men you meet at work?"

"Don't either. And even if they did, they're off limits."

He sat back in his chair, looking for all the world like the cat who'd swallowed the canary. "Why don't you like Christmas?" he asked.

*What? Where did that question come from?*

"What are you talking about?" She crossed her arms over her chest and then quickly uncrossed them as soon as she noticed her defensive posture. "What makes you think I don't like Christmas?"

"Mostly your scowl and refusal to join in while we were signing Christmas carols," he countered.

"Maybe I'm Jewish."

He shook his head. "Not buying it."

She'd loved Christmas when she was a kid. Her mom had always made cookies with her and her brother and sisters. They'd made popcorn balls and Christmas cards. They'd skated on the pond behind the house and made snow angels. It was perfect until the year she'd turned eleven. It was as if someone had taken the perfect snow globe of their world and shaken until everything broke free and swirled around with the fake snow and water.

Emerson shoved her plate out of the way and met his stare dead on. "I just don't like this time of year."

"Not even a little?"

The year she'd turned eleven, her mom had a cold she couldn't shake, six days before Christmas, they found out it was cancer. Emerson had prayed until her knees were sore, she'd said the rosary every night, begging God to heal her mother. She took care of the house and her brother and sister, bargaining with God that she wouldn't complain if he'd just make her mother better. It hadn't worked. Nothing had. Not the chemotherapy. Not the radiation. Certainly not the prayers. Or the tears.

They'd buried her mother the following year in the middle of December. The holiday decorations had mocked her pain, and Christmas greetings poked at the emotional wounds. Her home was no longer the warm, loving place she'd known. Her father stayed in bed for days at a time, a bottle of whiskey his only companion. She'd been terrified that he'd die and leave her too. After the New Year, he'd dropped all of the kids off with his wife's parents and never looked back. Turned out he didn't need to die to vanish forever. For years she lived in fear that the rest of her family would be taken from her too. They hadn't. Yet.

Her love life was no mystery. Superficial relationships only, thank you. Once a guy started hinting that he wanted more, she was gone. She couldn't survive loving completely only to lose him.

"Nope. Not even a little," she said finally answering his question about the wretched holidays.

Taliesin looked like he was about to push the topic, but closed his mouth as if he'd thought better of it. "I'm guessing it's time to get back to your questions about me."

She grabbed her files and pen from the table top. "Let's start over. You said you were pushed. By a friend. Any idea why he pushed you?"

He picked up the guitar and absently strummed a few chords. "Look, it's a long story. I could make up something to satisfy your curiosity and your forms, but I respect you too much for that."

"Right," she scoffed. "Because you know me so well." Her behaviour was downright deplorable. He was getting a new therapist first thing tomorrow morning.

He raised an eyebrow at her. "Better than you think, Em."

The way he said her name sent flutters of awareness riffling through her body to pool low in her abdomen. She shifted in her chair trying to ease the arousal that had dogged her all day – ever since seeing this man through the two way mirror.

She waited for him to say more, but he didn't. Instead he continued playing. And watching her. With a sinking sensation, she remembered, she was the only psychiatrist at the facility for the next three days. She'd have to deal with him whether she wanted to or not.

She met his gaze. "So, that's it?" she asked. "You respect me, so you're going to keep your mouth shut?"

"It's not that simple."

A soft knock sounded on the door and Molly stuck her head in. "Robbie wanted to know if he could use the music room tonight. Do you know how long you'll be?"

Closing Taliesin's file, she checked her watch. "He can have it now, we'll just take this back to my office."

"Thanks, I'll let him know," Molly said and let the door swing shut as she left.

Emerson rose to her feet, and he followed. A shiver skated across her skin at his nearness, but she ignored it and walked to the door.

Taliesin seemed lost in thought as they walked to her office. She thought about returning to the intake room, but she didn't want to be interrupted if someone else came in tonight. Usually, the facility was jammed packed this time of year. The holidays tended to bring out the worst in people.

She looked at him as he walked silently beside her. Her stomach slipped nervously as he met her gaze and she turned away, annoyed that he affected her with little more than a glance. What was it about him that transformed her from a skilled professional to a nervous school girl? It was frustrating as hell.

Stopping in front of her door, she slid her key through the magnetic card reader and entered the code. She turned the knob, pushed open the door and flipped on the light switch.

"Go ahead and have a seat," she said gesturing toward the furniture.

He eyed the couch but sat down in one of the wing chairs instead. Grabbing a pen from her desk, she sat in the chair opposite him and opened his file.

"Let's start at the beginning. Are you taking any medications, either prescription or street drugs?"

"No."

"Have you used any medications in the past few days?"

"No."

"Weeks?"

"No."

"Months?"

"No. I haven't taken any mind altering substances." His accent thickened as he continued. "I haven't even taken a bloody aspirin. Can we move this along, a bit?"

"Do you have anyone who may be concerned about your whereabouts?"

"No."

She tried not to frown. Everyone should have someone who worried about him. She might not have her parents, but she had her grandparents and her siblings.

"Anyone you'd like to contact and let them know where you are?"

"Not really."

"No friends?"

"A few, but no one I really care to call."

She adjusted her glasses on her nose. "Significant other?" she asked as if she weren't inquiring to satisfy her own curiosity.

His lips curved in a slow, provocative grin. "I'm all alone."

Her cheeks burned with embarrassment. Thankfully, the lighting in her office was dim at best. "I doubt that. Let's move on to something else. Where do you live?"

"I don't have a permanent residence. I travel a lot."

"For work?"

"I suppose you could call it that."

She didn't bother trying to hide her frown this time. "Look, it would be a lot easier to finish this interview if you would stop trying to be so cryptic."

Elbows on his knees, he leaned forward. "I'm not trying to be difficult, Em."

Stifling a growl, she stood up, walked to her desk and counted. To fifty. "Well, for not trying, you're succeeding admirably," she said as she whipped around and ran smack into Taliesin's broad chest.

His hands settled on her shoulders to steady her. Dread and desire mixed in her stomach as she raised her eyes to his. "I need you to move, please."

"There's something I've been dying to do all day," he murmured.

She frowned. "Whatever it is, I'm betting it's not a good idea."

He slid one hand up the side of her neck and brushed his calloused thumb across her cheekbone and her breath caught in her throat. The intensity in his gaze shot through her body to settle low in her clenching body.

"This is a very bad idea," she murmured as he slipped her glasses from her face and tossed them on the desk behind her.

"It's a brilliant idea," he breathed as he framed her face with his big, warm hands.

