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SAMHAIN ENCHANTED EVENING

M. KING

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**Enchanted Evening
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Samhain Enchanted Evening

By

M. King

Matt Collier disliked autumn. If it wasn't the discomfort of rain and wind, or the beginnings of wintry chill that accompanied the early dark, it was the sense of haste that always seemed to come with the season. Everyone so busily clung to the last dregs of summer that the turning leaves and deepening puddles almost felt ignored to begin with, as if there had been a consensus to pretend the next few months weren't happening. Then, before he knew it, there would be a flurry of activity, with Halloween and Bonfire Night crammed into the space of one weekend, parallel to the frenetic run-up to Christmas.

Hell, it's almost that time of year again, isn't it?

Matt shuffled grimly off the rush-hour District Line train. He'd enjoy the holiday once it got here – dinner at his brother's house, the traditional Christmas Day phone call to his elderly aunt in Fife, and a general surfeit of turkey and brandy – but he hated the run-up.

It was the desperation he disliked. The way decorations were thrown up at the earliest possible moment and pre-season offers thrust down shoppers' throats from every inch of the High Street. It took all the pleasure of anticipation from the thing, and made it just another part of the grim, endless treadmill of life.

Matt turned the corner and trudged gloomily up the road towards the boring mundanity of his flat. The whole estate was a network of purpose-built apartment

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blocks; great faceless bulks of buildings shingled in sludgy tones of beige and brown over dull taupe or red brick walls. Even the bricks were singularly devoid of feature or charm—those cookie-cutter modern things, all precisely the same shape, size, and colour, a very numb shade of peachy scarlet. A sorry little triangle of green in the middle of the complex was supposed to give local kids somewhere to play, though Matt had never seen any there. One single, solitary tree—a stripling of mountain ash—stood within a metal guard that encircled its young trunk, as if Nature had been judged too untidy to be allowed to roam free.

A pack of children aged between seven and nine, and in various stages of costume, ran past him, brightly-coloured plastic masks flapping askew over their faces. In addition to the various bits of white cotton sheet and polyester witches' and devils' cloaks, the kids were bundled up in gloves and winter coats. Their thick-soled boots and trainers drummed on the pavement as they streamed by, and loud, echoing shrieks lingered long after they'd gone.

Matt curled his lip. Oh, good...he'd almost managed to forget today was Halloween.

He glanced at his watch. Time for a shower and a quick cuppa before he had to appear at his brother's. Tony was a few years younger than him physically but, mentally, Matt suspected he'd never made it all the way through adolescence. He and his wife, Cathy, were throwing their annual Halloween party and, this year, Matt hadn't managed to fling any decent excuses in front of the unstoppable juggernaut of Cathy's enthusiasm.

“Oh, do come,” she’d entreated him, “*please!* You never know, we might even manage to get you fixed up with someone.”

She’d laughed when she said it, and Matt hadn’t been quite sure how to take that. As if either the prospect of him getting a date was that unthinkable, or fiddling around with his love life gave her some kind of perverse joy. He suspected the latter and – though Matt didn’t actively dislike Cathy, because that was tantamount to kicking a kitten – he hated the way she treated his sexuality as some kind of novelty handbag. When she and Tony first started going out, Matt guessed there must have been some kind of ‘and when you meet my gay brother...’ speech behind the scenes, because he’d never had to tell her – and he knew he wasn’t *that* bloody obvious. She just automatically switched the conversation around to clothes shopping, Thai food, and the latest *Big Brother* gossip, and asked him if he’d been to that new nightclub up by the cinema yet. They had been in one of Southfields’ only two pubs at the time, not far from Tony’s house, tucking into a Sunday roast special. Matt remembered staring at his Yorkshire pud in the hopes of getting some kind of inspiration from it...or at least a lessening of the desire to dump the entire plate on her head.

No, he didn’t actively dislike Cathy – but she exhausted him.

