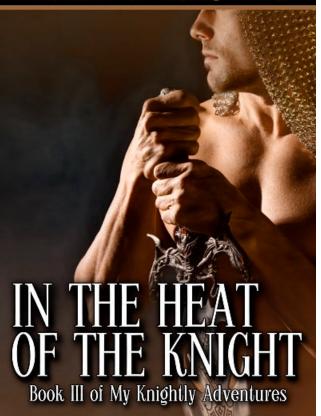
# MIMI RISER



...By the time I climb onto the redwood deck, I'm wearing nothing but night shadows and desire. I'm naked and wet—dripping—and I haven't even entered the hot tub yet.

I know what's happening inside it, though. Mesmerized, I stop a short pace away and inhale the scene along with the herbal-scented vapors that shroud it. More than Jacuzzi jets froth the surface of the water. My guys have begun without me. I'd feel slighted if they weren't such a turn-on to see.

I have a profile view of two beautiful males, Wolfred like a young, blond Hercules, and Glenn like a dark angel—a fallen one—battered from his hard landing, but still an eyeful. The sight of them immersed in steam and each other, deep in a coital embrace, sizzles my circuits. Electric tingles sweep me from my toes to my hair roots, leaving fried flesh in their wake. I can smell my own smoke.

It's a spacious tub with a luxurious diameter and depth. Glenn sprawls on the bench that circles the inside, leaning back, his head resting on the rim, his eyes closed and lips parted in ecstasy. Wolfred kneels on the bench, facing and straddling him, almost sitting on Glenn's lap, but carefully. Wolfred's keeping his weight supported on his own knees. I can tell by the way his thighs tense and bulge as he rises and sinks in the water. He's impaled on Glenn's cock, milking it with inner muscles, riding it into an orgasm. Red hot stuff.

I'm amazed neither man notices me—that Wolfred, in particular, doesn't sense my brainwaves and smell my lust. Probably he does and is trying to drive me nuts with this display.

If so, it's working ...

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# MY KNIGHTLY ADVENTURES BOOK III:

# IN THE HEAT OF THE KNIGHT

# BY

# MIMI RISER

AMBER QUILL PRESS, LLC http://www.AmberQuill.com

## IN THE HEAT OF THE KNIGHT AN AMBER QUILL PRESS BOOK

This book is a work of fiction.

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To my good friends and literary support group, the Rebel Writers—Alice Duncan, Alice Gaines, Bonnie Vanak, Jan Zimlich, Norah Wilson, and Pamela Clare fabulous authors and grand ladies all.

# IN THE HEAT OF THE KNIGHT

Hell hath no fury like a fairy scorned.

Especially a fairy like Morgan La Fey who'd been banished from her homeland because of the scorner. Small, furry things scurried for their burrows while night birds flapped high into the trees, giving Morgan a wide berth as she swooped silent as a bat and lethal as a guided missile into the dense shadows of a fey forest.

Boy, she was pissed. Having finally found a loophole that allowed her to sneak through the dimensional veils and return to the magical realms, she wanted to blast into dust the bloodsucking bastard whose deceit had doomed her to

centuries of exile in the mortal world. There was just one little problem.

Someone else had already destroyed him.

How did she know? Because she'd viewed his demise—in a secondhand sort of way—discovered it by accident while probing the mind and memory of the woman who'd done the deed.

Poop on a pogo stick. The vampire "Wicked," as he'd dubbed himself in this land, was buried in the Underworld now. Burning in hell, humans would say. Suffering for his sins.

But not nearly enough. Hell was way too good for him.

Scowling, Morgan pulled up short in mid-flight and dropped downward to land on a scorched patch of forest floor—the site where her ex-lover had met his end, dissolved into smoke with a wooden stake through his treacherous heart. The stink of his evil still clung to the blackened earth under her dainty feet. When she gazed with her inner eye, she saw the ghostly outline of his physical form, a psychic imprint left behind like a snapshot.