## Chapter Two

Emerson shoved at Taliesin's chest as he lowered his face to hers. His heart thundered beneath her palm and she half-heartedly pushed again. She didn't push as hard as she could have—as hard as she should have. Did she actually want him to kiss her? With a sinking sensation she realised that yes, she wanted to know what it felt like to have his lips on hers. She wanted to know what he tasted like. She shouldn't give in to the curiosity, but she couldn't seem to bring herself to stop him. She had plenty of time to argue more strenuously or at least call for assistance, but she didn't. Instead, she moistened her suddenly dry lips. And waited.

All she could see was Taliesin. If she was honest with herself, she'd admit he was all she wanted to see. His lips hovered a fraction above hers and the warmth of his breath drifted over her skin. She'd thought he might be tentative, but he took her mouth with a soft insistence that surprised her. Searching, tasting, he coaxed a response from her as he slid his fingers into her hair, removing the clip at her nape and letting it tumble to the desk. Her hair fell in loose waves past her shoulders as he dragged his fingers through the length.

She shouldn't be letting him kiss her. She sure as hell shouldn't be returning his kisses. No matter how many times she told herself to move away, she found herself edging closer. It was a wonder she hadn't pushed him onto the couch behind them and plastered herself against his body.

His hand slipped from her hair to settle at her waist. Exerting gentle pressure, he pulled her flush against his body—flush against the hard ridge of his cock. Her breath caught in her throat and his tongue slipped past her parted lips, delving inside to taste her. He stroked her tongue with his own and she realised her fingers had tangled tightly in his hair.

He thrust his cock against her and swallowed the shuddering whimper that escaped her as he slipped his hand between their bodies and splayed one big hand over her belly. If her panties hadn't been uncomfortably damp before, they certainly were now. In a slow but insistent climb, he inched closer to her breast. Her nipples had already contracted into tight

knots before he ever reached his destination. Finally, he cupped the taut, aching weight of her breast and brushed his thumb across the rigid nub.

She arched into his touch. She wanted to feel his hands on her bare skin more than she wanted to breathe. Tugging his shirt upward, she trailed her fingertips over his tightly muscled abdomen, as it rippled and flexed under her touch. Heat radiated off his skin and she wanted more. She wanted him hot and heavy between her thighs, his weight pinning her to the desk...the floor...the couch. She didn't care at this point. She just wanted him. Hooking her fingers in his waistband, she tugged him closer.

He dragged open-mouthed kisses along the side of her neck. He continued pressing against her and she braced herself against the desktop, her hand knocking the stapler to the floor. Startled by the clatter, she bolted upright and bumped her head on Taliesin's chin. Blinking, she looked around as if waking from a dream. They both panted for breath, their clothes were askew and he had a raging hard on. Horror-tinged ice raced through her veins, and she raised a shaking hand to her mouth.

"Oh my God," she whispered in horror. Tears burned her eyes as she raised her gaze to Taliesin's. "Oh my God, I'm so sorry. This never should have happened."

He cupped her cheek, but she flinched and pushed him away. Hard.

"I don't know if you remember, Em, but I kissed you."

"It doesn't matter. I shouldn't have responded. This is inexcusable." Nausea swamped her as the gravity of the situation made sank in on her. "I'll get an orderly. You need to file a report."

"What the hell for?" he demanded.

*Was he insane? Wait...train...mental hospital...right.* She just stared at him.

"I'm not filing any report, Emerson. It's not gonna happen."

"But —"

"But nothing," he interrupted.

"You're a *patient*."

Taliesin stared at her pale face, her stricken expression.

"Em, it's okay. I don't belong here."

A bubble of hysterical laughter escaped her. "You tried to commit suicide. By *train*." She dashed her hand across her eyes. "I think you're in the right place."

Frustration tightened his hands. "I didn't. Let me explain."

Her hair swirled in disarray around her shoulders and her blue eyes were bright with fear and anger. "Right. You were pushed. I forgot." She lifted the phone from its base and began punching numbers. "I need to call an orderly," she said more to herself than to him. "We need to file a report and get you assigned to someone else."

"No." He pulled the phone from her hand and set it on the desk behind him. "I need you to listen."

"Okay. I'm listening." She backed toward her purse—probably to get her cell phone.

"Em, I need you to really listen. Please, just sit down and I'll explain everything."

Her gaze darted toward the door, but he stood between her and the exit. Clearly biding her time, she sat on the edge of her chair.

"Please don't be afraid. I'm not going to hurt you."

He hated seeing her fear directed at him. He scrubbed his hands over his face and sighed. The sweet scent of her skin clung to him. Spiced vanilla and roses—it was enough to make him groan aloud. Hell, so was the memory of her soft, pliant lips and the taut warmth of her skin.

He realised he was resorting to melodrama to say that he wanted her more than any other woman he'd ever met, but it was true. His entire body ached to have her—not just his cock. Of course, that part of his body stood at painful attention, waiting for him to do something about it. But first he had to make her understand.

"I've never told anyone this before..." He shoved his hair out of his face. How did one go about confessing that not only was he not human, he wasn't mortal either? He glanced at her. "Remember when I mentioned that the train engineer couldn't see my friend?"

She nodded, her gaze darting between him and the door. "You said he was rarely visible to humans."

"He's not. He prefers it that way." Maybe this wouldn't be as difficult as he feared. "He's an angel."

Another hysterical laugh escaped her. "An angel?"

And then again, it might be more difficult.

"Yes, an angel. Gabriel, God's messenger."



The fear began to fade from her eyes and she crossed her arms over her chest. "You ought to know I'm the absolute last person you should try to pull this on," she snapped. "I don't believe in angels, and most days I don't believe in God."

Of all the things she could have said, he hadn't expected that. He opened his mouth, but she spoke over anything he might have said.

"I'm sorry. My beliefs have no place in a therapeutic relationship." She gestured loosely, "I'm a little stressed out right now. Please continue."

He laughed. "Somehow, I think we've moved way beyond therapy."

"Anyway," she prodded.

"I'm an angel, too."

She leaned back in her chair, scepticism written clearly over her face. "Where are your wings?"

He sighed. She wasn't going to make this easy. "I'm sorry—I should have said I *was* an angel." Reaching for the hem of his shirt, he pulled it up and over his head. He didn't miss the desire that glowed in her deep blue eyes before she schooled her expression to bored nonchalance. He turned knowing what response his back would get. She wasn't the first human who had seen his scars, but she was the first one who would hear the truth about them. Her gasp filled the room as he stood and let her look her fill.

"What happened?" she asked, her voice trembling.

He turned around and leaned against the desk. "I fell."

