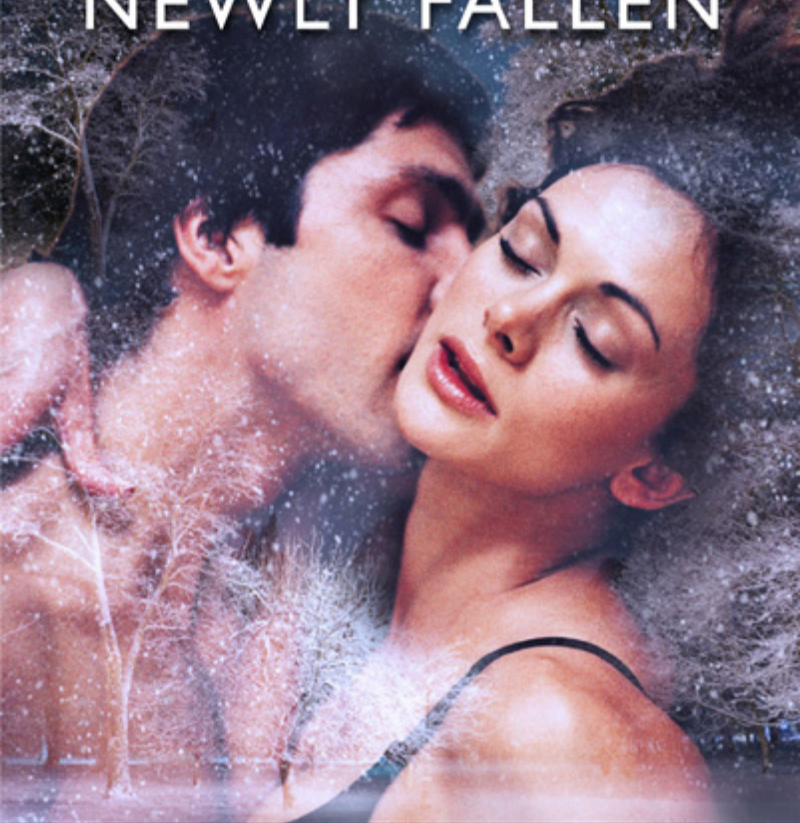


Megan Hart

# NEWLY FALLEN



Spice BRIEFS

# **Newly Fallen**

Megan Hart

*Spice*

Faced with spending her first Hanukkah alone, Lilly Gold wishes for a miracle that would change her life just a little bit. Then her prayers are answered—in a *big* way—when the most perfect naked man appears in her yard during a blizzard.

Zachariah tells Lilly he's been sent to be—and *do*—anything she wants. And for eight passionate days, trapped together by the snow, he does just that, giving Lilly all the pleasure she could have hoped for. But when their holiday is over, only another miracle can keep their affair from ending, too...

First night, two candles.

Hanukkah was Lilly Gold's favorite holiday, not for the exchange of gifts or excuse to indulge in fried foods, but because of the concept behind it. Not necessarily the religious reason—commemorating a war had never seemed festive to her. But bringing light into the world, celebrating by creating sparks in the darkness, had always appealed to her.

So had the idea of a miracle.

It didn't have to be something as incredible as a lamp burning for eight nights on oil meant to last only a few, or some grand victory over much stronger enemies. Nope, Lilly would be happy to settle for discovering a ten-spot in her coat pocket she'd forgotten from last year, or fitting into her skinny jeans, or maybe nabbing a sexy, out-of-season Louis Vuitton for twenty bucks at a yard sale in the rich part of town. Miracles like that might not change the whole world, but they'd change hers. And she was due for some change, she thought as she struck the match to light the first candle.

Thunder in the snow.

The noise came first, followed a bare second later by the bright white flash of lightning, fierce enough to outline the entire backyard. Blinking, Lilly paused, match in hand, to stare through the glass.

Weird.

With the lights on in the kitchen, all she could see was her reflection, two dark eyes in a pale face surrounded by a mass of dark curls, and beyond that, the cascading sheet of snow coming down as fast and thick as rain. The blizzard had been going on since that morning.

The match burned her fingers and with a hiss she blew it out and dropped it in the sink. Lilly stuck her fingertip in her mouth, sucking gently at the sting, as another boom rattled the window. A second later, another flash of light, so bright this time it seared her eyes and left her blinking away spots.

Wasn't the lightning supposed to come first?

She gripped the sink's metal edge, leaning forward to look out the kitchen window but unable to get close enough to press her face to the glass. She could hear the shush-shush of the snow against the house. Could feel the chill seeping through the glass. No more thunder, no more lightning. Lilly pushed back from the counter and lit another match, this time managing to get the *shamash*, the helper candle, lit before the match burned too low.

She said the blessings and used the *shamash* to light the other one for the first night of Hanukkah. Then she

stepped back to admire the menorah of silver and brass. Her grandmother Lillian had given it to her. It was the most beautiful thing Lilly owned.

She set it in the kitchen window because it had no curtains and was close to the sink, which therefore meant nothing would be likely to catch on fire. Lilly had learned that lesson already, in her old apartment. Sure, by the time the super-hot fireman had arrived she'd managed to put out the flames and clear out most of the smoke, and yes, she'd gained a date out of it, but she didn't want anything like that happening here in her new house.

Her house, hers alone. The one she'd bought and paid for all on her own, and in which she was spending her very first holiday.

Alone.

Hugging herself, Lilly stepped back to admire the tiny kitchen. Her appliances weren't old enough to be retro-chic, they were just old, and the cabinets and linoleum would definitely need to be replaced, but all that would have to wait. For now, she was just happy to be making the mortgage payments by herself.

She'd lit that menorah every year since her grandma had given it to her just before dying. Five years. It looked different in Lilly's kitchen window than it had looked in any other place, and Lilly couldn't stop the grin from teasing her mouth as she watched the flames flicker.

She turned out the lights to get the full effect. The candle flames reflecting in the kitchen window looked

twice as beautiful, but she wanted to see them from outside. That was the whole point of putting the menorah in the window, to share the light with the world. Grandma Lillian had always said it was a *mitzvah*, a good deed, to share the beauty of Hanukkah candles with people outside who might not have menorahs of their own to light. According to Grandma Lillian, when the world was new everything had been light until the vessels of God's love had been broken, scattering all the sparks across the Earth. Every *mitzvah* helped gather up a scattered spark and return it. Good deeds were lights in the darkness, each one helping to make the world brighter.

Lilly put her menorah in the window to share her light with the world outside, but she liked to look at it, too, in memory of Grandma Lillian. So, even though at least half a foot of snow had already fallen and it looked like they were going to get another six inches, Lilly opened the sliding glass door and stepped out onto her tiny deck.

Right into half a foot of newly fallen snow, all the way up to her shins. Shoot, she ought to have taken the time to slide into a pair of boots, throw on a sweater, at least. Preparation was never her strong point—impulsiveness was Lilly's forte. With a yelp, dancing in the snow, Lilly pulled the glass door closed behind her and braced herself against the wind.

Uh-oh, what if that weird lightning struck again while she was out here? Danny, her most recent ex, would've said it was just like her to get struck by

lightning in her backyard in the middle of the blizzard. Well, screw Danny, Lilly thought, eyes squinted against the snow whipping at her face.

She hopped off the deck, meaning to cross the miniscule patch of grass she called a yard to stand in front of the kitchen window. Her ankles were already frozen, her feet numb, so when she suddenly slid she was already bracing herself to end up in a pile of snow.

Heat.

“Huh?” Lilly looked down at the bare circle of earth into which she’d stepped. The snow had...melted? The earth was squishy under her toes and in the faint light from the neighbor’s yard she could see small wisps of steam rising from the bare earth. Even the grass looked...burned?

“What the...?” Lilly stepped back, heart thudding, eyes blinking.

The circle, if she stood in the center, looked to be as wide as her arms stretched out fingertip to fingertip in all directions. Though the snow was still falling heavily from the sky, it melted as soon as it landed on the ground. But she wasn’t in the center, she was still on the edge, because in the center of the strange circle was a man.

