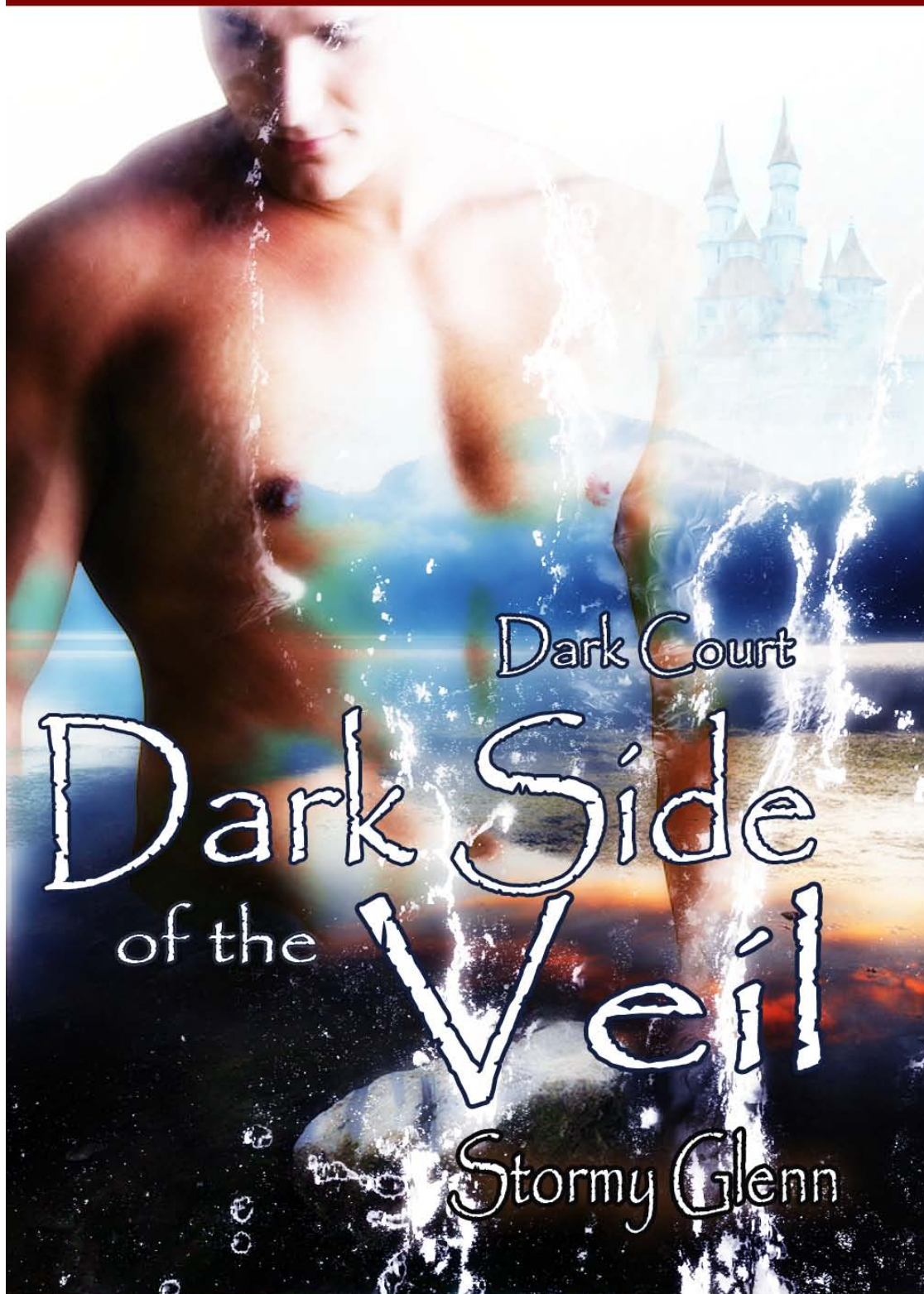


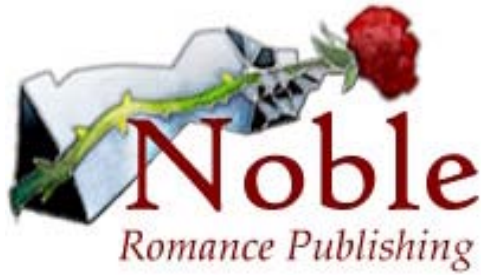
Noble Romance Publishing



Dark Court

Dark Side
of the Veil

Stormy Glenn



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Dark Court: Dark Side of the Veil

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Book Blurb

Zack Banning hasn't had an easy time of it recently. After spending more than fifteen years in the Marines, he's discharged due to a head injury received in combat. With no missions to run or people to save, it's all he can do to get out of bed in the mornings. The pills the doctors have him on to keep his injury-induced delusions at bay don't help the situation.

When he discovers a young man being accosted outside of a bar one night he sees it as a chance to feel the satisfaction of saving someone once again. He just doesn't realize until it's over that the young man came to the bar to warn him that someone is out to kill him. What Eljin tells him is a story so outlandish, Zack begins to wonder if he's having

one of his delusions. Because if Eljin's story is true, the entire foundation of everything Zack believes just flew out the window.

Fleeing through the countryside with Eljin, Zack tries to understand everything without telling the man he's nuttier than a fruitcake. But the more time Zack spend with Eljin, the more he wants him until he can't think of ever being separated from the little elf. The only way to save Eljin is to take him back home – through the veil between the two worlds. Arrival on the elf's side of the veil isn't perfect, however. They encounter a war between the elf worlds, the threat of human invasion, and a bias against humans. Zack and Eljin have to keep their wits about them as they try to save their home, their family, and themselves.

Chapter One

The passion flaming over every inch of his body was burning him alive. He needed more – more touching, more kissing, more everything. Every caress made him crave another. Zack had never desired another person like this in his life.

When the beautiful man above him licked at his nipples, Zack felt like flames licked at his body. He squirmed, trying to get those luscious lips on his other nipple, groaning gratefully when the man complied.

He could feel his hard cock pressing between the man's ass cheeks, a place he wanted to be more than he wanted his next breath. He wanted to feel the hot silk he knew waited for him wrapped around his aching shaft, pumping against him until he passed into oblivion.

"Please," Zack begged when the man's mouth continued to tease him. He'd beg, plead, whimper . . . do whatever he needed to do to get him what he needed.

The man pulled back, grinning down at him before he settled more closely over Zack's groin. A tight hand suddenly grasped Zack's cock, making him suck in his breath. He just might come from that alone.

When the man slowly lowered himself, impaling himself on Zack's cock, Zack didn't know if he would last more than a few minutes. He was so close to orgasm he could almost taste it.

"Oh fuck!" Zack cried out when the man finally bottomed out. His cock was so far inside the man, Zack wasn't sure where he ended and his mysterious lover began. The man moved,

slowly at first, then with more speed. Zack rolled his eyes back in his head, overcome with elation unlike anything he'd ever felt with any of his previous sexual partners.

Each thrust felt like he was being squeezed in molten lava. Strong muscles gripped Zack's cock and he doubted he'd have to move at all. The man could just massage him to orgasm. The feeling was exquisite.

Suddenly, the man leaned over him until they were nose to nose. Vivid blue eyes stared down at him. Zack couldn't look away, not even when the man lowered his mouth and kissed him.

Lost in the sweetest flavor he'd ever tasted, Zack barely felt the small nip of teeth until he tasted a light, coppery taste. His eyes widened in shock as he heard the man's voice in his head while their mouths were still connected.

"My leannan," the man whispered into his mind, "come for me, my beautiful leannan. Give me your life, your love, your forever, as I give you mine."

Instantly, Zack stiffened as every nerve ending in his body exploded at the same time. Pleasure shot through him and erupted inside of him. Zack roared as he came, filling the man above him with every last drop he had to give.

He distantly heard the man cry out and felt a hot wetness splatter across his abdomen but he was too far gone to acknowledge it. He floated in a euphoric haze of lust and desire. Zack opened his eyes and looked up at the flushed face of the man who'd just rocked his world.

Sad, azure blue eyes stared back at him as two little words filtered into his mind right before he faded off . . .

"I'm sorry."

The words echoed in Zack's mind for what must be the millionth time. He heard them in his sleep; he heard them during the day; he heard them all the time. Over and over again, for weeks now. Just when he thought he'd gotten past the words, he'd hear them again, echoing in his mind. And he didn't have the foggiest idea why. He just couldn't seem to stop hearing those two little words.

Zack took another long sip of his beer then cradled the brown bottle between his hands. Only one thing disturbed him more than hearing those two words over and over again . . . the image of deep, azure eyes looking at him with such sadness when the words were spoken.

To whom did those haunting blue eyes belong? Every time he searched his mind for some sort of connection, some small memory that could help him figure out what the hell was going on, his head started to ache. If he persisted in his pursuit for answers, horrific, agonizing pain ripped through him.

The injury he obtained on a combat mission wasn't life threatening but he had suffered a head trauma from a bomb exploding only a few feet from where he stood. The doctors said the injury caused short-term memory loss and he might experience delusions and hallucinations for the rest of his life. Zack figured that's what caused such weird dreams; they were a side effect of his brain trauma.

Shaking his head, Zack ran his hand through his hair. Although out of the service for a few months, years of training were hard to dismiss. He kept his black hair cut short and close to the scalp out of habit.

Maybe he'd never find out who said, *'I'm sorry'*, or why. Maybe it wasn't a memory, but simply a dream, brought on by the injury. Zack had no way of knowing.

He swallowed down the last of his beer and got to his feet. Hanging out in some backwater bar and getting drunk might sound good but it wouldn't solve his problems. More than likely it would just give him another headache and he'd suffered enough of those in the last three months to last him a lifetime.

He grabbed his black leather jacket and pulled it on over his shoulders. He tossed a couple of dollars down on the table then walked toward the door. Stopping on the steps outside, he started to zip up his coat when he heard a small whimper and the sounds of a scuffle coming from the side of the building.

Don't get involved, he told himself. *Whatever it is, just walk away*. He'd only been out of the hospital for a few weeks. He had no business getting into a fight with some fool who'd had one too many. Another frightened whimper shattered the silence, and

Zack sighed. As a Marine, he'd spent fifteen years protecting people. He *couldn't* just walk away, even if staying meant getting himself into deep shit. Resigned to the coming battle, Zack walked around the corner of the building.

He wasn't surprised to find three rather large men harassing a much smaller one. That's usually how it happened. Assholes tended to run in packs and attack people they could easily intimidate.

What did amaze him was how well the smaller man was fighting them off. Zack wouldn't have been surprised to find that the man had some sort of formal training. However, all of his movements seemed to defensive rather than offensive. Obviously, the man didn't want to fight. He just wanted to get away with his body intact.

The military uniforms the three attackers wore didn't register with Zack until he grabbed the first guy and took a swing at him. They were all dressed in full nighttime combat gear, the type only issued to military combat units. They even wore night goggles.

Zack knew immediately that there was more going on here than a simple mugging. These men were military and they were after the smaller guy for some unknown reason. That still didn't mean Zack was going to let the guy get his ass kicked. His gut and years of training told him the small, blond-haired guy was an innocent victim and in deep need of his help.

The first guy Zack hit went down without a struggle, too surprised to fight back. The second guy wasn't so easy. He lowered into a defensive stance, and Zack grinned. It had been a long time since he'd had the chance to get into a good fight.

He swung his fist at the same time he swiped out with his foot, aiming for face and legs. Both connected but didn't take the man down. Zack quickly spun around, aiming his next kick toward the man's head. That did the trick, much to Zack's satisfaction. He hadn't lost his edge.

The man fell to the ground, landing on his hands and knees. Before he could get up, Zack kicked out again, delivering another blow to the head. This time, when the man went down, he didn't get up again.

Before Zack could silently celebrate his triumph he felt a solid hit land on his back. He ignored the pain radiating through his body and turned to see the last man standing behind him. Zack grinned, watching the man's eyes widen at his easy smile before Zack decked him in the face.

Blood splattered from the man's nose and dribbled down his chin, and his eyes looked dazed. Zack didn't wait for the man to recover. He delivered a right hook, and then a left . . . pummeling his face and his upper body until the man fell back away from him. Zack pressed his advantage, hitting and kicking out until his opponent went down and didn't move again.

Zack took just a moment to check for a pulse before turning toward the form huddled against the wall. Zack inhaled sharply as eyes as blue as the deep sea met his. For a moment, he thought the man might be the one from his dreams, but then those blue eyes blinked and the illusion was gone.

Zack approached him slowly and held out a hand. He tried to keep his stance as non-threatening as possible. "My name is Zack," he said softly. "I'm not going to hurt you. I just want to make sure you're okay."

The man looked hesitant. His hands trembled as he rubbed them up and down his arms. His pale skin looked almost translucent in the moonlight. The fear in his wide eyes concerned Zack the most. It would be hard to check the man over if he was afraid.

What he did see didn't tell him much. The man wore an overly large hoody, baggy jeans, and a knit cap pulled down low over his brow. A braid of long, white-blond hair hung over his shoulder. Other than that, Zack couldn't even tell how big the man was. The clothes he wore made him pretty much shapeless.

"I'm not going to hurt you."

"You already said that," the man whispered.

Zack frowned. The man's voice sounded almost lyrical in nature, soft and light, almost birdlike in tone and quality. It also sounded like the voice in his head. If Zack didn't feel the aches and pains in his body from his fight he might think he was hallucinating, experiencing one of those delusions the doctors said he might experience.

Zack reached into his pocket and pulled out a bottle of prescription medication he was supposed to take when he started feeling this way. He popped the top and shook one out into his palm. Zack started to toss the pill into his mouth when it was suddenly smacked out of his hand.

"What the — ?"

"Don't take that!" the man snapped. "It will poison your mind."

"It was prescribed to me by my doctor." Zack shook out another pill, only to have it smacked out of his hand as well. Zack took a deep breath and shot the man a glare. "Look, I don't know who you are but you need to stop doing that. I need to take this pill."

"No, you don't. It only messes with your mind, makes you dopy and keeps you from thinking on your own."

Before Zack could react, the man reached over and grabbed the bottle of pills out of his hand and tossed them into the nearby dumpster.

"Hey! I need those. They keep me from having delusions." He started toward the garbage bin, ready to dive in and dig his pills out, but a light touch on his arm stopped him. Zack stopped, glancing down to see the man standing beside him, his delicately boned hand wrapped around Zack's wrist.

"Please, don't," the man said. "I swear you don't need them."

Zack frowned, his brows drawing together in confusion. "How can you know that? You just met me. You don't even know what I take them for."

Blue eyes bored into Zack. "You take them because a bomb exploded next to you and you received a head injury. The doctors said you had short term memory loss and you might suffer delusions. They also said you had permanent damage to your eyes, which drummed you out of the service."

Zack's mouth dropped open, his heart pounding faster with each word the man spoke. "Who in the hell are you?"

The man yanked on Zack's arm, pulling him away from the garbage bin and toward the opening of the alleyway. "I'll explain on the way, but we can't be here when

those guys wake up," he said as he pointed to the three unconscious men on the ground. "More will come when they don't report in."

"Wait, wait, slow down," Zack said. He planted his feet and refused to move another step. He wanted answers. "I want to know who the hell you are and why those men were attacking you before I take another step."

The man grabbed Zack's arm with both hands and pulled him toward the parking lot. He looked desperate, terrified. "Please, we need to go. They're going to wake up soon or others might arrive. We have to leave before that happens. I swear I'll explain everything on the way."

Zack was doubtful about the circumstances but the man's fear was real as were the three unconscious men lying behind him in the alley. Something serious was going on here and Zack was determined to get to the bottom of it, one way or another.

"Okay, fine, we'll go," he said, but he paused to point at the man with his free hand. "But the minute we're out of here I want to know everything that's going on and if you lie to me I'm done. Understand?"

The man nodded quickly. Zack shook his head, wondering what in the hell he was getting himself into. He had to be out of his mind. Granted, he'd done the right thing when he saved the guy but he had no business getting involved in whatever mess the man was in. He should just take him somewhere and drop him off.

Zack grimaced as that thought made his stomach roll. Everything in him rebelled at the mere idea of being separated from the man, which confused Zack to no end. He'd never even met the guy before. What did he care what happened to him?

Zack climbed into his pickup truck and hit the button to unlock the passenger side door. The little man quickly jumped in and shut the door, hitting the lock before leaning back and resting his head on the top of the bench seat.

He seemed relieved, the fear Zack felt coming from him lessening with each passing moment. That was until Zack opened his mouth again and then the man's fear came rushing back in great waves.

"Where should I drop you off?"

The man's eyes popped open and he turned his head to stare at Zack. "Drop me off? What do you mean, 'drop me off'?"

"Look, man, I don't know what kind of shit you're mixed up in but . . . Zack's voice trailed off as he caught sight of tears gathering in the corner of the man's eyes. He suddenly felt like the world's biggest jerk.

"Okay, you – do you have a name? I can't just keep calling you *man*."

"Eljin."

"Eljin." Zack chuckled. "Okay, Eljin, you can stay the night at my place but tomorrow you're on your own," Zack said after a moment. "I'm not trying to be rude or anything but I have enough shit in my life without adding yours."

Eljin glanced away from Zack to stare out the passenger side window. Zack could see his chest rise and fall several times as he took deep breathes. He wondered if Eljin felt nervous as he watched him continuously rub his stomach.

Zack put the key in the ignition and started to turn it on. "We'll head back to my place and we can get some food and a good night's rest. Everything will look better in the morning."

To Zack's surprise, Eljin shook his head and reached to unlock the door. "No, you're right. You don't need to be mixed up in my shit. I thank you for your timely rescue but I need to go."

"Wait," Zack shouted as Eljin opened the door and climbed out. "Where are you going?"

Eljin shrugged. "I'll find somewhere."

Zack's stomach clenched as Eljin walked away, his shoulders hunched against the cold night air. He looked desolate, alone. Zack knew what that felt like. He'd been alone most of his life, his only family the men he served with. Since his injury, he hadn't even had that. Figuring he might regret it later, he made a quick decision and jumped out of his truck.

"Wait, Eljin, come back to my place tonight and get a good night's rest," Zack said as he hurried after him. "You need some food and a warm, safe place to sleep. And you still owe me an explanation, remember?"

Eljin's steps slowed, paused for a moment then sped back up. "No, it's just better if we go our separate ways. Less chance of them finding—"

The rest of Eljin's words were lost in the sudden gust of wind that blew through the parking lot.

For some odd reason it gave Zack a chill. He flipped the collar of his jacket up as a deep shudder ripped through him. "Please, Eljin? I'd never get any rest if I knew you were out here on your own." Zack looked up at the dark clouds gathering overhead. "There's something in the air tonight."

Eljin stopped walking and looked up at the night sky. "Hunter's moon."

"Hunter's what?"

Eljin pointed to the full, dark orange and red moon overhead. "It's the hunter's moon, also known as the blood moon. This is the time when the veil between worlds is at its thinnest."

"Yeah, okay." Zack wondered if Eljin had all his oars in the water. The man sounded nuts. Still, he couldn't just leave him out here in the cold. "Look, come back to my place. You can go wherever in the morning."

Eljin glanced over at Zack then out at the darkness surrounding them. He seemed to give a little shiver, much as Zack had, before turning and walking back to the truck. "I'll leave in the morning."

Zack had no way to explain the exhilaration he felt in that moment. He shouldn't be so happy that Eljin decided to stay the night but he was. If it wouldn't have violated his dignity he would have danced a jig right there in the parking lot.

Instead, Zack walked around and climbed into the truck, waiting until Eljin shut the door once more. He started the truck and drove out of the parking lot, heading for his small apartment.

The silence in the cab was thick. Eljin didn't seem to be much into talking. He just stared out the passenger side window, continuously rubbing his stomach. Zack reached over and turned the heat on. Maybe Eljin was cold.

It took just a few minutes to get to Zack's apartment. He didn't like to drive far from home in case he needed to take his medication, in which case, driving was out of the question. He pulled into his designated parking spot and turned the truck off.

"I'm just over there." Zack pointed to the ground floor apartment on the right. "Let's go on in and I'll make us both something to eat, okay?"

Eljin didn't answer, just climbed out of the truck and shut the door. For someone who'd been so chatty back in the alley, he sure had clammed up. Zack shook his head and climbed out to walk around the front of the truck and join Eljin.

He led the way toward his apartment, listening to the man's footsteps as he followed along behind. They seemed to falter the closer they got to Zack's front door. Zack paused on the front step, house key in hand, to glance back over his shoulder.

"Eljin?"

Zack frowned as he took in Eljin's features. His eyes were huge in his pale white face, and his lips moved as if he mumbled something but no sound came out. His whole body seemed to tremble. He looked absolutely terrified.

"Eljin, what's wrong?" Zack took a step toward the man. "I won't hurt you, I promise. You're perfectly safe in my home."

Eljin started to shake his head, first slowly then faster with each movement. "We have to go," Eljin whispered. "It's not safe here."

"Eljin, wha — ?"

A loud creak brought Zack up short. He knew that sound. He'd made it himself a million times before, when he'd stepped on the loose board in his front foyer.

As Zack turned back toward the door, his senses instantly moving into battle mode, he saw things out of place that he hadn't noticed before. His attention had been too settled on Eljin but now he took everything around him.

There was small scratch around the door handle, a potted plant on his front stoop was overturned, and the curtains had a slight separation between them, one Zack knew wasn't there when he left. He always made certain his curtains were closed tightly so no one could look in. He liked his privacy.

He stepped away from the door, motioning with his hand for Eljin to back away. "You know what, Eljin? You just sit out here on the steps until you feel more comfortable. I'm going to get the groceries out of the truck."

Zack turned back to face Eljin and his truck. He waved his hand a little, making sure it could only be seen by Eljin, hoping the man would get the message.

"No, I'll help. I'm just tired so I'm moving a little slow."

Zack breathed a small sigh of relief. "Just don't overdo it, okay? I don't want you passing out on my front porch." He headed for his truck, making sure he remained between Eljin and whoever waited inside his apartment.

He had no idea who it was or what they wanted but something told him it had to do with the men who'd accosted Eljin back at the bar. With every passing second Zack grew more certain he needed to find a safe place and sit Eljin down for a little discussion. There were things he needed to know and he was going to find out and soon.

"It's going to be easier to get the groceries from the driver's side, Eljin," Zack said loudly as they approached his truck. "I have most of them stacked behind the driver's seat."

Eljin nodded and followed Zack around to the driver's side of the truck. Zack unlocked the door, keeping a close eye on the front of his apartment. He knew once they made their move they would only have moments to get away.

"Climb in and hand me those bags in back," Zack directed loudly. The moment Eljin climbed onto the front seat Zack shoved him all the way over and climbed in behind the wheel. He had the door shut and the engine started in seconds.

As he peeled out of his parking spot he saw his front door open and two men came running out. They were dressed in the same military gear as the men from the bar, only these men had guns in their hands.

Zack didn't wait for Eljin to buckle in before he punched the gas and headed out of the parking lot. He held his arm out, pinning Eljin to the seat, until they were on the main road.

"Buckle up!"

Just as Zack started around a sharp corner he spotted headlights in his rearview mirror. Another vehicle came speeding out of the parking lot behind them. Obviously the men from his apartment weren't going to give up easily.