Matt let himself in and hiked upstairs to his flat. It wasn’t large, but the wide picture windows along the far wall of the sitting room flooded it with natural light, lending an illusive suggestion of more space than there really was. Granted, today the glass was spotted with rain, and the light was decidedly grey and dingy, but at least he still had his panoramic view of the car park.

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Matt snorted to himself, dumped his car keys in the small brass bowl on the end table by the door, and went to put the kettle on.

He really didn't want to go to the party. There would be unappetising canapés bought in multiples of fifty from the frozen aisle of the local supermarket and reheated unevenly in the oven. They would be accompanied by cheap white wine, and cocktails Tony had invented on the spur of the moment, and awarded entertainingly rude names. Matt padded through to his tiny bathroom and shucked off his work clothes, still feeling like he had the smell of the office—apple-scented air freshener, other people's feet, and the odour of stultifying boredom—all over him. He stepped gratefully under the stream of hot water, catching a glimpse of his soft, pallid body in the mirror that hung on the wall as he did so. He winced. Definitely time to hit the gym again. A couple of weeks' decent work-outs should see him toned up—still far from underwear model material, but not too shabby. As good as it was ever going to get, anyway.

It was the face that worried Matt most. He wasn't sure when it had started to happen, but he'd grown aware that he had started to look...well, tired. Not fatigued, exactly, but— maybe bored was a better word. Yes, that was it. A tightening around his mouth, a hooding of his eyes; a slight contemptuous cast to his whole expression. He didn't like it. He wasn't, to the best of his knowledge, that kind of person. He enjoyed life, didn't he? There were still plenty of things he took pleasure in. After all, nobody could be lucky all the time, or have everything permanently go their way. He didn't expect that—he never had—but...

Matt closed his eyes and leaned his head back, letting the water soothe away all his thoughts, until nothing existed under the stream but the sound of his own breathing and the echo of blood beating in his ears.

Life wasn't perfect. He knew that. He'd never imagined it would be – and maybe that was the problem. Matt had never allowed himself the luxury of the kind of optimism that assumes everything will somehow be okay. Tony had been like that; when they were at school, he used to talk about how he would have done such-and-such by his thirtieth birthday – have this job, that car, get a mortgage sorted out, maybe be working on kid number two – and, when none of it had ever happened, he'd hit a real downward spiral. Matt had been there for him, talked him out of the dark places. After a few classic benders, he'd seemed to pick up, to remember that it was okay not to meet all those goals he'd set himself when he was too young to know any better. Life didn't need to be a race, and there wouldn't be a test at the end of it to make sure he'd checked all the right boxes.

Those were the exact words he'd used, Matt thought, and the taste of them came back to him now, sour and thick on his tongue. Sure, Tony had perked up – a few months later he met Cathy, and everything seemed to have worked out beautifully – but very little had changed for Matt. Same flat, same dull clerical job, his soul sold, straight out of business school, to the data entry department of a certain telecommunications giant, and the same stolid approach to every single bloody day.

Oh, things changed from time to time. There'd be some flash of colour – a minor promotion at work, a new boyfriend – but they never lasted very long. The boyfriends

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rarely did, anyway. Matt occasionally wondered if Cathy was right and he really was that difficult to pair off. Dating kryptonite...he supposed it could be possible. He'd always put it down to bad luck and bad judgement – who ever likes the guys that are good for them? – but things had been drier than usual lately.

Matt shut the water off, stepped out of the shower and towelled himself dry. He shouldn't get so introspective. It probably wasn't healthy...although it stood to reason, if he thought himself into this rut of negativity, he'd stay in it. Positive mental attitude and all that. It was just so damn hard to maintain when the whole world looked so bleak and changeless. His entire future seemed to stretch out like a concrete wall, freshly scrubbed clean of graffiti. The traces of so many things – so many opportunities and potentials – remained, but they were faded and barely visible, just waiting for someone to come along with a can of non-drying paint and blank them all out.