"I don't understand."

"Many of God's chosen, his angels, his protectors of mankind willingly sinned. And we were banished. We became the fallen."

Her expression of concern and horror twisted his gut.

"What happened?" she asked.

He shrugged. "The usual sins—lust, envy, pride, greed."

"Sloth?"

He laughed. "There's not a lot of room for sloth in Heaven."

Her curiosity shone clearly but she stayed silent.

He took pity on her and voiced the question she refused to ask. "My sin was pride. I was the Angel of Inspiration. I visited artists, musicians, writers and prodded them toward

their best work. After a while, I believed my own hype. I believed my work was the only thing that brought these people to their full potential. To their genius."

He paused and watched her, trying to gauge her reaction. It was impossible to tell. Either she believed him, or she was cataloguing his perceived mental illnesses.

"What happened?" she finally asked. "When you were banished."

"I was called before the Divine Power and a group of my peers. In my vanity, I actually argued my case." Despite the centuries that had passed, he remembered it all as if it happened yesterday. The pain wasn't nearly as sharp but it was still there. "I was deemed guilty and Michael drew his sword and severed my wings. I've been wandering the earth ever since."

He waited for her to say something. Anything. Instead, they sat in endless silence. Finally, she shifted in her chair and grabbed his file folder and a pen off her desk.

"You've suffered a very serious injury," she said, clearly back in therapist mode. "You're just as much a human being as I am. Isn't it possible that perhaps, you've created this alternate existence to deal with the pain of your wounds and whoever hurt you?"

"No, Dr. Matthews, it's not."

"I don't doubt you're a brilliant musician...and for all I know, a writer too. You're certainly a wonderful storyteller, but you and I both know there's no such thing as immortality."

He needed her to understand – to believe. He had no idea why it was so important. It just was. Sighing, he dragged his hand through his hair. "I'd hoped it wouldn't come to this."

"What do you mean?" she asked.

He snatched a pair of scissors from Emerson's desk and turned to face her. Holding his left hand palm up, he rammed the blades through his extended flesh. He gritted his teeth. Just because he couldn't die didn't mean that a thick blades through several inches of bone, muscle and tendons wouldn't hurt.

Emerson's gasp changed to a strangled scream. "Oh, my God! Taliesin, what in the hell are you doing?" She grabbed the phone. "I'm calling the infirmary."

"Don't Em. Not yet," he grated. "Just watch."

In horrified silence she paused as he slowly withdrew the instrument. As they watched, the blood flow stopped, and the skin quickly knitted itself back together. He flexed his hand,

showing her the front and the back. The blood hadn't even had time to dry, but the wound was gone.

Her mouth fell open and her eyes were huge. "How did you do that?"

"It's the whole immortality thing. I *can't* die."

She shook her head, her breathing rough and uneven. Grabbing his hand, she pulled it to her chest and wiped away the remaining blood. "It's a trick. It's gotta be a trick," she muttered.

He shook his head. "It's not." Pulling his hand from her grasp, he placed the bloodied scissors at his wrist, dug in and dragged the blades downward, opening his forearm to the elbow.

"*Fuck*, that hurts!"

Together they watched, as his body healed itself. Finally, she grabbed a handful of tissues and wiped at the blood that spilled down his arm.

"Now do you understand?" he asked. "Now do you believe me?"

Shaking violently, Emerson wrapped her arms around her middle.

Taliesin pulled her to his chest, holding her tightly. He smoothed his hand over the back of her head, in an attempt to soothe her. "I'm so sorry, Em. I didn't mean to scare you, but I didn't know how else to convince you."

Slowly, she relaxed, melting into his embrace and circling his waist with her arms. "I think I'm losing my mind," she mumbled against his chest.

"If you were, you'd be in the right place," he said with a chuckle. "But you're not."

He felt her answering smile against his chest. "Smart ass."

Tilting her head back, she searched his eyes. "So you can't die?" she whispered.

Shaking his head, he smoothed his hand along the side of her face. "Not with mortal implements."

She drew a shaky breath. "Oh." Almost absently, she trailed her fingertips over his chest, tracing the delineations of his muscles.

His adrenaline flooded body demanded more. More of her touch. More of her taste. More of her. He slid his fingers through her hair to cradle the back of her head. Slipping his other arm around her waist, he crushed her to him as he captured her mouth. She opened easily, as if she'd been waiting for him to get on with it. Angling her head, he slipped inside

and tasted the sweetness that was Emerson, groaning as her tongue stroked his. It wasn't enough.

He slid his hands beneath her deep blue sweater. It was as soft as he'd thought it would be, but it wasn't nearly as soft as her skin. Burying his face in the side of her neck, he inhaled her spicy-sweet scent as he deftly unhooked the clasp of her bra. Soon he'd have her in her naked glory, writhing for his touch.

Breaking from his embrace, she walked toward the door and his heart sank. Had she simply been biding her time, waiting to escape from the crazy man in her office?

"Em, wait."

With a soft smile, she keyed in the code for the lock and then turned to stare at him. Holding his gaze, she grabbed the hem of the sweater and tugged it and the bra off, baring her to his gaze. Rosy nipples topped her full, creamy breasts. He had to taste them.

Crossing the room in swift strides, he pinned her against the door and took her mouth again. He cupped her breasts, loving the way her nipples peaked against his palms. Her responsiveness heightened his arousal—not that it wasn't already nearing a level of ravenous need. God, he wanted her. She reached for his waistband and unfastened the button and zipper. Sliding her hand inside, she wrapped her fingers around his aching cock and squeezed. He breathed deeply, trying to keep his hunger in check. He might be immortal, but he was willing to bet she had the power to do him in.

Capturing her wrists, he pinned them above her head against the cool wood of the door. She raised a dark red brow and pushed her chest out, taunting him with the flesh he was so desperate to taste. He thrust his now freed cock against the satin skin of her stomach and kissed her, revelling in her breathless moans, but he needed more. Nipping along her jaw line, he forged a trail to her neck and down her chest over the swell of her breasts. Her body trembled for his touch as he paused and gazed at her, wanting to imprint this moment in his memory for all time.

She opened her sleepy blue eyes and held his gaze as he lowered his lips to her body. Keeping her secured against the door, he nuzzled the underside of her breast, pleased to hear her breath catch. He teased her, coming close to the nipple but never touching it. Her breathing became more ragged and she struggled trying to free her hands. He had no doubt she meant to drag his head where she wanted it. For now she'd have to wait.