Good. That meant he wasn't too long gone. With her inborn fairy magic to bolster the witchy skills she'd gleaned from a succession of sexy alchemists and necromancers on the mortal side of the veil, she could resurrect him and kill him again if she dared.

And she did.

Granted, this was exactly the sort of activity that had gotten her exiled, but he deserved it, the jerk. Since Wicked was the one who'd first seduced her into the darker arts, and

then abandoned her to her fate, he had only himself to blame.

Her frown twisted into a wry smile at the thought. How appropriate to consider that the most dangerous incantation in her repertoire—words, which when properly uttered, raised the dead—she had learned from him. In fact, she'd used it on him once before—to call him forth from his tomb in ancient Egypt after he'd been assassinated by a rival priest.

And he'd repaid her for it by running off with some little tramp of a vamp simply because the slut could pass him through the Astral Gates. Whereas she, Morgan, had already been banned from this side—but mainly because she'd resurrected him. "Interfering with Cosmic Law" the High Council had declared it.

Pooh.

A bunch of bloody politics, that's what it was when oncehuman vampires were granted easy access to the fey realms and a natural fey like herself was denied entrance. Screw the lot of them.

Her big mistake, obviously, had been breaking the seal on his tomb in the first place. She should have left him there to rot.

Hmm...there was an idea. What if she put him back into it? A delicious thrill swept her, curling her toes.

Yes, that would fix the ungrateful son of a bitch. She'd resurrect him all right. But he'd awaken in the mortal world, bound like a mummy and encased in his old sarcophagus.

Hah!

Sure of her direction now, she stretched her arms skyward

and summoned her power—summoned Wicked. In a clear, silvery tone, she began the incantation by calling aloud his ancient, true name...

\* \* \*

"Odji-Nebi Kamenwati, Djal-en-Menetnashté!"

With infinite care, my old friend and former professor, Dr. Hiram Sloane, folds back a protective drapery and proudly displays the current crown jewel of Maryn College's archeology department. He couldn't wait to show me—even though I haven't seen him for months, and I've plenty to show him, too. Even though I caught him here tonight as he was on his way home, the last to leave, as usual. We're alone in a locked building and, except for our voices, the place is silent as a tomb. How very appropriate.

A weird chill slides down my spine as I stand gawking in uncertain awe at the massive, carved and painted, oblong box laid out before us—an eerie effigy of man's quest for immortality.

"Magnificent, huh? And wonderfully well preserved. It's Sixth Dynasty, over four thousand years old, and never been opened! I have high hopes for what we'll find tomorrow when we raise the lid. X-rays indicate the contents are intact," Hiram announces with the gruesome glee of a modern-day grave robber.

I don't fault him for this, of course. He pillages the past not for personal gain or glory but for wisdom and truth. He believes the only way to understand mankind's present path

and avoid its pitfalls is to know what shit we've already stepped in, and why.

"It arrived just yesterday, straight from a newly discovered burial chamber," he adds. "I had to pull strings and call in a lot of favors to get it here so fast."

Or to get it here at all, I should think. Such finds usually go to the big institutions, not small, private schools like Maryn. Then again, there's nothing small about Hiram Sloane. At seventy-three he's still built like a bull, with the strength to match, and has a mind like Einstein's—not to mention an equally impressive trust fund. Hiram comes from old money. His grandfather made millions back east before settling down in nearby Honeydew, Kansas and founding this college. Which is why Hiram has devoted his life to the place when, with his credentials, he could have taught anywhere he wanted.

"Wow," is all I can say. I realize what a coup this is for him and want to share his excitement, but the Old Kingdom sarcophagus we're staring at gives me the willies—even before Hiram explains its original owner's lengthy appellation.

"Names were very important to the ancient Egyptians, so they often had more than one," he reminds me—as though I might have forgotten my Egyptology 101. You gotta love Hiram; he takes nothing for granted.

"Odji-Nebi and Kamenwati," he continues, "mean Wicked Panther and Dark Rebel, respectively, and were probably intended to signify strength, physical and mental, a man who's a force to be reckoned with—to inspire fear in his enemies,

perhaps. Djal-en-Menetnasté means Staff of Power and may have been some sort of magical title. He was a priest of Osiris."