A naked man.

Lilly looked immediately into the sky, bracing herself for bright lights, more booming thunder, maybe a tractor beam getting ready to suck her up into the mother ship and probe her ass. Nothing but black sky and more pelting snow. She looked at him again. He



crouched on hands and knees, his naked back curved and pale and glittering. Yes, glittering, like Edward from *Twilight*, only there was no sunshine now and the sparkles faded as she watched.

“Whoa,” Lilly said, awed into less-than-eloquent speech. “Did you just transport here, or what?”

Danny always said Lilly spent too much time believing in the unbelievable, too much effort accepting the strange as ordinary. Well, screw Danny, she thought again. She didn’t step closer, though. Not without seeing the dude’s face, at least. He could have tentacles or something super freaky getting ready to suck out her brains.

Earlier, the thunder had rattled the windows in their frames and pushed at her eardrums. Now outside with nothing between her and the sound, the boom pushed Lilly to her knees. She clapped her hands over her eyes, expecting the light to come next, bracing herself to be fried like an egg by the blast. Nothing came but another roll of noise, softer this time, still throbbing in her eardrums and in her stomach. She understood it this time, though. Words. She took her hands away from her face.

“No,” said the man in front of her, lifting his head.

Face-to-face, she could see he didn’t have tentacles or laser beams for eyes. If anything, he had an ordinary face, the kind designed to never get a second glance. In shadows it was hard to make out his features, but Lilly got a hint of dark brows, dark eyes, a curving mouth.

She was soaked and shuddering from cold, despite the freakish heat of the ground under her now muddy hands. All of this was too surreal, yet she heard herself say, “No what?”

“No, not transported,” the man said. He stood, tall, the sleet and snow parting around him, not even touching him. “Fallen.”

“So you...fell.” Lilly turned from the microwave with a mug of hot cocoa in her hand and set it on the table in front of him.

The man, still naked beneath the afghan Grandma Lillian had knitted, looked curiously at the mug, then her. “Yes.”

“From...a...plane?”

“No.”

“From something else?”

He smiled, slow. It was like watching chocolate melt. That sweet, that rich. That good. “You could say that.”

Lilly leaned against the counter, her arms crossed, and eyed him. “Unless it’s super cold where you come from, you’d better drink that cocoa so you don’t get pneumonia. Shit.” She had a very bad, very sudden thought. “Are you going to go all War of the Worlds on me?”

“Hmm? What does that mean?” The man shifted, the afghan slipping on his broad, naked shoulders.

“You’re not going to get sick and die on me if I sneeze, are you?”

“I don’t think so.” He gave her another of those smiles. He lifted the mug to his mouth and sipped, then let out a completely decadent, sensual sigh. “Ah, I had no idea. They told me this would be good, but...”

“They, who?”

“The others who came before me.”

Lilly let out a small, shivery gasp. “Others who came before you? Like, oh, shit... at Roswell?”

He gave her another curious glance. “You are very trusting.”

“Because I let you in, instead of calling the police?” She laughed. “Trusting, or stupid. But my grandma always told me it was important to be kind to strangers, since you never knew who you might be entertaining without knowing it.”

“Your grandmother was a wise woman, and you are not stupid, Lilly Gold.”

“You know my name!” She scooted along the counter a few steps away from him.

“Would you imagine otherwise, that I should land in your backyard without knowing who you were?”

“Oh.” She watched him finish the cocoa. He made another of those moaning sounds and licked his lips, and she watched his tongue. “What’s your name?”

“You could not pronounce my name.”

Lilly laughed, loud enough to offend him if he was the sort to take offense. He didn’t appear to be. He smiled at her while she guffawed.

“You’re kidding, right?” she asked.

He shook his head. The afghan slipped further down, baring his chest. She couldn’t see the rest of him hidden by the table, but she had no trouble remembering what he looked like. Underneath he might be tentacles and scales, but on the surface he was all very, very hot dude.

“I am not kidding. I have answered to many names. You couldn’t pronounce the one I use most often.”

All this was too surreal, even with Lilly’s admittedly very broad worldview. “So what should I call you, if I can’t pronounce your name?”

“You could call me Zachariah.”

“Is that your name?”

“I told you—”

“Right, right,” she said, waving a hand. “Okay, Zach. You show up naked in my backyard in the middle of a blizzard. Tell me, please, what I’m supposed to do with you?”

That smile again. Slow and creamy and rich and delicious. Lilly forgot, for a moment, to breathe.

“Anything you want.”

All this should’ve been too much. Too strange, too crazy-out-there, too...something. But all Lilly could do was watch, fascinated, as Zachariah’s tongue slipped over his lower lip. His eyes gleamed. He had lovely dark eyes.

“Anything?” she asked, her voice hoarse and not sounding like her own.

He nodded, just once, then tilted his head to stare at her with heavy-lidded eyes and that damned smile. “Anything.”

“What if I asked you to leave? Right now?” She pointed with a barely shaking finger at the sliding glass doors. Snow had melted in front of it, from her feet, not his. He’d tracked nothing inside with his bare feet.

“Do you want me to leave?”

He stood, the blanket falling off his shoulders. He might’ve come from some mother ship or some strange planet where they didn’t speak a language she could pronounce, but he looked every inch a human male. Broad shoulders and chest tapering to a lean waist. Strong thighs. Nicely muscled and curving ass she could see as he stepped out from behind the table. Lilly had never been a fan of full-frontal nudity on dudes—too often she felt like giggling at the sight of shrimplike dicks curled tight in shrinkage, or even aroused cocks, bobbing as their owners walked.

But this guy...this Zach, this stranger...

“Wow,” she said, throat dry. “Um...”

He held out his hands and fixed her with a stare she felt unable to look away from. “If you tell me so, I’ll have to go.”

“Is that, like, a rule or something?”

“Something like that.”

Lilly swallowed again. “Why are you here?”

“I told you. To do anything you want. Be anything you want. What you need.”

“Why me?”

At this, he tilted his head again. She thought there might be a flicker of something in those dark eyes, but she couldn't be sure. “I wasn't told the reasons.”

She shook her head at this. “What happens if I tell you to leave?”

“I will fail in my task.”

Damn, his voice was as soft and low and deep and rich and butter-creamy as his smile. As his eyes. This wasn't a battle Lilly could readily win; she knew this about herself, at least, and didn't try to pretend otherwise.

“And if you fail?”

A definite flash that time. “I don't intend to fail.”

“You drop out of the sky, naked, and come into my house telling me you're here to be anything I want, what I need, for crying out loud, and I'm supposed to just accept this? How do I know you're not just some random crazy stalker freak with a degree in theatrical special effects?”

“You can't know,” Zach said, “but you should have faith.”

She scoffed at that. In the window, her candles had burned out at last. The wind whipped snow against the glass. There'd be no work tomorrow. The governor had already called a state of emergency, and not even Lilly's boss would expect her to come out in this.

“I should feel weirder about this. Did you have something to do with that? Are you doing some sort of mind freak on me?”

"I am making this as easy for you I can," Zachariah said, "but in the end, it's your own heart and mind that must accept."

"Right," Lilly said. She clapped her hands together briskly. "Well, on that note, I'm going to bed. Alone," she added when he seemed about to speak. "And I'm going to lock my door and sleep with my phone under my pillow. And I have a knife, too."

"Under your pillow?"

"I'll put it there," she said, narrowing her eyes, though she could detect no signs he was mocking her. "You can sleep on the couch."

"If that's where you want to put me, then that's where I'll sleep."

Lilly made a low, disgruntled noise, the one Danny had always hated. Screw Danny. She eased past the tall, naked man and down the hall toward her bedroom, half-tensed in anticipation that he'd follow her and half-hoping he would. He didn't, and in another minute or so she opened her door again to toss him a pair of sweatpants too big for her.

"You can wear these."

He made a shadow in the hallway. It stretched down to touch her, though he made no move at doing so. "Thank you, Lilly."