Matt shook the image out of his head, sprayed on some deodorant, and went to drink his tea while his hair dried. He dressed in dark indigo jeans and a comfortable dark-red v-neck sweater, a t-shirt under it to keep out the chill. Poking his tongue out at his reflection in the bathroom mirror, he decided he'd do well enough for tonight and readied to leave the flat.

The short walk back down to the Tube station was riven with the shouts of children, more gaggles of them out on sugar-fuelled rampages as the dusk deepened. Matt shrugged deeper into his jacket and tried to avoid the chill. The rain couldn't seem to decide whether it was actually going to fall properly or not. No droplets came, just a

faint dampness crystallising out of the air, visible only in the coronas of light that spilled onto the pavement where streetlamps fizzed into murky orange life.

Tony and Cathy lived a little way off the Southfields Grid—so named for the unusually ordered layout of the streets. The houses here depressed Matt almost as much as the purpose-built warren of rabbit holes he called home, but in a different way. Victorian-built, they were more attractive than the usual flat-faced terraces that fringed London's suburbs, but the way they stood in regimented lines unsettled him. Street after street, row after row. Their conformity was...frightening, Matt supposed.

He thought about that while, on automatic pilot, his feet carried him away from the dark, juddering, grimy world of the Tube and up through the networks of roads and corners that led to his brother's door. More trick-or-treaters here, accompanied by older siblings and parents. A small child dressed as Frankenstein's monster—complete with fake blood painted on and rubber bolts clipped to its neck—clutched a plastic pumpkin lantern with a battery-powered candle inside.

No, Matt decided, frightening wasn't too strong a word, even though it did sound silly in his head.

He could hear the music pounding from the end of the street and guessed Tony and Cathy must have invited half the neighbourhood. Sure enough, all the doors and windows were open, and people milled in the front garden, cans and glasses in hand, while a Kylie album, cranked up to deafening proportions, spewed from inside the house.

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Matt nodded at some of the guests, though he recognised no-one, and picked his way through the throng. There were a few Draculas and a couple of dodgy comedy wigs, but even they were nothing close to what wobbled out of the front door to greet him.

“Ooh! Matt!”

Cathy gave a squeal of excitement and lurched forward to fling her arms around his neck. Matt moved to hug her back, but wasn't entirely sure where to put his hands. She appeared to be wearing a selection of sequinned silver handkerchiefs, with a pair of fluffy white wings and a fluffy white halo on a wire. Body glitter and high-legged silver gladiator sandals with a two-inch platform completed the picture. Matt patted something vaguely in the direction of the wings and hoped for the best. Cathy pulled back and looked him over, her mouth twisted into a curl of reproach.

“Oh, Matt...what are you s'posed to be? You haven't come as anything! Spoilsport!”

Matt smiled awkwardly. Fancy dress. He should have known, though he couldn't remember picking it out of the barrage of things she'd said to him on the phone. She turned those big hazel eyes on him and stuck out her bottom lip.

“I'm a serial killer,” he said and felt slightly mean about it. “You'd never suspect me 'til it was too late, 'cos I look completely normal.”

She grinned and grabbed his arm. “Normal? Well, I dunno about that. Come on, let's get you a drink. I've got some friends from work I really want you to meet.”

Matt groaned inwardly but said nothing. If Cathy wanted to play matchmaker, there really wasn't anything he could do to stop her. His best hope was probably prayer – and hoping that whatever poor victim she'd chosen didn't turn out to be as bad as the

last one. Not that Gary, the most recent former target, had been all that unattractive. It was just that he was ten years younger than Matt, worked at a sports supply shop, and had few interests outside quad biking and squash. The only thing they had in common was their orientation and –had they ever got as far as the bedroom –Matt doubted *that* would have proved compatible.

The music was even louder in the front room. Knots of people he didn't know, some in costume and thankfully some not, were dotted about the place, spilling all along the hall and emanating from the kitchen.

Tony had taken up his usual stance by the drinks cabinet. He waved to Matt, most of him obscured by a comedy nun's habit, complete with inflatable pregnant belly effect beneath the cheap fabric. Matt glued his smile in place and hoped it didn't make his face hurt.