God of the Underworld.

"Sounds like a real fun dude." I suppress a shiver. My back hairs bristle with warning, but I'm not sure why. As the sarcophagus is sealed, I can't see its grim occupant. Even if I could, with an archeology degree under my belt, mummies don't usually creep me out like this.

Mind you, I've rarely used my degree professionally, but that's due more to my personality than a lack of knowledge or interest. One has to be a politician and a diplomat to succeed in the halls of academia today, and I'm neither. After being fired in rapid succession from my first—and last—two jobs in the archeology field, I was forced to admit it wasn't for me.

A craft show gypsy is what I've become instead. Imagine that. It started as a summer lark several years ago and somehow rolled into a ramshackle career. Crazy maybe, but then no one has ever accused me of good sense. I make and sell designer jewelry inspired by the ancient cultures I once studied, and live on the road for the most part.

Recent developments, however, have brought me back to my roots in Honeydew with desperation nipping at my heels. Which is why I've stopped off at the college this evening en route to what's left of the old homestead. I've just finished two weeks at the High Plains Summer Ren Faire in west Texas, where sales began well then bottomed out the second week, while my living expenses have tripled.

Never mind how it happened—it's a long, strange story—but I've suddenly acquired two extra people to support besides myself. And one of them... Well, his health seems to be deteriorating. Fast. He's scaring the hell out of me. Glenn obviously needs better care than I can give him on the road, so I've brought him here for an extended rest. I own a small farmhouse a few miles outside town, my legacy from my late mother. But the place needs repairs if we're to stay there, and we'd all like to keep eating.

Nope, there's no escaping it. I need more money, and I'm hoping to entice Hiram into parting with some of his in exchange for an armful of early medieval artifacts I have outside in my van. A mail shirt, specifically, and a pouch of silver coins with the seal of a legendary British king on them—all in beautiful condition. Almost too beautiful, making this a touchy transaction. How do I explain where I got such museum pieces?

I'm sure Hiram would be far more interested in the stuff's owner, who's also outside in the van—and in gorgeous condition. But Sir Wolfred isn't for sale. Although, I do have his permission to translate his armor and purse into contemporary cash. Wolfred's as worried about Glenn as I am.

::How goes the barter? Will your friend give us a fair price?:: he asks me, mind to mind. We've a telepathic link, my beloved and I—one that's lengthened and strengthened in the last several days, so we can now read each other's thoughts at a distance.

::He will if I ever get the chance to ask him,:: I reply.

Hiram is, at the moment, expounding upon the Egyptian magical system, Heka, and some verse discovered in Odji-Nebi's tomb that may be a spell for raising the dead. In a singsong voice, he begins chanting it. ::I have to wait till he comes up for air. But Hiram's a generous man. And a discreet one who'll guard your secret—I think—if I have to reveal it.::

Well, the part about Wolfred being a knight from ancient Camelot, anyway. There's no need to mention he's a werewolf, too. Right?

::If you trust him, my lady, 'tis enough for me. Tell him whate'er you must, but make it snappy. We sore need the bucks::

I choke on a chuckle. Wolfred has been in this century less than three weeks. He's only just started peppering his medieval speech with modern slang, and it tickles me to no end—as he realizes. He wanted to make me laugh to loosen my tension.

Hiram, unfortunately, assumes I'm laughing at him. I know because he uses my full name, whereas usually he calls me Dee like everyone else does. Unless he goes with "missy," or "little girl," or something equally diminutive. He's known me since I was born—and never lets me forget it.

"Care to share the joke, Dorothy Jean Day? You find my recitation funny, do you?"

All huffy and indignant, he folds thick arms over his barrel chest. At almost six foot, I'm tall for a woman, but Hiram is tall for a man. Looking like a disgruntled, graying grizzly bear, he glowers down at me, his bushy brows pulled together

in a frown. However, a suspicious twitching at the corners of his mouth ruins the act.