"I'm locking this door," she reminded him. "Don't you try anything crazy. And if you're going to steal something, make sure you break a lot of stuff, too, so I can prove the break-in for the insurance."

"I'm not going to steal anything."

She made that noise again, and this time thought she heard a soft chuff of laughter. It warmed her as much as his smile and voice had. As much as the look. He was definitely mind-freaking her, what else could it be?

In the morning, Lilly awoke to the smell of something good. Coffee, eggs. Bagels? She swung her feet out of bed, wincing when her toes touched the cold floor.

In the kitchen, Zach stood over the stove. He wore the sweatpants she'd given him but nothing else. He was thinner than she remembered, but more muscular. When he turned to face her, in the snow-bright light of day, she wondered how she could ever have thought his face was ordinary.

"Good morning, Lilly."

"Breakfast?"

"You need to eat when you awake, or else you suffer."

She smiled. "You mean everyone around me suffers."

Zach inclined his head in the way he had of looking her over. "I don't wish to suffer."

She sat at the table, waiting again for a sense of unreality to wash over her. A sense of something other than perfect normality. It didn't come. She only felt hungry.



He set the plate on the table and took the chair across from her. He folded his hands, one over the other. He watched her.

Lilly paused, fork halfway to her mouth. "You don't eat?"

"I don't need to eat yet."

"You drank cocoa last night."

"That was for the pleasure of it," he said. "Not a need for sustenance."

"They send you down here with like what, a week's worth of stored-up energy?"

"Something like that, yes."

She narrowed her eyes at him. "Are you saying that because it's true or because you want to agree with me?"

"It's true. You know more than you think you could, Lilly."

"Mind freak," she muttered and bit into the fluffy, perfectly cooked eggs. He'd spread her bagel with cream cheese and lox in just the right amounts. She washed down both bites with hot coffee brewed just right.

Zach sat and watched her. He had thick, dark brows to match his thick, dark hair. Dark eyes. Big, strong hands.

Lilly put down her fork and licked her lips. "Why me?"

"Why not you?"

"That's no answer."

Zach shrugged, never looking away from her eyes. "It's *my* answer."

Lilly sipped coffee while she thought. She looked out the sliding glass doors. The snow had piled up, drifted, waist-high. Outside she could see more drifts, more snow. She lived in at the end of a cul-de-sac, usually the last street to be plowed. She hadn't yet heard the plows go by. They were stuck here for hours, if not the entire day.

"Tell me you know how to play board games, Zach."

"I can learn whatever you want to teach me."

She smiled. "Is that so?"

Zach smiled, too. She was prepared for it this time, but it still affected her. "This is so."

"All right then," she said. "Let's play."

Seven hours later he'd thoroughly kicked her ass in Scrabble, but she'd wiped him out in Trivial Pursuit. Zach, it seemed, knew a lot of big words but not much about pop culture. He had lit a fire in her never-before-used fireplace, waving a hand over the sodden wood from a pile on the deck Lilly hadn't even known she had, and coaxing it into flame.

He hadn't put on a shirt, which was fine by her. He had a very, very hot body, even with the strange and random sparkling thing his skin did. Not like Edward Cullen, Lilly thought as he got up to poke at the fire. Softer than that, more like ripples of iridescent color.

He caught her staring. “Would you like another game?”

“Why do you look like us?”

“I do not look like you, Lilly Gold.”

“No.” She scooted closer to study his bare skin. “I mean, like us. Like humans. Like a man.”

“I am as I was made. How else should I look?”

“I don’t know,” she admitted. “But your skin...glows.”

He looked down at himself, then at her. “Does it?”

“Yeah. See?” She ran a fingertip down his arm to his wrist and watched the way the light subtly shifted over his skin. She put her arm next to his, to show him. Skin to skin, heat. Her breath caught.

Zach caught her wrist, turned her arm, traced a line down the soft inner flesh of her forearm. The faintest blush followed his touch. Lilly shivered, feeling it all over.

She was getting a pretty good idea, maybe not of what she needed, but what she might want from him. Which was just crazy insane, crazier even than him being from another planet. But was it?

She’d slept with three guys since she left Danny, and not one of them had she known more about than what she knew about the man in front of her—a first name. She hadn’t spent a day playing board games with any of them, either. She hadn’t done anything with them other than go home and fuck them.

“At least I know you’re not a vampire,” she whispered as his finger traced more heat over her skin. “You’re not cold.”

Zach looked surprised. “Would you think I am?”

Lilly shook her head slowly, aware of how close they were sitting. She could feel heat radiating from him, hotter than the fire. She could see the reflection of flames in his deep brown eyes. “Where did you come from? Does it have a name?”

“It has many names.”

She quirked a grin at him. “Could I pronounce any of them?”

His laugh, low and rumbling, tickled her belly like a sudden, sharp drop. “No. But your people have names for where I’m from.”

“Mars? Venus? Saturn? No, someplace farther away than that. Right? Has to be.”

“Both farther away and closer than you could ever think,” Zach said. His fingers traced another pattern on her skin.

Outside, night had fallen. Lilly got to her feet, a little unsteady in the aftermath of Zach’s tender touch. He looked up at her.

“The candles,” she said. “It’s time to light the candles.”

Zach unfolded himself from the floor and followed her to the kitchen. Second night, three candles. Lilly shook them from the box, concentrating on this simple task to keep her mind from going to other strange places. She placed the candles in their holders, lit the

*shamash* and murmured the blessing, suddenly self-conscious until she heard Zach's deep voice speaking the words along with her.

*"Baruk atta Adonai, Eloheynu Melekh Ha-olom, Asher Kiddeshanu Bo-mitsvotot viztivanu Lehadlik Ner Shel Hanukkah,"* he said. "Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, who has sanctified us by His commandments, and has commanded us to kindle the lights of Hanukkah."

As with everything else that had happened, him knowing the blessing should've surprised her, and it didn't. Together they stared at the candles' reflection flickering in the window glass. Zach had a way with silence, of making spaces between words that were somehow as meaningful as speech itself.

"I'm glad you're here," Lilly said quietly, watching the wax begin to drip.

Zach, silent, took her hand. Their fingers linked. Palm to palm. Skin to skin again. That was reply enough for her.

Gray skies the next morning forecast more snow. Mid-state was being slammed with severe weather warnings. The plows still hadn't gone by and a quick call to the local borough office earned Lilly a recorded greeting stating that all crews were working, but there was no guarantee of any service soon. In case of emergency, she was supposed to call the police or fire department, but Lilly had no emergency. Her boss had

closed the office in response to the governor's declaration of a state of emergency. Nobody was going to work.

"When I was a kid, I used to pray for snow days." Lilly looked out the window at the falling flakes adding to the inches already on the ground. She yawned and stretched, feeling decadent, and shot him a grin.

Zach smiled. "I know."

"Do you?" She studied him. He'd slept on the couch again last night. If in fact, he slept. Since he didn't eat she couldn't be sure. She hadn't locked her door and had thought she'd lie awake in anticipation again, but had slept dreamless and hard. "What else do you know about me?"

"Much. Not enough. I could learn more. You could tell me."

She thought of how his fingers had slipped into hers and of his warmth. "Do you look like you do because of me?"

Zach hesitated, tilting his head in that way he had. Like he was taking the time to really think before answering. "Yes."

Lilly nodded. She thought as much. "Can I see what you really look like?"

"Your eyes can't see my true form any more than your voice could pronounce my real name." Zach shook his head and swept a hand over his body, giving her that look. "But this form pleases you, doesn't it?"

“My grandma always told me it wasn’t what a person looked like on the outside, but what was inside that counted. What was underneath.”

“Your grandma said many smart things.”

Lilly looked him over, no longer waiting for this to feel weird. If it didn’t by now, it never would. “Do you want to watch a movie?”

“I would like to do whatever you want.”

“Well,” Lilly said with a laugh, “that’s a first.”

As was the way with gray days, she fell asleep on the couch halfway through the movie. She awoke to setting darkness and a warm chest beneath her cheek. A hand stroking her hair. And a sense of peace and satisfaction she hadn’t felt in...well, ever.