Emerson thrust her hips, whether to knock him away or provoke him into getting on with it, he wasn't sure. Opening the closure of her slacks, he pinned her to the door again with his hand flat on her belly, his fingers toying with the top edge of her tiny panties. He'd just about bet she was wearing a thong.

"Just touch me already," she practically growled.

He flicked his tongue over the tip of her distended nipple. "Like this?"

"More," she demanded.

He brushed a finger over the front of her damp panties. "Or maybe this?"

*"Taliesin."*

Without warning, he released her hands and scooped her up and deposited her on the couch. She landed with a bounce and he quickly stripped her remaining clothes from her body. "Or perhaps this is what you had in mind," he murmured as he knelt between her spread legs.

Her cheeks flushed, but she didn't try to hide from his perusal. Instead, she watched him as he looked his fill.

"You're so damn beautiful."

Her lips quirked. "I didn't think angels were supposed to swear."

He drew a finger through her swollen, damp lips, coating his skin with her nectar before painting her nipples with her damp arousal. "I think we've established I'm not a particularly well-behaved angel."

He lunged forward and latched onto her nipple, sucking her sweet cream into his mouth. On a cry, she arched against him, driving her fingers through his hair and anchoring him to her. She tasted like heaven. He couldn't wait to drink directly from the source. Gathering her in his arms, he feasted on her nipples, back and forth between them as she thrust her slick pussy along the aching ridge of his cock. It took every bit of will power he possessed not to bury himself inside her warmth then and there.

Forcing restraint he was nowhere near feeling, he dragged open-mouthed kisses down her belly, to the beckoning heat of her cunt. Slipping his hands under her sweetly rounded ass, he lifted her to his mouth, spreading her lips with his thumbs. Topped with tight, red curls, her sex was pink and glistened with her arousal. She was perfect.

Her legs fell open and Taliesin lowered his face and swiped his tongue through her gathering cream. Her wordless moans sharpened his hunger. The taste of her—tangy, sweet

and completely addictive—filled his mouth and satisfied him more than anything he'd ever tasted.

He glanced at her. Her head had fallen against the back of the couch and her hair tangled around her head like a halo. Her eyes had closed and her lips were parted, delicately framing her panting breaths. Gently, he dragged his tongue upward and circled her clit as he slipped a finger into her grasping channel. God, she was snug. His balls pulled up tight at the thought of sliding his cock into her taut passage. With slow, gentle pressure he worked a second finger in and out of her grasping body. Her back bowed as he sucked her clit between his lips and nipped at it. She stiffened on a cry as her release hit. A flush washed over her skin and her hands clenched and twisted the cushions, he pushed her harder, farther. He delighted in the knowledge that he brought her to that screaming peak and was about to bring her to another one.

"Please," she breathed as she tugged at his shoulders, urging him closer. "I need you."

Shoving off his jeans, he slipped his arm beneath her waist and surged onto the bench of the couch with her. The head of his cock hovered outside her dewy entrance. Despite the fact he'd met her no more than a few hours ago, he felt like he'd been waiting for her his entire, endless life.

Emerson stared at the man who lay cradled between her legs. If she stopped to think about the situation, she'd likely freak out. She needed him inside her. Now. Sliding her hands along his sides, she grasped his ass and urged him forward. Bracing his hands on either side of her head, he surged into her body. She cried out as she struggled to adjust to him. The tiny bit of discomfort was worth the feeling of having him buried within her.

His eyes fluttered shut, and his arms shook as if he fought to hold himself motionless. "I don't want to move," he gritted out. "You feel so damn good. So hot and tight. God, Em," he groaned as he pushed deeper.

Her pussy rippled around his thick cock. Apparently nothing was spared when it came to the perfection of angels. All semblance of thought vanished as he slowly withdrew from the clasp of her body. Bracing her feet on the cushions she lifted her hips and met his next advance.

Sliding a hand over her chest, he plumped her breast and bowed his head to take her nipple into his mouth. Sucking greedily, he fucked her in time with the rhythmic pulls on her

breast. Her need for him coiled deep in her womb, and every fierce thrust wound her a little bit tighter.

“Harder,” she demanded. “Fuck me, harder!”

His eyes darkened, reminding her of thunderheads. “It’s not hard enough for you, Em?”

She shook her head.

In a movement too fast for her to register, he’d pulled free from her body and dragged her off the couch. Facing her toward the cushions and nudging her knees apart, he placed his hand in the middle of her back and shoved. She sprawled face first and her pussy clenched in needy anticipation. Nervous energy built in her middle as he stroked the blunt head of his arousal up and down her cleft. She loved the feel of it grazing her agonised flesh, but she needed more.

“Please, Taliesin,” she moaned.

Reaching around her, he brushed his thumb over her clit. “Please what? I want to hear you say it.”

“Fine.” Looking over her shoulder, she met his gaze. “I want you to fuck me. *Hard.*”

His smile was almost feral as he grasped her hips. The smile vanished completely the moment he drove himself into her aching cunt. Cupping her mound, he played with her clit, sliding his fingers to caress where they were joined. The combination of his cock and fingers was maddening as he brought her to the edge of release over and over only to leave her dangling there.

Stretching across the seat, she hung on to the back of the cushion as he pounded into her—his strokes measured, even and deep. At least, they were for a while. She slammed her hips into his, grinding against him as he fucked her. He filled her like no other man had ever come close to doing. If she believed in nonsense like fate, she might have thought he was made for her. Of course, maybe he was—after all he was an angel.

Dragging his free hand up and down her spine, he chased away any remaining thoughts she might have had. He fisted his hand in the hair at the nape of her neck and leaned forward, his breath rasping across her cheek. “You’re mine, Em.”

He chanted her name like a dark prayer as their bodies met and parted. The wet slap of his balls against her flesh sent sharps jolts of pleasure through her cunt as he shafted her

harder. Each driving lunge pushed her closer to her peak. Her pussy rippled around him and she knew it wouldn't be much longer.

Taliesin must have sensed it too. He plucked at her clit and all sensation started and ended with his pistoning cock and his clever fingers. The coiled urgency within her twisted and pulled until it finally snapped and spread like fire through her body. A primal scream tore from her lungs only to be muffled by his hand. A fresh rush of cream coated his shaft as he continued to plough into her, and she contracted almost violently around him. Who knew restraint could be so arousing?

He loosened his grip slightly as her cries faded to whimpers. "I love the way you scream for me," he groaned. "Later, when we're out of here, you can yell as loud as you like." He let go of her hair and locked his arm around her waist. "But right now, I think we still need this."