Zack maneuvered through traffic, turning as many corners as he could as he tried to lose the people on their tail. "Start talking, Eljin," Zack snapped as he made yet another turn. "I want to know what in the hell is going on and I want to know now. Why were those men in my apartment?"

Eljin sighed. "They were sent there to kill you."

Chapter Two

Eljin's stomach rolled as Zack stared over at him with his mouth hanging open and his eyes as big as saucers. He knew this wasn't going to be easy. His tale was outlandish, even for him. He just hoped Zack would believe him.

"Kill me?" Zack exclaimed. "Why in the hell would they want to kill me?"

"Do you really want to know?" Eljin asked. "You're not going to like the answer. Hell" Eljin snorted. "You're not going to *believe* the answer."

"Just tell me, Eljin."

"After you were injured by that bomb you spent some time in a hospital."

"How do you know that? How do you know so much about me?"

Oh goody, the fun part. "I read your file."

"My file?" Zack asked, looking back and forth between Eljin and the road. "How did you get a hold of my file?"

Eljin's face grew hot. "I stole it."

Zack's eyebrows shot up nearly to his hairline. "You stole it? Stole it from where? From who?"

"I'm getting to that."

"Get to it faster."

"What I'm about to tell you sounds really outlandish but I can prove it." Eljin grabbed the dashboard as they went around a particularly sharp corner. He glanced out the back window but didn't see any headlights. "Do you think they're still following us?"

"Yes," Zack answered simply.

"Yes?"

"If they can find my apartment then they can find my truck. We need to get rid of it and find another mode of transportation before they locate us again."

"Any ideas?"

"Yes. *You* finish telling me what's going on. *I'll* worry about finding us another vehicle."

"Alright, look, it's really simple. When you were in the hospital you were involved in a secret government research project. You don't remember it because of the drugs they gave you, the ones you tried to take tonight."

Eljin didn't think it was a good thing when Zack started laughing. "Zack, I'm being totally serious. Yes, you suffered a head trauma from the explosion but it didn't cause any permanent damage. You're not suffering from delusions or paranoia or Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. You're fine except for those damn drugs they keep pumping into you."

Zack's mouth snapped shut and he stared back at the road. Eljin held his breath while he waited for him to say something. If he couldn't convince Zack of the truth he was going to be in a lot bigger trouble than he was already.

"You don't know what in the hell you're talking about," Zack finally said.

Eljin's hands clenched into fists. He had been through so much in the last several months. The one person he hoped he could count on didn't believe him. Eljin didn't know why he was surprised or felt hurt but he did. He just wanted to curl up in a hole somewhere and hide until this whole thing was over but that wasn't an option. He had responsibilities. He had something to protect.

Resigned to the fact that Zack was never going to believe him and he was on his own, Eljin leaned his head against the window. His eyes fluttered closed as deep sorrow filled him. He had been so sure Zack would believe him. He had been so wrong.

"Just drop me off at the next corner," Eljin finally said. "They'll stop following you once they pick up my trail again. They want me more than they want you."

"Not happening, Eljin, so forget it."

Eljin's snapped his head up and glared at Zack. "You don't understand. These guys won't stop, not until they catch me or I'm dead or both."

"Why, Eljin?" Zack asked. "You still haven't told me why."

"We were both involved in the research project. That's how I was able to get your file." Eljin rubbed his lips as he remembered the few brief hours he'd known Zack back at the research facility. They'd been magical, a time Eljin would never forget.

"Why me? Why did you steal *my* file? Weren't there others?"

"Yes, there were, but we met at the research facility and I knew I could trust you."

"I don't remember you."

Eljin glanced down at his lap as unimaginable anguish filled him at Zack's words. Until that moment, he'd held out hope that their brief time together had made as much of an impact on Zack as it had on him. Eljin felt tears gather in his eyes as that hope died.

"Yeah," he said, "I guess you don't."

"Did we know each other well?" Zack asked. "Were we friends? What?"

Eljin choked back a laugh. It would have been a bitter sound anyway. "No, we didn't know each other well. We only spent a few hours together."

"And that made you think coming to me was your best option? Are you crazy?"

Eljin couldn't hold back his laughter this time. *If you only knew.* "After you were released I overheard two of the guards talking about elimination orders that had been taken out on you. I had to warn you so I stole your file and came looking for you."

Eljin threw his hand in front of him, grabbing the dash board as Zack slammed on the breaks. He glanced over at the man, wondering if *he* was the crazy one.

"Elimination orders? Research facility? Mind altering drugs? This all sounds crazy, Eljin. You do realize that, don't you? You sound like a lunatic, like a delusional, paranoid, nutcase."

Eljin waved his hand absently. His faint smile held a touch of sadness. "Maybe I am. Maybe this is all some crazy nightmare and I'm going to wake up any minute and none of it will have happened. Wouldn't that be great?"

"Eljin, you're not making any sense." Zack put the truck back in gear and started down the road again. He pushed his hand through his short hair. "Tell me about this research project. What was it all about?"

"Genetics, mostly. The researchers were trying to find someone with superior genes to mix with recently discovered genetic material in the hopes of creating a super soldier or some such shit like that."

"And they chose me?" Zack scoffed. "For what?"

"You have very good genetics, Zack, far superior than most people on the planet. But that's not why they chose you. You were chosen because you have a genetic anomaly that makes you unique. Very few people have it, less than one percent of the population actually."

"And just what is this genetic anomaly? Is it a disease or something?" Zack gestured to his head. "Make me have black hair and blue eyes? What?"

"No, it's a dormant gene in your DNA that you inherited from one of your parents. It makes your DNA compatible with the new genetic material they discovered."

"I never knew my parents; I grew up in an orphanage. How would your scientist even know I had this gene?"

"Blood tests, most likely taken when you were injured. Once they knew you had the gene you were transferred to their research facility. After they took what they needed from you, they transferred you back to the hospital where you were released a few days later, never knowing what happened to you."

Zack's mouth took on an unpleasant twist, a muscle quivering in his jaw. "What did they take from me?"

"Your sperm," Eljin said quietly.

"My sperm?" Zack shouted as the truck swerved on the road. "What in the hell do they need my sperm for?"

Eljin rolled his eyes. "To make a baby, what else?"

"Did they?" Zack shouted. "Did they make a baby? Is there someone out there pregnant with my child?"

Eljin sighed and nodded. "Yes."

"Who?"

"Me," Eljin whispered then closed his eyes and waited for the fallout. It wasn't long in coming. Eljin opened his eyes in alarm when Zack slammed on the breaks and jumped out of his truck to storm around to the passenger side. Zack yanked the door open and pulled Eljin out before he could protest.

"I don't know who the fuck you think you are," Zack shouted as he jabbed a finger into Eljin's chest, "but I don't find this funny, not one damn bit. This is a sick joke."

"It's not a joke," Eljin insisted weakly because he knew it was a joke but the joke was on him for believing Zack would accept his words. "They locked us in a room together. You were tied down to a bed. They made us have sex until I got pregnant."

"First, men do not get pregnant. It's physically impossible," Zack said as he took one step toward Eljin then another, forcing him back. "And second, I am not gay. I would never have sex with a man."

Eljin held out a hand to Zack, hoping to get him to listen, to believe. Zack slapped it away, his face glowing red with his rage. He looked so mad, so fierce, that Eljin took a step back, suddenly frightened.

"I'm not lying, I swear."

"I don't believe you!"

Eljin's hands fell to his sides. His heart ached so much that he thought he might pass out. "I know," he said sadly. Eljin took one last long look at Zack knowing it would be the last one. He wanted to imprint Zack's memory into his mind.

"I'm sorry," he whispered. Tears burned a trail down Eljin's face as he turned and walked away. He wrapped his arms around his waist, not knowing if he was trying to hold onto the child they created together or to hold in his grief. "I won't bother you again."

"What did you say?"

The words were so softly spoken, so different from Zack's anger of a moment ago, that Eljin paused to look over his shoulder. Zack stood there, a totally bewildered look on his face. Eljin shook his head. "It doesn't matter."

Eljin turned and started walking again when a hand on his shoulder stopped him.

"Please, Eljin, what did you say?"

Eljin closed his eyes and prayed for strength. "I said I was sorry. I know my story is too outlandish to believe. You're right to think I'm crazy. Just go somewhere for a few days and stay hidden. They'll stop following you and you'll be safe." Eljin pulled away from Zack's grasp and began walking again.

Eljin's heart splintered into a thousand pieces when Zack did nothing to stop him. He knew the bond they'd formed back in the research facility hadn't been a strong

one but there *had* been one. Maybe it was just stronger on his side because of what he was. Clearly Zack no longer felt it.

"Eljin, wait," Zack called out.

Eljin kept walking.

"Please?"

Eljin stopped walking but he didn't look back.

"Look, you're right, this story of yours is pretty outlandish but I just can't leave you out here. There is someone after you; at least I know that part of the story is true. Let me take you somewhere safe, okay?"

"And the rest of it?"

"Eljin, I can't — men don't — fuck!"

Eljin glanced over his shoulder to see Zack raking his hand through his hair as he paced back and forth on the road. Deep in his heart, he'd known this wouldn't be a good idea. He knew someone like Zack wouldn't believe him. He almost didn't believe it and he had proof growing inside of him.

"Look, let's just not go there, okay? I'll take you somewhere safe and we'll take things from there. But I don't want to hear about us having sex or pregnant men or any of that. Understood? Not a word."

Eljin felt an acute sense of loss as he nodded his agreement. He warned Zack just as he'd meant to do. Now he needed to concentrate on the unborn child he carried. The only other people who knew he was pregnant were a select number of research scientists that wanted to hold him prisoner. No one else would believe him, not even the baby's father.

"Come on." Zack gestured with his hand for Eljin to join him. "We still need to find another vehicle."

With a heavy heart, Eljin walked back to the truck and climbed in. He didn't say a word as Zack started the engine and maneuvered them back onto the road. There didn't seem to be anything to say. He just leaned his head against the cool glass and

pretended to watch the scenery go by but he couldn't see a thing through the tears that swam in his eyes.

* * * * *

Eljin opened his eyes, dragged from his sleep by the bumpy dirt road they drove down. The tiny, two-door sedan they'd traded the truck for wasn't nearly as comfortable. Even as small as he was, Eljin felt scrunched up. He couldn't imagine how Zack must be feeling.

"What time is it?"

"About six thirty," Zack replied. "The sun should be coming up pretty soon."

"Where are we?" Eljin glanced at the trees lining the road outside of the car. They looked to be driving through a densely forested area. He couldn't see anything but trees and the dirt road in front of them.

"We're headed to a friend's house. He has a house out in the country. This is the only road to his place so it should be fairly easy to secure." Zack smiled over at Eljin. "Don't worry; I've known the Gunny for a lot of years. There's no one on the earth I trust more."

Eljin nodded to show he understood, and he did, even if it made his stomach cramp. Zack trusted this man they were going to see, but he'd never trust Eljin. Message heard. Message understood.

"Can you pull over, please?" Eljin asked as his stomach started to roll.

"Why?" Zack looked over at him.

"I'm going to throw up." Eljin covered his mouth and tried not to lose it before he could get the door open. Zack brought the car to a stop. Eljin jumped out and ran to the bushes. He dropped to his knees as he lost what was left of his stomach contents.

Morning sickness was a bitch!

Once his stomach calmed a little, he wiped his mouth on the cuff of his sleeve and went back to the car. Zack looked concerned when he climbed back in but he didn't

ask any questions, for which Eljin was grateful. Zack didn't want to hear why he was throwing up. It was better to let the man think it was nerves.

They spent the rest of the ride in silence, which was all of about ten minutes. The trees suddenly fell away to showcase a big cabin sitting on the edge of a large meadow, a lake in the middle of it. Very picturesque, and in many ways, much like Eljin's home.

"This is it," Zack said as he stopped the car. "Stay here while I go in and let Gunny know we're here. He doesn't like visitors much."

Zack climbed out of the car and walked toward the log cabin's front porch with his hands raised at his sides in a non-threatening gesture. Eljin was beginning to think this was a really bad idea, especially when an older man came out of the cabin, a rifle in his hands.

Eljin's hearts slammed against his ribs when the man pointed the gun at Zack. Then he looked beyond Zack to where Eljin sat in the car. He could see Zack talking, gesturing with his hands, but it was several moments before the rifle was lowered.

Eljin's heart didn't stop beating rapidly until Zack gestured for him to get out of the car. Eljin had no idea what Zack said to the man. He could only hope it wasn't anything about the story Eljin told Zack. He'd had about enough of people thinking he was a wack job.

He climbed out of the car and shut the door then walked over to join Zack on the porch. He scooted away when Zack reached out to grab his arm. Eljin couldn't handle Zack touching him, not anymore. It brought back too many memories, too many desires. Better they remained strangers.

Zack gave him a funny look then turned and walked into the house, holding the door open for him. Eljin followed at a slower pace. Zack might know the man who lived here, but Eljin didn't and he wasn't about to blindly give away his trust.

"Eljin, this is Gunnery Sergeant Montgomery Barnes. We've always called him Gunny," Zack said as he waved to the older man. "Gunny, this is Eljin, the man I told you about."

Eljin nodded in greeting. He could tell he was being measured for his worth. He understood that concept and couldn't say he wasn't doing the exact same thing. The man he looked at was a formidable person, muscular like Zack but shorter than him, with salt and pepper hair cropped short against his head.

"So, Zack tells me you've got someone after you," Gunny said. "Is that right, boy?"

Eljin nodded again as his gaze darted over to Zack. Just how much did Zack tell the man? "To be truthful, they're after me and Zack both. They only want to capture me; they want to *kill* Zack."

"Really?" Gunny crossed his arms over his chest and looked over at Zack. "Something you forgot to tell me, boy?"

"I'm not sure if I believe they're after me," Zack said. "I think they were just looking for Eljin."

No, of course not. If Zack believed they were after him he might have to give some credence to Eljin's entire story and he couldn't do that. Eljin suddenly felt very tired. He just wanted to lie down and sleep, maybe have a shower.

"Is there somewhere I can lie down? I'm not feeling so good."

Gunny frowned and looked Eljin up and down. "Yeah, there's a spare bedroom down the hallways, second door on the right."

"Thank you." Eljin refused to look at Zack as he walked past him and made his way to the spare room, but when opened the door and started to go in he gave into his desire for one quick peek.

He paused and looked back down the hallway to find Zack watching him with a funny expression on his face, as if he could quite figure out what was going on. Eljin turned away and walked into the room, quietly shutting the door behind him.

He leaned back against the door for a few minutes then walked across the room to sit down on the bed. Within a matter of moments, Eljin had his shoes and hat pulled off and lay stretched out on the bed.

He didn't climb under the covers because he doubted he'd be here that long, just laid across the top of the blankets. Once Zack had the chance to tell Eljin's outlandish story to his friend, the man would probably boot him out.

Eljin closed his eyes, feeling more tired than he could ever remember being. He knew he was at the end of his emotional limit. He just didn't think he could take anymore, not right now. He'd been through too much.

Tears sprang to his eyes again as he rubbed his hand over the small mound in his stomach. That was probably one of the things he disliked about carrying more than any other, except maybe the morning sickness. His emotions were all over the place. He couldn't seem to stop crying at the littlest thing.

It made him feel weak and as unmanly as he could possibly be. Not that being a man seemed to help matters, anyway. He'd probably be in a much better position if he were a woman. At least then people would believe he was pregnant.

Eljin suddenly felt a wave of home sickness wash through him. If he were home, he'd be cuddled right now, loved and cared for. His people would hold a great celebration at the news of the coming birth. It would be a welcome event. Instead, he felt alone and lost.

He never should have left home. But it wasn't like he'd done so voluntarily. Someone betrayed him; someone sold him out and turned him over to the human military to be used as a guinea pig.

He'd been on a diplomatic mission with his cousin when they were attacked by men with guns, men dressed like those who'd attacked him tonight. His cousin got away. Eljin did not. That was six months ago. His life had been hell ever since. The only bright spot was the few hours he'd spent in Zack's arms.

And that meant the joke was on him. Eljin shoved his hand into his mouth when he started to cry. There was no way in hell he wanted Zack to hear him. He'd start asking questions and Eljin didn't have the answers he wanted to hear.

Eljin cried silently until he had no tears left, just a hollow feeling deep in his chest. He wrapped his arms around himself because no one else was going to do it then

snuggled down into the blankets and pillow beneath him, hoping sleep would take him fast.

As he faded off to sleep, Eljin could hear Zack and Gunny talking in the other room. He couldn't make out what they were saying but he had a pretty good idea. He also knew his time here was now limited. Soon, he'd have to move on.

He just didn't know where he would go. Who would want him?

Chapter Three

"What's his story, Zack?" Gunny asked as he settled into one of the chairs in front of the fireplace, Zack sitting down across from him. "That boy has a lot going on in his head and I don't believe all of it is rosy."

"To tell you the truth, I'm not real sure," Zack replied. "I can't quite figure out if he's crazy and in need of serious medication or if he's telling the truth, in which case my entire concept of reality just went out to hell."

"What makes you say that?"

"Do you remember when I was injured by that bomb? Do you remember anything strange happening during that time?"

Gunny rubbed his chin then shook his head. "No, not really. I mean, you were pretty sick there for awhile. They weren't sure you were going to make it. Docs had you in the intensive care unit for awhile and we couldn't see you but they kept us informed of your progress."

"I was in ICU?"

"Hell yeah. You had a head injury, Zack. Where do you think they'd put you?"

"How long was I in the ICU?"

"Couple of weeks, why?"

"And you're sure that's where I was?"

Gunny frowned. "Where else would you have been?"

Zack rolled his head. "Oh, I don't know, a secret government research facility?"

"A what?" Gunny exclaimed. "Boy, have you been dipping into the whiskey?"

Zack chuckled. "You might think I have after I get done telling you what Eljin told me. As he put it, it's a very outlandish tale."

"Does it have to do with why you're hiding out here?"

Zack nodded. "And then some. According to Eljin, the men who are after him, the same ones who want to kill me, kidnapped me from the hospital and took me to some secret research facility to be part of some sick genetic experiment." Zack chuckled and shook his head at the absurdity of his story. "Apparently, they needed my sperm to help them create some sort of super soldier. I have this dormant gene that I inherited from one of my parents and —"

"Stop right there," Gunny said, holding up his hand. "Don't say another word."

"Wha — ?"

"Not another word, soldier!" Gunny barked.

Zack's eyes widened. He hadn't heard Gunny use a tone like that since he was in boot camp. Zack suddenly got the eerie feeling that his entire concept of reality just indeed went to hell.

"Go get your boy and bring him in here," Gunny said as he held out his hand. "Give me your keys. I'm going to go hide your car."

"Hide my car? Gunny, what in the hell is going on?"

"No questions." Gunny took the car key Zack held out then waved down the hallway. "Now go do what I told you to do. There's a lot more at stake here than you think."

Zack had a hundred questions he wanted to ask Gunny but he was more concerned that Eljin might have been telling the truth. The very idea was terrifying. If Eljin told the truth about the genetic experiments then he might be telling the truth about the rest of it and that made Zack hesitate as he reached the guest bedroom door.

Something about Eljin had intrigued him from the very beginning but he'd attributed it to the danger they were in, the adrenaline rush. He couldn't wrap his mind around the idea that they might have had sex, and maybe more.

Zack wasn't gay. He'd never been attracted to other men. Granted, he could look at a man and appreciate his good looks but he never found himself wanting to have sex with one. Of course, since he'd left the hospital, he hadn't wanted to have sex with women, either. He thought that was a side effect of his injury.

Zack took a deep breath and opened the door. Eljin was laid out on the bed, one hand wrapped around his stomach, the other under his cheek. Zack paused at the end of the bed and gazed down at the man, trying to see him as someone he might be interested in.

Eljin was a small man, delicate like a hummingbird. He couldn't have stood taller than five-foot-five and he might be a hundred and twenty pounds sopping wet. He had a sprite-like build, with fine, fragile bones. A strong wind could have blown him away.

His long, thick, white-blond braid fell down his back and onto the mattress. Zack wouldn't have minded seeing all of that glorious hair unbraided. It had to look wonderful. Maybe Eljin would let him brush it out someday?

Zack swallowed past the sudden lump that formed in his throat. What in the hell was he thinking? The thought of wrapping Eljin's long hair around his hand was making his cock throb in his jeans.

Why was he suddenly thinking of Eljin in an intimate way? He was a man. They were both men. Men didn't get involved sexually; at least *he* didn't get involved with another man sexually. He couldn't think of a single man on the planet that he wanted to have sex with . . . except maybe the one sleeping on the bed in front of him. How crazy was that?

I am so fucked!

Zack groaned then walked over to the side of the bed. He squatted down and reached over to rub the back of his knuckles along Eljin's cheek. Eljin's eyelids fluttered for a moment before they finally opened.

"Hey, hummingbird," Zack said softly, not realizing he'd used an endearment until Eljin's eyes widened and he inhaled sharply. "Gunny needs us out in the living room."

"Is it time for me to leave already?"

"No, Eljin, it's not time to leave yet." Zack stood and grabbed a folded blanket off the bottom of the bed. He shook it out and held it open for Eljin. "Come on; let's go see what Gunny wants and then you can get some more rest."

Eljin slowly climbed off the bed. He looked worn out, with deep shadows under his eyes, his movements stilted. Zack decided to take things into his own hands. He grabbed Eljin's shoes and hat off the floor and handed them to the smaller man.

Eljin yelped when Zack wrapped the blanket around his shoulders and lifted him into his arms. His hands grabbed onto Zack's shoulders, his gaze darting wildly around the room before coming to settle on Zack.

Zack froze, mesmerized by the deep blue of Eljin's eyes. Eljin looked away. When he glanced back, his eyes were once again pale blue.

"Do your eyes change color?" Zack asked.

"Sometimes," Eljin whispered.

"Why?"

Eljin shrugged. "It's a trait common in my family."

"What's their true color?"

Zack inhaled sharply when Eljin's eyes deepened to a brilliant azure blue, the same mysterious blue he saw in his dreams every night. Zack suddenly felt breathless, like he'd just run a marathon. His heart pounded frantically. His cock pulsed. Blood rushed to his head.

"Wha – ?" Zack stopped speaking and swallow. His throat felt dry. "This is your true color?"

Eljin nodded, watching him intently. Zack would have felt his stare even if he hadn't seen it.

"Who are you?" Zack finally asked.

Eljin's eyes closed for a moment. When he opened them a moment later, they were once again pale blue. Zack caught a glimpse of them just before Eljin looked away.

"You don't want to know," Eljin whispered.

The sad, resigned lilt in his voice sent a pang of heartache through Zack. It wasn't a feeling he was used to and he didn't like it. He felt guilty and forlorn at the same time.

"I don't understand any of this, Eljin." A myriad of emotions rolled through him. He didn't know whether to go with the joy he felt at holding Eljin in his arms or the guilt he felt at the sadness etched in the man's face.

"You don't have to," Eljin replied. "I know you don't want to be involved in this mess. We'll be —" Eljin hiccupped and his face grew paler. "I'll be fine."

Zack didn't miss the small break in Eljin's speech. He dropped his gaze to Eljin's stomach. The overly large hoody the man wore still hid his true form from view. If it wasn't for Eljin's delicate bone structure Zack might never have known that the man was thin, dressed as he was.