She didn’t move, her eyes still closed, though she was fully awake. Somehow they’d shifted so she lay against Zach, cradled on his strong thighs. His chest rose and fell beneath her cheek, and the steady, strong thump of his heart vibrated against her. Her hand rested on his tight belly.

She knew she should move, but didn’t want to. It was that not wanting that got her up, hair disheveled and eyes gritty. She rubbed at her face. He was smiling.

“It’s time to light the candles.” Lilly’s voice was hoarse, maybe from sleep. Maybe something else.

“Yes.”

Third night, four candles. She lit the *shamash* and the first and second, then held it out to Zach. “Do you want to light some?”

Those dark eyes widened a little. “I would like to. Yes.”

His hand closed over hers. Took the candle. He lit the others and settled the *shamash* back in its place, higher than the others. They both stared at the flames.

“I’m hungry,” Lilly said. “Let’s make latkes.”

Together they grated potatoes and onions, minced garlic. Lilly filled the pan with oil and turned on the burner. She scooped potato mush into the oil and the delicious smell of frying latkes made her mouth water.

They talked while she cooked and he watched. She told him jokes, and he laughed. She spoke of her childhood, her job, her past relationships. Zach listened, his silence again as much a conversation as anything he said.

“Nobody’s ever listened the way you do,” Lilly said when the latkes were cooked and set on the table along with the traditional applesauce and her favorite, sour cream. “I mean, people hear, but they don’t always listen.”

“Then they’ve lost a great opportunity, Lilly.”

“Don’t I know it.” She put two plates on the table and sat, adding latkes to hers.

Zach sat, too, and used a fork to stab a latke onto his plate. He cut it into smaller pieces and ate one as she watched. His eyes closed. His features smoothed into an expression so serene, so sensual, Lilly’s throat dried.

His mouth glistened with oil. He tasted like latkes when he kissed her, and of something else she couldn’t



figure out. He tasted of laughter and comfort and desire, and she pulled away from him, shaking. Zach's hand stroked her hair, then cupped her cheek.

Lilly looked into his eyes and lost herself inside his gaze. Everything she wanted, all she needed was right there before her, if only she could allow herself to take it. Every muscle tensed, but Zach didn't kiss her again.

That night, she left her door not just unlocked, but open, and slept again without dreams all the way through the night.

"If you're going to build a snowman, you're going to need some warmer clothes." Lilly looked Zach up and down on his place stretched out on the couch. "I don't have boots or a coat to fit you. I can find a sweatshirt, I think. Hat, gloves. But do you even need things like that?"

He sat and looked at himself. "This body would suffer the cold the same as yours."

"Oh, bother." She tapped her finger against her cheek. Four days snowed-in was making her stir-crazy. They still couldn't go anywhere, and more snow, incredibly, had been predicted, but they could at least go into her miniscule backyard and get some fresh air.

"Wait a minute," she said. "I think I have a box of some stuff that might work in the garage."

Leftover junk from Danny she'd meant to toss in the trash but never had. Rummaging through it, she found a pair of worn boots that might fit Zach, along

with a long-sleeved thermal shirt. The sleeves were too short and left his wrists bare, and the hem rode up a bit on his belly, but the fit was so tight it clung to him in a way she had to admit was delicious.

She couldn't stop thinking of his kiss.

She didn't really want to.

In the yard they made a snowman and a snow lady. Mrs. Peterson from next door leaned out her back door and told them they were crazy, but she was laughing as she said it, and she invited them both into her house for hot cocoa.

"Your new young man seems very nice," Mrs. Peterson said when Zach excused himself to use the bathroom.

At first, Lilly was too busy pondering the fact that he had needed to use the bathroom to answer. She guessed if he ate, he needed to use the toilet, too. But then Mrs. Peterson's words got through.

"Zach?"

"Oh, yes. He's very handsome, Lilly. And so much going on in those eyes. How did you meet him?"

Mrs. Peterson didn't know the half of it. Fortunately, Lilly didn't have to come up with an explanation, since Zach came out from the bathroom. Cocoa finished, they went back across the yards, through the snow, as the sky got dark again.

Fourth night, five candles.

They shared the lighting of them, and the blessing, and when Lilly suggested they go outside to look at the

menorah through the glass, the way she had the night Zach first arrived, he agreed without hesitation.

She should've been cold, but with Zach's arm around her, all Lilly felt was delicious warmth. The light from the candles didn't shine far, but looking at the light also made her feel warm. Everything about this felt right.

Looking down at Zach's feet clad in the castoff boots of her ex-lover, Lilly realized that for the first time in the past six months, she'd thought of Danny without "Screw Danny" riding coattail.

Zach had done that for her. Led her to letting that go. She found his hand, neither of them wearing gloves. His long, strong fingers, fully male. Warm. She looked up at him.

"Let's make snow angels."

Zach blinked, then laughed. He kissed her. "If that's what you want."

Laughing, Lilly flopped back in the snow and moved her arms and legs, making the angel's wings and robes while Zach watched.

"Don't you want to make one?" she asked him, breathless with laughter, with chill, with desire.

He shook his head. She held up her hand for him to take so she could get up, but instead, he moved to her. He covered her with his heat. His mouth found hers. She opened for him, his tongue. She wrapped herself around him, arms and legs. Snow found its way into many strange places and made her shiver even as his heat kept her from being cold.

They kissed that way forever or maybe only a minute or two. There wasn't enough light for him to sparkle, but she had no trouble seeing his face. Lilly touched his brows, his cheeks and chin. She kissed his mouth.

"Let's go inside," she said.

He got up first, pulled her to her feet. Together they looked at the impression they'd left in the snow. It looked nothing like an angel, and she laughed.

"We ruined it."

Zach kissed her again. "I don't think so."

She wasn't going to argue with that. Instead, Lilly took him by the hand. Inside, they stripped off their wet clothes and left them in piles on the floor, then their dry clothes, too. She'd seen him naked already and thought she might feel shy about being that way in front of him, but she didn't.

Nothing about Zach made her shy.

"You are perfect," she told him.

"You're beautiful," Zach said.

She believed him. It would've been romantic to lie down with him in front of the fire, to make sweet love the way it happened in movies, but she didn't want to wait long enough for him to build a fire. All at once, Lilly felt she'd waited four days too long already. She jumped a little, and he caught her, not hesitating a second as she wrapped her arms and legs around him and found his mouth to kiss.

He was lean, but strong. He held her as though she weighed nothing, which definitely wasn't true. His

mouth opened under hers. His tongue stroked, his lips nibbled.

“Bedroom,” Lilly breathed, looking into his eyes. Fathomless, dark eyes.

Zach took her there.

Inside, they fell onto her bed in a tangle of limbs. Zach rolled them until she was on top. The soft material of her panties pulled snug as she straddled him. She already needed him so much the fabric had gone damp.

“Is that what you meant,” she asked him between kisses, “when you said you’d be what I need?”

Zach paused in his exploration of her mouth to stroke a hand over her hair. His mouth curved, smiling, but his eyes were serious. “Yes.”

“Sex? I need sex?”

Both hands skimmed her shoulders, her arms, down her sides to settle on her hips. “You tell me.”

“I’m telling you,” she whispered and bent to kiss him again.

It was what she needed. Simple, pure pleasure, unsullied and uncomplicated by anything as messy as emotion. No expectations. Nothing now but focused desire.

Her nipples went tight when his palms slid up to cup her breasts. In the next second when his fingertips tweaked them, Lilly gasped and rocked on his cock, her panties the only barrier between them. His cock thickened against her and his hips bumped upward.

He knew just how to touch her, and why this surprised her when nothing else about this entire situation had, Lilly didn't know. Maybe because no man had ever seemed to know so how smoothly to touch her, or for how long, or with what strength to tug on her desire-swollen nipples. If this was the result of mind-freaking, she was totally okay with it.