Pushing her tightly to the couch, he picked up the pace again. Each thrust rubbed her sensitised clit against the soft fabric of the cushion, and she cried out. Grateful for his hand over her mouth, she gave in to the bliss of his cock surging through her swollen channel. The overwhelming contractions raced through her body, holding him almost immobile for a moment before he pushed deeper still and shuddered. On a tortured groan, he pulsed hot and heavy inside her.

Boneless and utterly satisfied, she couldn't bring herself to move from where she lay flopped on the couch. Still buried to the hilt, Taliesin covered her with his body, sliding his hands down her arms to lace his fingers with hers where they lay limply on the cushion.

"Does this facility handle addictions?" he muttered.

She rubbed her face against the fabric of the couch and tried to get her foggy mind to work. "Yes...why?"

Nuzzling her, he buried his face against her neck. "Because I've developed an unhealthy addiction for a certain red-head."

Feeling happier than she could remember feeling in years, she laughed. "Dork."

Withdrawing from her body, he pulled her to lay on the couch with him. She reached for the afghan draped across the back, the one her gram knitted for her clients to use just in case someone took a chill and dragged it over his or her body. Wouldn't gram be surprised if she knew how it was being used today?



Taliesin stroked her face and dropped tender kisses on her upturned lips as she tried to make sense of the insanity of the situation. She'd just had the most amazing sex of her life with a client...well, a former client since he was right, he really didn't belong there. And he didn't belong there because he was an angel, of all things. Well, a fallen angel, she amended. It was almost too much to be believed and yet, how could she not believe him after the things he'd shown her? And all things considered, he didn't belong in a mental hospital.

"How long have you been on earth?" she asked, curiosity getting the better of her. She should be arranging his discharge, but instead, she was quizzing him.

His brow furrowed as he thought about it. "Since shortly before the time of Christ. When I was first exiled, I ended up in what's now known as Wales. A woman named Cerridwen cared for my wounds and taught me the language of her people."

Emerson couldn't help but wonder what else this woman had taught him. Pushing her jealousy aside, she focused on the present. And the present involved the hottest man she'd ever known staring adoringly into her eyes while he worshipped every inch of her body. Too bad it was only temporary. He had the world at his fingertips. Why would he want to stay in small town Michigan? *Geez Emerson. Get a grip. Just because he fucked your brains out doesn't mean he's interested in picking out furniture together.*

"I stayed there a long time, but eventually, I had to move on." His eyes took on a faraway look that twisted her heart. "After a while, people start wondering why they're growing old and you're not."

It was clear he didn't form more than a passing bond with humans. What would be the point? The relationship would be over in the blink of an eye. Her breath caught in her throat at the sensation of loss she hadn't expected to feel. She had no business thinking of him in any sort of permanent framework. Brushing his hair from his eyes, she met his gaze and wondered if she'd signed up for him too. If so, she was in for more heartache.

He shrugged. "Vampires and were-creatures have the same problem."

"Vampires? Were-creatures?" She blinked a few times waiting for him to take it back, but he didn't. "You're not joking, are you?"

"You've probably had contact with several of them over your life time."

She frowned. Well, wasn't that comforting? Reality came thundering back. Despite the magic of this brief interlude, she still needed to deal with the here and now. And her present life didn't involve vampires or fallen angels.

Taliesin smoothed her hair out of her face and smiled down at her. "I could get used to this," he murmured as he leaned in to kiss her

*Yeah. So could she. That was the problem.*

She sank into his kiss, into the heat of his body loving his comforting weight against her, pressing her into the couch. Wrapping her arms around his neck, her fingertips brushed across the horribly scarred skin where his wings had been removed. He flinched slightly at her touch.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to hurt you," she murmured.

"It's okay."

"Why didn't your healing ability work?"

"An angelic weapon was used. I guess they wanted to make sure I remembered I was being punished." He smiled depreciatively. "It doesn't hurt too much anymore. It's more like an uncomfortable reminder of what was."

"You miss heaven," she said. It wasn't a question.

Taliesin gazed at the woman in his arms. "I do, but there are some things that make up for the loss." He pulled her closer. "You're one of them," he murmured.

She smiled, but he could tell her heart wasn't in it. She didn't believe him.

"You don't have to drag out the lines on my account," she said lightly. "Or worry that I think this is more than what it is." She trailed her fingers along his chest. "I get that you're not staying." She pushed at his chest. "In fact, I should get your discharge papers in order. You don't belong here."

He was beginning to think that maybe he did—not in the hospital but with her. For endless moments, he stared into her eyes. Sudden desire had darkened them to the indigo of the night sky and he wanted to fall into their depths and lose himself forever. An odd sensation expanded throughout his chest as he stared at Emerson, and then he realised what it was. Joy. Even before he'd fallen, he couldn't remember experiencing this kind of elation. He'd certainly been happy, he wouldn't deny that, but this was something else entirely. What he'd felt before was a shadow compared to this.

Worry flared at the edges of his consciousness. She was human. He was immortal. Perhaps this was his true punishment. Now that he finally found someone who touched the cold places inside of him, he wouldn't be able to stay with her for more than forty or fifty

measly years. If he was lucky. Was that what Gabriel meant by “heed what you’re to learn?” Was he supposed to learn that true happiness was fleeting and to make the most of what he had? As far as lessons went, it was pretty pedantic. No matter what, he wanted as much time with Emerson as he could get.

“What are your plans for the rest of the night?” he blurted.

She looked at him sceptically for a moment and then shrugged. “I’m not sure. Go home, maybe make some dinner, read for a while.”

“Change of plans,” he announced.

## Chapter Three

Emerson raised a perfect red brow in question and she opened her mouth to protest.

He laid a finger over her tempting lips. "Come with me Just for tonight," he amended. He wanted her with him a hell of a lot longer than tonight, but something told him she wasn't ready to hear that. He swallowed a sigh. Even if she was, she didn't have an endless life to while away as he waited for forgiveness that would likely never come.

What if he did obtain forgiveness? Would he be whisked away to heaven never to be with her again? If that was the case, maybe he'd stay right here.

"What did you have in mind?" she asked before she drew the tip of his finger between her lips and swirled her tongue around it, distracting him from his thoughts.

Staring into his eyes, she sucked hard, and he wished her lips were wrapped around his cock instead. He hardened rapidly, jutting against her hip.

The corners of her mouth quirked slightly as she tried to hide her smile. Releasing his finger, she waited expectantly.

Right. She'd asked a question. Sliding a hand over the curve of her hip and across the taut flesh of her quivering belly, he grinned at her. "Come with me and find out."