It was going to be a long night.

* * * *

A little over two hours later, Matt's suspicions had been confirmed.

Cathy's friends from the bank –two high-pitched, giggly women both called Laura, and Kevin, a redheaded accounts manager who kept looking at him like a frightened rabbit –had been introduced and, in the women's case, hustled away again. Cathy had winked at Matt as she left him and Kevin 'alone' on the patio. They talked about football for a couple of minutes, then Kevin blushed deeply, stammered something

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about being very confused, and excused himself. Matt watched him disappear back into the knots of people in the kitchen, murmured 'kryptonite' under his breath, and fought the temptation to glance at his watch. Surely it couldn't be too long until he could safely make an exit.

He clutched his glass of scotch like a life belt and watched his breath mist in the cold air. The night was soft, the kind of darkness that enveloped everything...so thick it was almost possible to believe it had mass, like velvet or silk. The various coloured lanterns and strings of star- and daisy-shaped lights that festooned the garden did little to really puncture it; in even the tiniest chinks of shadow, the darkness seeped back in.

"Hi."

Matt glanced around sharply. He hoped his sudden intake of breath hadn't been audible, but he wasn't expecting the voice that rippled through the air at his side.

The man stood unusually close—closer than necessity demanded, because there was hardly anyone else out here. He wasn't much taller than Matt, though his presence filled up the air, as if there was a great deal more to him than first met the eye...not that Matt had any problem with what first met the eye. He blinked and tried not to look like he was leeching. Broad—stocky, really, though not fat—and dark-haired, his complexion just the healthy side of pale, the bloke had something instantly attractive about him, something that engaged the eye and encouraged trust. It made Matt ashamed of the small burst of annoyance he'd felt at being caught unawares, and he smiled awkwardly, a dark pit of embarrassment opening up inside him.

"Hello."

The man grinned, displaying an even row of dentist-white teeth and devastatingly gorgeous dimples, like some kind of preternaturally photogenic fashion model. His eyes creased up when he smiled, and faint lines traced from their corners over the outline of his cheeks. Matt supposed he must smile a great deal, and then he was smiling too, but properly, not the gawky pretence at politeness that he'd first summoned.

"Not your bag, is it? This."

The man glanced over his shoulder, back towards the house and the thumping music, the shrieking laughter and the occasional tinkle of broken glass. Matt followed his gaze then shook his head.

"No. Well, I mean—not that I don't... It, um, it isn't really, no," he admitted. "I don't know anyone here. Except Tony and Cathy, obviously."

"Right."

The man kept looking at Matt, kept smiling, almost encouraging. Matt couldn't help but speak, just to fill the void. It definitely wasn't that he wanted to gain anyone's interest or approval.

"My brother," he added. "Um. Tony."

"Right."

"I'm sorry...I didn't catch your, um, name."

"Ciáran," he said, and Matt caught the slight hint of an Irish brogue he hadn't noticed before. "And you're...?"

"Matt. Um, hi."

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"Hi," Ciáran echoed, and they both laughed, the awkwardness giving way to something that felt, for a moment, like intimacy, or at least friendship.

It flustered Matt, though he tried hard not to show it, a stab of anger going through him at this man who could cause so much consternation with just one simple look. The fact he couldn't stop picturing what the guy looked like under his clothes wasn't helping matters either.

"Special night," Ciáran observed, tilting his head to look up at the stars.

Matt followed his gaze, seeing nothing much except the yellowish, opaque cast to the undersides of clouds, dulling the few pinpricks of stars he could make out in the city sky.

"Is it?"

"All Hallows' Eve," Ciáran said, still staring up into the muted dark.

Matt tried not to notice how handsome he was, the tawdry party lights sending slices of translucent colour across his face, and his expression all bound up with that strange, hidden melancholy. He seemed to be focused on something only he could see, or perhaps understand. Matt wondered if he'd run into a certifiable nutcase, but Ciáran appeared totally rational, totally...well, better than normal, in a number of ways.