She leaned to kiss him again. He tasted so good

Zach slid one hand from her breast to press his thumb between her legs. It circled her clit gently, and Lilly sighed. She put her hands flat on his chest.

If he hadn't faltered, if the man beneath her had made every move just right, continued that mind fuck, Lilly would've been disconcerted enough to stall her orgasm. It would've been too much for him to know her *so* well, so perfectly, that she need say nothing to him about what she liked.

She realized even this was for her, this hesitation, as Zach ran his hands over her body. As he looked into her eyes, a question in his, waiting for her to answer. He really did know what she needed.

"Touch me," Lilly said. Neither command nor demand, but a soft and subtle plea. "Please, Zach. Touch me. Here. Like this."

She placed his hand in hers and stroked it over her body. Her breasts, the nipples tight, peaked, throbbing. Over her belly. The slope of her hips. Over the curves of her ass. Between her legs again, his fingertips stroking the soft satin of her panties and the tight, hard knot of her clit inside.

She lost herself in his gaze. Like looking into a night sky without stars—and thinking of that, she wondered again where he'd come from and why he'd found her. But when she parted her lips to ask, all that came out was a sigh quickly captured by his mouth. Suddenly, knowing didn't seem so important. Not with the magic his hands were making on her skin.

She touched him, too. His skin, hot and smooth under her palms, tempted her lips to kiss, teeth to nibble. Tongue to slide out and taste. She bent forward to fix her mouth on the jut of his collarbone. She bit a little too fiercely when his thumb pressed just right on her clit, but Zach didn't flinch.

Lilly pulled away to look at him. His cock, thick and long and lovely, was hard between her legs, but he was so silent it was hard to tell if he was enjoying this as much as she was. She curled her fingers around his shaft and stroked, slowly. She was rewarded with a groan.

His eyes fluttered closed, then open. His cock pulsed in her hand. His hands ceased their roaming.

Lilly paused in her stroking. She sat on his thighs, hard with muscle, and looked between them to her hand, full of his erection. She'd felt power like this before. Using her hand or her mouth to make a man come.

It was different this time. All of it was different. He was; she was. Together they made something a mere four days ago she never would've said could be true and now couldn't imagine in any other way.

Lilly shifted enough to get her panties off and then tossed them aside. She couldn't hold back her groan as the hot, bare flesh of her cunt at last touched him. She had to pause, shaking, her thighs clutching his hips and her head bent so her hair fell over her face. She had to catch her breath.

"Lilly?"

Again, his dark gaze drew her in, and Lilly stopped thinking about anything else but this. Moment. She shifted, took him in her hand, rubbed the head of his cock against her entrance. Wetting him.

She was so wet, so slick and hot, he slid in without effort. His gasp rumbled, deep and male and so thoroughly aroused it sent a shiver through her.

Lilly moved on his cock, torturously slow. Her thighs gripped him, her hips tilted. She ground herself onto his cock so her clit rubbed his tight belly. She placed her hands flat on his chest, ran her fingers through the crisp, curling hair over his nipples.

Her hair fell again over her face, and Zach drew his fingers across her forehead to push it away. Lilly had been with men who spoke more, but Zach's every gesture, every look, said more than any lover she'd ever had.

They moved together, slow at first and faster. The first bright, sparkling waves of orgasm started moving inside her, and Lilly gave herself over to them. She gave it up to the overwhelming power of desire, of ecstasy. Passion coiled tight inside her and exploded,



an internal big bang that left her shaking and crying out his name.

She opened her eyes when he moaned her name. Her fingers had dug grooves into his flesh, and she smoothed the marks with the pads of her fingertips and watched them disappear, leaving only redness behind.

Zach smiled. He drew her down for another kiss. “What are you thinking?”

She stretched herself out over him. “You can’t tell?”

His hands cupped her ass to press her against him. “Not everything.”

Lilly’s body ached in the best way, from fulfillment. She propped herself on her elbow to look into his face. When she kissed him, Zach tasted pleasantly of salt. “No?”

He traced her brows. “No. Every day...”

“Every day what?”

“The longer I stay here, Lilly, the less I will be able to see inside you.”

She blinked. “I don’t understand.”

“The longer I stay here, the more I’ll become like you. And eventually...”

She ran her hand over his chest. “Eventually, what? The mother ship will come and beam you back up?”

“Eventually, Lilly, if I don’t return to where I came from, I’ll die.”

Fifth night, six candles.

They hadn't spoken further about Zach staying or leaving. He'd turned the conversation deftly away from that topic and Lilly had let him. In the morning, he made her breakfast again and they both looked out into the yard to see another few inches of newly fallen snow.

"We'll never get out," she said.

"Would that be such a bad thing?" Zach, wearing the sweatpants she'd given him but chest bare, drew her close. "I can think of a lot of ways to occupy our time."

He sounded different today, unless it was her imagination. Lilly turned in the circle of his arms to face him. He looked a little different, too. Same dark eyes, thick dark hair, heavy brows. Yet something in his eyes had changed.

"Hmm," Lilly mused and allowed him to pull her closer and nuzzle at her neck. "I wonder what that might be?"

"I can show you."

She held him at arm's length for a moment, studying him. "Zachariah."

"Yes." His gaze captured hers, held it.

"It's an unusual name."

"Depends on where you're from." He slipped his hands down to anchor at her hips.

His grin tempted her to return it. "True. I guess in Amish country it's not so unusual. But you're not Amish."

“No, I’m not. But neither are you.” His mouth brushed hers and as his grin had tempted her to smile, so did his kiss.

Last night’s sex had been good enough to sate her for a few days—if this had been a normal situation, a normal man, but nothing about this was normal. His mouth and hands on her sent her mind spiraling straight into visions of sheer, blowing curtains and white, gigantic beds, of soft, pulsing music and writhing bodies.

“What is it about you,” she murmured against his lips, “that makes me feel like I’m in an early eighties high-concept music video?”

“Should I sing?” Zach traced the line of her jaw with his lips.

Lilly’s eyes had drifted half-shut with pleasure. She smiled. “Mmm, only if I can tease my hair and wear shoulder pads.”

“You may choose to do whatever you like with your hair, Lilly, but I’d prefer you to be naked with me now.”

She looked at him. She’d put on a loose cotton robe imprinted with a Japanese flower print. It should’ve been too light for winter temperatures, especially with all the snow, but even though she’d kept the thermostat low, the house had stayed at a comfortably warm temperature. Because of Zach, she thought, running her hands over his warm, bare skin.

Now she untied the belt and let the robe fall open. She was naked beneath it. There hadn’t seemed much

point in putting on clothes now, as though they would be going outside or doing anything but what'd they'd done all night.

Did she need this? She still wasn't sure. But she wanted it.

There in the kitchen, without fanfare, he went to his knees in front of her. He pressed his face to her belly, his hands cupping her rear. Every inch of her tingled at his touch, and again Lilly's eyes fluttered closed. She had to force herself to open them. She didn't want to miss a moment of this.

It wasn't going to last.

That was why it was so easy to let him kiss her, touch her, lick her, stroke her. It wasn't whatever mind-freak powers he had or the snow outside making it impossible for them to leave. It wasn't her innately horny nature, which had led her to many a bed she'd later regretted. This wasn't going to last and she didn't want to waste a second. Not one breath, not one kiss.

Zach kissed her belly just over the small tattoo of interlocking hearts that formed the shape of a star and then looked up at her hiss. "Does that tickle?"

Lilly put her hand on top of his head. "Feels good."

"I would have all this feel good." He bent back to nuzzle along her hip and down her thigh.

He guided her back one step as one long arm reached to pull one of the kitchen chairs closer. The sound of the legs scraping the linoleum sent a shiver through her, but she giggled as he pushed her gently to sit. Her knees were already parting for him.

Zach stood long enough to shuck off his sweatpants before getting back on his knees. If the floor hurt them he didn't show a sign of it. He looked into Lilly's eyes and smiled, one side of his mouth tipping higher than the other.

"Wicked," she murmured and touched his cheek. "You look wicked."