Zack wasn't quite ready to address what might be underneath that hoody. He'd had enough surprises for today and it was only 8:00 in the morning. He wasn't sure he could take too many more shocks. Better to deal with what he could right now and take on the weirder things at a later date.

With that thought firmly planted in his mind, Zack carried Eljin out of the guest bedroom and into the living room. They arrived in the living room just as Gunny came in the front door.

The old sergeant secured the lock. He glanced over at Zack, stared for a moment then nodded. Zack had no idea what the man was thinking but he wasn't in a place to question it right now. He felt too confused by all the recent events to delve into the Gunny's thoughts.

"Come with me," Gunny said as he walked into his kitchen. Zack followed, confused even more when Gunny walked into the food pantry. "Come on, we don't have a lot of time."

Growing more baffled by the moment, Zack followed Gunny into the pantry. Gunny shut the door behind them, plunging them into darkness. Zack felt Eljin stiffen in his arms. For some unknown reason, he leaned over and rubbed his cheek along the top of Eljin's head until he felt the man relax.

A moment later, Gunny flipped on the pantry light. Zack's brows drew together in confusion until Gunny reached over and pushed in a small knot in the wall. A second later, the back of the pantry wall slid open, revealing a stairwell.

Zack chuckled. He should have known. You could take the Marine out of the service but you couldn't take the service out of the Marine. They were always prepared, no matter what. Zack had no hesitation as he followed Gunny down the stairwell, hearing the wall slide closed behind him.

He was surprised, however, by the room they ended up in when they reached the bottom of the stairs. The hidden floor Gunny had beneath his house was a Marine's dream. Zack wished he'd thought of something like this.

At the bottom of the stairs the entry opened into a wide hallway with cement walls. As they walked through the passage, Zack noted an infirmary on one side, a locked cage with numerous weapons on the other. There were also a few small, private rooms with beds and lockers.

The end of the corridor opened into a large room that seemed to be a cross between a recreational room and a kitchen. To one side Zack could see a gun range; the other held a bowling alley, strangely enough. Gunny always did like his bowling.

"This is quite a setup you have here, Gunny," Zack said. "Expecting Armageddon?"

Gunny snorted and walked over to a cabinet. "You never know what's going to happen." He opened the cabinet, revealing a large surveillance setup with several high-end monitors. Zack hadn't seen a setup like that since he served in the military.

Gunny hit several buttons before giving a satisfied sigh. "There, secure as a bug in a rug," Gunny said. "Now we'll know if anyone comes within a mile of the house."

"You have a built-in security system out here?" Zack scoffed. "For what? Squirrels?"

"There are a lot of animals out there." Gunny said as he glanced away from the monitors to frown at Zack, "The two-legged ones as well as four-legged ones. I like being prepared for either."

Zack sat on the couch Gunny indicated, setting Eljin down next to him. Something induced him to keep his arm wrapped around Eljin's shoulders as they both faced Gunny.

"You're *Aes Sídh*e, aren't you, boy?" Gunny asked.

Zack had never heard that phrase before, had no clue as to its origins. It sounded foreign to him. He stared down at Eljin in confusion as the man nodded slowly. There was more going on here than he understood. He could feel it in the cold chill that ran up his spine.

"I thought so," Gunny said. He rubbed a hand down his face. "Christ, boy, what in the hell are you doing out here?"

"If you know about the *Aes Sídh*e then you must know the courts are at war," Eljin said. "I was betrayed and handed over to one of your secret government agencies, the same one that took Zack. I heard them plotting to kill Zack; I escaped so that I could warn him."

"I do appreciate that; Zack means a lot to me. But you have to know it's not safe for you on this side of the veil."

"It's not safe for me on the other side of the veil either."

Eljin snorted and his eyes turned deep blue.

Gunny inhaled sharply. "You're *fayerye*," he whispered.

Zack lifted Eljin up onto his lap, wrapping his arms possessively around the man as he growled at Gunny. "Mine!"

Zack blinked. Where in the fuck had that come from? Why did he suddenly want to rip Gunny's arms off and beat the man with them? And why did he suddenly feel an overwhelming urge to rub himself all over Eljin until he scent-covered the man?

"Sweet hell!" Gunny swore softly as he jumped to his feet and began pacing. He stopped several times and looked over at Zack and Eljin, his mouth opening as if he needed to say something before snapping shut. Then he'd start to pace again.

Finally, he stopped to stare at Eljin, his hands planted on his hips. "Have you completed the . . . ?"

Eljin shivered in Zack's arms. "It's not completed but I had to start it when we were together. They threatened to kill him if I didn't . . ."

Gunny paled. Zack's stomach clenched at the worried look on his old friends' face. He'd been in more than one dangerous situation with the man and he'd never seen him lose his cool or show a drop of fear. The fact Gunny looked frightened now disturbed Zack more than anything else could have.

"Would someone tell me what in the hell is going on?" Zack snapped.

Gunny ignored him. Instead, he knelt on the floor in front of Eljin. "Are you –?"

Eljin nodded.

Gunny closed his eyes briefly. When they opened, Zack thought he saw sadness in their depths.

"Please, *fayerye*, may I?" Gunny asked, holding his hands out. When Eljin nodded, Gunny reached out and laid his hands on the soft mound of Eljin's abdomen. He moved them around a bit as he caressed Eljin, a large grin breaking out over his face. "He's strong."

Eljin uttered a small laugh. "I thought so."

Zack was losing his mind. Gunny and Eljin seemed to be helping it along. He picked Eljin up and set him on the couch then jumped to his feet. Gunny fell back. Zack took several steps away from the both of them. He shook his finger at them.

"I don't know what kind of shit the two of you are playing at but men do not get pregnant. It's physically impossible," Zack shouted. He narrowed his eyes at Eljin. "And we didn't have sex. I'm not gay."

Having said what he felt he needed to say, Zack spun on his heels and stormed back up the stairs and out of the house. He needed fresh air. He needed to get away from the deep blue eyes that stared at him with so much sadness that it made his heart ache.

He walked for hours, barely noticing the scenery around him. His attention was centered on the argument he was having inside his head. He knew Eljin attracted him.

Every time he looked at the man he wanted to strip him naked and fuck him into the nearest flat surface.

Maybe that's what scared him the most. All his life, his sexual orientation hadn't been an issue. He liked women. He always had. He wasn't attracted to other men. So, why this man? Why Eljin?

Why did he have this uncontrollable need to protect the man from all the evils in the world? Sure, Eljin was an attractive man. Anyone who looked at him and saw that long, white-blond hair and those deep blue eyes would think the same thing.

But that didn't mean he was going to believe Eljin's outlandish story about being pregnant. If it wasn't for the fact that Zack was pretty sure Eljin was crazy, he might be tempted to follow his attraction and see what would happen. As it was, he wondered how long it would be before the men in white coats showed up to take Eljin to a padded room.

Not having any answers and feeling more confused by the second, Zack headed back to the house. Maybe Gunny could shed some light on the situation. Zack trusted Gunny more than any man on the planet. Gunny wouldn't lie to him.

The sun was just starting to set by the time Zack walked back into the house and headed back to the secret basement. Everything was quiet inside, almost too quiet. Zack walked down the stairs and glanced over to where Gunny sat watching the security monitors.

"Where's Eljin?"

"What do you care?" Gunny asked without lifting his head or looking away from the fire.

"Hell, Gunny, I care what happens to the guy. I just don't buy this story he hatched up about being pregnant. Men don't get pregnant. You took human anatomy just like I did. It's not possible."

"That would be true if Eljin were human," Gunny said, "but he's not. He's Aes Sídhé."

Chapter Four

Zack plopped down in the plush chair across from Gunny and dropped his head into his hands. Maybe he was hearing things? Maybe he really *did* have a massive head injury and the delusions were coming on one after another. He hadn't taken any of his pills since the previous day.

"Here, you look like you could use this."

Zack lifted his head to see Gunny holding a glass of whiskey out in front of him. He gratefully took it and swallowed some down, coughing when the fiery liquid burned down his throat. He frowned at the glass then glared over at Gunny.

"You still drink the cheapest shit you can find."

Gunny chuckled and shrugged as he sat down again, his own glass of whiskey in his hand. "Don't see any reason to spend tons of money on something I'm just going to piss out in a few minutes."

Silence reigned in the room as both men contemplated their thoughts. Finally, Zack spoke. "Tell me about the Aes Sídhé."

"Do you really want to know?"

"Truthfully, I don't know." Zack grimaced and stared down at the glass he held between his hands. "Gunny, you need to understand, I don't know if any of this real. Hell, for all I know, I'm back in the hospital in some rubber room."

"You're just as sane as I am, Zack."

"How do you know? I take pills to keep delusions away. I haven't had any medication since yesterday. What if this is all some elaborate fantasy created in my head because I forgot to take a pill?"

"You're not crazy, Zack," Gunny insisted. "This is all real and it's all happening."

Zack drew in a deep breath. "Okay, then tell me what *this* is."

"Eljin is Aes Sídhé. He's not of our world."

"An alien?" Zack asked skeptically.

"No, Aes Sídhe are a powerful, supernatural race like fairies or elves. They don't live on another planet but rather in a parallel universe of sorts. That was what I meant when I mentioned the veil. There is a thin veil between our world and his, like a gate." Gunny paused to take a drink of his whiskey, but he continued watching Zack intently. "Eljin isn't a normal Aes Sídhe, however. He's fayerye, of royal blood. That's what makes his eyes so blue. Only those born with royal blood have eyes that color."

"Royal blood?" Zack chuckled. "Of course he is. That would just fit so perfectly into my little fantasy. If I'm going to get involved with someone they might as well be royalty."

"Zack, this is no laughing matter," Gunny said sternly. "Eljin's life is in serious danger, as is the life of your unborn child."

Zack groaned, dropping his head back onto the seat cushion behind him. "I don't want to hear about that right now."

"You need to hear about it, damn it," Gunny snapped. "If anyone from the *Unseelie Court* gets their hands on Eljin they will kill him, especially now that he's carrying. Same goes for whoever is after you two here on this side of the veil."

Zack looked up. "Unseelie Court?"

"Eljin's world is divided into two worlds, like two separate countries. One is called the Seelie Court. This, uh, country, is beautiful. It's like spring all the time. There are animals everywhere, things growing, beautiful cities made of the purist white stone you ever saw. It's really breathtaking."

"And the Unseelie Court?"

"The Unseelie Court is just the opposite. It storms all the time, nothing grows, the people are miserable, starving, everything dies. Think of what a war-torn area is like after the soldiers leave. There's nothing. No happiness, no hope . . . only a brutal, dismal existence."

"Why would someone from this Unseelie Court want to kill Eljin?"

"He's a royal. That right there puts a bull's eye on his forehead. Add in the fact that he's carrying and he's probably at the top of their hit-list, right under the ruling monarch."

"Why?" Zack asked, refusing to put Eljin's possible pregnancy into words. He still wanted to know though.

"Because your child joins others in being in line for the throne," Gunny said. "Both countries are at war. The Unseelie Court wants the territory of the Seelie Court and vice versa. It's a war as old as time."

Zack understood war. He'd fought more battles than he cared to remember. He wasn't a regular Marine, but rather one of a team that was usually sent on special missions, the ones others couldn't complete.

It was everything else he didn't understand. "Tell me about Eljin," he finally said. "If what you and he say is true and he is pregnant, how is it possible?"

"Eljin is a royal —"

"You said that already, Gunny."

"Just listen." Gunny held up his hand. "Eljin is a royal, as denoted by his blue eyes. Royals are always born male. As such, their genetic makeup enables them to carry a child and give birth."

"Can all of the Aes Sídhé do that?" Zack asked in horror.

"No, just those of the royal bloodline, like Eljin."

Zack rubbed the bridge of his nose, feeling a headache coming on. "Do you know how fucked up this sounds? Fairies and elves fighting each other, men that give birth, secret agents trying to kill people? Are you sure I'm not delusional?"

"You're not having a delusion, Zack. This is all perfectly real."

Zack dropped his hand to stare across at Gunny. "How do you know so much about all of this? Are you Aes Sídhé?"

"No." Gunny chuckled, and then his face turned more solemn, his lips turning down in a frown as his eyebrows drew together. "Twenty some odd years ago I went on leave to the hills of Ireland. I met a young man there named Roland." Gunny smiled as

he stared into the fireplace. "God, he was beautiful, Zack . . . long, blond hair and the bluest eyes I ever saw. I was instantly smitten with him. We had three months together but it was enough for me to know I wanted to spend the rest of my life with him."

"What happened to him?" Zack asked softly.

"He was captured by the Unseelie Court and I never saw him again." Gunny lowered his tearful gaze to the glass in his hand. He took a deep gulp then returned to staring at it. "I've spent the last twenty years learning everything I could about the Aes Sídhe, trying to find him."

"Damn, Gunny, why didn't you ever say anything?"

"Would you have believed me?" Gunny waved his hand toward the hallway. "You have proof sleeping down the hallway and you still don't believe me. Why would I possibly think you'd believe me before?"

"It's not the same thing," Zack growled and clenched his fists.

"It *is* the same damn thing, Zack. Eljin is pregnant with your child. Deal with it."

Zack jumped to his feet, anger ripping through him. "I never agreed to it, damn it. I was tied down to a fucking bed. I never —" Zack's own words suddenly slammed into him. His knees buckled and he dropped to the floor as memories flooded him.

The soft caress of Eljin's hands, the feel of the man's skin pressed against him, the feeling of burying his cock deep into Eljin's body. Zack cried out, besieged by images he couldn't stop from filling his head.

Then he remembered the desolate look in Eljin's eyes, the softly spoken words in his head. He remembered and now knew who whispered *I'm sorry* to him. Zack looked up at Gunny in desperation as he realized he really wasn't delusional. Everything he'd been told was true.

"Gunny . . . fuck . . . Eljin." Zack looked down the hallway toward the guestroom. He remembered every horrible thing he'd said to Eljin, each time he'd scoffed at his unbelievable tale. He remembered Eljin's promise to leave and not involve him, how sad Eljin looked as he'd said the words.

"I need to talk to Eljin," Zack whispered as he climbed to his feet. His legs were shaky as he walked down the hallway. He paused outside the door, his heart pounding. Zack was afraid — terrified, actually — of what he'd find on the other side of the door. Would Eljin be gone? Still here? Zack wasn't sure which scared him more.

Gathering his courage, Zack turned the knob and stepped inside. His gaze immediately went to the bed where Eljin sat brushing his hair. Zack's breath caught in his throat at the guarded look Eljin cast him, almost as if the man waited for him to say something scathing.

And considering his recent behavior, Zack figured Eljin had every right to be on his guard. Shoving his hands into his pockets, Zack tried to appear as non-threatening as possible.

"Can I talk to you?"

Eljin stared at him for a moment then nodded. He scooted back on the bed to lean against the headboard, crossing his legs and sitting Indian style. He didn't say anything, but he kept his gaze pinned on Zack's.

"Gunny told me everything."

Eljin visibly shuddered and his gaze dropped down to his lap. "I'm sorry," he whispered.

"You've said that before, Eljin."

Eljin's eyes flickered up to Zack then back down to his lap. "Do you want me to go?"

Zack didn't answer. He didn't know what he wanted. He felt too confused by everything that happened in the last two days and everything he learned to be able to give Eljin a concrete answer.

"How far along are you?" Zack asked. He gestured to the mound under the white cotton shirt Eljin wore. He wasn't surprised when Eljin's hands dropped down to cover the mound as if he were trying to protect the unborn child. Eljin seemed fiercely protective of the baby.

"I'm in my second trimester."

"So you're what . . . five, six months along?" Zack tried to quickly do the math in his head but Eljin's words stopped him.

"No, our gestational period is different than humans. We only carry for five months." The smile Eljin shot down to his stomach as he rubbed it made Zack wish the man smiled at him. "I only have another couple months to go."

"Two months? Isn't that kind of quick?"

"Each trimester is only seven weeks long. I have two weeks left in this trimester."

"You're not showing much. Is everything okay?"

"Yeah, everything is fine." Eljin looked up, giving Zack the smile he wanted. "He's growing just like he should. During the last trimester I'll be as big as a house. That's when the baby really starts to put on weight. Right now all his little body parts are forming."

Zack reached out his hand, unable to stop himself, but then paused. "Can I—?"

Eljin looked hesitant, staring intently at Zack before nodding and scooting down on the bed to lie back against the pillows. Zack's breath caught in his throat as he watched Eljin pull his shirt up, revealing a stomach more swollen than Zack had expected.

Zack slowly stretched out beside Eljin, giving the man plenty of time to stop him. He leaned on his forearm and reached over with his other hand. He held it there, hovering just above the mound, glancing up when he heard Eljin chuckle.

"He's not going to bite you," Eljin said as he grabbed Zack's hand and pressed it over his distended stomach, palm down.

Zack didn't feel anything except Eljin's silky skin. He glanced up at Eljin in concern. "Is he sleeping?" The moment the words were out of his mouth Zack felt a hard kick under his hand. "Whoa!"

Eljin laughed. "I said he was strong."

Zack moved his hand over Eljin's stomach, chuckling when the kicks followed his movements. "He certainly is active." He glanced up at Eljin, not realizing until then how close their faces were to each other. "Is that normal?"

Eljin shrugged. "I guess so. This is my first so I—"

"This is your first child?"

Eljin nodded, his gaze meeting Zack's. "Of course this is my first child."

Zack immediately felt like a jerk. "I'm sorry, Eljin. I just don't know how these things are done. I've never been in this situation."

Eljin nodded. "Me neither. I'm the youngest of five children so I was never around when my father gave birth to my brothers."

Zack choked. "Your father?"

"Only the men in my family give birth." Eljin smirked. "It's been that way for centuries."

"You do know how strange this sounds to me, don't you?" Zack asked. "In my world, men don't have babies."

"I'm sorry," Eljin whispered. He seemed to fold into himself, his chin tucked down close to his chest, his arms wrapping tightly around his chest. "They said they would kill you if I didn't—that they didn't need you if I couldn't get you to . . . to perform. They promised they'd let you go if I just" Eljin's eyes were filled with tears as he glanced up at Zack. "I'm so sorry."

"Shh," Zack whispered as he wrapped an arm around Eljin and pulled the man into his embrace. "I know, hummingbird, I know."

As Zack held Eljin he began to notice the softness of the man's curves, the sweet smell of his silky skin. Each inhale brought more of Eljin's sweet scent into his body until his cock ached with a need to feel the man's naked body pressed against his.

"Eljin."

When Eljin tilted his head back, they were nearly nose to nose. Zack stared at Eljin's lush mouth. He felt his cock jerk when Eljin licked his lips. He looked up into Eljin's eyes then back down to his lips again. His heart beat faster.

"Eljin," he murmured, not sure if he wanted to warn the man off or plead with him to come closer.

Eljin took the decision out of his hands by leaning up and kissing him. Zack lay there stunned until Eljin pulled away, sadness making his face pale. Zack couldn't have that. He cupped his hand around the nape of Eljin's neck and pulled the man back into the kiss.

He tasted so sweet, felt so soft. Zack groaned. He never felt such desire before, at least not that he could remember. His hands trembled as he moved them, one caressing Eljin's cheek, the other running up and down Eljin's back as he pulled the man closer.

Zack was right; the feel of Eljin's body pressed against his was heaven on earth. He stroked his hand down Eljin's back to his hip then around the perfect curve of his ass. He gently grabbed his thigh and pulled it up over his hip until their cocks met, mashing together.

A sense of urgency drove him. He needed to feel more. Grabbing the hem of Eljin's shirt, he worked it up the man's lean chest then over his head. He heard Eljin's groan of protest turn into a cry of ecstasy when he started nibbling along his jawline then down to his neck.

When Eljin started yanking on his shirt, Zack leaned up far enough to whip it over his head. He tossed it across the room before lying back down. His hands were immediately back on Eljin's body.

Every time his gaze met Eljin's, his heart turned over in response. His body was inflamed, burning. He stroked his hand over Eljin's back again, moving down until he encountered the waistband of Eljin's jogging pants.

Zack leaned back and took a moment to look into Eljin's eyes before pushing his hand under the material, instantly cupping a softly rounded butt cheek in his hand. Eljin's eyes widened, growing darker, but he didn't protest. Instead, he pressed into the caress.

Eljin brought his leg back over Zack's hip, opening himself up to Zack's questing fingers. Zack watched Eljin's passion-flushed face carefully as he moved his fingers down between the two cheeks, grazing the man's puckered flesh. Eljin's body stiffened before humping wildly against Zack's seeking fingers.

"Zack," Eljin moaned, his hand digging into the flesh of Zack's shoulder. When his head dropped back against the pillow, his throat muscles arched. Zack thought he was the most beautiful thing he'd ever seen.

He leaned forward and licked from Eljin's collar bone up to his chin and then across his plush slips. Eljin's tongue came out to war with his. It was a battle for dominance until Eljin finally surrendered with a deep sigh and allowed Zack into his mouth. Zack delved in, licking and sucking as he claimed Eljin's mouth for himself.

As he brushed his finger across Eljin's tight hole again Zack realized he needed some sort of lube. He might not remember having sex with Eljin but he'd had enough anal sex with women to know he needed something to smooth the way.

He broke away from Eljin and scanned the room, his gaze finally settling on a small bottle of body lotion sitting on the nightstand next to the brush Eljin had been using. He reached over and grabbed the bottle, squirted a fair amount out onto his fingers then dropped the bottle on the bed.

Eljin was panting when Zack turned back to him, the knowledge of what was coming clear in his eyes. Zack moved his hand back beneath the waistband of Eljin's jogging pants and down toward the tight little hole he wanted into.

As he started pushing his finger in, he claimed Eljin's lips once again, swallowing the man's deep cry as his ass was breached. Zane paused, afraid he'd hurt him, until he felt the man push back against him. Tight heat enveloped his finger.

Zack took Eljin's reaction as permission to continue and began thrusting his finger in and out. He was a little surprise at how much Eljin seemed to want this, how much his *body* seemed to want it.

Every time he pushed his finger in it was swallowed right up as if Eljin's body craved his touch. It made Zack's breathe hitch, his cock throb. He wanted to feel Eljin's body swallow his cock in just the same manner.

Zack added a second finger to the first, amazed when Eljin's body readily accepted it. After a few thrusts, he added another. This one was also sucked right in. Zack started to tremble as he fought for control.

He wanted to pin Eljin to the mattress and fuck him until they both passed out but he knew he needed to be gentle. Eljin was very fine-boned and delicate. Zack could seriously hurt him if he gave in to the deep passion burning through his body. He also needed to consider the baby Eljin carried. They both needed his gentle care, not a lust-filled beast.

Zack pulled his fingers free of Eljin and rolled the man onto his back. Eljin lay there, blinking up at him. Zack gave him a reassuring smile then grabbed the legs of his jogging pants and pulled them slowly off, drinking in every inch of skin he uncovered until he could toss the pants over his shoulder.

Zack swallowed hard, the level of his lust skyrocketing at he looked down at the bounty before him. Eljin didn't have tons of muscles like Zack did but he did have some definition. His form was more delicate, with lean lines and creamy skin. He didn't have a hair on his body lower than his eyebrows.