"Right," Matt said, inwardly cursing himself for not picking a better response.

"Yeah."

Ciáran smiled and turned to face him. "Would you like to go somewhere? Get a drink?"

Matt blushed. He hated himself for it—hated the way it took him right back to his adolescence and the first few agonisingly embarrassing times he'd tried to flirt with another bloke—but he couldn't stop it. The heat just flooded up through the centre of his body, washing into his cheeks like high tide on an empty beach, and all he managed to do was work his lips around a small, pathetic 'yes'. It was so transparent. His lust, his need, his emotions and desperation...and the nakedness of Ciáran's question.

Matt recognised that as easily as he did his own inadequacy. It wasn't what he said, but the way he said it. The look in his eyes—were they green or brown? The shadows made it hard to tell—the curve of his lips, and even the subtle lilt in the voice all said the same thing.

Come home and fuck me.

Matt had already agreed, even before he wanted to back-pedal and call it off. He didn't do this; he wasn't that type of guy. He wasn't impulsive, or confident, or able to put off—for at least the time it took him to finish—the nagging fear that a casual partner he'd just picked up wouldn't turn out to have something horrible.

Yet, all the same, every instinct and rational thought in his head currently meant less than dandelion seeds on the breeze, next to the absolute certainty he felt that this was what he wanted. This was *right*.

Nobody seemed to notice them leave. It was around eleven and, though things were winding down, the party was far from over. Matt followed Ciáran a little way along the street, supposing he had a car parked somewhere, and wasn't entirely surprised when Ciáran turned suddenly and kissed him. Up close, he felt just as strong as he looked:

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muscular, hard...mouth insistent and enduring. Matt tasted him through the flavour-haze of the scotch he'd been drinking. Something like rain on cold windows and Irish stout, all mixed up together. He palmed Ciáran's chest through his black t-shirt, the zip of the black fleece catching at the side of his hand. Breaths, tangled and shorn at the edges, mingled in the space between them.

"You've been sad for a long time, haven't you?"

Ciáran's voice softened, the words barely needing to pass his lips before Matt could hear them...as if they were sharing the same thoughts. He reminded himself of how ridiculous that was, but it grew hard to concentrate when there were so many kisses and so many new places to touch. Ciáran's hands skimmed the waistband of Matt's jeans, and he wondered—for one fleeting, terrifying moment—if he wanted to try and suck him off here, amid the privet hedges, streetlights, and parked Fiestas.

"I..."

"You have. I know. I can tell. But don't be, all right? D'you trust me?"

"Trust?" Matt floundered, the edge rubbing off his desire. "I've only just met you. What—"

"C'mon."

Ciáran moved away, his smile still so tempting, and walked backwards along the pavement. The uneven pools of orange light spilled over him in waves, highlighting him for just a moment before the shadows rolled back up around him, leaving just his face and hands pale against the gloom. A car whooshed past, and Matt flinched, almost as if it was a strange thing intruding on them from some other place, some other time.

He shook his head.

I can't believe I'm doing this.

It started to rain again as they walked down to the Tube, though neither seemed to mind, or even notice much. The short journey passed in a rattling blackness that barely touched Matt, his attention far too occupied by Ciáran. Had the carriage been empty and the train been Circle Line, Matt could have pictured them going ahead with it right there on the seat, just letting the stations whirl by outside, an unattended mass of darkness.

As it was, it wouldn't have worked and, besides, an elderly drunk sat at the end of the carriage, clutching a can of lager and cursing—apparently either to himself or the universe at large.

"Feel it?" Ciáran whispered, lips brushing Matt's ear. "Everything's closer tonight."

Matt didn't know what he meant, but he smiled and nodded anyway.

They walked back to the flat—his place, where he could at least fool himself into believing he had a modicum of control—in fits of daft, childish giggles at how loud their footsteps sounded on the pavement. The night had taken on a thicker feel, like oil or treacle against the skin. Matt struggled to get his key into the door, a sudden chill nipping at his fingers.