"Some might say so," Zach said in a low voice, but before she could ask him what he meant, he'd bent to kiss between her legs.

All speech became sighs. With everything they'd done the night before and into early morning, he hadn't yet gone down on her. Lilly's hips tipped up under his lips. Her fingers gripped the chair on either side of her. She slid her tongue over her lower lip, capturing the faintest flavor he'd left behind.

His mouth moved slowly, softly, sweet kisses interspersed with gentle suction on her clit. It was often hard for Lilly to abandon herself to a man's tongue on her pussy—too often she worried about whether she'd shaved enough, if it was going to take her too long to come, if he really wanted to go down on her or if he was doing it out of a sense of obligation.

She didn't worry about any of that with Zach. As she'd done from the moment she'd met him, Lilly gave herself up to whatever lay ahead. To his fingers stroking her inner thighs, to his lips and tongue on her clit. The chair creaked as her body moved.

Zach slid one of her legs over his shoulder and focused his tongue in smooth circles against her clit. Not too hard, not too fast, but with enough direct and constant pressure to build the desire that hadn't really left her despite her earlier orgasms.

Lilly looked down at him, her fingers tightly wound in his hair. His eyes were closed. She'd never looked at him without him looking back. Now all she could see were those brows, the fringe of black lashes and the slope of his nose. Broad shoulders and if she peeked, the expanse of his back and a hint of his ass. His right hand gripped her thigh, but his left had gone between his legs, moving on his cock.

"That is so fucking sexy." The words spilled out of her on a gasp.

Zach didn't say anything, but she felt his smile against her and saw it in the crinkles at the corners of his eyes. His breath huffed out as his arm moved a little faster. Oral sex and hand jobs had always been foreplay, but she wasn't going to last long enough to get that far.

His tongue moved faster, steady, smooth flat strokes in perfect time with his arm's motion. Lilly shifted, pushing herself against his tongue. Her hands held the chair so tight her fingers had gone a little numb; she'd think about that in a minute when she could think about something other than the bright, blinding pleasure flooding her and overflowing.

She came with a low moan. Her eyes closed, so she didn't see the furrow of his brow, the jerk of his

shoulders as Zach came, too. She could imagine it, though, on the sound of the moan answering hers. Then the climax rippled through her and made it impossible to imagine anything at all.

Blinking as sweet pleasure faded, leaving behind warmth and heaviness in every limb, Lilly looked at the man still kneeling in front of her. Sweat had pasted a few strands of his hair to his forehead. He licked his lips, drew in a breath. He kissed each thigh and withdrew just enough for her to see all of him.

His belly gleamed, wet. Zach drew his fingers through it and rubbed them together, then shook his head. The look he gave her was bemused.

"This body," he said. "What a great miracle, to make life."

Lilly, languid and sated, pulled him by the shoulder to bring him close enough to kiss. "I've met a lot of men who thought what came out of their pricks was magic, but never one who thought it was a miracle."

He laughed. "But it is."

He took her hand and ran it across the sticky wetness. With anyone else, Lilly would've squirmed, wrinkled her nose, pulled away. With Zach, she let him make her feel it, already drying on his skin.

"*Nes Gadol Haya Sham*," he murmured into her mouth. "A great miracle happened there. Yes?"

This struck Lilly so funny she giggled, and the giggle became a guffaw. "*Nun, gimmel, hay, shin*. Just like on the dreidel!"

Zach got to his feet and pulled her up with him, into his arms. "Yes. Just like that."

"Dude, I have to tell you, I've never met a guy who compared his come with spinning a dreidel." She laughed a little more, interrupted by his kisses.

"All of this," Zach told her, "is a miracle."

And Lilly believed him.

Sixth night, seven candles.

They'd eaten all the latkes and decided against more. Spun the dreidel, playing for peanuts, literally. Lilly'd shown Zach how to crack the shells and eat the nuts inside, and now when she kissed him she thought of baseball and the circus.

"Do you know baseball?" she asked, curious.

"I do."

"How? From inside my head? Intercepted space transmissions? What?" She was straddling him on the couch, their bellies touching, the tips of her breasts brushing his chest.

Zach shifted her weight just slightly to stretch out his long legs. He was silent for so long Lilly wondered if she'd somehow misstepped. Then he said, slowly, "Lilly, I should tell you something."

She tucked his hair behind his ears and cupped his face. "If you tell me your real name is Joe Smith and you're from Milwaukee, and all of this is some elaborate setup, I swear to you I will kick that very fine ass from here all the way back to Wisconsin."



“No. I’m not from Milwaukee. But I’m not what you think I am.”

They’d made love on and off all day, his stamina impressive and hers unexpectedly astounding. Even so, his cock stirred, half-hard between them. Lilly shifted to press her belly to him.

“Nobody ever is, Zach.” She’d meant this to sound light and not philosophical. Certainly not sad. She surely hadn’t meant for tears to fill her eyes or clog her throat.

He looked solemn and brought up a thumb to brush away the tear Lilly was aching to pretend she hadn’t shed. “I’m sorry for the hurts that have been done to you.”

“I’m not the only woman who’s had a shitty love life. It could’ve been worse. I could’ve been with men who abused me or stole from me. Addicts. I could’ve been with men who treated me a lot worse than simply not...loving me.”

Spoken aloud, she sounded more pathetic. Lilly bit down hard to keep herself from saying more. She didn’t want to look at his face, but she did. This time when he kissed her, he breathed in as she breathed out.

Zach unclipped the barrette keeping her hair piled high. “You have beautiful hair.”

Her dark curls fell down over her shoulders and back, tickling and erotic. He pulled the locks forward over her breasts, covering them yet with no pretense at modesty. Heat, not a blush, swept over her at his scrutiny.

“Should I dance for you?” she asked.

Zach tilted his head, giving her that curious look she’d seen less and less of since they’d had sex. “Would you like to?”

“With my hair this way I feel like I should be doing the Dance of the Seven Veils or something.”

Zach laughed. “If it would please you to dance for me, Lilly, I’d be happy to watch.”

“Wait here.” She got off his lap and went to the bedroom for a handful of silk scarves she’d collected over the years. From her jewelry box she grabbed a belled ankle bracelet that had been a holiday gift in an office gift exchange—she’d given a gift certificate to a local restaurant and felt cheated in return, but was grateful for it, now.

Swathed in silk and lace, jingling with each step, her hair unbound and wild, Lilly returned to the living room. Zach hadn’t moved. On her iPod she found an old playlist, all songs with sexy, sensual beats. Songs to fuck to. She couldn’t remember who she’d made it for, if anyone, and decided it didn’t matter.

When the music began she turned, hip cocked, to face him. “Are you sure you can handle this?”

“Yes.” Zach’s cock had gotten harder as he watched her. His hand gripped the base with fingers loosely curled. Not stroking just yet, but if she had her way he’d be full-on fucking his fist before long.

Lilly loved to dance. In a club, at the gym in aerobics class, in her kitchen while making dinner. She

never felt self-conscious about it. Music moved her. If she wanted to shake and shimmy, she did it.

It was different with an audience.

A cock of hip, a twist of her ankle made the bells jingle. The scarves fluttered as she lifted her arms. Step, step, shake, shake. The music filled her and she spun until she was dizzy. She stopped, and the world kept on, moving though she was still.

Zach didn't move.

He'd seemed like something from another world the first time she'd seen him, but now with his prick in his fist Lilly had trouble seeing him as anything but a man. And this, she discovered with something akin to wonder as she shifted her hips and moved closer, was not a bad thing.

He'd changed, but so had she. Not enough time had passed for her to love him. And yet she did. Lilly would never have believed such a thing could happen. But watching him watch her, looking at his eyes gleam as she twirled and dipped, moving for him, it didn't seem so unlikely.

This dance had no steps, no choreography, and so sometimes she stumbled. It didn't matter. She didn't have to be a ballerina to make beauty with her body. Not when she was doing it for him.

One by one, the scarves fell away until all that remained was the jingling anklet. She danced closer as the music changed. Again, she straddled him, her hands on his shoulders and her pussy a slick, hot

channel clutching tight on his cock as she slid down on it. They moved together.