Reaching between their bodies she took hold of his cock and slid her hand up and down his length, gently caressing and squeezing. "Are you sure you wouldn't rather stay here?"

He lowered his head and caught her lower lip between his teeth. Nipping slightly before releasing her, he soothed the tiny injury with a swipe of his tongue. "I think we've got time for both."

Slipping her free hand behind his neck, she pulled him closer and kissed him. She slid her tongue into his mouth and tasted him thoroughly as her nipples hardened against his chest. He loved the way she writhed against him like she couldn't get close enough. He knew the feeling. Despite the fact he'd just been locked within the tight, wet heat of her body, he wanted to be back there again.

Breaking from her kiss, he nipped along her collarbone to her sternum and downward between the valley of her luscious breasts to tease the sensitive undersides with his lips and teeth. Her back arched, and she released his cock bringing both hands to his head trying to drag his attention to her pebbled nipples. He blew on the tight flesh watching as goose bumps raced across her skin and she shivered beneath him.

“Don’t make me keep you locked in here,” she threatened.

He drew one of the hardened buds into his mouth, feeling the delicate flesh crinkle further against his tongue. His cock jerked at her response and he felt his pre-cum drip against her belly. A shudder of desire ran through her at the sensation. He released her nipple and replaced his mouth with his fingers, continuing to tug and pull at her tight flesh. “That would be *such* a hardship,” he murmured. “Staying here, with you would be...” He lightly pinched her nipple, smiling at her strangled cry. “Pure, unmitigated torture,” he finished.

Scowling at him, she tugged at his waist, trying to urge him to lie between her spread legs. Like he needed any urging. He slipped between the satin skin of her thighs, groaning as the head of his cock grazed her slick pussy—the entrance to heaven. The metaphor was probably bordering on blasphemy, but it wouldn’t be the first time and he sincerely doubted it would be the last. Besides, it was true. He’d begun to think of her as his salvation.

Emerson lifted her hips and pushed against him. He was lost. Holding her gaze, he sank into her beautiful cunt. Slowly, he withdrew, shuddering as her body clutched at him. Groaning, he surged forward as her internal muscles clenched and released around his shaft. She tangled her hands in his hair and wrapped her legs around his waist, locking him to her like a vice. There was nothing better on this earth than being wrapped in her exquisite heat.

He stared into her wild eyes and rocked against her. Unable to hold back, his thrusts deepened as he drove himself into her over and over. Fierce tremors wracked her body as she neared her peak. Fearing her desperate sounding cries would bring building security down on them, he captured her mouth, swallowing her screams of ecstasy. She tumbled over the edge as her orgasm hit her—hard. She stiffened and milked his cock, drawing on him until he thought he’d explode.

Wanting to extend her release as long as possible, he shoved into her, filling her, burying himself again and again. Pleasure streaked up his spine, so intense it bordered on

pain as it constricted his balls pulling them up tight. Each time they slapped her wet pussy she cried out and it was all he could do not to let go completely.

Breaking free of his mouth, she sank her teeth into his neck and shoulder as she came again. He gathered her closer. She shook so hard he thought she'd come apart in his arms. Her breathless cries stoked his hunger and roared through his blood. He couldn't hold back any longer and release ripped through him. He pumped unrelentingly as he filled her in shuddering gushes.

Taliesin panted for breath as he rested his forehead against Emerson's. "You're going to be the death of me."

With a trembling hand, she pushed the hair from his eyes. "Yeah, right."

Joy filled him as he stared at the woman in his arms. How had he gone centuries without experiencing this sensation? The answer was simple — he hadn't known Emerson.

Her stomach growled loudly and he felt the vibration against his own. Unable to stop the ridiculously huge grin that spread across his face, he nuzzled her neck. "That's what happens when you ogle clients instead of eating your supper."

"Whatever." She tried not to smile, but she hadn't been able to keep the amusement from her voice.

Easing from her body, he pulled her to a standing position. "Let's go." He rubbed his stomach. "It seems I've worked up an appetite, too."



Emerson willed her hand to stop shaking as she laid the papers on her supervisor's desk. There was a good chance she'd get in trouble for not following protocol come Monday morning, but right now she didn't care. She wanted Taliesin out of here where she wouldn't have to worry about his secret getting out.

She walked him to the release area and handed the orderly a copy of the forms she'd filled out and Taliesin had signed.

The young man at the desk scanned the papers, confusion in his eyes. She smiled broadly hoping to allay his concerns. "Would you get this gentleman his coat? I'm hoping he'll be out of here in time to catch the last bus home."

The orderly nodded as he checked the patient number and went into the locked room where client belongings were stored. A few moments later he returned with Taliesin's wallet, shoelaces and coat then handed them over one at a time. After putting the wallet in his back pocket, Taliesin knelt and quickly laced his shoes. His shirt rode up a little as he switched feet. She noticed a flash of his perfectly muscled back and her mouth went dry. Despite the hot, frantic sex they'd had, she hadn't gotten enough of him yet. When he stood, she handed his coat to him, trying to appear unconcerned as he slipped it on. Sure he'd said he'd meet her in the parking lot of the Taco Bell down the street, but she couldn't help but wonder if this would be the last time she'd see him.

She held her hand out to him. "It was lovely to meet you," she said in her best doctor voice for the benefit of the orderly. "Please don't hesitate to contact me if there's something I can help you with."

Taliesin engulfed her hand in his much larger one and nodded his head. "Thank you for everything, Dr. Matthews." He turned and walked out the door.

Emerson forced herself to turn away and chat with the orderly. After several excruciatingly long moments of conversation, she gathered her purse and coat and left through the staff entrance. Stomach fluttering nervously, she unlocked her car door and drove to the restaurant, half convinced that Taliesin wouldn't be waiting for her. But he was. Her heart leaped into her throat at the sight of his welcoming smile.

She stopped the car and he slid in. "It turns out that I do need some help with something, Dr. Matthews."

"What?" He cupped her face in his chilly hands and slowly lowered his head. Staring into his silvery-grey eyes, she leaned into his kiss. As he threaded his fingers through her hair, she couldn't believe there was ever a time she hadn't known him.

Finally, he lifted his head and gazed into her eyes. "Let's get something to eat, before I jump you here in the parking lot like a horny teenager."

She grinned. "Do you hear me complaining?"

"You deserve better than a quick tumble in a parking lot." He frowned. "Or your office for that matter."

Emerson pulled out into traffic and headed toward her house. "Again. No complaints from me." She patted his leg reassuringly as they drove through town.

Halfway down Main Street, Taliesin pointed at a row of brightly lit storefronts. "Let's stop."