"Witching hour's coming," Ciáran observed. "It'll be midnight before long."

Matt quirked an eyebrow as he finally got the door open and ushered them both inside. "What happens then? You turn into a pumpkin or something?"

Ciáran laughed and shook his head. "No. Not yet, at least."

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Upstairs, the nervousness Matt had felt disintegrated. He supposed it was due to being on his own turf, but he definitely felt braver...and better equipped to believe it was all actually happening. The *click* of the door closing behind them sounded loud, as if it echoed from some unexpected source. Matt wanted to say something, but there weren't any words he could think of that didn't sound ridiculous.

Christ, I'm out of practice.

Ciáran brushed the worry aside by leaning in and kissing him, hard. There was nothing soft or romantic about it, no element of wooing or convincing. One mouth claimed the other, a triumph and a demand, and then Matt found himself kissing him back. The fervour—the hunger—surprised him. He pulled at Ciáran's clothes, fingers fleeting to tug their way through his hair, hurriedly learning the contours of his face, his neck, his shoulders. Ciáran was just as impatient, and Matt's body responded to the roughness of his hands, his imprisoned cock aching to be touched with the same swift briskness as Ciáran stripped him. The heat of his mouth drew pulse after pulse of desire from Matt—an intensity he hadn't felt in a long time—and he groaned into the kiss, wanting more.

He backed Ciáran through the room in an awkward ballet of entwined limbs and bunglesome legs, neither able to see where they were going, nor prepared to break contact long enough to check. They hit the sofa and tumbled onto it, noses and teeth clashing, elbows and knees banging and jarring. Laughter smothered the collapse but didn't choke the desire, and Matt raised his arms to allow Ciáran to pull his top off.

The light of approval in his face made Matt want to blush again, made him want to almost shrink away, embarrassed. Ciáran ran his hand over Matt's bare chest, his fingers tentatively brushing one nipple, testing out the reaction he evoked. Matt stifled a shiver before realising he didn't need to—there was no reason to modify his responses, his pleasure, or his desires. He could take pride in them, and in himself, in his ability to arouse, to attract...to please.

He straddled Ciáran's lap and bent low over him, latching his mouth to that firm, strong jaw, tongue, lips and teeth trailing and tasting the skin so deliciously rough with stubble. The hard, heavy, tantalising landscape beneath Matt's mouth and hands culminated in the promise of the bulge that mirrored his own, rubbing against him where their crotches met. He could almost feel the heat of Ciáran's cock through the layers of denim and cotton that separated them, and those layers seemed altogether far too numerous, their very existence an assault on the natural order of things.

With some difficulty, Matt eased himself away from his exploration of Ciáran's neck and chest—those wide planes of muscle, better-toned than his own, though not admonishing him by it, proved almost irresistible—and set to tackling his fly. Ciáran followed his lead, two pairs of hands battling buttons and zips. Ciáran's mouth suddenly and inexplicably back on his, the whole thing became a heated, writhing push towards desperate freedom. It disorientated Matt a little, though he supposed he could blame lack of oxygen.

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Usually, that instant of being naked for the first time was rife with uncertainty, or at least a little nervousness. He didn't remember it ever feeling so liberating, like coming up for air in the sea, or the first flicker of sunlight when the train leaves the tunnel.

Ciáran looked amazing. Matt hadn't doubted he would. Thick-set and muscular, but through genuine strength rather than living at the gym. His body was rough-hewn—sculpted in wide angles and raw planes rather than straight lines and polished curves—and scatterings of dark hair covered his arms, legs, upper chest and belly. He didn't leave Matt much time to sit and stare, pulling him close once more for another deep, aching kiss.

Their bodies crushed tight together, their cocks met for the first time, skin on skin. Matt squirmed, rubbing closer, the delicious pressure and the enticing heat, dampness and friction firing his nerves. He broke first, reaching down for Ciáran, desperate to feel the weight in his hand, to learn the shape of his shaft, the veins that wrapped it and the fat head that topped it. His cock was so hard, so heavy, yet so delicate...a blossoming red bloom above a stout branch, and elegant, to Matt's eyes. He was just preparing to feel self-conscious about his own equipment—not quite as well-proportioned, and uncut—when Ciáran touched him for the first time, coaxing a host of new pleasures from Matt's core.