His hands gripped her ass as she rode him. Her hips circled, grinding her clit on his belly. Their skin, slick with sweat, slipped and stuck and skidded. She was so wet she coated his thighs and belly and cock, so wet she sank so deep on his cock it would've hurt if it didn't feel so good.

Everything about this felt so good.

Lilly moaned his name when she came. She pressed her forehead to his, eyes closed, breathing hard. Her fingers had tangled in the hair at the back of his neck. Zach's hands came up to press at her shoulder blades. They rocked together a few more times and he shuddered with his own release.

The music sounded louder when she wasn't consumed with passion. The lyrics made her laugh. Lilly pulled away from Zach, their bodies sticking, and she kissed his mouth softly as she looked into his eyes.

"Mmm," she murmured.

His stomach rumbled. They both looked down between them. When he looked at her, something had shifted again in his gaze. Zach opened his mouth to speak, but she stopped him with a kiss.

"Food," she told him. "Then sleep. Tomorrow, who knows? Maybe the snow will have mysteriously melted and we'll be able to get out of the house."

"Food," Zach agreed. "Then sleep. But the snow isn't going to melt by tomorrow."

Lilly smiled. "Then I guess we'll just have to stay inside another day."

Later, Lilly curled herself against him and timed her breathing to the in-and-out regularity of his. It was the surest way she'd found to fall asleep. She was drifting into dreams when he spoke, so softly she almost didn't hear him.

"Lilly," Zach said into her hair, his breath caressing her as easily as his fingers had. "I don't want to leave."

She didn't want him to go, either, but nothing about this had ever been promised as permanent. "So stay."

He didn't say anything after that, and neither did she.

Seventh night, eight candles.

She watched the candles, their flames bright and steady and strong. The candles in her grandmother's menorah weren't fancy and hand-dipped, but they lit her kitchen as they shone through the window to the world outside as prettily as pricey candles would've.

"Pretty." Zach had come up behind her to put his arms around her, his chin resting on her shoulder.

They'd barely bothered with clothes at all today. The warmth of his belly pressed Lilly's butt, and she pushed it back against him and smiled when his cock stirred. She turned her head to look at him.

"It always is."

"Yes."

Together they watched the wax dripping, the candles burning. Zach linked his fingers through hers and laid them flat against her belly. Lilly was considering making something to eat—her pantry had been sadly depleted by this near week of forced seclusion. The weather forecast had called for warmer temperatures and the governor had called off the state of emergency, but tonight was Friday. No work tomorrow even if it all melted away in the night.

Earlier she'd called her mother to wish her happy holidays and reassure her that she was fine. She hadn't mentioned Zach. That would've opened up too many questions she wasn't sure how to answer. He'd listened to the conversation but said nothing. Until now.

"Your family would want to know who I am. Your friends. You have a life I'm not a part of, Lilly."

She didn't turn, just pressed his hands more firmly to her belly and her back against his chest, her ass against his crotch. "We can figure out something to tell them."

"Lilly." His voice turned her. His gaze, concerned, pinned her. "One of the things I find so appealing about you is your ability to find the brightest side of any situation. But my time here is almost finished. And there are things we have to talk about before that."

"I don't want to." She shook her head, broke his grip. Stalked away. "I know this is all some sort of fantastic, crazy thing. I know it, Zach. But why

shouldn't it be? Why should something that feels this good and right be anything less than fantasy? And I want to hold on to it for as long as I can. Is that so wrong?"

"No." He shook his head, watching her. "But we have to talk about this. My time here is almost finished, whether I want it to be or not."

"Why did you come here?" She threw the words at him as she backed away, her arms crossed. Wishing she'd put on a robe. Wishing a lot of things.

"I told you—"

"Why me? Of all the millions of people on Earth, why me?" Lilly demanded.

He hesitated, but didn't reach for her. "I want to tell you that you're special. Words fail me, in every language, to tell you how I feel."

She drew in a slow shudder of breath that dried her throat. "But I'm not, right? I'm nice and all, I get it. Oh, I have a great personality and my body's fine, too, but there's just something lacking, right? That's it. Believe me, I've heard it before."

"No." She'd never seen Zach angry, but his brow furrowed now, his voice got low. Hard. "You are special. But you are not the only one. We are sent to where we're needed. This world, your world...it needs help. And we are sent to do our best to help where we can. It's necessary. It's *chesed*."

*Chesed*. Loving kindness. Lilly took a step back, looking at Zach. Zachariah.

He followed her. "At the beginning of time, everything was light, contained in the vessels."

"They broke." So did her voice. Lilly knew the story, the Kabbalic retelling of the origin of evil. Grandma Lillian's story. "Scattered the light here on earth. We're supposed to perform *mitzvot*, good deeds, each one helping return one of those bits of light to its origin. I thought it was just...a story."

"It's *tikkun olam*. Repairing the world."

She knew the words but hadn't expected in a million years, no, in ten million, to hear them coming from his mouth. She drew in another breath, fighting to keep herself steady and unable to, until Zach's hands were there to keep her from falling.

Blinking to focus, she looked at him. Now she understood how he'd become so beloved to her, so fast. Why he'd been naked in the snow.

Why he'd fallen.

"Turn around," she told him.

He did, obedient. He was tall, but not so tall she couldn't stand on tiptoe to pass her palms over his shoulder blades. His skin was smooth to the touch, but looking now in the kitchen's bright, work-strength light, Lilly leaned closer. She studied his skin, saw the faintest of scars he bore, instead of wings. They grew harsher as she watched, then faded to nothing.

"I never looked," she murmured. "Not that closely."

"You didn't want to see tentacles or lizard skin."



Lilly's laugh crested on a surge of tears. He was teasing her? "I was worried about the wrong things."

Zach looked over his shoulder at her. "It's a manifestation, only. This body."

She turned him to face her. "A solid body. A beautiful one."

He nodded and put his hands on her waist, his head tilted as he looked down at her. "A temporary body, held just long enough to do what I was required."

"For how long?"

He smiled and looked at the menorah on the windowsill. "Eight days."

Lilly put her head on his warm chest. His heart beat under her cheek. "What a coincidence."

"Not really. A great miracle happened there, remember?" His arms tightened around her. "It's not my place to question the length of time we're given on our quest."

She stayed in silence for a moment or two. "And if you don't succeed?"

"Have I failed you, Lilly?" He used a finger to tip up her chin so she could look at him. "You'll have to tell me. I've been here too long, now, simply to know."

She wanted to lie, tell him yes, so that maybe he'd stay. That seemed like a pretty bad idea, not to mention a selfish one. So instead, she closed her eyes and let herself...feel.

She hadn't done that for a long time. Simply given herself permission to open her heart and mind to her

emotions and let them fill her. She'd spent too much time pretending she didn't ache inside, and it was difficult, now, to recognize that instead of pain, she felt peace.

She opened her eyes. "No. You didn't fail."

Zach brushed her hair off her face and cupped it with his hands. He kissed her, soft and slow. "I'm glad."

Lilly kissed him, too. "But sex? Really, Zach? I'm pretty sure that's not what they taught me in religious school."

"There's nothing as sacred as the joining of two bodies in celebration of love," Zach said, totally serious yet with eyes twinkling in mischief. "Let's just say not everyone requires the same attention I gave you."

"Huh." She tweaked his nipples until he laughed, squirming. "So I'm not your first?"

Zach captured her hands with his, holding her still. "Actually, you are. Not all of us are chosen to serve here."

"But I was chosen? For you?"

Zach hesitated again. His kiss was harder this time, though sweet all the same. He pressed her against him, naked flesh hot on hers. When he pulled away, his dark eyes blazed with passion, setting spark to her own.

"No, you weren't chosen for me. I chose you."

“I think that is the sexiest, most romantic thing anyone has ever said to me,” Lilly told him, and as she’d done that first time, jumped into his arms.