With an impending sense of dread, she glanced at the twinkling lights and the people rushing up and down the sidewalks trying to finish their holiday shopping. A young mother patiently held her toddler in the air so he could get a better look at the glowing star on the top of the tree in the town square. Taliesin waited for her answer, his sense of impatience barely concealed. Would it kill her to spend the evening doing Christmas related things?

She pulled the car into a recently vacated spot near the skating rink where Santa stood ringing a bell and collecting donations for the needy. Across the street, a group of Marines in their dress uniforms collected toys for underprivileged children. Taliesin barely waited for her to get out of the car before he dragged her into a toy store. Arms full, they left the shop half an hour later and dropped off their purchases with the Marines.

"Angels have credit cards?" she whispered glancing back at the huge pile of toys in the now overflowing bins and looking at the bag of doughnuts and steaming cups of cocoa he'd just bought.

"This one also has a debit card," he said with a wink. At her puzzled look he continued. "In this day and age, relying on the barter system and the kindness of strangers is, well, obsolete. I work for a living just like anyone else."

"Doing what?" she asked around a mouthful of glazed doughnut.

"Mostly sitting in on recording sessions. Depending on the artist, it pays well." Stopping in front of a crowded book-store, they peered in the front window. Well, he looked in the window — she just stared at him as she sipped her hot chocolate.

"Back in the early seventies, I realised that in order to continue working, I needed documentation...so a friend showed me how to go about it. Every fifteen years or so, I have to reinvent myself."

"If that's the case, why didn't you give me one of those names in the hospital?"

He flashed a bone-melting grin at her. "It's going to sound crazy," he warned.

"Crazier than anything else?"

His brow furrowed. "Probably not." He shoved his fingers through his hair. "Mostly, I just didn't want to lie to you."

Her heart flipped in her chest, and she stood on her toes to kiss him. "Thank you."



For a minute, she thought he might take her into his arms, instead he laughingly tossed their empty cups in the trash and pulled her across the street toward the ice rink. "C'mon Grinch, time to have some fun."

She shook her head. "This is a bad idea," she protested.

He stopped and pulled her flush against his body, heedless of the foot traffic forced to walk around them. "The last thing you claimed was a bad idea ended up being fabulous." When she didn't respond, he continued. "Remember? Back in your office?" he prodded. "I took off your —"

"I remember," she snapped.

His eyes sparkled. "I was going to say glasses."

"I haven't been on skates in years," she said more gently.

He shrugged. "Neither have I. Humour me?" He lifted her chin and held her gaze. "Please?"

"Does anyone ever tell you no?"

He grinned and she felt it in the pit of her stomach.

"I didn't think so," she grumbled. "Let's get this over with."

After renting skates, which he gallantly laced for her, he coaxed her onto the ice. Her ankles wobbled as badly as her nerves. At the other end of the rink, a mother and her two young daughters practised figure eights and Emerson's eyes burned with sudden tears. She swiped at her eyes as he led her expertly around the ice.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

She shook her head and skated away from him only to slip and fall on her butt.

Crossing to her side, he helped her up. "How about you tell me why you hate Christmas?"

"You're not going to let that go, are you?"

"Nope. Besides, I told you my secret. It's your turn."

A light snow drifted lazily from the low hanging clouds making this seem like the perfect postcard moment. She stared down at their skates. "When I was a kid, my mom was diagnosed with cancer right before Christmas." Her throat thickened with threatening tears and she had to swallow several times to continue. "We buried her the following December."

Gathering her into his arms, he smoothed his hand over her head. "Oh Em, I'm so sorry."

She blinked rapidly, willing away the tears. "I prayed constantly...rosaries, novenas. You name it—I said it. I begged. I pleaded. And all it got me was sore knees and pitying looks." She laughed, the sound harsh even to her own ears. "You know, you might be better off here with us mortals than with a God who doesn't give a shit if a child's mother lives or dies."

The tears she'd held back spilled down her cheeks and she dashed at them angrily. He held her closely and let her cry herself out. When her grief slowed to hiccups, he gently wiped the moisture from her cheeks and then folded her back in his arms. Closing her eyes, she let his warmth comfort her.

"He does care, you know."

Emerson raised her head and looked at Taliesin. She didn't think she'd ever seen him look so serious. "I can't explain His plans, or why things happen the way they do, but He truly cares for all of His people—no matter what they've done or how they feel about Him."

Taliesin pressed her head back to his chest and held her as the snow drifted down around them. They stood in silence, and she watched the happy faces of the people around them. Their joy was no longer painful to her. Normally, this sort of picture perfect scene would bring her to tears or at the very least, heighten her sense of loss—but not tonight. Tonight as she took in the scene before her, something in her chest loosened a little.

She'd shut the joy away for so long she hadn't realised how much the denial and anger had hurt her. For the first time since her mother had become ill, Emerson experienced a sense of peace about the situation. It didn't erase the pain, but it eased it somewhat. He hadn't told her anything that she hadn't heard before, but his quiet insight opened her eyes anyway. With a smile, she realised he'd already opened her heart.

"What are you smiling about?" he asked.

"You."

Taliesin stared at Em, wondering if she had any idea how she glowed right now. Despite the red nose and puffy eyes, she was the most radiantly beautiful woman he'd ever seen. It dawned on him. She was at peace. She was *happy*.

The whole time he'd been banished, he'd made himself happy. Certainly, other people had benefitted from his enjoyment and assistance with their art, but that wasn't the point. He might have brought the others joy through his inspiration, but in the end, his own happiness

had been more important. For once in his life, that wasn't the case. He wanted Em's happiness more than he wanted his own. This was *love*. Love was truly what he felt for her. And if the emotion shining from her eyes was any indication, she loved him, too.

The problem of his immortality played at the back of his mind, but they'd figure something out. And if they didn't, it would hurt to eventually lose her, but he'd rather have as much time with her as possible than walk away now because of the pain that would come later.

She took his hand and pulled him toward the rental shed where their shoes were. "Let's go home."

He followed willingly. "I'd like that."

The ride home was spent in companionable silence. Em even turned on the radio station that played all Christmas music all the time. He raised his eyebrows at her and she shrugged.

"I'm trying to turn over a new leaf," she said as she pulled into the driveway of her cottage-style home.

"Perfect timing." He followed her onto the front porch and leaned against the wall while she unlocked the door and pushed it open.

He walked inside as she asked, "What do you mean?"

Shutting the door behind them, he tucked a stray lock of silky hair behind her ear. "Tomorrow is the Winter Solstice—the longest night of the year. After tomorrow the days will be getting longer and longer." He brushed a tender kiss across her lips. "It's the perfect time to start letting in more light."