And then there was the soft mound that proclaimed Eljin pregnant with Zack's child. His hands trembled as he reached down and covered the slight lump. Did Eljin's present condition make him more desirable, Zack wondered. Incredibly, and most confusingly, the answer to that question appeared to be yes.

He moved his hands away from Eljin's distended stomach and farther up to pluck at his nipples. He liked the reaction he received; Eljin wiggled and moaned beneath him. Zack suddenly wanted to give him so much pleasure he'd never remember any time he'd been without it.

Zack leaned over Eljin's body, making sure he kept his weight on his arms. He nipped at Eljin's lips, his jawline, his throat, then moved down to circle Eljin's nipples with his tongue. Eljin wailed, his cries growing louder with each wet swipe.

With Eljin's cries ringing in his ears, Zack grabbed his legs and pulled them up over his arms, lifting his ass higher in the air. He scooted forward until the head of his cock pushed against Eljin's tight entrance then grabbed the bottle of body lotion and squirted a large amount onto the both of them.

He looked up at Eljin suddenly as a thought came to him. "Do I need a condom?"

"No." Eljin shook his head. "I'm already pregnant and I can't catch any human diseases. I also can't pass anything on to you." Eljin smiled. "But thank you for asking."

Zack nodded, relieved, then glanced back down to where their bodies met intimately. "Fuck, Eljin," he whispered hoarsely as he watched Eljin's puckered skin quiver around his cock, "your body craves me."

"Yes," was Eljin's only reply as he bore down and Zack slipped in a little more.

Zack couldn't tear his eyes away as he watched himself slowly sink into Eljin's body, the sight more erotic than any pornography he'd ever watched. Eljin's body just sucked him right in as if he were made to be there, every last inch of him until none of his cock remained outside of Eljin's grasp.

Zack let his head fall back. He took several deep breaths, trying to regain the control that was quickly slipping away from him. If he'd known sex with Eljin could feel like this he would have attacked the man the minute he first saw him.

He just hoped that someone like Eljin could continue to have sex through most of his pregnancy because now that he'd experienced what being inside of the man felt like Zack was pretty sure he'd rather be dead than go without it.

He finally looked back down to where he was joined with Eljin and started pumping his hips. He meant to go slow, to be gentle, but the first time he pulled back then shoved in again he knew he was done for. Nothing ever felt this good. Pleasure zinged through his body from the top of his head to the bottom of his toes. He was in so much trouble.

He gripped Eljin's legs tighter, lifting them up a little more, and started thrusting. He panted heavily as his body took over, knowing exactly what it wanted. And it wanted Eljin.

The sudden tightening of Eljin's body around his and the wild cry from the man's lips caught Zack by surprise. He glanced up quickly, captured by the sight of Eljin's cock spouting white cream all over the both of them.

Dear God. The man came and Zack hadn't even touched his cock. He'd heard of things like that happening, he'd just never experienced it firsthand. He was mesmerized until his body told him he was heading to the same place.

Zack winced as Eljin's inner muscles massaged his cock, squeezed it until he could barely move. All that hot silk surrounding him, and the knowledge he'd brought Eljin pleasure, combined to send Zack right over the edge.

He pulled out until just the head of his cock remained inside Eljin's tight hole. As he felt himself start to climax, he rammed back in as far as he could go, feeling Eljin's body caress him the entire way.

A great bellow came from Zack's mouth as the most exquisite pleasure he'd ever experienced ripped through him. His body went stiff as his cock swelled then erupted, filling Eljin with his seed.

As he slumped over Eljin's body, still mindful to fully support his own weight, he heard a soft whisper in his ear.

"My beautiful leannan, give me your life, your love, your forever, as I give you mine."

He felt Eljin's hands stroke his back, his sides, the nape of his neck. He lay there enjoying the caress for several moments before pulling free and rolling to his side. He rubbed his hand over Eljin's stomach.

"He's okay?" Zack asked quietly. "We didn't hurt him?"

Eljin's hand covered his, holding it in place over their child. "He's fine. I told you, he's a strong one."

"I just wanted to be sure. I've never had sex with someone who was pregnant before."

Eljin chuckled. "I've never had sex while pregnant before."

"Funny!" Zack smirked as he rolled to the side of the bed. He went into the bathroom and cleaned up, grabbed a wet washcloth and brought it back into the bedroom. When Zack began wiping Eljin down, the man protested for a moment but then let Zack work.

Zack tossed the washcloth into the bathroom then curled his body around Eljin's, snuggling the smaller man back against his chest. He laid one arm down on the bed for Eljin to rest his head on and wrapped the other one around the small mound where his child slept.

"Go to sleep, hummingbird," Zack whispered as he closed his eyes. "I'll keep you safe."

Chapter Five

"Eljin, wake up. It's time to go."

Eljin's eyes flickered open. He stared up at Zack as the words registered in his sleepy brain. *Time to go.* A cold shiver ran up his spine. "Okay." He rolled to the side of the bed and reached for his clothes, pulling them on slowly feeling as if it took every bit of energy he had to move.

His heart was breaking. He knew this time would come but he'd hoped for a few more days with Zack before it did. He wanted just a little more time to build some memories, memories he could pull out and go over in the years to come.

Eljin couldn't keep a small sob from breaking free of his lips when he thought of his future without Zack. If it weren't for the baby he carried, he'd probably throw himself off the nearest cliff, wherever that was.

"Eljin?"

"Please, let me —" Eljin shut his mouth and lowered his gaze as he realized what he'd been about to do. *I won't beg him to let me stay.* He turned his head away as tears started to fall down his cheeks. His shoulders shook. "I'm sorry. I promised myself I wouldn't —"

Again, he stopped talking before he said something stupid. Zack never signed on for an instant family, certainly not one where the mother of his child was actually a man.

"Okay, I'm ready," Eljin finally said as he got to his feet. "I appreciate everything you've done for me."

"Eljin, wha — ?"

"Thank you, Zack," Eljin whispered. His hand trembled as he reached out to Zack and brushed a finger along his cheek. "I won't forget you." He turned and headed for the door.

"Eljin, where are you going?"

"I don't know. I'll find some place." He glanced over his shoulder. His lips trembled as he tried to give Zack a smile even though he felt like he was dying inside.

"Don't worry, we'll be okay."

"Eljin," Zack said firmly, "you're not going anywhere without me. You — " Zack placed his hand over the mound in Eljin's stomach. "You and this baby belong to me. We go together from now on or not at all."

"You want me to stay?" Eljin whispered, afraid that he might be dreaming. "You're not telling me it's time to leave?"

"We do need to leave, hummingbird," Zack said as he pulled Eljin into his arms, "but we're going together. I don't know about you but last night meant something to me."

"I thought you were telling me it was time for *me* to leave," Eljin cried. He gripped Zack's shirt so hard, the material ripped. "I promised myself I wouldn't beg you to stay, that I'd respect your wishes but I — " Eljin shook his head, too overcome with emotions to continue.

"Shh, hummingbird, not to worry," Zack replied. "I'm not leaving you and you're not leaving me."

"Then why did you say it was time to go?"

"Gunny heard word when he was in town that strangers have been sniffing around. We both think that moving from here is the best choice. I'm not going to let those people get you or our baby, Eljin."

"They've found us."

"Afraid so, hummingbird."

Eljin frowned. "Why do you call me hummingbird?"

Zack's smile shined brightly in the darkness of the room. "Because you remind me of a hummingbird. You're so small and delicate but there's a strength about you that makes you beautiful."

Eljin knew Zack could see his flaming cheeks, even in the dark. No one ever called him beautiful or strong. His brothers were the beautiful ones, tall and muscular, warriors and future leaders each and every one of them.

"We say *leannan*," Eljin whispered. "It's a Gaelic word meaning sweetheart or concubine, like lover or partner."

"So that's what you've been calling me all this time?" Zack asked. "And the rest of it, the other words? What were they?"

"Give me your life, your love, your forever, as I give you mine," Eljin said. "They are just simple words from one lover to another."

Zack chuckled and shook his head. "Oh no, Eljin, you're not getting away with that answer. Nothing is ever simple where you're concerned. Now tell me the rest of it. What do those words mean?"

Eljin dropped his gaze. Zack would be so pissed when he found out what Eljin did. He couldn't blame him. He would have been angry too. He just couldn't take something from Zack without giving something back, even if it was a part of himself.

"Eljin?"

"They're words of commitment," Eljin whispered. "When we were together before, at the research facility, I took something from you against your will. I couldn't do that without giving something back so I gave you me."

"Gave you me? What does that mean?"

Eljin pushed away from Zack and took several steps back, rubbing his stomach. He realized it was a nervous habit he'd developed but it gave him a connection to Zack, even if it was a small one.

"In my world when one person says those words and commits to another, it's forever. I promised you I'd never be with another, never love another, or give them a part of myself." Eljin swallowed the lump in his throat. He could see Zack's shock in the way his face paled. "Once it's done, it can't be undone."

"Damn, Eljin, what would you have done if we never saw each other again?"

Eljin shrugged then rubbed his hands up and down his arms when a sudden cold feeling brushed over him. "I would have had that night." He moved his hands to his stomach. "And our son."

"Oh, Eljin," Zack whispered.

Eljin gratefully walked into the arms Zack held out to him, shocked to be standing where he was. He'd felt sure Zack would tell him to leave or laugh at him.

"Did you really commit yourself to me with a few words?" Zack's voice reflected his disbelief.

"There was a little more than that involved. For the words to truly be effective I have to take your blood." Eljin sighed. "I bit the inside of your cheek when I kissed you."

"Does that make me committed to you in the same way?"

"No," Eljin murmured, closing his eyes at the pain that statement caused him.

"Then don't you think we should fix that?"

Eljin's eyes popped open. He stared at Zack in shock until he saw the knife the man held. His breath flew from his chest as he watched Zack draw the blade across the palm of his hand. Then Zack held both his bleeding hand and the knife out to him.

"Will you let me take your blood?"

Eljin's hand trembled as he reached for the knife. "Zack, you know this can't be undone once it's done. It's for life, forever. You won't be able to change your mind once you do it."

Zack's hand covered his over the handle of the knife. "I don't want to change it," Zack said as he brought the blade across Eljin's palm.

Eljin winced, but the joy of the moment quickly overrode the pain. He could barely breathe as Zack ran his tongue across the palm of his hand, licking away the

blood. Zack then lifted his head and clasped their hands together and their blood mingled.

"Now, say the words, hummingbird, so that I can repeat them."

Eljin opened his mouth to speak but nothing came out. He swallowed then tried again, this time looking deep into Zack's eyes. "Give me your life, your love, your forever, as I give you mine."

"Give me your life, your love, your forever, as I give you mine." Zack echoed the vow.

Before Eljin had been the only one making the commitment, this time they both were. The bond was instantaneous, like a bolt of lightning hitting each of them. Eljin felt Zack in his mind, felt himself in Zack's. It was a heady feeling.

Zack shuddered. "Damn, Eljin, I can feel you."

"Yeah." Eljin felt drunk. His head felt woozy, his body languid. He would have dropped to the floor if Zack hadn't been holding him up.

He'd dream of this, filled hour after hour fantasizing about this moment. He'd wanted it more than he could ever remember wanting anything. To finally realize his dream overwhelmed him. Tears clouded his eyes, and Eljin felt certain he couldn't attribute them solely to being so emotionally overwrought from the pregnancy.

Zack. He whispered the word in his mind, using their mental link for the first time since they were fully bonded. He looked up at him, letting the man see the tears of joy in his eyes. *My beautiful leannan.*

"Eljin, I can hear you."

"Yes, it's one of the benefits of bonding. We can speak to each other in our minds. It's a connection we won't ever share with another living being." Eljin chuckled and glanced down at the movements under his shirt. "Except for maybe our son."

Zack's hand settled over his stomach, and the baby's movements instantly ceased. "He can talk to me anytime he wants."

"And me?" Eljin leaned his face into the hand Zack cupped around the side of his face.

"I demand it, hummingbird."

"Zack, not that I'm complaining because believe me I'm not, but why the sudden change of attitude? Yesterday you were yelling at me, saying you weren't gay and men didn't have babies. Why the sudden change of heart?"

"I'm not sure I have an answer for that, Eljin," Zack said. "Gunny told me about you and the Aes Sídh. I don't think I believed him until he started telling me about his long lost lover, Roland. If a man like Gunny can admit he wants to be with a man then so can I."

"Roland?" Eljin asked in confusion.

"Roland was Aes Sídh, just like you. Gunny met him about twenty years ago in Ireland. Apparently Roland was taken by the Unseelie Court and Gunny never forgot him. He's spent his life trying to find him. That's why he knows so much about your kind."

"Zack, my uncle's name is Roland. He was captured on your side of the veil nearly twenty years ago. The Unseelie Court held him for almost two years before they released him."

"Christ!" Zack stepped back, pushing a hand through his hair. "We need to tell Gunny about this. I don't know if your Roland and Gunny's Roland are one and the same but he needs to know."

"So, let's go tell him then," Eljin said. "If they are the same person then we need to get the two of them back together. Roland has been alone for twenty years, never taking a leannan. He never talked about it but I always knew something happened to him. I'd like to see him happy."

Zack started for the door then suddenly stopped when an alarm started blaring. Eljin glanced wildly around the room. What the hell? A cold, creepy feeling climbed up his spine.

"Zack?"

"That's the alarm. Someone must have breeched Gunny's secure perimeter." Zack held out his hand to Eljin. "Come on, we really need to go now."

Eljin grabbed Zack's hand, grateful Zack seemed calm and cool, and in control of the situation, because he certainly didn't. Had he been on his own, he'd have frozen in fear. "Zack? Is it —?"

"I don't know, Eljin, but you'd better grab anything you want to take with you because I don't know if we're coming back here. Gunny has some sort of escape plan in mind for us but we need to be ready for anything."

Eljin glanced back over his shoulder to see if he'd forgotten anything. His gaze landed on the body lotion on the nightstand. He pulled away from Zack and ran over to grab it. He slid the bottle into the pocket of his hoody before running back over to join Zack.

"Okay, I'm ready."

Zack shook his head, but a smile played across his lips as he reached for Eljin's hand again. "Good thinking, hummingbird. We might need that."

"I can hope," Eljin murmured as he followed Zack out of the room and into the main gathering room. They met Gunny just as he came into the room from the small kitchenette. The older man's gaze went to their joined hands and he raised a brow.

"We'll explain later," Zack said, giving Eljin's hand a quick squeeze.

Gunny snickered and shook his head before heading toward the hallway. "You two need to get ready. There are clothes on the table for you to change into. I need to go sanitize the house."

"Sanitize the house?" Eljin asked as he followed Zack.

"Gunny is going to clear out all sign of us being here, make the bed, straighten the guestroom, stuff like that," Zack explained. "It won't keep the bad guys from coming after us but it might delay them for awhile if there's no sign of us being here."

Eljin nodded. That much, at least, made sense to him. Zack and Gunny acted as if their current situation was an everyday occurrence. Eljin, on the other hand, felt so out of his depths that he needed to be led around by the hand . . . literally.

"Zack, what if —?" The rest of Eljin's words were lost in his cry as Zack suddenly grabbed him and shoved him behind his back. Eljin looked beyond Zack to see two

huge shadows advancing on them. He cringed, waiting to be attacked, only to frown in surprise when Zack's laughter filled the room.

"Doc, Rocky, what in the hell are you doing here?" Zack asked as he shook hands with each of the two large men.

"Gunny called us, said you'd gotten your ass in a sling and we needed to come rescue you," one man said.

"Again," said the other, laughter clear in his voice.

"You might say that." Zack laughed. He glanced back to Eljin, holding out his hand.

Eljin stepped forward and grasped Zack's hand. His other fluttered against his neck as his shattered nerves failed him. Too much had happened in too little amount of time. How much more could he take before he cracked?

When Zack drew him into his strong arms, Eljin went gratefully, clinging to him as if he were an anchor in the storm. And, Eljin supposed, that's exactly how he felt Zack was his one solid rock in all of this craziness. He clung to the man, afraid if he didn't, he'd sink to the floor like a large puddle of mindless goo.

"This is my hummingbird, Eljin," Zack said, much to Eljin's surprise. He didn't expect Zack to claim him so publicly.

"Hummingbird?" Mused the man with the dark brown hair.

Zack's knuckles grazed the side of Eljin's cheek. "You don't think he looks like a hummingbird?"

"If you say so, dude," said the other man.

"Eljin, this is Pete Lewis. He's our unit medic. You can call him Doc," Zack said as he pointed toward the man who'd just spoken. He then nodded in the other man's direction. "And this rather impressive mass of muscles is Rocky Rodriguez."

Eljin offered a tremulous smile to both men, not sure what exactly to say to them.

"Gunny said you two had someone after you?" Rocky asked. "Want to fill us in?"

"There's some sort of secret military unit after Eljin and me. They want to capture Eljin and kill me. The perimeter security alarm just sounded, which tells us they're

about fifteen minutes out. And I'd bet my right arm they're heavily armed and I *know* they're very persistent. They followed us over three hundred miles, all the way from my place."

"Dude, who'd you piss off this time?" Doc asked.

Zack shook his head. "I don't rightly know. From what Eljin's told me they took me when I was in the hospital and did experiments on me. After I was released, they kept me hopped up on drugs to make me forget the whole thing, made me think I was delusional."

Doc chuckled. "You mean you're not?"

"Yeah, I've always kind of thought you were off your rocker." Rocky laughed.

Eljin stepped forward on a surge of annoyance. "You can't talk to Zack like that."

"Whoa, dude," Doc said, holding his hands up in a non-threatening gesture. "We didn't mean anything by it. We were just fooling around with Zack."

"Yeah, man," Rocky said. "We were just funning."

Feeling like he'd just made a fool of himself, Eljin turned and buried his face in Zack's wide chest. He could feel the rumble of Zack's laughter under his cheek.

Thank you, hummingbird. Zack whispered through their bond. *No one's ever stood up for me the way you just did.*

Eljin melted, not just from the loving tone in Zack's voice but also from the soft kisses he could feel being planted on the top of his head. *My leannan.* He whispered back as he snuggled deeper into Zack's embrace.

"Zack, dude, seriously, we were just funning," Doc said. "We really didn't mean anything by it. You know that, right?"

"I know that, Doc. Eljin's just a little protective of me."

The way Zack said the words—his tone of voice—caused Eljin to glance up at him.

Zack grinned. "I belong to him."

Eljin's heart skipped a beat at the proud way Zack announced the nature of their relationship.

"You . . . *belong* to him?" Doc asked.

Zack nodded enthusiastically. "Eljin claimed me fair and square."

Doc and Rocky both stared at them, their mouths hanging open. Eljin felt a moment's worry, but then the other men began to laugh.

"Dude, you've moved over to the dark side," Doc said. "Gunny must be thrilled."

"How is it that everyone knew Gunny was gay except me?" Zack asked.

"Never came up, I guess." Doc shrugged. "It was never a big deal, you know? It wasn't like Gunny was sleeping with every Tom, Dick, and Harry that came along." Doc frowned. "In fact, I can't ever remember him hooking up with anyone."

"And you two?" Zack asked.

Doc's face flushed. "I knew Gunny was gay because I am too. I was having some issues with an ex-lover and he talked to me about his Roland."

"If there's more like him," Rocky said as he gestured to Eljin, "I'd certainly consider it."

Eljin couldn't help but burst out laughing. He held up his hand when all three men looked at him in astonishment. "I'm the runt of the family. You should see my four brothers. I'm considered the ugly duckling."

"Not possible, hummingbird."

"Just wait until you meet them," Eljin said. "They're stunning: tall, blond, and absolutely breathtaking."

"I think I prefer short, blond, and breathtaking," Zack said.

The surprising tenderness in Zack's expression brought Eljin a rush of joy. Zack had done a complete turnaround from when they met at the bar.

He gave Zack a teasing smile and shook his head. "Are you sure you're not delusional?"

Chapter Six

Zack laughed at the stunned expression on Eljin's face. It felt good, everything about Eljin felt good. The emotions he'd experienced since meeting Eljin gave Zack hope for the future. "If I'm crazy then I hope I never become sane."

Gunny's raspy voice broke through the light mood in the room. "You aren't dressed yet? We're on a timeline here, folks. Company will be here any minute and we need to haul ass before they get here."

"Sorry, Gunny," Zack said as he grabbed the clothes off the table. He handed one set of the green combat fatigues to Eljin. "I was just introducing Eljin to Doc and Rocky. Thought he might want to know who the two armed, muscle-bound strangers were before we hit the road."

"That's all well and good but it's time to get to moving."

Zack nodded and pulled Eljin into one of the small sleeping rooms then shut the door. "Come on, hummingbird, change clothes and be quick. We need to get going."

Eljin started undressing. Zack could see the confusion in the scrunched look on his face as he stared down at the combat clothing. "Why are we changing? What's wrong with what I'm wearing?"

"We need to blend in with our surroundings."

"Yeah." Eljin snorted. "Because we sure aren't going to win any beauty contests in these things."

Zack chuckled. "Come on Eljin, they're not that bad."

"Yes," Eljin said, "they are."

Zack shook his head as Eljin pulled his clothes off. Despite the danger they'd soon face if they didn't get moving, he found himself standing there staring in amazement as Eljin's naked body was revealed. Damn, the man was gorgeous. He almost hated to see him cover up all that beautiful flesh again but he knew they didn't have time to fool around.

He stifled a groan when Eljin bent to retrieve the khaki pants. For a moment, Zack's gaze fastened on Eljin's enticing bare ass, but then he quickly turned his head

and changed his own clothes. If he kept watching Eljin they'd never make it out of the room. He hadn't failed to notice there was a bed right there in the corner.

"What do I do with this?"

Zack glanced up to see Eljin holding the bottle of body lotion in his hand. He chuckled, taking the bottle and shoving it into one of his many pockets. "Well, we certainly can't leave it behind."

"Yeah, that would be bad."

"Real bad." Zack laughed. He couldn't remember ever laughing this much with a lover in his life. It was something new and something he loved, something he wanted more of. "Come on, hummingbird. We need to get going."

Eljin pulled up his pants, shaking his head. "I look ridiculous."

"These clothes aren't for looks; they're for hiding in plain sight."

"It would help if they fit."

Zack bit his lip and studied Eljin's outfit. The man was right. The fatigues hung on him. They had to be two sizes too big.

"I think I have something that might help." Zack hurried from the room and went in search of some rope. He found a small roll of twine in one of the utility closets. Zack cut off a piece then headed back to Eljin, meeting up with him just outside of the makeshift barracks.

"Let's try this," Zack said as he pulled the jacket and shirt up to Eljin's chest then reached for the waist of his pants. "Hold your shirt up, hummingbird." As Eljin did as instructed, Zack squatted before him and pulled the rope through the belt loops on Eljin's pants. He tied it high on his waist, well over the mound created by the baby.

After he was done, he gave the small mound a soft caress. "How's our boy?"

Eljin's voice was thick with emotion when he replied. "He's good. Sleeping right now, I think."

Zack looked up to study Eljin's face, looking for any signs of discomfort. "And how are you? Doing okay?"

Eljin shrugged, dropping his shirt and jacket and pulling them down over his distended stomach. "I'm okay. A little scare but I've pretty much felt that way for months now. It's nothing new for me."