They didn’t make it to the bedroom this time. With one hand holding her firmly, Zach swept the kitchen table clean with the other. Then he laid her down on top of it and kissed her mouth until she gasped.

Zach kissed her throat and collarbone. The slopes of her breasts, taking time to suckle at each nipple until they tightened, tingling from his mouth. Down her belly, painting with his tongue. Over each hip. Her thighs, knees, ankles. Standing, he lifted her foot and kissed each toe while Lilly giggled and gasped.

“Not here,” he told her finally, when she moaned. “Someplace softer.”

He lifted her again, cradled in his arms, and took her to the bedroom. The bed welcomed them with the fresh, clean sheets she’d put on earlier. Zach stretched out beside her to kiss her mouth.

She clung to the taste of him, the scent, the feeling of his fingertips tracing patterns on her skin. Lilly wanted never to forget a second of this, but in trying so hard to capture and keep the moment, she was afraid she’d lose it.

“Relax,” Zach whispered as she tensed. He slid a hand up her thigh and found her heat, dipped a finger inside and out to smooth over her clit. “Let me do this for you.”

He'd done so much already, and Lilly didn't want this to end just yet. "Wait," she told him as she got to her knees. "Let me do this for you, instead."

They'd done so much, but she hadn't used her mouth on his cock. She wanted to now. She would taste every inch of him, experience every pleasure before he left. She wasn't going to regret not taking every chance she had with him.

He said her name with what sounded like surprise as she took him deep into her mouth and drew back, sucking gently. Her hands cupped his balls and she stroked with her thumb. She wanted Zach to feel as much pleasure as he'd given her. His thigh muscles tensed as she sucked him slowly, then a little faster. His fingers tangled in her hair, not pulling or guiding. Encouraging.

Pleasure built inside her even though she wasn't even touching herself. It came from knowing that what she was giving was making him feel good, judging from the sound of his low moans and sighs. Lilly moved, her hair caressing him where her hands and mouth didn't, until at last Zach gripped her shoulder.

"Wait," he pleaded, and before he could say more, she was already moving up and over his body to settle him inside her.

He rolled them both so he was on top, her legs locked around his back. They'd made love slowly, fucked fiercely, come hard within moments of each other. This was all those times and more, made precious with knowing it was the last. He looked into

her eyes and Lilly gave him everything she was, had ever been, would be.

She gave him all of herself and took what Zach gave her. He moved inside every part of her. Ecstasy surged and she fought not to control or delay or prolong it, but to allow herself to let it take her fully away.

They didn't need words; if he murmured in a language she couldn't pronounce, Lilly had no trouble understanding his meaning. She spoke with her eyes and mouth, hands, her slick, hot pussy clutching at his cock. Everything had been distilled into this pleasure, this desire, the sum of their parts making up a whole.

She didn't tell him she loved him.

She was sure he already knew.

Her body craved sleep, but Lilly forced herself to awake when the sun came up. She turned to look at the man—not a man, but something greater, only wearing the suit of a man—snoring lightly beside her. She brushed his hair back from his forehead.

Zach awoke.

“And now you go...back?” She gave a self-conscious glance upward and saw nothing but the ceiling.

Zach didn't look up. He didn't look away from her. “I have until sundown.”

“And if you don't go back, you die.”

“Yes.”

Lilly bit back a sob and clung to him, tightly. “And what will happen to me?”

“You will go on with your life,” Zach whispered into her hair. “That is what’s meant to happen for you.”

She couldn’t argue with him, or rail against how unfair all this was—whatever had led her to accept this entire situation from the start now forced her to accept it, too. No matter what she wanted with her heart, her mind told her this was what was necessary, and right. What was meant to be.

“So this is our last day?” She looked up at him, her vision unblurred, her voice steady. “Let’s make the most of it.”

He lifted her as he’d done that first time. She felt safe in his arms. Protected. Cherished.

Loved.

Now that she knew how it felt, she would seek it again and recognize it when it came. She’d be ready for love when it found her the next time, and not settle for something less. This was the gift Zach had given her, his act of *chesed*, and though Lilly had no idea how her smallness could affect the entire world, she believed him when he said his task was to help with *tikkun olam*.

They made love slowly this time. Savoring. It lasted for what seemed like forever, and though she wept at the end of it, Lilly was anything but sad.

“I’m hungry,” Zach said into the quiet.

She rolled on her side to face him. “Then let’s eat.”

They did. Anything they wanted, digging deep into Lilly's freezer to pull out chocolate and ice cream, fried mozzarella sticks, pizza. They drank cold glasses of beer and she danced for him again. He danced for her, too, with grace and humor, his steps fumbling sometimes but never faltering.

The day passed, no way to stop it. Night fell early in the winter and Lilly shook the last few candles from the box. She placed them all in the menorah.

Eighth night, nine candles.

She lit them with the prayer, tasting all the words this time as though they were something new. She supposed they were. She felt new, anyway. New and strange.

She faced him. They'd both dressed by unspoken agreement, Zach in the sweatpants from the first night and she in the cotton robe. She thought there should be fanfare. A ceremony, maybe. She waited for Zach to vanish in a burst of blinding light.

Night fell. The candles flickered. He took her hand and drew her to him for another kiss.

"Is it time?" she asked against his mouth, and he nodded.

"I love you," Lilly said. She took his face in her hands and made sure he saw everything she felt in her gaze. "Even though it was only eight days. I was blessed to have you. Thank you, Zach."

"Lilly..." He looked pained, his hands coming up to take hers from his face.

She cried out when he collapsed and she knelt beside him. Zach crouched on hands and knees, forehead placed to the floor. His skin, for the first time, had gone chilly. Under her palm, his shoulders tensed, relaxed. He let out a small noise that sounded like her name.

And then, he was gone.

Surely he wouldn't mind if she wept.

Tomorrow, Lilly would get on with her life. Tomorrow, she would venture out into the world, the snow melted, back to work. Back to friends, family. Back to the possibilities she knew were waiting.

But for now, surely Zach wouldn't mind if she cried.

The candles hadn't even burned low enough to sputter when the first boom of thunder cracked the air and shook the house. The lightning came a second later, but Lilly was already on her feet. She threw open the sliding glass door, mindless of the snow burning her feet as she ran into the backyard.

And there, in a circle of earth made bare by melted snow, lay a naked man.

Did she cry his name, or did her voice echo only in her head? It didn't matter. Lilly ran across the deck and slid in slush and ice, down the steps, onto frozen grass. Into the mud. On her knees she took him in her arms, his eyes dazed but his smile burning as bright as the candles now nearly gone out in the window.



“Lilly,” Zach said. “I’m here.”

Questions could wait until they were inside, away from neighbors’ prying eyes and the cold making her shiver. Him, too. She noticed that, noticed how his skin was still not as hot as it had been. How his lips turned blue and stayed that way until she got him into the heat of the shower.

Once again, he’d changed. Some things hadn’t. As she rinsed him free of the mud that hadn’t covered him after his first descent, Zach shivered at her touch and laughed when his cock roused. Lilly laughed, too, tipping her face into the stream of water and letting it wash away her tears.

The water was turning cold by the time they got out of the shower. She pushed him onto the thick bathmat and slid him inside her. She leaned to kiss him. They moved, they rocked. They made love as though it was the first time, not the last time.

She wouldn’t forget a moment of this, either.

Later, wrapped in towels and snuggled under the blankets they both needed now, Lilly sighed and pressed her face to Zach’s still-damp skin. “I thought you would die if you stayed.”

“I will die.”

She sat up, heart hammering, gut twisting. “What? Then why did you come back?”

His smile soothed her, his kiss even more so a moment later. “We all die, Lilly. My time will come as any other. I won’t know when, but none of us do.”

“Us?” She eyed him, then looked upward.

Zach's kiss was sweet. His answer was sweeter even than his kiss. "Lilly, this time I didn't fall. This time, I jumped."

She'd believed she would know when love came for her, and she'd be ready for it because of what Zach had given her. Now, in his arms, his mouth on hers, Lilly was ready.

Love was here.

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Newly Fallen

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