Shaking her head, she smiled. "I can probably find you a job as a motivational speaker."

"I've got a better job in mind." He caged her against the wall as she reached out and pulled his hips flush against hers. "It involves worshiping your body morning, noon and night."

"Have I mentioned that I like the way you think?"

Capturing her lips, he kissed her as he shoved her coat off her body and palmed her ass to drag her up against his raging hard on. She groaned and thrust herself against him yanking off his coat and his shirt. She dragged sweet, open-mouthed kisses over his bare chest as she freed the button of his pants. He slipped his hand beneath her soft sweater as a painful flash of blue-white light filled the room.

*Gabriel.*

Whirling, he stood in front of Emerson, blocking the angel's view of his woman. Trembling "What do you want?" he growled.

"You. Well, I don't," his sometime friend amended, "but He does."

"Look," Taliesin began. "I've changed my mind. I'd prefer to stay here."

Gabriel doubled both his size and brightness and roared like a gale through a canyon. "It isn't about what you want, fallen one. He bids you come, and so you shall." The angel extended his hand and though Taliesin fought with every fibre of his being Gabriel used his powers and dragged him from Emerson.

Clearly terrified, Em still reached out to him as if she could pull him back from the angel's grip. Rage swirled through his middle. He didn't want to leave her – not tonight of all nights. Not now that she'd finally found some happiness in her life. As they faded from sight, she shouted. He thought she said she loved him.

Emerson sank to the floor. If she'd ever had any doubts about Taliesin's angelic origins, tonight's nightmare would have put them to rest. Gathering his shirt in her hands, Emerson sobbed. And then raged.

Once again God had taken someone she loved. She might have only known Taliesin for a short while, but she loved him. Like an idiot, she'd gone and fallen in love with him, and God had taken him away. "What is it with you?" she shouted. "I actually find some joy in my life and you have to crush it?" Was there something so horrible about her that she didn't deserve love?

To think she'd actually believed what Taliesin had said about God caring. What a freaking joke. Once she'd screamed out her rage, she slumped against the wall and for the first time since her mother died, she prayed. She considered praying for his return, but even more than that, she wanted his safety.

Curled on the floor, she wrapped herself in his coat and waited. Being surrounded by his masculine scent offered a small measure of comfort. As the night wore on, exhaustion tugged at her eyelids, but she refused to give in. She needed to keep vigil. Shaking with rage and fright, she waited.

Taliesin hit the floor with a thud. Gabriel had literally dropped him on the floor of the audience chamber. Taliesin looked around. God wasn't here yet, but Michael was. The angel

stared at him like he wouldn't mind carving another chunk of flesh from his body. Taliesin got to his feet and nodded to him before turning back to Gabriel.

"I don't get it. Why make sure I meet someone I actually fall in love with and then yank me away? What's the fucking —"

"Language," Michael warned from the corner, hand on the hilt of his sword.

Taliesin glared at him. "What's the point?" he amended, turning back to Gabriel. "Believe it or not, I actually took your advice—heeding what I was to learn and all that. I figured it out. Emerson's happiness is more important than mine. I get it now."

Gabriel's lips twitched, but Michael laughed outright.

"What I don't understand," Taliesin continued, glaring at both of them, "is why I can't spend the rest of her life making her happy."

Michael wiped tears of amusement from his eyes. "You? In love? And with a human?" He shook his head.

Taliesin shrugged. "I wouldn't trade her for anything."

"Not even the full restoration of your powers?" Gabriel asked.

"Not even." Taliesin just hoped there would be a choice.

Emerson squinted against the blinding flash that cut the dull dawn light. They were back. She scrambled to her feet, still clutching Taliesin's shirt and rushed into his arms. Watching the angel warily, she threw her arms around her lover's neck.

"It's okay, Em," Taliesin murmured.

She smoothed her fingers over his face. "Are you all right? Did they hurt you?"

"I'm fine. Really." He tightened his arms around her. "And I'm here to stay if you'll have me."

"You'll stay with me?" She couldn't disguise the suspicion in her voice no matter how hard she tried. "I'm not sure I could bear it if they took you away again."

"I'm not going anywhere."

"He's human now," Gabriel volunteered. "He chose you."

"What?" Confusion and hope clashed in her chest, but hope won.

"I love you, Em. I want to spend the rest of my life with you." He laughed. "Some Angel of Inspiration I am—was," he clarified. "I can't even find the words to tell you how I feel without resorting to cliché."

"I love you, too," she whispered, happiness flooding her being. "So I can live with a little cliché here and there."

Gabriel stepped closer and she stiffened. A gentle smile softened his face as he laid his hands on the top of her and Taliesin's heads. "Live well in love, and find joy in one another. Revel in the blessings of our Lord."

He faded from sight and Em pressed closer to Taliesin's bare chest, adjusting her hold around his neck. Her fingers brushed over the scarred skin of his shoulders. "Does it still hurt?" she asked worried that she'd unintentionally caused him pain.

He shook his head and laughed. "I'm fine. Gabriel said the scars are to keep me humble."

She frowned. "I'm not sure I like him."

"I do." His dove grey eyes darkened with desire and he lowered his head. "He brought me to you," he whispered against her lips.

Driven by the same desire-fuelled need, their mouths met and fused as they lost themselves in each other. Barely breaking the kiss, he lifted her in his arms.

"Bedroom," he demanded and she pointed. Shouldering the door open, he laid her gently on her bed.

She tore at her clothes needing to feel the warmth and strength of his flesh against hers. She needed him to help her wash away the fear and uncertainty that had tormented her all night long.

Gloriously naked, he covered her with his body and stared into her eyes. "So, do you want to spend the shortest day of the year starting the longest journey of our lives?" She opened her mouth, but before she could speak, he added, "Marry me, Em."

A future she'd never dared hope for opened up in front of her. Her fear vanished, replaced by pure joy and she nodded. "I love you," she breathed as she welcomed him inside her body and heart.

Framing her face with his hands, he gazed at her. "You're all the inspiration I need."

Their hearts and bodies twined together as their new life began, bright as the rising sun.

## **About the Author**

I live in Michigan with my wonderful husband, two amazing sons and six somewhat psychotic cats.

When not tormenting my characters, I can usually be found helping with reading, writing and art projects in my sons' classrooms as well as providing child care and tutoring for several daycare children.

Besides writing, I also enjoy reading, knitting, sewing, cross stitching, pottery, drawing, jewellery making – basically anything that helps me avoid cooking and cleaning.

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