"Oh," he murmured, his surprise genuine.

The way the man *touched*...! His grasp was soft but expert, firm yet yielding, each stroke ending with a subtle twist of the palm that wrenched deeper sensations from Matt's flesh. Before he was fully aware of it, his hips were moving in needy little

thrusts, his cock jutting into Ciáran's slick fist, nudging over and over towards a climax far quicker than he wanted it to be.

Not yet...oh, God, not yet...

Ciáran seemed to hear his thoughts, because he backed off, his hand slipping beneath Matt to support his back as they adjusted their awkward position on the sofa. Pins and needles Matt hadn't even been aware of started to abate in his left leg, the limb screaming as the blood flow returned. Ciáran kissed his neck, hot tongue trailing the path of his jugular.

Dim recollections of thoughts filtered through the ragged edges of Matt's brain. Halloween, and the witching hour. Midnight. A thinning veil between two worlds. Wouldn't it be just his luck to have picked up a vampire?

He tilted his head back, giving Ciáran all of his neck and – in that moment – not really caring if he did bite it out. Matt wanted him to, in a way. Wanted something faster, harder, and messier than he'd ever had before. Something that proved he was alive.

Ciáran pulled back and looked at him seriously in the half-light, his palm tipping Matt's jaw close, so their eyes met.

"D'you want me to bite you?"

Matt's train of thought stalled. "Wh-what?"

He couldn't have...no. He doesn't mean –

"Way you had your head back, I thought... You like it like that? 'Cause if you do, it's fine. It's not really my thing, but –"

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“Oh.” Matt lowered his gaze, feeling exquisitely silly. “No, it’s fine. I’m not much of a biter. Or a bitee, if that’s even a word. I don’t know if —”

Ciáran’s mouth silenced him, the wet heat of a very human kiss. They toppled to the floor in a pile of arms and legs, and he rocked against the crisp firmness of that raw, broad body, loving every part of it, every inch of sensation.

“Want your cock,” Matt murmured, his voice thick and husky, the words growled straight into Ciáran’s mouth. “Fuck me?”

“Sure.”

It was all he needed to hear. A strange mixture of relief and desire sluiced through him, as if that one assurance had opened up a floodgate. Briefly, Ciáran's face hung above Matt as he began to push himself up, readying to get to his feet. Matt gazed into those deep-set, dark eyes, hypnotised. Ciáran’s expression was part simple want and lust, but part something else...something darker. That sensuous curve of a mouth—lips reddened with kisses, like a gash across the white of his skin—twitched into a dark smile, and a small shiver skittered down Matt’s spine.

Ciáran seemed something other than human in this odd light, at this weird hour; somehow powerful and mystical, despite how daft that sounded to Matt, even in the privacy of his own head. His pulse beat a steady tattoo of hunger at the base of his throat, and he wanted completion, total fulfilment...the kind of fullness he’d do anything to feel.

They stumbled to the bedroom, their nudity almost forgotten and their bodies half-draped around each other, unwilling to break away. To Matt, Ciáran still felt like a

strange, arcane thing. This body, with its unquenchable thirst, and the sense of one who so desired him—he hadn't realised how strange those things were to him, or how lonely he'd been.

The bed welcomed them, his worries about not having changed the sheets or picked the discarded clothes off the floor by the wardrobe forgotten as, in turn, he welcomed Ciáran. Matt lay face down, his cheeks burning against the cool cotton while they negotiated the unwieldy business of Ciáran finding the necessities in a bedroom not his own. Matt closed his eyes against the rattle of drawers, the sound of him taking a condom from the packet and dealing with the wrapper.

Christ, I hope those things are still in date. They must be, mustn't they?