"You know I'll keep you safe, don't you? We'll *all* keep you safe." Zack got to his feet and waved his hand at the other men who'd joined them in the hallway. "That's what we do, Eljin. We're Marines."

"And the men who are after us are psychotic, armed mercenaries working for a secret government research facility." Eljin voice was rough with anxiety. "They seem to be doing a pretty damn good job of messing with us so far."

"Ah, but that was before you had me and my unit to keep you safe," Zack said. "They really have no idea who they are messing with but they will."

Eljin looked skeptical. "Do you really think we can get away from them?"

Gunny laughed. "Hell, boy, the only reason it's taking them so long to get here is because they have to get through all the little surprises I left for them. I can't wait until they reach the house."

Gunny sounded almost gleeful. Zack knew the man was a tad paranoid. He always had been, but Zack usually attributed his odd behavior to being overly cautious, rather than being slightly nuts. Now, he realized Gunny's attitude had to do with the things he knew about how the world really worked.

If the people who'd captured Eljin could get their hands on Gunny they would have a fount of information. Gunny was probably the only human on earth who knew so much about the Aes Sídh. He'd be a great boon for them.

"Alright, so what's the plan?" Zack asked as he took the weapons Rocky handed him and tucked them away in different areas of his outfit. "Do we actually have one?"

"Eljin, is there a way to get you back to the other side of the veil?" Gunny asked.

"I'm not leaving Zack."

"I'm not asking you to. Zack, Doc, Rocky, and I will all be going with you. I don't think whoever's after you can get through. We'll be safer there."

"Oh, well then, any reasonably sized body of water will do but a waterfall would be best," Eljin replied. "The veil is always thinnest at a waterfall."

Gunny rubbed his chin for several moments, staring off into space. "Okay, there's a large waterfall about a ten mile hike from here. Do you think you can make it that far?" he asked as he looked at Eljin. "We'll need to move quickly because these guys won't be far behind us. Can you do that in your condition?"

Doc stepped forward, looking confused. "Condition? Is Eljin sick? Is this something I need to be aware of?"

Eljin, Zack, and Gunny all stared over at Doc.

"Uh, maybe it wouldn't be a bad idea for you to know seeing as how you're the medic on this mission," Zack told him, "but you're going to think we're crazy when you hear what we have to say."

Doc crossed his arms over his chest and arched a brow. "Nothing new there."

"Okay, here's the short version." Zack stepped up to stand beside Eljin, one arm wrapped around his shoulders. "Eljin is special. He's born of royal blood, the fifth son of a king. He's also not fully human. His anatomy is slightly different than ours."

"Is that why he needs special care?"

"Yes and no," Zack answered. He took a deep breath and let it out slowly. "Eljin is pregnant, in his second trimester. It's my child."

Zack watched two sets of shocked eyes drop down to Eljin's stomach. He wasn't surprised by their astonishment; he'd expected just such a reaction. He'd felt much the same way when he heard of Eljin's pregnancy.

"Are you serious?" Doc asked.

"Very," Zack said. He glanced down at Eljin's pinched face. "Eljin, do you mind? Doc needs to know so he can care for you if there's an emergency," he said as he gestured to Eljin's shirt.

Eljin hesitated then shook his head. "No, I don't mind."

Zack reached down and pulled up Eljin's jacket and shirt then untied the rope belt and pushed the waistband of his pants down to bare his distended stomach. A soft gasp of shock filled the room.

"Geez, is that real?" Rocky asked.

Doc dropped to his knees. His hands hovered over Eljin's stomach for a moment as he glanced up at him. "May I?"

Eljin nodded.

Doc carefully pressed his hands over Eljin's stomach, moving them around gently. He seemed mesmerized rather than disgusted, which was good. Zack would hate to have to hurt the man for hurting Eljin's feelings.

"Do you know if it's a boy or girl?" Doc asked.

"It's a boy," Eljin replied. "We only give birth to boys."

"And everything is progressing as it should?"

Eljin nodded. "So far. I've had a little trouble with morning sickness but that's not unusual during the second trimester. It should pass in a couple of weeks and then I'll just get a lot bigger while the baby gains weight, until I go into labor."

"If you have any issues, feel any pains, you need to let me know." Doc stood, his gaze still on Eljin's stomach. "I may not know anything about men being pregnant but it can't be that different from a woman. The basics are about the same." He swallowed hard. "I hope."

"They are pre —"

Another alarm pierced the air.

Eljin cried out. "What's that?"

"They've broken through the second perimeter," Gunny said as he grabbed a backpack off the floor and pulled it over his shoulders. "Lock and load, boys; the party's starting."

Zack took the backpack Gunny held out to him and pulled it on as Eljin tugged his clothes back into place. He grabbed Eljin's hand. "You ready for this, hummingbird?"

"Seriously? No."

Zack chuckled. "Just let me know when you need to stop and don't push yourself. You have to take care of our baby."

Eljin nodded. "I'll be okay."

"Alright, come on." Zack pulled Eljin along behind him as he followed Gunny down a long cement hallway, Rocky and Doc bringing up the rear. The corridor's cement block walls were quickly replaced by rock, letting Zack know Gunny was a lot more intelligent than he'd given him credit for.

The old soldier had tapped into the natural lava tubes flowing through the area from what Zack could only hope was a dormant volcano. Ingenious.

Zack heard the faint sounds of several explosions behind them as they ran. He had no idea what little surprises Gunny left for their party crashers but he hoped it took as many of them out of the hunt as possible.

He wasn't sure how far they ran before the tunnel opened up into a large cavern. It seemed like miles but was probably only a few hundred yards. Zack glanced over his shoulder at Eljin, worried the strain would be too much for him, but the man seemed to be doing well so far. Zack could only hope Eljin could hang in there until they had a safe place to rest.

"Which way, Gunny?" Zack asked when they stopped at the opening of the large cave.

"To the left," Gunny replied. "The cave opens up to the forest in that direction."

"And the other direction?"

Gunny smirked. "Back into a series of tunnels that they'll never find their way out of."

Zack chuckled quietly and led Eljin to the left. He could hear Doc and Rocky covering their tracks behind them. Their pursuers might not go to the right but the less indication they gave as to the direction they took, the better.

When they reached the opening of the cave, Zack stumbled to a stop. Holy shit, were they high up on the mountain. He knew they'd traveled quite a ways inside the tunnels but he hadn't realized they had also been traveling up.

As he looked out over the valley below, he spotted the smoke. Gunny's cabin. *Shit*. "Oh Gunny, your house, I'm sorry."

"Granted, I'm not happy about my house burning to the ground but it *is* just a house, Zack," Gunny replied. "The important things are either in my head or locked up somewhere safe."

"I'm still sorry. This never would have happened if we hadn't involved you in this mess."

"You've brought me closer to finding Roland than I have been in years. That's worth more than a hundred houses."

"Oh, damn, that reminds me," Zack said, recalling his earlier conversation with Eljin. "This might not mean anything but Eljin's uncle is named Roland. Twenty years ago, just about the time your Roland disappeared, Eljin's uncle was captured by the Unseelie Court. He was held for two years before they released him."

"Zack," Gunny whispered, his face going pale. "Do you think—?"

"I don't know. They might be the same man but I don't want you to get your hopes up just in case they're not. Roland could be a very common name in Eljin's world."

"I don't know if I can keep from getting my hopes up," Gunny admitted. "I've searched for Roland for twenty years. To actually find him is something I've only dream about."

"If your Roland is my Uncle Roland," Eljin said, stepping forward, "I know where he is."

"What . . . what is your Uncle like?" Gunny asked. "What does he look like?"

"Well, he has blond hair like I do, but then again, most of my people do. His eyes are also deep blue because he's of royal blood. Other than that, he's taller than me." Eljin frowned. "Everyone's taller than me in my family."

"Anything else?" Gunny asked. "Does he have any distinguishing features, tattoos or scars? Anything to differentiate him from the others in your family?"

Eljin frowned, looking thoughtful. "Well, he has a small scar on his chest but I don't know much about it. Uncle Roland refuses to discuss it with anyone." Eljin's lips thinned into a straight line. "I think he got it while he was being held by the Unseelie Court."

Gunny paled even more. His hands shook as he pulled the collar of his shirt down, barring a small, thin scar over his heart.

"Does it look like this?"

"Yeah," Eljin replied, wonder filling his voice. "It does. How did —?"

Zack watched in astonishment as Gunny's eyes teared up. He'd never seen Gunny cry, not even when Zak dug a bullet out of his leg in the field with a knife blade, using no anesthesia. The man hadn't made a sound. Now, he looked ready to fall apart.

"Gunny?"

"It's my Roland, Zack. It has to be," Gunny murmured. "We cut our chests when we exchanged blood for the bonding. We each have scars over our hearts."

"*Should I tell him about Monte?*" Eljin asked silently as he looked up at Zack.

"*Monte?*"

"*Roland's son. When he came home from the Unseelie Court he had a son with him. His name is Monte.*"

"*No, don't say anything yet. I think this is hard enough on Gunny as it is. Knowing that he might have a son out there somewhere might just be too much for him to handle. We'll either tell him when we're positive that the two Roland's are the same man or let Roland tell him.*"

"*Okay.*"

"Come on, we'd better get going," Zack said, urging Eljin toward the woods. "The quicker we move, the sooner we'll find out if our two Roland's are actually one and the same."

Gunny nodded and wiped his eyes. He had a smile on his face when he was done. "I'm sure they are. I just know they are. They have to be."

Zack hoped Gunny was right. If they were wrong, Gunny would suffer yet another devastation.

"Up or down, Gunny?" Zack asked when they got the edge of the forest.

"Over," Gunny said, pointing up over the mountain.

Zack glanced up the steep hill, his heart sinking. Eljin would never make it up the steep slope of the mountain. He glanced down toward the valley, seeing the smoke still rising from Gunny's burning house.

"Are you sure that's the only way?"

"We can always head into the forest and most likely lose them but the waterfall is up and over." Gunny pointed up the side of the mountain again. "Eljin said that would be the best place to breach the veil between our two worlds."

"Just remember that Eljin can't move as fast as we can," Zack said. "I'm not putting him or the baby in any more danger than they are already in."

"I can make it," Eljin insisted.

"I have no doubt that you can, but we have to be careful. If you slipped or fell or got over exhausted it could hurt the baby."

"But, Zack —"

"We'll go but you have to promise me you'll tell me if you get too tired."

Eljin rolled his eyes. "I'm stronger than I look, Zack. You have to stop treating me like spun glass."

Zack chuckled. "Not going to happen, hummingbird."

"Can we just go?" Eljin asked. "I promise to let you know if I get tired."

Zane took a deep breath then grabbed Eljin's hand, pulling him along beside him. Gunny said the waterfall was only ten miles away. Ten miles felt like a whole lot more when walking up the side of a mountain. Zack doubted they'd reach the waterfall before dark.

They made slow progress. Zack concentrated on getting Eljin up the mountain and let Doc and Rocky bring up the rear. They needed to hide the direction they went, covering their tracks and protecting them from behind.

About halfway up the steep incline, Eljin suddenly stopped, yanking on Zack's hand. Zack turned back to look at him. "Eljin, what's wrong?"

Eljin had a hand over his mouth. His gaze darted left and right before he leapt to the side of the small trail and lost whatever was in his stomach.

Zack dropped the backpack, opened one of the pouches and grabbed a small cloth and a canteen of water. He wet the cloth then quickly crossed over to squat down next to Eljin, holding his hair back out of the way as the man threw up.

Once Eljin seemed to calm a little, Zack handed him the cloth to wipe his mouth then offered the canteen. Eljin took several swigs, swishing the water around in his mouth before spitting it out. His face looked pale when he looked over at Zack, his lips turned down in a grimace.

"How are you feeling, hummingbird?" Zack asked as he took the canteen and cloth from Eljin.

"Like crap but I'll be okay."

"Do you need to rest?"

Eljin glanced up the side of the mountain then shook his head. "No, let's get farther up the mountain first."

"How about if I carry you for a little while, just until you feel better? You can rest and we can still get up the mountain."

Eljin's eyebrows shot up nearly to his hairline. "Are you nuts? You can't carry me and that backpack. That thing has to weigh at least eighty pounds and I'm well over a hundred. You'd never make it."

Zack knew Eljin was right. He glanced over his shoulder at the backpack, chuckling softly when he saw Rocky, Doc, and Gunny dividing the bag's contents between the three of them.

He looked back to Eljin and grinned. "Not a problem, hummingbird."

Eljin looked like he might protest for a moment but then shook his head, a small smile on his face. He stood and held his arms out. Zack carefully grabbed him and picked him up, cradling him close to his chest.

"Ah, hell, hummingbird, I think you weigh less than the backpack."

"Funny."

Zack chuckled and started up the hill once again. He'd have to make sure he thanked the guys for taking on his load without question. They'd always been close; fighting together tended to form nearly unbreakable bonds. You had to trust the person guarding your back when out in the field. He just never considered that bond might extend to his personal life.

Their trek up the mountain moved a lot quicker with Eljin cradled in Zack's arms. It also created less work for Rocky and Doc. As military men, all of them were trained not to leave a trail. They knew where to step so they didn't leave a trace and how to move quietly through most any terrain. Eljin did not.

They reached the summit of the mountain just as the sun started to set. It'd taken them longer than Zack had anticipated because they'd needed to stop a few times so that Eljin could throw up.

Zack knew the situation was taxing on the man. How could it not be? They were on the run for their lives. Even Zack's nerves were pretty frayed and he wasn't pregnant.

But Eljin didn't complain. His face was pale white by the time Zack set him on his feet, his lips thinned into a tight line. Zack held onto Eljin's arm when the man swayed a bit.

"Eljin?" Zack said, afraid he'd pushed himself too hard.

Eljin waved him away and walked over to sit on a fallen log. "I'm fine, just tired and hungry." He pointed toward the backpacks that Gunny, Rocky, and Doc were pulling off their shoulders. "I don't suppose you have a gourmet meal in there somewhere, do you?"

"Uh, no," Doc said as he glanced over, "but would beef jerky and crackers do?"

"Hell, at this point I'd eat a shoe." Eljin rubbed his stomach. "We're starving."

Doc dug around in the backpack for a moment before producing a bag of beef jerky, some dried fruit, and a package of crackers. Eljin practically leapt at them, grabbing them away from Doc and carrying them back over to his log.

Eljin's deep, satisfied sounding groan made Zack squirm. The sound reminded him of the moans the man made during sex. Zack suddenly wished they were alone. His cock throbbed in his pants. Not a good thing when surrounded by other people or on the run from madmen.

Zack walked over and sat on the ground next to Eljin. "Going to share?" he asked, holding out his hand. Eljin's eyes narrowed but he held out a cracker. Zack kept his eyes on Eljin as he leaned over and bit the cracker out of his hand.

Eljin's soft laughter was a boon to Zack's soul. It wrapped around him, making him feel warm and content. He grabbed Eljin's hand, and before he could pull back, he yanked the man down into his arms, sitting him between his legs and dragging him back against his chest.

Eljin continued to share his meal, offering up a cracker or a bit of beef jerky in between bites for himself until every piece of food was gone. Zack had one last item for Eljin. He didn't know much about pregnant men but he'd met a couple of pregnant women in his time.

"Hey Doc, want to toss me that little brown bag you have in your pack?"

Doc nodded, his mouth full of crackers, and reached into his backpack. He pulled out the paper sack and tossed it over. Zack caught it and reached inside for his secret weapon. "Here, hummingbird, your dessert."

"Oh my God!" Eljin exclaimed. "Chocolate!" He eagerly reached for the small piece of chocolate and shoved it into his mouth in one bite. He groaned loudly, his eyes closed, and a look that could only be described as one of pure ecstasy came over his face.

Score one for Zack!

Chapter Seven

Eljin curled into the curve of Zack's body and pulled the green wool blanket up over his shoulders. It was getting pretty cold and Zack told him they couldn't have a fire because it would be visible for miles around.

Snuggled as he was against Zack's larger body, he didn't think the cold would be much of a problem. The man was like a furnace. Eljin nuzzled his nose into the soft curve of Zack's neck, loving the musky, masculine fragrance that filled him when he inhaled.

I'll get to smell that sweet scent for the rest of my life. The thought brought him such joy he tilted his head and pressed a small kiss on Zack's throat.

I wish we were alone. Eljin spoke to Zack with his mind as he glanced over to where Doc and Rocky sat leaning back against their backpacks. Gunny had gone to scout out the area ahead.

Me too.

Eljin could hear the laughter in Zack's voice even through their bond. It made him smile, and wish even more that they were alone.

We could always go find a bush to hide behind, Zack added thoughtfully.

Eljin laughed out loud. *No, as much as I wish we could, they'd know.*

Like I care about that.

I would. There are some things that need to be private. Our sex life is one of them."

The air rushed out of Eljin's lungs when he felt Zack's hand suddenly cover his semi-hard cock. He pressed his face against Zack's throat to hide his groan even as he parted his legs under the blanket.

Zack!

Shh, hummingbird. Zack worked Eljin's zipper down and pushed his hand inside to grip his cock, which was hardening by the second. *Keep quiet and they won't be any the wiser.*

He was supposed to keep quiet with Zack's hand wrapped around his cock? Eljin wasn't sure that was possible. His hands clenched against the fabric of Zack's shirt as the man began to work him, stroking him slowly so he didn't disturb the blanket.

His breath started coming quickly. He knew he wouldn't last long. While they had been intimate just the night before, it had been too long since he felt the touch of Zack's hand on his body. He needed it more than air.

Eljin flushed when he glanced up to find Zack watching him, his gaze intense. His mouth was drawn tight, his nostrils flared. There was a little tick in his jaw that told Eljin just how much control the man was exerting.

Suddenly, Eljin didn't care who saw them. He needed Zack. He needed to share the pleasure flowing through his body. *Where in the hell did you say that damn bush was?* Eljin asked as he wiggled against the hard cock he could feel pressing against his ass.

Eljin muffled his groan of protest against Zack's lips when the hand stroking his cock left. He felt Zack fumbling around then his hand was grabbed and pushed into the opening of Zack's pants. Elfin grasped the hard shaft waiting for him there.

At the same time, Zack shoved his hand back beneath Eljin's waistband. A contest, of sorts, ensued, where they tried to see who could stroke faster, harder, without moving the blanket and revealing their activities to their friends.

Eljin was pretty sure he lost when his hips began to involuntarily thrust against Zack's touch. He turned his head and sank his teeth into Zack's chest as he came, covering Zack's hand with his release.

Eljin, fuck, don't stop. Zack whispered desperately in his mind when Eljin paused, panting harshly against Zack's chest.

Sorry. Eljin resumed his efforts.

The head, Eljin, rub the head.

Eljin smiled as he rubbed his thumb across the head of Zack's cock, feeling the shudder that ripped through Zack. He wiped the drops of pre-cum away then switched hands. Making sure Zack was watching, he brought his thumb up to his mouth and licked the drops away.

Christ, you're going to kill me.

Maybe, but I'll send you to heaven first.

Eljin doubled his efforts, stroking longer, harder, quicker. He reached down with his free hand and gently cupped Zack's balls, massaging the silky sac. He could feel Zack's breathing quicken, feel his body tense, and knew the man's orgasm was just moments away.

Kiss me.

Zack's lips immediately claimed his, the man's moan of completion filling his mouth. Eljin slowed his movements, stroking Zack's cock a few more times as spunk covered his hand. Zack's mouth continued to plunder his even as he bucked against Eljin's ministrations.

When Zack finally lifted his head, his eyes looked dazed but warm and happy. Eljin grinned. At that moment, there were no shadows across his heart, no demons to fight, just the two of them loving on each other.

Love you, Zack.

Eljin didn't like the slight frown that crossed Zack's face, the eyebrows that drew together. *How can you know, Eljin? We barely know each other.*

I know you, Eljin replied, feeling relieved. Zack wasn't denying Eljin's love. He just seemed confused. Eljin hoped he could clear up that confusion. *I'm in your mind, Zack, in your heart. I know you probably better than I know myself.*

I don't know what love is, Eljin. I've never experienced it before. I grew up in an orphanage. I didn't have anyone to teach me what love was.

You know what love is, Zack, you just don't recognize it. Eljin nodded toward the men sitting a few feet from them. *When you think of your friends, how do you think of them?*

They're my friends. There's no one on earth I would trust more to protect me or you. I know when I need them that they will always be there for me, as I will for them. I'd do anything for them, die for them.

And if something bad happened to them? How would you feel?

Sad and angry at the same time, I guess.

If something good happened to them?

They are my friends, Eljin; I want only good things to happen for them.

That is called love. It might only be love of one friend for another but it's still love. Eljin reached up and cupped the side of Zack's face. That's how I feel for you. I don't trust anyone on the earth as much as I trust you. I know that you'll protect me, keep me safe. I know you'll always be there for me and I'd do anything for you. Your happiness is my happiness. Your sadness is my sadness. You're the most important person in my life.

Yeah? Zak's eyes seemed a little shinier than normal as the man blinked several times. Then I guess I love you too because that's how I feel about you.

Eljin's heart sang with delight at Zack's words. He felt blissfully happy, fully alive for the first time in his life. He had Zack, their baby growing inside of him, and now he had Zack's love. He couldn't ask for more.

* * * * *

Zack held Eljin cuddled against his chest, watching his lovely face until the man fell asleep. He was so tired but he never complained, and he tried to be so brave. Zack felt more admiration for Eljin's courage than almost anyone he knew.

"He's quite the man."

Zack looked up to see Doc watching him and Eljin. "He is," Zack agreed. "He's one of the best."

"I never thought I'd hear you say that about another man."

Zack chuckled. "Me neither but that was before I met Eljin. Now I can't see my life without him. Eljin and the baby are more important than my life."

"Dude, you have to know how weird that sounds coming out of your mouth."

"What do you mean?"

"You've never been a gay basher or anything like that but you always made it perfectly clear that you preferred women over men. To see you so crazy for a man now . . ." Doc chuckled and shook his head. "It's like totally weird, dude."

"Before Eljin I never even considered being with a man."

"What changed your mind?"

"Truthfully, he did. Oh, hearing about Gunny's lover had a small bit to do with it but Eljin was really the deciding factor. There's just something about him that makes me want to slay all of his dragons, makes me want to be a better man for him."

"You want to be his hero."

Zack laughed. "Yeah, I guess I do but it's more than that. In the beginning I was fighting this so hard. I'll admit it, I was outright mean to him but Eljin never called me on it. He just accepted my decision and made plans to leave my life because that's what I told him I wanted."

"Dude!"

Zack looked down into the sleeping face of the man in his arms. There was a small smile on Eljin's plush lips. He looked serene, peaceful, as if he were exactly where he wanted to be.

"Maybe that was it. As much as he loved me he was willing to give me up because that's what I wanted. Suddenly, it didn't matter anymore, not the gay thing or the male pregnancy thing, none of it. It just suddenly mattered that I do everything in my power to make him happy."

"You're in love with him."

Zack glanced up, taking in the shocked look on Doc's face. "Don't look so surprised. Do you actually think I could *not* love him? He's the most beautiful thing I've ever seen and that's just the outside packaging. The inside is much more beautiful."

"And the baby?"

The smile on his face echoed in the warmth of his voice as he replied. "The baby is just a bonus." Zack looked back down at Eljin. "Besides, he has the sweetest lips I've ever tasted. I'd be an idiot to give that up because I have a little confusion about what to do with the equipment."

Doc laughed long and hard at Zack's words, enough to have Zack frowning at him. He didn't think his statement was that amusing. Doc held his hand up as his laughter trickled down to the occasional chuckle.

"Sorry, Dude, but I just suddenly had a picture of you in my mind in bed with a very naked Eljin without a clue what to do with him. It struck me funny. I think I would be in the same position if I had a naked woman in front of me."

Zack chuckled, seeing the humor of the situation. "I kind of feel that way sometimes."

"Just do to him what you'd want done to you," Rocky added as he sat beside Doc and leaned back against his pack. "I assume you know what you like, right? Well, if it works for you then it will probably work for him."

"Is it really that easy?" Zack was skeptical until Doc laughed again.

"Yeah, pretty much," Doc said. "We're men, Zack. We're basically driven by the need to get off. We seek it, fight for it, and try to charm our way to get it. Blow in our direction and we're pretty damn happy. Don't over analyze it."

"Okay, I hear you." Zack still wondered if things were that easy but so far they seemed to be. Eljin loved his touch and Zack certainly craved his. Maybe he was over analyzing things. Maybe he needed to just let things happen when they happened. It seemed to be working for them so far.

"We need to get some rest," Rocky finally said as he stood up. "Doc and I are going to go check the perimeter while you get your little man cleaned up. We'll be back in five."

Zack's face flamed as he realized that he and Eljin hadn't hid their little sexual interlude earlier. "Sorry, guys."

"Don't be. It's great to see you with someone." Rocky slung his rifle over his shoulder. "I just don't think we should mention to Eljin that we know what you two were up to. It might embarrass him."

"It would."

Zack waited until Rocky and Doc walked away before lying Eljin back on the ground. He quickly wet a cloth and wiped them both down then zipped their pants up. Eljin slept through the whole thing, which told Zack exactly how tired his little man really was.

He wrapped the blanket more closely around Eljin's body then picked him back up again, cradling the smaller man in his lap. Eljin's head fell against his shoulder, his hand coming up to pat at Zack's chest before he tucked it under his cheek. He never opened his eyes.

Sleep, hummingbird, I'll protect you.

Zack looked up as Rocky and Doc came back into the little clearing they were camped out in, taking in the anxious looks on their faces. "What?"

"Company is coming," Rocky said. "Do we stay and fight, or go?"

Zack glanced down at the precious bundle in his arms and then got to his feet, holding Eljin close. "We go. I don't want to put Eljin in the middle of a firefight. If we can get to the waterfall and Eljin's veil we may be able to get to safety."

Rocky and Doc nodded, quickly gathering their stuff and covering any signs that they were there. Zack started up the mountain, hoping he'd run into Gunny somewhere along the way. He knew Rocky and Doc would catch up to him but any head start he could get on the people following him, the better.

"Zack?" Eljin asked, starting to rouse.

Silently, Eljin, speak to me only through our bond. We need to remain as silent as possible. Our party crashers are still in pursuit.

Zack could feel Eljin instantly wake, his eyes popping open, fear shining brightly in them. *Where are we?*

We're still in the woods, hummingbird, about five hundred yards from where we were when you went to sleep. I just left Rocky and Doc cleaning up our campsite.

Where's Gunny?

He's still out scouting the area. We should run into him soon. I hope.

How close are they?

Zack knew by *they* that Eljin meant the guys after them. *I'm not sure, Eljin. I didn't ask when Rocky and Doc told me they were close. I just decided to get us all out of there. The more distance we put between us and them the better I'll feel.*

If we can make it to the waterfall we'll be safe.

You can't know that, Eljin.

Yes, I can. If we can get to the waterfall we can cross through the veil to the Seelie Court. My family will protect us. There are always guards close by. They'll get us to my father.

Great, you're taking me home to meet the parents.

Eljin started to laugh then suddenly slapped a hand over his mouth but his eyes still held his merriment. *My parents will love you because I do. Besides, we've bonded. There is nothing they can do about it even if they didn't like you. Once we're bonded, it's forever. And when they discover that I'm carrying, I doubt there will be much you can do wrong in their eyes.*

I'm starting to like this bonding thing better and better, Eljin.

"Pick up the pace, Zack," Rocky said quietly as he came silently out of the woods and started leading the way. Zack glanced over his shoulder to see Doc bringing up the rear.

The farther they walked, the more worried Zack grew. He had no idea where the waterfall was located and they had yet to run into Gunny. If they didn't find one or the other pretty soon, they'd just have to keep running aimlessly.

Luckily, they were headed down the side of the mountain now, instead of up. Of course, so were the people hunting them. Still, it made the way easier. That fact didn't make Zack feel any better when he heard noises behind them.

"They're coming," Rocky said as he fell back. "I'm going to try to slow them down a little. You two get to the waterfall."

"Oh hell, Rock, I don't know where the damn waterfall is."

"I do," Gunny said as he stepped out of the shadows. "Rocky, you and Doc hold them off as long as you can then hightail it down the hill about a mile then north for another two. The waterfall is at the base of the north facing cliff at the bottom of the hill."

Doc and Rocky nodded and headed back up the way they'd just come. Gunny watched them for just a moment before turning to hurry down the hill, Zack following behind him as fast as he could move with Eljin in his arms.

Zack stumbled when they heard gunfire erupt just as they reached the bottom of the hill and turned north. He cast a worried look over his shoulder then started moving faster. He couldn't risk Eljin's safety no matter how apprehensive he felt about Doc and Rocky.

The next two miles seem to take forever, especially when the gunfire suddenly stopped. A heavy silence filled the air. Zack didn't know if Rocky and Doc made it out safely and he didn't have time to stop and check. Getting Eljin to the waterfall needed to be his top priority.

Zack breathed a big sigh of relief when the waterfall finally came into view. He was surprised by how big it was, falling down quite a ways from the cliff above. He walked to the edge of the water and set Eljin on his feet.

"Okay, Eljin, we're here. Now what?"

Eljin pointed to the small cliff at the edge of the waterfall. "We need to go there. We have to go through the waterfall itself. That's where the gate between our worlds is, in the waterfall."

"Okay, I want you and Gunny to go on through. I'm going to wait here a few minutes for Rocky and Doc, see if they made it."

Eljin grabbed Zack's arm. "No, Zack, you can't — "

"Please, Eljin," Zack said as he pushed Eljin toward Gunny. "I need to know that you and the baby are safe. I promise I'll join you in just a few minutes."

"But — "

Zack glanced beyond Eljin's pale face to Gunny. "Please, Gunny?"

Gunny nodded and grabbed Eljin around the waist, lifting the man up in his arms and wading out into the water. Zack's heart ached as Eljin fought Gunny the entire way, screaming and yelling.

Zack didn't turn away until they disappeared into the waterfall. One minute they were there, the next they were gone. Zack blinked several times, positive he had something in his eyes then turned and scouted the area for the most secure location to sit and wait.

He spotted a small outcropping of rock off to one side. It wouldn't have been his first choice of places to defend himself from but it seemed to be the only place that offered enough cover. It also kept him between the waterfall and whoever came in his direction.

Zack hurried over to the rocks and knelt on the ground. He pulled out his gun and laid it beside him. He checked that each of his knives were where they should be then settled in to wait.

He didn't have long. Only a few minutes later he heard someone coming toward him at a quick pace. Zack looked over the rock and watched, holding his breath until he saw Doc's sandy blond head come into view.

He had his arm wrapped around Rocky's waist and seemed to be helping him along. Zack did a visual inspection and noticed a piece of cloth tied around Rocky's leg. Doc seemed to be fine but it was clear Rocky'd been injured. Zack hoped it wasn't life threatening. Rocky was a good man and he'd hate to lose him.

As soon as they were close enough, Zack leaned up and waved them over. Doc immediately changed direction and hurried toward him, Rocky in tow. Doc lowered Rocky down to the ground then crouched next to him.

"How bad is it?" Zack asked, gesturing to the injury.

"It's just a flesh wound," Rocky said. "I'll be fine."

Doc snorted. "Don't let him fool you. He's lucky he's not bleeding out. The bullet missed the artery by inches. The bullet went all the way through but he still needs medical attention." Doc glanced around. "Where's Eljin and Gunny?"

Zack pointed past his shoulder. "I sent them through the waterfall."

"And you decided to be a hero and wait here for us?" Doc asked. "Dumb ass!"

Zack ignored that statement. "What are we looking at?"

"There are four heavily armed men in black special ops fatigues left. They are well equipped and well armed. They are also very persistent, just as you said."

"Black fatigues?" Zack didn't like that statement. He knew what it meant. The men were military trained, mercenaries most likely. They would be dressed in black, which during the day made them stand out like a sore thumb. At night, like it was now, it was an entirely different story. They could hide in the shadows right next to a person.

"Ah hell, we took three of them out." Rocky laughed. "They ain't so bad."

"They sure whooped your ass," Doc replied.

Zack rolled his eyes. Doc and Rocky could argue over the color of the sky. "How soon until they reach us?"

"Three, maybe four minutes," Doc replied. "It depends on whether they stop to check their dead or not."

Zack nodded. The odds did not seem to be in their favor. He didn't know if they could get to the waterfall before their guests arrived. "We can stay here and wait for them or make a run for the waterfall? Your choice."

"I say we fight them," Doc said. "If we go through the waterfall they are likely to just try to follow us. I don't want to take this fight to Eljin's side of the veil. We need to end it here."

"And you, Rocky?"

"Hell, just get me my gun."

Zack laughed. "Okay, ammo check, guys." He couldn't agree more. He didn't want to take the battle to Eljin's side of the veil either. From how Gunny described it to him, the Seelie Court was practically a utopia. Bringing guns and fighting to that might destroy it and Zack wouldn't allow that to happen.

Zack glanced up when he heard a branch break. He could see movement just ahead. Strange. Their pursuers had obviously given up trying to move quietly. They were approaching like bulls charging through a china shop.

"Here they come," he said as he picked up his gun. He closed his eyes briefly, hoping Eljin could hear him through the veil. "*Love you, hummingbird.*"

Zack took aim. He started to pull the trigger when someone suddenly grabbed him from behind and ripped the gun from his hands. He opened his mouth to scream, but before he could make a sound, water filled his mouth as he was pulled back into the pool surrounding the waterfall.

Zack's last thought was of Eljin and the baby he'd never see before the darkness of the water pulled him under.

Chapter Eight

Eljin paced back and forth before the large gate to the human world. His fingers twisted together nervously as he waited for Zack to come through. The two large guards standing on either side of the veil watched him dispassionately.

He knew they would never let him back through the gate, not when there was a battle being fought on the other side. His father would have their heads. Sometimes it really sucked being the youngest son of the king.

Other times, his position truly paid off. He and Gunny encountered armed guards the moment they stepped through the gate. They recognized Eljin instantly. Instead of allowing them to take him to the castle as the guards wanted, Eljin ordered them to go back through the gate and retrieve Zack, Rocky, and Doc. He wouldn't leave until they were here.

That's what he'd been trying to explain when Zack had sent him and Gunny on ahead. No one could pass through the veil unless accompanied by an Aes Sídh. When the guards wouldn't let him go back to get Zack, he'd told them they had darn well better go themselves.

Eljin turned at a noise behind him, his heart catching in his throat when he saw two guards carrying Zack out through the gate, Rocky and Doc right behind them. Zack's head sagged and his eyes were closed.

Eljin raced up the steps and knelt as the guards laid Zack down. His hands quickly moved over Zack's body as he searched for an injury, a cut, a bullet wound, something to tell him why Zack wasn't moving.

"Zack, leannan, please, open your eyes," Eljin whispered as he shook him.

"Excuse me, fayerye," one of the guards said as he stepped forward, "I believe he is just unconscious from being pulled through the gate. The battle you warned us about was just beginning to start when we grabbed him."

Eljin rubbed his hand over his eyes then glanced around. Rocky was also unconscious, lying on the gate platform several feet away. Doc seemed to be caring for him. "Okay, let's get them to my father. He'll know what to do."

"Yes, fayerye," the guard said. Several guards stepped forward and picked Zack up, carefully carrying him between them. A few more picked up Rocky. Eljin started to follow when he felt an arm drop over his shoulders.

"He'll be fine, Eljin," Gunny said.

"I hope so," Eljin whispered. "I don't know what I would do if anything happened to him."

Gunny patted his shoulder gently. "You just be there for him when he wakes up and he'll be as happy as a clam."

Eljin wrinkled his nose. "I don't much like clams."

"Bug in a rug?" Gunny chuckled.

Eljin shook his head. "Bugs give me the creeps."

"Dog with a bone?"

"Gunny!"

"I'm just sayin'."

Eljin rolled his eyes. He knew Gunny was just trying to make him feel better but he didn't think he would until Zack opened his eyes. Eljin hurried up a few steps to walk beside Zack, grabbing and holding onto his limp hand.

It wasn't an easy feat as he had to walk between the guards carrying Zack. They had much longer legs and Eljin needed to run to keep up. The top spire of his father's

white stone castle just came into view when Eljin's stomach started churning. He broke away from the group quickly and ran to the bushes to throw up.

By the time he lifted his head, the captain of the guards squatted next to him.

"Fayerye, you are ill?"

"No, I'm carrying."

"Carrying." The guard grinned, his gaze dropping to Eljin's distended stomach.

"Your father will be pleased. Who is the *fayer*?"

Eljin pointed past the guard to where the others stood holding Zack. "My leannan, Zack, is the father."

"The human?"

Eljin wasn't sure if it was shock or disgust he heard in the guard's voice but he knew he didn't like the tone. "Watch how you speak of my leannan, Captain. Not only have he and his friends saved my life several times over the last few days but we're bonded."

The guard flushed. "My apologies, fayerye. I was merely stunned by your news. We haven't had humans at the Seelie Court in many years. I don't believe I have ever seen one in my lifetime."

"Then you couldn't have three more perfect people to meet for the first time." Eljin stood back up and began walking with the captain, keeping a close eye on Zack. "Gunny is their leader," Eljin said as he pointed to the man who walked on the other side of Zack. "His other two friends are Doc and Rocky. Doc is a medicine man so he will be instrumental in the caring for the men. He might even be able to teach us a few things."

"You don't think our medicine is superior? I've seen the pictures of what these human doctors do. It's barbaric."

"The human world is barbaric by our standards. But, no, I don't necessarily believe our medicine is superior. I just think it's different. Doc is a combat medic. He's used to caring for people in combat situations while under fire. We don't have anything like that."

"He cares for his comrades while in battle?" The captain glanced over his shoulder to where Doc walked beside Rocky. "How unusual."

"But not necessarily a bad idea," Eljin mused. "I know we don't have that many battles here but if we had a few soldiers trained to care for fallen men while in battle we might bring more of them home."

"Things are getting tenser between us and the Unseelie Court," the captain said. "There have been several recent raids on our side of the border in the last few months. Your father believes an all out assault is imminent."

"Then maybe you should discuss it with my father," Eljin suggested. "Any extra help we can get can only benefit us."

"Why don't you ask him yourself?" The captain pointed down the road. "Here he comes now."

Eljin glanced up, his heart pounding as joy swept through him. He'd missed his family almost as much as he'd missed Zack when they were separated. He couldn't believe he was back home again, and had managed to bring Zack with him.

Eljin let out a cry and broke away from the slow procession to run ahead. His father stopped his horse several feet away and slid down. Eljin gratefully ran into the older man's open arms.

"Mayer."

"Eljin, my son," his mayer said as he wrapped his arms around Eljin and hugged him tight. "I feared I would never see you again. No one knew what happened to you. You just disappeared."

Eljin tilted his head back to look into his father's strong face. "It's a long story and I'd be happy to tell you all about it, but first we need to get my leannan back to the castle. He lost consciousness coming through the gate."

"Your leannan?"

"His name is Zack Banning; he's a Marine from the human world."

"The human world?"

Eljin frowned. His father didn't sound pleased. "Yes, he's human. He's also the most wonderful man I have ever met. Besides" Eljin smirked as he bumped against his father. "You have to like him. He's the father of my baby and he saved both our lives."

King Tuathal's pale blond eyebrow shot up. "You're carrying?" His hand moved down to cover Eljin's stomach. A slow easy grin began to move across his face. "Your fayer will be so very happy."

"Well, except for the morning sickness I'm not really upset about it. I'm at the end of my second trimester. I thought I'd be done with this by now."

"Ah, my son, do not despair." King Tuathal chuckled. "It is a family trait to have morning sickness until you begin your third trimester. It should stop soon and then you will just grow as you should."

Eljin looked over his shoulder when he heard the procession catch up to him. He grabbed his father's hand and pulled him forward until he stood next to Gunny. "Father, this is Gunny Montgomery Barnes. He was Zack's commander when he was in the Marines." Eljin pointed to Doc and Rocky. "This is Doc and Rocky. They are also soldiers like Zack. Rocky has been injured though."

"Injured?"

"I told you, it's a long story but there are some men after us. They want to take my baby from me and kill my leannan. Gunny, Rocky, and Doc protected us while we made our way to a gate." He frowned. "They burned Gunny's house down, Father, and shot Rocky."

"By all means then, let's get your friends to the castle where they can receive proper care. And then you, little one," the king said as he pointed a finger at Eljin, "can tell me why someone from the human world is after you."

The procession began moving again, Eljin walking between Zack and his father. He could see Gunny walking on the other side of Zack just out the corner of his eye. "Father, is Uncle Roland in court?" Eljin hid his grin when Gunny jerked his head up to look at him.

"Yes, he's been here for several weeks."

"Could you have one of your men ride ahead and ask Uncle Roland to meet us in the courtyard?"

The king seemed puzzled, his forehead wrinkling in confusion but he nodded and waved a soldier over, giving him instructions to tell Roland to be waiting then he turned back to Eljin. "I suppose this is another thing I'll have to wait to hear about?"

"All in good time, Father, I promise."

Eljin was on pins and needles as they approached the castle, not only because he would be able to see his family after months of being gone but because he wanted to see if his Uncle Roland was Gunny's Roland.

When he spotted his uncle standing near the castle entrance he could barely keep himself from running forward and grabbing the man. He glanced over to Gunny, who seemed just a bit paler than normal.

"Gunny, that's my Uncle Roland standing by the two big doors."

Gunny's head snapped up as his gaze searched out the figure by the door. Gut instinct told Eljin something profound was about to happen when he saw tears form in Gunny's eyes.

Gunny gave a small cry and ran forward. He dropped to his knees the moment he reached Roland and wrapped his arms around the man. Roland looked stunned for a moment, staring down at Gunny with a look of complete shock on his face, and then his hands slowly lowered to cradle Gunny's face.

Eljin couldn't hear what was being said between the two men but the image of them together said more than any words. His Uncle Roland was Gunny's Roland. He could see it in the joy expressed on each man's face.

"Eljin, what is occurring here?"

Eljin laughed, happiness for Roland and Gunny flowing through him. "Gunny and Roland met twenty years ago in Ireland. They bonded then. When Uncle Roland was taken by the Unseelie Court, they were separated. Gunny's been searching for him

ever since." He smiled at the two men when Gunny stood and they embraced. "He doesn't even know about Monte yet."

The king stopped suddenly, grabbing Eljin by the arm. "You know where Monte is?"

Eljin frowned. "I thought he was here."

"No, after the two of you went on your diplomatic mission, he never came back. He disappeared just like you did."

"No, I was captured and never saw him again." Eljin inhaled sharply, covering his mouth with his hand. "You don't think they got Monte too, do you?"

"I don't know," King Tuathal replied. "I believe anything is possible. We thought you were being held by the Unseelie Court this entire time. We've been negotiating for your release for weeks."

"No, I was taken by humans through the veil."

"You were taken by humans through the veil or you were taken through the veil and handed over to humans? Be specific, Eljin. It's very important."

"It was definitely humans that took me through."

"Humans here? On this side of the veil?" The king frowned. "I must talk to my security council right away. I'm sorry, Eljin, this can't wait. I'll send your fayer down to you as soon as I can."

The king started to walk away then paused. He walked back to give Eljin a small kiss on his forehead. "I am glad you are home, my son. It does my heart good to see you and know you are safe. Your leannan and his friends will be welcomed here."

"Thank you, Mayer," Eljin said, returning his father's hug then watching him hurry inside of the castle.

"Eljin?" Doc called from behind him. "What does mayer and fayer mean? I keep hear you using those words."

Eljin smiled. "Mayer means birth father. Fayer is what we call the man who provided the seed for our creation, our other father. It literally means the father of our creation."

"You have two fathers?"

"Yes, all of the direct line royals do. Only the men of my family give birth. As with human women, we need sperm to create a child." He shrugged. "It just seems easier to have two fathers."

"Do you have a mother?"

"Nope, just two fathers."

Doc chuckled. "That is so going to blow Zack's mind when he wakes up."

That turned Eljin's thoughts back to his unconscious leannan. He started to turn back to Zack when Roland and Gunny walked over to him. Both men looked like they had been crying but there were smiles on their faces now.

"Thank you, Eljin," Roland said. His gaze was filled with tenderness as he looked at Gunny. "You've brought my heart back to me. How can I ever repay you?"

"No need, Uncle, I'm glad you two found each other again. I'm just sorry it has to be under these circumstances. Mayer told me that Monte is missing?"

"He's not with you?" Roland asked.

"I haven't seen him since I was captured months ago."

"Who's Monte?" Gunny asked.

Roland shot a worried look at Gunny then glanced back at Eljin. "You didn't tell him?"

Eljin shook his head. "I didn't want to say anything until I knew you were the Roland Gunny told me about."

"Who's Monte?" Gunny asked again. "Is this someone I need to be concerned about?"

Roland's chuckle sounded strained. "Not the way you think, love. Monte is — Monte is our son."

"Our son?" Gunny roared. "And you didn't think to tell me?"

"I didn't know until I was already being held by the Unseelie Court." Roland grabbed Gunny's shirt. "I swear, love. I would never hide that from you. I just never had the chance to tell you. Please believe me."

"I have a son?" Gunny finally said. He looked stunned. Apparently, Roland's words finally sank in. "We have a son?"

"Yes, Montgomery," Roland whispered, "we have a son. I named him Monte after you and he looks just like you, my love, except for the eyes. Those are mine. I told him all about you and he's tried so hard to live up to your image. He's a good man."

"He is," Eljin said, adding his two cents. "My cousin has always been one of the best men I know. He fought very hard when I was taken. I'm just sorry he was taken too. All this time I thought he'd gotten away."

"The same people that had you took Monte?" Gunny asked, looking at Eljin.

Eljin grimaced. "It looks that way. My mayer has gone to talk with his security council. All this time they believed that Monte and I were taken by the Unseelie Court and they were negotiating for our release. The Unseelie Court played along."

"We have to go after him," Gunny insisted.

"We have to figure out who has him first. The Unseelie Court might have him after all. Someone did turn us over to the people that had me. Humans took us from this side of the veil, not Aes Sídhe. We don't know who has Monte."

"Come on, love, let's go talk with King Tuathal and his security council," Roland said. "We'll come up with a plan to get our son back. Besides, you have insight into the human world that we do not. You might be able to help."