Fuck, when was the last time I—

Ciáran's touch swept the thoughts away like cobwebs, and Matt loosed a small moan into the duvet. That hot mouth branded his shoulder, then the centre of his back, then the hollow above his arse, warm breath just skimming the top of the crack as Ciáran's fingers slid inside. One, two...urgent, demanding, and relentless. He allowed Matt very little time to adjust, the bed creaking beneath them as he shifted his position, his body pressed close. Matt held his breath, the feel of that slick cockhead pressing into him like teetering on the edge of a precipice. His mind—hardly engaged anymore, his body thinking for him—thrashed briefly against the bonds of lust and enchantment that still ensnared him. He lived in the real world, and he wasn't stupid. He wasn't a fantasist. Yet this still felt like fantasy...and he didn't care. At that point, Ciáran could have

turned into a devil, an angel, or any monster of the season, and Matt wouldn't have shrunk away.

He knew that, and the knowledge filled him as surely as Ciáran did—that first, greedy thrust that burned and soothed at the same time, splitting him and hitting every nerve he possessed. Matt cried out, humped back against him, and felt Ciáran's fingers curve around his arm, just holding on. The touch was gentle: strangely so, when theirs was an ever-harder fuck. Flesh met flesh, skin on skin, sweat and bodies slapping together as the intensity built, the pace speeding. Low, animal-like grunts mingled between them, and Ciáran squeezed his hand beneath Matt's body, returning to those torturously good, firm strokes. Matt felt his body tauten, and those solid, powerful hips gave two or three deep heaves as Ciáran came, his breath grazing the back of Matt's neck.

He slowed, pulled out and, for a second, let Matt think he meant to leave him like that, open and unspent. He heard Ciáran slicking off the used johnny then, wordlessly, he pulled Matt over, half-onto his back, so that he lay against that broad chest, the damp, softening spear of Ciáran's cock wedged against his buttock. Their legs intertwined, Ciáran held him, stroked him...kissed the side of his neck as he came.

Matt lay still for a while afterwards, not ready to move. He wasn't sure whether it could be a spell or not, but he didn't want to break it, just in case.

His eyelids grew heavy, and he didn't realise Ciáran had spoken at first, aware only of the air being disturbed somewhere in the region of his ear.

"Hm?"

"I said, did you have an early start in the morning or anything? I don't. So I could...y'know. If you want, I could stay."

Through the blurred bars of his eyelashes, Matt thought the world suddenly looked rather brighter. The hopeful tone in Ciáran's voice wasn't lost on him, and he flexed his fingers against the warm skin – arm, maybe, or perhaps thigh – beneath his hand.

"I don't have to, of course. If you're...well, if you do have to be somewhere, I understand. I mean, I don't usually –"

Matt patted whatever part of anatomy it was he was touching, and let his head loll a little against Ciáran's shoulder.

"No early starts. You can stay if you want." He let out a long, contented breath. "I'd like that a lot...if you did. And, incidentally, I don't either. Usually."

"Oh." Ciáran sounded pleased – and possibly just a little bit flattered. "Right, then."

"Mm."

Again, the temptation to sleep tugged at Matt's eyelids, and he knew he would be pointless to fight it.

"Matt?"

His name had never sounded so good on another man's lips, and he couldn't stop the sleep smile that spread across his face. "Hm?"

"Happy Halloween."

The smile became a grin. "You too. S'pose it is a special night, isn't it?"

Ciáran chuckled softly and kissed his hair.

Samhain Enchanted Evening

Matt drifted off to sleep on the thought that real enchantment could come from the most prosaic sources and – just maybe – there could be a little bit of magic in everything.

M. King

About the Author

M. King lives and works in a damp, verdant corner of South West England, where she may usually be found behind a keyboard and a vat of coffee. She has a deep and wide-ranging interest in folklore, and the Travellers' Tales series available from www.loveyoudivine.com is inspired by her long-time affection for Romany stories. She also has BDSM and f/f stories published by Loveyoudivine.

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