Gunny nodded, almost as if he couldn't bring himself to speak.

Roland wrapped his arms around Gunny. "We'll get him back, I promise."

"You're damn right we will," Gunny said. "If I have to search every damn inch of land on both sides of the veil, we'll get him back."

Eljin's heart ached for the two men as he watched them walk away. Gunny had to be feeling a mixture of joy at finding Roland and sorrow at the loss of his son. Eljin was just glad he had Roland to help him get through the days to come.

"Fayerye?" one of the guards asked. "What would you like us to do with your leannan and his friends?"

"Oh, bring them inside. You can take my leannan to my quarters. Rocky and Doc should be put in the room across the hall. They are to be considered honored guests and treated as such."

"Yes, fayerye."

Eljin trailed along behind the guards who carried Zack, concerned that the man hadn't woken up yet. If he hadn't been injured he should be awake by now. Eljin turned to one of the guards not carrying Zack.

"Have my fayer and the healer join me in my quarters."

"Yes, fayerye." The guard turned and hurried off.

Eljin took in his surroundings as he walked inside. He'd never lived anywhere else. This was home. Would Zack want him to leave here? To live with him in the human world? He hoped not.

"Eljin!"

Eljin glanced up at the sound of someone crying out his name. He could see his fayer, the father of his creation, on the balcony above the great entrance. He waved and hurried up the stairs toward him.

"Fayer!" Eljin said as he threw himself into the arms of his other father. It was good to be home. The castle, with all of its opulence, white stone, and spiraling towers was nice, but this . . . being in the arms of his family . . . *this* was really home.

"Oh, my son, your father has been so worried about you."

Eljin smiled as he buried his face in his father's tunic. He knew that was his fayer's way of telling him that he missed him too. His fayer didn't like to admit to emotion. He was the big, bad, commander of the Seelie Court's army. He was supposed to be unemotional but he'd always had a soft spot for Eljin.

"I missed my father too."

"Come," Gavril said as he slapped Eljin on the back, "tell me where you've been all of this time."

"Oh, can that wait, Fayer?" Eljin gestured to the guards carrying Zack and Rocky up the long winding stairway. "My leannan and one of his friends have been hurt. I'd like to get them settled and have the healer look at them."

Gavril's eyebrows drew together as he frowned. "Of course, my son."

Eljin wrapped an arm around his father's waist. "I have more news," he said as he walked with his father toward his private quarters. "Zack and I have bonded and I'm carrying."

Gavril's mouth dropped open. Eljin wasn't sure he'd ever seen his father so surprised. "And this is a good thing, my son?"

Eljin grinned. "It's a very good thing. Zack is a wonderful man. He and his friends have done everything they could to keep me safe while we journeyed here. Gunny even had his house burned down and Rocky was shot by the men who were after me."

"Gunny?"

"It's a long story, Father," Eljin said. "I've already promise Mayer I would tell him everything once I was assured that Zack was okay. I'd prefer to tell you both at the same time, if you don't mind?"

"Where is your mayer? Why isn't he here with you?"

"He went to talk to the Security Council. I wasn't taken by the Unseelie Court. I was taken by humans on this side of the veil then taken to the human world."

Gavril's face paled. "Humans? On this side of the veil?"

Eljin laughed. "That's the same thing Mayer said before he ran off."

"Yes, I can see where he might be concerned." Gavril patted Eljin's back gently. He was a large man. "Get your leannan and your friends settled. I'm going to go talk with your mayer. We'll discuss this after you've had some rest." Gavril wrinkled his nose. "And a bath."

Chapter Nine

Zack blinked several times at the sun shining in his eyes. It took him a moment to get used to the bright light. When they closed last, darkness surrounded him. It had clearly been awhile since then.

It was also clear he wasn't home in his small apartment. For one, the ceiling he looked up at was dome-shaped with beautiful carvings lining the edges. It looked to be made of white stone.

Zack pushed himself up against the pillows behind him and looked around the spacious room. He lay on the largest bed he'd ever seen, which sat on a small platform on the floor. The covers were a deep blue, almost like Eljin's eyes.

The remaining furniture in the room was sparse: a desk and chair in one corner, a large fireplace in the other with low-sitting couches surrounding it, a sideboard on one wall and a series of bookshelves on the other wall. There were brightly colored tapestries hanging on the tall walls and some large potted plants. Other than that, the place seemed empty.

"Zack, you're awake."

Zack turned to see Eljin walking in through a set of double doors. He looked good, a healthy glow on his face, his hair shining as if recently washed. He wore white, loose-fitting pants and a long white tunic that fell almost to his knees. It had blue embroidery on the lapel.

"Hey, hummingbird," Zack said as Eljin sat on the side of the bed, "how are you?"

"I feel much better now that you're awake." Eljin's smile lit the room up more than the sunshine. "I've been bathed, fed, and examined by my family healer." Eljin patted his stomach. "We are both fine. It's you I've been concerned about."

"Where are we?" Zack waved his hand around the room. "This isn't my apartment and Gunny's house burned to the ground."

"These are my private quarters in my family's castle at the Seelie Court. We made it through the veil, Gunny and I. Guards were waiting on the other side. I sent them back for you, Doc, and Rocky."

"Well, that explains who grabbed me then."

"I'm sorry about that. They didn't have time to warn you. It seemed better to cut and run rather than stay and fight. Without one of the Aes Sídhe, the bad guys couldn't make it through the gate. That's what I was trying to tell you when you had Gunny pull me away. You have to be Aes Sídhe – or be with one of us – to get through the gate."

"Sorry about that, Eljin," Zack said as he reached up and cupped the side of Eljin's face. "I just wanted to get you and the baby to safety."

"Which is why I'm not mad at you." Eljin laughed.

"So, this is your place, huh?" Zack looked around the room. "It's not bad, kind of nice digs."

Eljin laughed again. "Just wait until I show you the rest of Seelie Court. This is a beautiful place to live." A frown suddenly covered Eljin's face and he twisted his hands together. "That's something we've yet to talk about. Where are we going to live?"

"Where would you like to live?"

Eljin shrugged but Zack could see the tension in the stiffness of his body. He knew this mattered to Eljin. "I was kind of thinking that we could live here."

"I can't be a kept man, Eljin. I have to carry my own weight."

"Oh, I know, and I've thought of the perfect thing for you," Eljin said quickly. "It goes right along with your training as a Marine. We have a pretty good army here at Seelie Court but they know nothing of fighting in the human world. We don't even have combat medics."

Eljin began pulling at the fabric of the covers, his eyes downcast. "So, I was thinking, with the danger of humans being on this side of the veil, that you might be able to teach our soldiers something about fighting in your world."

"Humans on this side of the veil?" Zack asked. "What are you talking about? I thought you said humans couldn't get through the veil without someone of the Aes Sídhe with them?"

"Usually that's true but the people who took me from this side of the veil to the other were human. I don't know if they had help or what but they were definitely

human. That means humans are somehow able to come and go through the veil and that makes things very dangerous for the Aes Sídhe."

Zack grabbed Eljin's hands and held them between his own as he thought about his words. He'd been drummed out of the service due to his head injury, an injury he now believed hadn't been as severe as the doctors claimed.

He would never be allowed back into any branch of the service and that's all he knew how to do, be a soldier. Add the fact that someone inside the government wanted him dead and his opportunities in the human world didn't look that good.

Here in the Seelie Court he might have a chance to use his abilities again and put his training to good use. Plus, he'd have Eljin and their child someplace safer than the human world. Eljin's idea had a lot of promise.

"While I like the idea a lot, I need time to think about it, okay?" Zack asked. "I don't know much about your world. Considering the circumstances, I'm not even sure that your people will accept me. I am human, after all."

"You're also my leannan, a royal consort." Eljin snickered. "That gives you a lot of clout. Just ask my fayer."

"Your fayer?"

"Fayer means father of my creation, basically, the sperm donor. You are our child's fayer. I am the mayer, the birth father." Eljin laughed. "You know, Doc asked the same thing. He said it would blow your mind when you found out that I had two fathers."

"Two fathers?" Zack chuckled. "Yeah, I guess that is a little crazy sounding."

"My mayer is King Tuathal. He's of royal blood so he rules Seelie Court. Gavril, my fayer, is commander of our army. He is not of royal blood so he cannot rule but don't let that fool you. My fathers rule side by side as equals. Anyone who doubts that should face my fayer in hand-to-hand combat."

"Big man, huh?"

"Strong." Eljin chuckled. "Just wait until you meet him and you'll see what I mean."

"I have to admit I'm a little nervous about meeting your fathers, Eljin." Zack grabbed Eljin around the waist and moved him over so he straddled Zack's lap. "What are they going to think when they find out I knocked up their youngest son?"

"They've already stated that you, Gunny, Doc, and Rocky are to be treated as honored guests."

"Guests, hmm? That doesn't sound very promising, Eljin."

"Although you are officially my leannan, you haven't decided if we are going to stay or not." Eljin shrugged. "That kind of makes you a guest, doesn't it?"

"I'll think about, I promise," Zack said. He reached over and grabbed the hem of Eljin's white tunic and pulled it up over his head, tossing it over the side of the bed. "In the meantime, hummingbird, I need to examine you and make sure you're okay."

Eljin giggled. "Examining me means I need to be naked?"

Zack pulled at the hem of Eljin's pants. Eljin lifted his hips so Zack could pull them down his legs. Once Eljin was naked, Zack pulled him down to his chest. "I need to exam you inside and out, just to be sure, you understand."

Zack's eyes widened when Eljin let out a little growl and practically jumped on him. Apparently Eljin was as interested in being examined as Zack was. Zack grabbed Eljin and rolled him over onto his back, his body coming down beside him. He moved up on his elbow and leaned over Eljin, careful to not put his weight on the baby bump.

"Hey, hummingbird, missed you."

Eljin grinned. "Missed you to, my beautiful leannan."

Zack leaned into the hand Eljin cupped around his cheek, turning slightly to kiss the palm.

"I was so worried about you, Zack. I didn't know if you would ever wake up."

"Never going to leave you, hummingbird."

"You'd better not," Eljin said fiercely. "I may only be five foot five but I'm not someone to mess with. I'd kick your butt."

Zack laughed. The weight of the world lifted off of his shoulders as Eljin's joy and happiness filled him. "I have no doubt that you would, hummingbird."

Zack could see the delight shining in Eljin's deep blue eyes. They shined brighter than Zack had ever seen them. "I know sometimes you have to hide your true eye color to keep yourself safe but don't ever hide it from me, Eljin. I love the color of your eyes. That was the one thing I remembered when they tried to take my memories, the color of your eyes."

"Really? You remembered my eyes?"

Zack rubbed his thumb along the curve of Eljin's eye. "I saw them in my dreams, Eljin. I saw them when I was awake, even. No matter how many of those damn pills I took I couldn't forget your beautiful eyes."

"I think I like that."

Zack chuckled. "Where's that bottle of lotion?"

"Got something better," Eljin said as he pointed to a small purple jar sitting next to the bed. "This is made especially by my people for coupling. It's supposed to enhance the experience for both parties."

Zack grabbed the glass jar and pulled out the topper, leaning in to sniff at the contents. A sweet cinnamon-like scent filled his nostrils. His cock jerked and he wondered about the potion's ingredients. He'd bet if he bottled it and sold it in the human world, he'd make millions. It was like a lube and aphrodisiac rolled into one. Better to keep it in Seelie Court.

"On your hands and knees, hummingbird," Zack growled as he patted at Eljin's hip.

"I have a better idea," Eljin said as he sat up and moved out of the way. "Lay down on your back."

Zack was confused but did as Eljin directed. Once he was on his back, Eljin straddled him, his ass facing Zack's head, his head down by Zack's groin. The sight of Eljin's puckered hole right in front of him was almost as good as the feel of the lips that suddenly wrapped around his cock.

"Eljin," Zack cried out as his eyes closed. His hips surged upward, pushing his cock farther into the wet heat surrounding it. It had been a long while since Zack

received a blow job but he couldn't ever remember it feeling this good. Eljin's lips were magical.

Zack opened his eyes and looked at the hairless hole right in front of his face. He could see Eljin's silky sac dangling between his legs, his hard cock bobbing with each movement Eljin made. It was an arousing picture.

Zack lifted his hands and stroked them over the soft curve of Eljin's ass. He pushed Eljin's ass cheeks together then pulled them apart, watching the small entrance twinkle at him. Suddenly curious in a way he'd never been before, Zack leaned forward and licked at the puckered flesh.

A strong, musky flavor entered his mouth. Zack wasn't turned off, but rather intrigued, especially when Eljin cried out and his legs began to tremble.

"Zack, what are you doing?"

"I have no idea." But he planned to do it again. He leaned forward and licked again, running his tongue over the quivering flesh before pushing inside. Eljin's cry of delight vibrated around his cock, spurring him on.

Zack didn't know how long he'd last with the way Eljin was working his cock. He already felt close to the edge as it was. It seemed to always be that way with Eljin. The man merely had to breathe in his direction and Zack was hard as a rock.

Grabbing the jar of lube, Zack poured some out on his fingers then pushed one into Eljin's ass. He was fascinated by the way Eljin's body seemed to suck his finger right in as if it needed to be filled by him.

The second finger was just the same. Eljin's tight circle of muscles widened enough to take him in, swallowing him up as if waiting just for him. Zack knew from the last time they'd been together that Eljin's body would take his cock just the same way. He could hardly wait.

"Are you about ready for me?" Zack asked as he pushed a third finger into Eljin's tight hole. He moved his fingers around to stretch Eljin out. His fingers encountered a small bump, and Eljin cried out, his back arching. Fascinated, Zack rubbed the spot again.

Eljin came unglued. He started thrusting back against Zack's fingers, his body taut. Loud cries filled the room. Zack could feel drops of pre-cum smear across his stomach as Eljin moved frantically against him.

Zack was shocked. He'd never seen anyone so aroused just by a touch. He had anal sex with a lot of women but none of them ever had this response. It fueled Zack's desire to a fever pitch. It was suddenly imperative that he be inside of Eljin in the next few seconds.

"Eljin, need to feel you."

Eljin immediately flipped around. His eyes zeroed in on Zack's. Zack watched them widen as Eljin grabbed his cock and slowly sat back on it, impaling himself inch by inch. When Eljin was finally seated, his head fell back and he took several deep breaths. Zack thought he'd never looked sexier.

"Fuck, Eljin, you look good on my cock." Zack brought his hands up and stroked them down Eljin's slender chest. He moved them farther down until he passed over the bump made by their child to the hard cock jutting up from Eljin's groin.

Zack looked up at Eljin at the same moment he wrapped his hand around Eljin's hard shaft. The blissful look that crossed his face filled Zack with a deep sense of pride at the knowledge he could bring his love so much pleasure.

"Ride me, Eljin," he commanded. "I want to see you fuck yourself on my cock."

Eljin's eyes blazed. He planted his hands on Zack's chest and began riding him for all he was worth, his movements slow and steady but increasing with each thrust. Eljin's inner muscles tightened around Zack's cock even more with each plunge.

Zack watched Eljin's face as he stroked him, moving his free hand down to cup his balls and gently massage them. He stroked the skin between Eljin's balls and his ass then brushed around the skin gripping his cock.

Eljin's cries increased, becoming louder and more frantic. His body trembled, his hands digging into Zack's chest. Zack was ecstatic. "Make me come, Eljin."

Zack had no idea how he did it but Eljin did exactly as ordered. His inner muscles squeezed and massaged Zack's cock, sending him to a level of pleasure he'd

never reached before. It was all Zack could do not to scream out his release as he suddenly felt his cock swell then spill inside of Eljin, filling him.

Eljin cried out at the same time. His body shuddered uncontrollably as white pearly seed shot out of his cock and splattered all over Zack's chest. Zack had just enough time to drop Eljin's cock and catch him as the man fell forward.

He felt concerned until he saw the smile on Eljin's face and heard the satisfied sigh that fell from his lips. Zack stroked the blond hair back from Eljin's flushed face. "Are you okay, hummingbird?"

"Hmmm, never better." Eljin snuggled into Zack's chest. "That was great."

Zack chuckled. "You seemed to enjoy it. You went a little wild there."

Eljin's eyes popped open and he snorted. "I would have been fine if you hadn't pegged my sweet spot."

"Your sweet spot?"

Eljin's eyebrow shot up. "My prostate." He frowned then leaned up on his elbow. "Haven't you ever had your prostate stroked?"

"Uh, no." Zack waved his hand at himself. "Gay virgin here, remember?"

Eljin's chuckle was evil. "Not for long," he said as he scooted down to sit between Zak's legs. "Hand me that purple jar and spread your legs."

Zack grabbed the discarded jar of lube and handed it to Eljin. He watched the man pour some out on his fingers then set the jar aside. "I'm not so sure about this, Eljin. No one has ever been up there before."

"Not to worry, leannan, I promise to be gentle." Eljin patted Zack's legs. "Now, spread them as wide as you can and tilt your butt up toward me. It might even work better for you to have a pillow under your ass."

Zack took Eljin's word for it, grabbing a pillow and shoving it under his ass until his hips were canted up toward the man then he spread his legs. He felt ridiculous, exposed. But as Eljin's hands began to skim over his buttocks, he wondered if it mattered.

"Okay, first finger," Eljin warned.

Zack instantly tensed up, anxiety overwhelming him.

"Zack, this isn't going to work if you don't relax," Eljin said. "It won't hurt, I promise. I enjoy it, don't I?"

"Yeah, but you've been gay for awhile. I've been gay for two days."

"I may have been gay for a lot longer than you but yours were the first hands to touch me. I'm as new to this as you are."

Zack tilted his head up. "Really?"

Eljin nodded.

"You've never had a lover before me?"

"Nope, saved myself for my leannan."

Zack grinned as he laid his head back down on the pillow. He could hear the pride in Eljin's voice.

"Wait a minute," Zack said as he looked at Eljin again. "If you've never been with anyone before me then how do you know so much about gay sex?"

Eljin chuckled. "I just do to you what feels good to me."

"That's what Doc told me to do when we discussed it."

"You discussed our sex life with Doc?"

"I was a little confused about the whole sex thing. I needed to know how to please you and Doc told me to just do to you what felt good to me."

"Smart man."

Zack took a deep breath and let it out, trying to relax. "Okay, go ahead." He instantly inhaled when Eljin wiggled a finger, one that was already deep inside Zack's ass.

"Already there."

"I didn't feel a thing."

"I told you it wouldn't hurt."

"Add another one."

Paying attention as he was this time, Zack felt the second finger push into his ass. It burned a little but it didn't hurt. A few deep breaths and the burn went away to be replaced by a feeling of intense fullness.

"Okay, here comes the sweet spot," Eljin warned.

Zack started to tense when he felt Eljin's fingers move, curving in slightly. Then it was as if an electrical pulse shot through his body. Zack cried out, his body arching in the air. "Fuck, Eljin."

"I told you that you'd like it," Eljin said, "now just sit back and let me do all the work. You just lie there and enjoy it."

Zack went out of his mind in under ten seconds. Eljin played him like a concert pianist. He knew every spot to touch, every bump to massage, and just how fast to thrust his fingers in and out of Zack's body.

Zack just lay there and took everything Eljin did to him. He couldn't have stopped the man if the room was on fire. It felt too good, unlike anything he'd ever felt before. But after awhile, it didn't seem to be enough. Zack could feel himself teetering on the edge of a magnificent orgasm. He just couldn't seem to fall over that edge.

"Eljin," Zack pleaded, "need more. Need something —"

"It's okay, leannan," Eljin said as he pulled his fingers out of Zack's tight grip. "I know what you need."

Zack wasn't sure anyone knew what he needed until he felt the head of Eljin's cock press against his hole. He started to tighten up until he remembered Eljin's words to relax. "Fuck!" Zack shouted as Eljin slipped in. He felt so full, fuller than he ever had. Eljin's cock seemed to fill every inch of his ass.

"Eljin," he cried out as the man began to move, "I've never felt anything —" He swallowed hard. His body sucked Eljin back in every time the man pulled out. "I've never felt anything like this."

"Do you like it?" Eljin panted between thrusts.

"Fuck, yes!"

"Then you'll probably like this too."

Zack's eyes rolled back into his head when Eljin grabbed his cock and began stroking him to the rhythm of his thrusts. He fisted the sheets and held on tightly.

He never in his life felt anything like it. His entire body felt strung out like a rubber band ready to shoot across the room. He knew just a little more and he'd fly. "Eljin, please, harder." Zack couldn't contain his loud groan as Eljin's body began slapping against his, the man pounding into him.

Zack opened his eyes and looked up at Eljin through the haze of desire clouding his mind. "The minute you're not carrying anymore I'm going to fuck you into the mattress," he growled. "I'm going to fuck you on every flat surface I can find then I'll create more."

Eljin's eyes widened. His face flushed and Zack knew the idea turned him on.

"I can't wait to feel your body pressed up against the wall, my cock buried deep in your ass."

Eljin grinned. "I have this fantasy about being fucked on a horse. Do you think you can help me with that?"

Zack's body surged as he pictured himself fucking Eljin on the back of a running horse. It was just enough to send him over the cliff he'd been hovering over for so long. Zack roared as a red haze enveloped his body. The world around him exploded. He felt nothing but white hot pleasure and the feeling of Eljin's cock pulsing into him, then darkness.

Chapter Ten

Eljin lifted his head from Zack's sweaty chest to find the man passed out. He might have been concerned if there hadn't been a huge, satisfied smile on Zack's face. Zack's cock pulsed against him, giving little jerks as it spat out the last of his seed.

Eljin brushed his fingers over Zack's damp forehead, shaking his head. Thank goodness Zack had enjoyed himself. He certainly knew he had. There was almost nothing like being deep inside Zack's ass except maybe having Zack buried in his.

Eljin couldn't decide which he liked more. After this, he was pretty sure he wouldn't have to make a choice. Eljin carefully pulled out of Zack then rolled to the side of the bed. He made a quick trip to the washroom, cleaned up then grabbed a washcloth for Zack.

Zack just started to come around by the time Eljin was done cleaning him up. Eljin tossed the washrag over the side of the bed and scooted up to lay next to Zack. He brushed the side of Zack's cheek until his eyes fluttered open.

"Hey, leannan," he whispered softly.

Zack opened his mouth to speak but no words came out. He licked his lips, swallowed, then tried again. "Hey."

"Are you feeling okay?"

Zack's forehead wrinkled. "Did I pass out?"

"Yep." Eljin chuckled.

Zack seemed to think about that for a moment, his black eyebrow arched. "Did I miss anything?"

"Just me cleaning us up," Eljin replied. "You were here for the rest of it."

"That was amazing, Eljin."

"Now you see why I like it so much." Eljin snuggled down against Zack's chest. "I'm holding you to that mattress thing. I expect to be fucked on every flat surface we can find the moment this baby is born."

"Duly noted, hummingbird." Zack chuckled as he wrapped his arms around Eljin, one hand on his back, one hand covering their baby.

Eljin felt like he was wrapped in a silken cocoon of euphoria. All was right with the world. Zack loved him. He loved Zack. They were together along with their unborn child. Eljin didn't know if a more perfect moment existed.

He knew he hoped for too much the moment his bedroom door banged opened and someone stormed in. Zack instantly rolled them across the bed and over the side, pressing Eljin between him and the mattress.

Eljin struggled with Zack until he could peak over the top of the mattress, relief filling him the moment he spotted his oldest brother, Conall, standing in the middle of the room. He pushed at Zack's shoulder.

"Let me go," he snapped. "It's just my brother, Conall."

"Your brother?" Zack asked as he eased his grip on Eljin. "Does he always barge into your room?"

"Yeah, pretty much."

"Well, he's damn lucky we weren't at my place. I sleep with a gun under my pillow." Zack stood slowly, grabbing a sheet to cover his nakedness. "He could have ended up with a hole in his head."

"He still might," Eljin growled. He took the sheet Zack held out to him and wrapped it around his hips then turned to glare at his brother. "I'm an adult now, Conall. It's time for you to stop treating me like a child and give me the privacy I deserve. Stop barging into my room unannounced."

"Ah hell, Eljin, you'll always be a kid to me."

"Well, I'm not anymore," Eljin shouted as he stormed across the room. "Five minutes earlier and you would have interrupted something that would have proved to you beyond a shadow of a doubt that I'm not a kid anymore."

"Oh?" Conall's blond eyebrow arched and he glanced past Eljin to where Zack stood. "You got something going with this human?"

Eljin rolled his eyes as exasperation filled him. "This *human* is my leannan, Conall, and you need to treat him as such. He already has Mayer and Fayer's approval."

"They approved you bonding with a human?" Conall snorted. "I don't think so."

Eljin felt like throwing a two-year-old-like temper tantrum when Conall ignored him and walked over to stab his finger into Zack's chest. "Our fathers would never approve of you bonding with a human. They're nasty, backstabbing cowards. They're not fit to lick our boots."

"Conall!" Eljin was floored by Conall's words. He'd never heard his brother talk in such a way. His brother never showed a hatred for humans before. In fact, Eljin thought he was always kind of partial to them. Why would Conall act this way now?

"Conall, what's wrong with you?"

"I'm not going to let some flea-bitten mongrel bond with my baby brother."

Zack crossed his arms over his chest. "I don't believe that's up to you."

"Want to bet?" Conall sniped. "I'm next in line for the throne. If you don't think that means I have the clout to declare your bond invalid, you're wrong."

"Conall, no!" Eljin's heart beat frantically. Fear and anger knotted inside him as his gaze darted back and forth between the two formidable men. He could see the tension radiating between them. Eljin grabbed at Conall's arm. "Please — "

He cried out when Conall pushed him away. He tripped over the long sheet and fell to the floor. Before he could look up he heard a loud roar. The next thing he knew he was crawling out of the way as Conall and Zack grappled together.

Fear choked Eljin. Two people he cared about were fighting. Fists were thrown, legs kicked out, blood hit the floor. Overcome with the horror of the situation, Eljin jumped to his feet and raced out of the room, yelling for his fathers.

People came running from all directions but Eljin didn't stop until his fayer's arms wrapped around him. "Eljin, son, what's wrong?"

"In my quarters." Eljin panted heavily. "Conall and Zack fighting."

Gavril pushed Eljin into the waiting arms of King Tuathal and ran down the hallway. Eljin sobbed, tearing himself away from his mayer and ran after his fayer. He reached the door to find his fayer filling it, sounds of laughter coming from inside.

Eljin pushed past his father, skidding to a stop when he found Conall and Zack on the floor, both of them laughing their asses off. He didn't see what they had to laugh about; each of them were covered in bruises, scrapes, and scratches.

"What in the hell is going on?" Eljin snapped.

Conall waved at Eljin, laughter overcoming him. Zack wiped the back of his hand across his mouth, wiping away the blood from his split lip. Eljin gave in to the

anger filling him and stamped his foot on the floor. He was barefoot and it barely made a noise but it made him feel better.

"I want to know what in the hell is going on here."

"I wouldn't mind knowing that myself," Gavril stated. "It seems you two boys had quite the introduction."

"I just wanted to see if Zack was fit to be my baby brother's leannan," Conall said. "I had to make sure he could protect Eljin."

"So you called him a flea-bitten mongrel?" Eljin asked.

"I think it was more my pushing you out of the way that got him rather than the words," Conall said. He glanced over at Zack. "He seemed to put up with all of the things I called him up until that point."

"Well, duh." Zack snorted, "He's pregnant. You could have seriously injured him or the baby."

"Pregnant!" Conall shouted. His gaze snapped to Eljin then down to his stomach. "You're carrying?" He jumped to his feet, all signs of his earlier laughter gone from his face. "Are you okay? I didn't hurt you?"

"Yes, you hurt me!" Eljin snapped. "You called my leannan names and hit him."

"Eljin, I swear, I was just trying to see what type of man he was. I never meant a word of what I said."

"Then you shouldn't have said it."

Conall shot a desperate look at Gavril but Eljin wasn't about to let go of his anger. He'd been treated like a child by his brothers all his life. They needed to understand he was perfectly capable of taking care of himself and finding an honorable man.

"I'd like you to leave my quarters," Eljin said quietly.

"Eljin, I—"

"Now!" Eljin almost gave in to the miserable look that crossed Conall's face until he saw the bruises on Zack's face again. His anger returned with a vengeance. Eljin gripped the sheet wrapped around his body to keep from attacking his brother.

"Okay, Eljin, I'll leave if that's what you want."

"It is."

Conall looked like he was about to say something, his mouth opening, but then he turned and walked out of the room. Eljin let out the breath he'd been holding and walked over to squat next to Zack. He hesitated as he reached out to touch the cut on Zack's lip.

"Does it hurt?"

Zack grabbed his hand. "Eljin, you need to forgive your brother. He was just trying to make sure I'm capable of taking care of you. He obviously loves you a great deal."

"If he loves me so much then he needs to let me grow up."

Zack chuckled then groaned as the cut on his lip split again. He wiped at it then looked back at Eljin. "Hummingbird, you know he didn't mean any of the things he said. He admitted as much. And no matter how old you get you will always be the baby of the family. Be thankful that you *have* a family."

Eljin frowned as he remembered Zack had grown up in an orphanage. He sat back on his heels. "I guess. He just makes me so mad when he treats me like a child."

"You're not a child anymore, Eljin." Zack's face turned red and his voice lowered to a mere whisper. "You proved that more than adequately a little while ago."

Zack climbed to his feet, one hand grabbing the sheet around his waist, the other reaching down to pull Eljin up. "I think you should go talk to your brother. Family is too precious to give up over a little fight. I'll go check on Rocky and Doc while you do, okay?"

"Yeah, okay." Eljin grimaced as he started for the door. The smirks on the faces of his fathers didn't make him feel any better. In fact, it made him feel like the child he protested he wasn't.

"Uh, Eljin, do you think you could wear more than a sheet when leaving our room?"

Eljin stopped suddenly, his cheeks heating as he realized he was only covered in a thin sheet. "Yeah, that might be a good idea."

* * * * *

Eljin felt like he walked to his execution as he made his way to the balcony where his brother waited. He knew he'd lost his temper with Conall but he couldn't help it. He hated everyone treating him like a child.

The large double doors to the balcony were open, sunlight and fresh air filling the hallway. Eljin loved that about the Seelie Court; everything was always so bright and colorful, the beautiful scents of the outside filling the air.

Seelie Court was a wonderful place to live: happy people, beautiful countryside, plenty of food and goods for all to have. As much as he needed to stay with Zack, he couldn't imagine living anywhere else. He just had to hope Zack chose to stay because being separated from Zack was worse than leaving his homeland.

Eljin turned the corner out the double doors, instantly spotting his brother standing by the railing. His shoulders seemed slumped; a small frown marred his lips. Eljin knew their argument weighed heavily on him.

"Conall," Eljin called out softly as he walked out onto the balcony. "Can we talk?"

"Eljin." Conall spun around, his mouth dropping open. "I thought you didn't want to talk to me."

Eljin shrugged. "Zack grew up in an orphanage with no brothers or sisters, no parents. He told me that what we have is too precious to give up over a simple argument. He sent me out here to talk to you."

"Your leannan sounds like an intelligent man."

Eljin smiled. "He is. As you've discovered, he's also very protective of me."

Conall's face flushed and he glanced away. "That's all I wanted for you, Eljin."

Eljin laughed lightly. "Protective is nice but I was hoping for a little more. Luckily, Zack gives me all that I need."

Conall suddenly turned toward Eljin. His face looked anguished, his eyes clouded and his eyebrows drawn together. "Eljin, I hope you know that I was just trying to look out for you. I know you're an adult, I swear. It's just . . . well, I'm the oldest. I'm supposed to look out for you and the others."

Eljin quickly stepped forward and gripped Conall's hand in his. "I understand that, Conall, really I do. And I appreciate it. You've always been the best of brothers. But you need to understand that I can make my own decisions. Even if you hadn't liked Zack I still would choose to be with him. He's everything I've ever wanted."

Eljin felt the weight of Conall's stare as the man looked down at him.

Finally, Conall smiled and patted his arm. "Okay, I'll defer to your decision."

"And admit that I'm adult, old enough to make my own choices concerning my life?"

Conall chuckled. "With protest," he said. "I can't promise I won't try to look out for you. You are still my baby brother."

"I'm also bonded to Zack now. It's his responsibility to look out for me now." Eljin looped his arm through his brother's and turned them to look out over the plush green landscape below. "Besides, once you find your leannan you'll be too busy to concern yourself with me and my life."

"Eljin, do you think my leannan could be human?" Conall asked after a moment. His voice sounded low and filled with tension.

"It's certainly possible, Conall. Mine was."

"But I never leave the Seelie Court," Conall protested. "If my leannan is human, how will I ever meet him?"

"We could sign you up for one of those human dating services."

Conall frowned. "Not funny, Eljin."

"I'm sorry." Actually, Eljin thought it *was* rather funny. The thought of his oldest brother signing up for a dating service tickled him. "I've asked Zack to stay here in Seelie Court. With his military training and his knowledge of the human world I think he'd be a benefit to us."

"Will he stay?"

Eljin shrugged. "I don't know. But if he chooses to leave, I'll be going with him."

"Even if it means returning to the human world?"

"Yes. I'm not happy about the prospect but I can't be separated from him."

"And you shouldn't have to be." Conall patted Eljin's hand again then leaned over and planted a small kiss on his forehead. "If he decides to stay he'll be welcomed with open arms, I promise you. If he decides to go, then we'll deal with it, okay?"

"Thank you, Conall."

"No, thank you, Eljin. I was an ass and you had every right to be angry with me. If one of our brothers had pushed my pregnant leannan I think I would have killed them. Zack has been very understanding."

"You didn't know."

"I don't think it would have mattered." Conall chuckled. "I'm just glad you weren't hurt. I never would have forgiven myself."

"We're fine. I keep trying to tell Zack that I'm not made of spun glass." Eljin wagged his finger at Conall. "I won't take it from you too."

"Yes, sir."

"And don't you forget it."

"I think pregnancy has helped you grow a temper, baby brother. I don't think I've ever seen you so fierce."

Eljin snorted. "Mood swings are a bitch!"

* * * * *

Zack liked the silky pants and knee length tunic that Eljin gave him to wear. He felt like he wore pajamas in the daytime but they were so comfortable, so silky soft against his skin, he couldn't bring himself to complain.

The tunic had slits on each side up to the hip and the sleeves were wide and came down just past Zack's elbow. The pants were drawstring and bellowed out at the

bottom. Zack really enjoyed the collar, which was v-necked and gave him lots of room to breathe. Add the small brown slip-on sandals and Zack felt like he was at a summer resort.

Zack knocked softly on the door across from the quarters he shared with Eljin. He hadn't seen Rocky and Doc since the night before and was concerned about their welfare. He'd been assured they were fine but he needed to see them with his own eyes.

He heard a soft reply and opened the door. A look around the room told Zack that it was much like Eljin's room, sparsely decorated and spacious. He immediately spotted Rocky and Doc on the low mattress sitting on a platform across the room.

Zack felt a shock of surprise rock through him when he saw Doc wrapped in Rocky's arm, Doc's head on Rocky's chest as he slept. Rocky seemed to be awake but mesmerized by the man in his arms. Zack chuckled.

"Well, I see he's finally given into his feelings for you?"

"What are you talking about?" Rocky asked as he looked over his shoulder at Zack.

"Oh, please, like you don't know. Doc's been in love with you for years."

"I thought you didn't know he was gay."

"I'm talking from experience when I tell you that being gay has absolutely nothing to do with what one person might feel for another." Zack smirked. "And being gay isn't that bad."

Rocky looked shocked, his eyebrows shooting up nearly to his hairline. "You let Eljin fuck you."

Zack grinned even though he felt his face flame. "Yeah."

"How was it?" Rocky looked intrigued, more so than Zack thought a man that professed to be straight would have been.

"Well, just to give you an idea, I passed out from the intensity."

"No shit?" Rocky laughed.

"No shit." Zack grinned, not all turned off by the shock in Rocky's face. "You might want to try it one of these days. I can promise you, it's nothing like fucking a woman."

Zack chuckled to himself a few minutes later when he left Doc sleeping in Rocky's arms and walked down the hall. Rocky looked at Doc with such curiosity when he left the room that Zack wondered if the two might finally hook up. It would be nice to have more members of his makeshift family find happiness.

"Zack!"

Zack turned to see Gunny hurrying down the hallway toward him holding the hand of a tall, blond elf. Zack stopped walking and waited until he caught up, curious as to the identity of Gunny's companion. The way Gunny held the man's hand, Zack figured the blond elf had to be Roland.

"Gunny," Zack said as he took in the happy glow on Gunny's face, "you seem to be doing okay. No worse for wear."

Gunny's smile would have lit up the hallway if the sunlight shining through the floor-to-ceiling windows hadn't already done so.

"This is Roland, *my* Roland," Gunny said as he pulled the elf forward.

"Hello, Roland, I've heard a lot about you," Zack said. "I'm glad you and Gunny finally found each other again. I'm just sorry it took so long."

Roland's pale face flushed with color as he gazed over at Gunny. "I would have waited forever."

"I have a son, Zack," Gunny said quickly. "His name is Monte. Roland named him after me. He says Monte looks just like me except for the blue eyes, which are Roland's. And he says that —"

"Whoa." Zack laughed as he held up his hands. "Slow down, Gunny, and take a breath. You're talking so fast I can barely keep up with you."

"Sorry, I'm just so excited." Gunny patted the hand he held in his, his eyes drinking Roland in as if he couldn't bear to look anywhere else. "So much of my life has changed in the last two days."

"Believe me, I can understand. Less than a week ago, my life was so boring it was all I could do to get out of bed in the morning. Now, I have Eljin, a child on the way, and possibly a new job. Things just keep getting better."

"A new job?" Gunny asked.

Zack chuckled. "Yeah, Eljin seems to think I could put my experience in the Marines to good use training the Seelie soldiers. The men who took Eljin were human, which means humans can somehow breach the veil between our worlds. The Seelie soldiers have no experience fighting humans."

"Actually," Roland said, speaking for the very first time, "that's not a half bad idea. I've spent enough time between worlds to know that our soldiers do not fight like your soldiers. We'd be at a distinct disadvantage if caught in a battle with the humans."

"Honey, if Zack and I are going to live here and teach the Seelie soldiers how to fight then you have to stop referring to them as our soldiers and your soldiers. We may be human but your family is our family now."

Zack reeled as Gunny's words slammed into him. The breath in his lungs moved up and got caught in his throat. Gunny was right. Zack had felt confused about what his place in both the human world and the Seelie world would be.

He suddenly realized it didn't matter as long as he had Eljin and their child. They were his family and by extension, the rest of Eljin's people had become his family too. It was his duty to protect them just as he would Eljin, which meant he'd be staying in the Seelie Court.

"Gunny's right, Roland, our bonds with you and Eljin mean that your family is our family. We need to stay and help protect your people, *our* people. There are things Gunny and I know about the human world that you do not, things we can teach you. We're staying."

Just saying the words made Zack feel excited about the future. He needed to find Eljin and tell the man of the decision he'd just made. He felt sure it would make Eljin happy knowing he wouldn't have to leave his family or the only home he'd known.

"I need to go find Eljin. He's supposed to be out making up with his brother, Conall."

Roland's forehead wrinkled. "Conall?"

Zack chuckled. "Yeah, Conall came into our room and started spouting off at the mouth." Zack waved a hand at the concerned look on Roland's face. "Oh, he was just trying to get me riled, find out what type of man I was. He wanted to make sure that I could protect Eljin."

Gunny frowned. "Let me guess, you bought it hook line and sinker and punched the guy?"

"Yeah, well, I was doing fine until he pushed Eljin and then all bets were off. I wanted to pound him into the ground."

"Did you?"

"Neither of us came away without a few bruises but it wasn't long until I figured out Conall's game. Eljin, on the other hand, was pissed. He ordered Conall out of his room and refused to speak to him. I told Eljin he needed to make up, that family was too precious to give up over something so trivial."

"Very true, Zack," Roland said. "I hope Eljin is able to see it as well."

"He did, even before he went to talk to Conall. He's just tired of everyone treating him like a child."

"He is the youngest," Roland insisted.

"He's also bonded and carrying a child. I think that makes him an adult."

"There is more to being an adult than the ability to breed," Roland said. "He needs to behave as an adult as well."

Zack nodded. "I understand that but he also needs everyone to give him a chance to prove he's an adult. I imagine it's not easy to be the baby of the family but it's hard to prove he's an adult if no one gives him the chance."

"Probably not," Roland agreed.

"Believe me," Zack said, his face flushing a little as he remember the intimate contact he'd had with Eljin earlier, "he's not a child."

Chapter Eleven

"Hello, hummingbird."

Eljin turned away from Conall and smiled when he saw Zack walking out onto the balcony. "Hello, leannan, did you check on Doc and Rocky? Are they doing okay?"

"That depends on your definition of okay," Zack said as he walked over to stand next to Eljin. He wrapped an arm around his waist, leaned down and kissed Eljin's forehead. "When I left them Doc was asleep in Rocky's arms and Rocky was giving Doc the eye."

"Oh?"

"Yeah, Doc's had a thing for Rocky for years but he never did anything about it because Rocky is straight, or at least he used to be straight. He might be coming over to the dark side, as Doc puts it."

Eljin bumped his hip against Zack's. "I happen to know from personal experience that the darker side is a blast. It has to be better than the lighter side."

"You think so, do you?" Zack asked, nuzzling the side of Eljin's neck.

"You do, too." Eljin giggled and leaned into Zack.

"I might," Zack replied. "Maybe you should show me again in case I didn't get it the first time."

Eljin's mouth dropped open at the same moment his body heated up. He swallowed hard, the hungry look in Zack's eyes turning him to lust-filled mush in a matter of seconds. "Okay," he whispered huskily. He was ready for whatever Zack wanted.

"Holy shit!" Zack suddenly exclaimed. "Would you look at that view?"

Eljin smirked at the astonishment in Zack's voice even if he felt disappointed that Zack's attention was on something other than him. He knew the view was fabulous. He'd been looking at it most of his life.

From where they stood they looked out over the city of Falias, the home of the ruling family. White stone buildings sat between gardens of every color under the rainbow. Cobblestoned walkways, statues of marble, and fountains with crystal blue water littered the landscape.

"I told you this was a great place to live."

"And you're correct, which is why I think we should stay here."

Eljin's heart pounded. He turned in Zack's arms to look up at him. "Really? We're going to stay here at Seelie Court?"

"Well, your family is here and that means my family is here. As you said, your soldiers need to be trained to fight this new threat from the human world and I have no strong ties there. It just makes sense for us to stay here."

"I believe we would only benefit from your experience in the human world, Zack," Conall said, reminding Eljin that he still stood there. "We've never a lot of contact with your world but I fear that is about to end."

Zack nodded. "From what I understand from Eljin, humans took him from this world into theirs. I also know that only Aes Sídhé can pass through the veil. Either someone of the Aes Sídhé is assisting the humans or they've discovered a way to pass through the veil without one of you. Either way, we have a problem."

"I agree and I believe we should talk to my fathers about that," Conall said. He looked grim, his lips thinned, his eyebrows furrowed. "Something needs to be done."

"We also need to find Monte," Eljin added. "If the same people that had me have him then he's in a lot of danger. They want a child of the Aes Sídhé. If they get one" Eljin's voice trailed off. He couldn't put his worst nightmare into words.

His mood lightened when he felt Zack's hands cover the mound of his stomach. "I won't let them get to our child, Eljin. That's another reason we will be staying here. You have a lot of people here to help me keep you safe. I won't put your life in danger."

"But, Monte —"

"I have to talk with Conall and your fathers but I think sending Rocky and Doc back to the human world to find Monte is our best bet. They're military, they know how

the government thinks and they have a lot of contacts in the human world. If anyone can find them, they can." Zack brushed the hair back from Eljin's face. "Besides, I'm needed here. I would never consider leaving you at a time like this. I feel for your cousin but you're more important to me."

"What about Gunny then?" Eljin asked. "Monte is his son. Shouldn't he go?"

"No, he needs to stay here with Roland and help me prepare your world for the humans. We all know they're coming. Besides, whoever is after us knows that we went to Gunny for help." Zack snorted. "Hell, they burned his house down. But they don't know about Doc and Rocky, at least, we can hope they don't."

"I agree, Eljin, the best men for the job are your two friends. They know the human world much better than we do. They will have a better chance of finding Monte than we would."

"I guess," Eljin replied. "I just hate to see Doc and Rocky go so soon. I think they like it here."

"They'll be back, hummingbird, and I think they like it here too."

"There is also the little issue with the Unseelie Court to deal with," Conall said. "We've been negotiating with them for months for your release, Eljin. They knew they didn't have you and they negotiated with us anyway. They have a lot to answer for."

"Personally," Zack said, "I think the Unseelie Court is up to their eyeballs in Eljin and Monte's kidnapping. How else could these humans get through the gate but with someone's help?"

"That is a possibility and most likely the truth but we can't accuse the Unseelie Court of anything until we have proof. As you are a military man yourself, you must be aware that wars have been started for less."

Zack's nod sent a chill down Eljin's back. He moved closer to him, suddenly needing the man's reassuring warmth. Zack seemed to read his mind. He wrapped his big, strong arms around Eljin and pulled him as close to his body as possible. Eljin felt better immediately.

"So, what are we waiting for then?" Eljin asked as he grabbed Zack's hand and started pulling him through the door. "Let's go talk to our fathers and the security council. We need to arrange for Doc and Rocky to go back to the human world and then I want to show you *our* world."

Zack chuckled. Eljin yelped when he felt a small smack land on his ass. "And then maybe you can show me a few other things, humming bird."

Eljin glanced over his shoulder, his body once more tingling when he saw the heat in Zack's eyes. "I can do that, leannan."

~The End~

About the Author

Stormy Glenn believes the only thing sexier than a man in cowboy boots is two, or three, men in cowboy boots. She also believes in love at first sight, soul mates, true love, and happy endings.

When she's not being a mother to her six teenagers or cleaning up after her two 70-pound lap puppies, you can usually find her cuddled in bed with a book in her hand or her laptop, creating the next sexy character for her stories. Stormy welcomes comments from readers. You can find her web site at www.stormyglenn.com

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