I meet his mock glare with a grin. "I was just clearing my throat."

"A likely story," he says.

Evil laughter follows the words.

Oh, shit.

Both Hiram and I freeze. That laugh didn't come out of him or me. It came from...

"What the devil?" Hiram scowls at the sarcophagus, which is suddenly shaking and thumping as though something is trying to force open the lid.

From the inside.

A devil indeed. I know. I've heard its cold cackle before—a siren's song of dark desires and death.

"Son of a bitch," Hiram mutters. "The damn spell works."

So it appears. But I don't think he should blame himself. I've been sensing an ominous presence since I arrived at the college. I just couldn't believe it was real. *Here*. I suspect Hiram's chant merely roused from black slumber a creature who'd already been resurrected. A hungry creature. A creature who wants me.

And I know why.

My blood turns to ice water. We're alone. The downstairs doors are locked and bolted from the inside, and the lower floors' windows are barred. For security. Which seems a bitter irony now. No one can get to us if we yell for reinforcements.

I yell, anyway. A knee-jerk reaction, I can't help it.

"Wolfreedddd!" I scream as ancient wood shatters. All hell breaks loose with the crash. In an explosion of splinters and shredded bandages, Odji-Nebi Kamenwati bursts forth from the grave.

Or maybe we should just call him Odji.

Wicked.

My worst nightmare come true. Again.

Furious, he thrashes free from the wreckage of his sarcophagus and mummy wrappings, and hauls to his feet—tall, dark, and deadly—lips curled in a snarl, eyes burning like hot coals. His gaze sweeps the room and lands on mine. A single syllable hisses out of him.

"You!"

"Gee, it's nice to be remembered," I croak out.

Christ, I think I'm having a heart attack.

"You two know each other?" Hiram sounds stunned—but not nearly as much as he should be. I don't think he fully comprehends the situation. Hiram suffers from Absentminded Professorism, which could be viewed as the opposite of Attention Deficit Disorder. He gets so engrossed in his studies, it often takes a while for more minor matters such as...oh, earthquakes and nuclear attacks, for instance, to penetrate his otherwise brilliant brain. Too bad we don't have a while.

"Run!" I hear someone shout. Me. But my legs won't cooperate; they're wobbling like jelly. And Hiram is no help. He grabs my elbow, which keeps me from collapsing.

But also keeps us both from escaping. Fuck.

"Wait, missy, think what we can learn from this—a living

piece of history! I need to talk to him!"

"No, you don't. If you want living history, I'll introduce you to someone who can give you an earful. *Without* draining your blood in the process." As Hiram refuses to release my arm, I strain toward the door, trying to tug him with me. He tugs back.

He would.

"My blood?" he grumbles. "What the hell does my blood have to do with anything?"

"Nothing." Wicked blocks our path, poised like a spider about to pounce on a fly, and grinning like a death mask. "It's *her* blood I'm after."

Along with the rest of me, I'm sure.

My stomach does a sick flip-flop. I expected no mercy from Wicked the last time we met. I expect even less now, since I destroyed him then. He wasn't what you could call thrilled over being nailed to the ground by a jagged tree branch jammed into his heart. It's payback time. I see it in the lustful gleam of his eyes. Unless...

I dart a quick, sideways glance at the only other exit from the room, a large, plate glass window that overlooks the parking lot. Not much of an exit, really. The window is sealed shut...on the top floor of a three-story brick building...with hard pavement below...

"Well, I'll be damned." Hiram leans forward, squinting. "Will you look at that? The fellow has fangs!"

Wicked's grin broadens. "Most vampires do, pops."

"Aye, but wolves have bigger ones," a voice hollers

through heavy plate glass.

Wolfred's voice.

Wolfred's face framed by his arms stretched over his head. Wolfred's incorrigible daring that I worry will get him killed someday.

Although it'll probably kill me first. I think I'm having another coronary. He's outside on a moonless night, hanging at least fifty feet in the air, and clinging to God only knows what. On his climb up he couldn't have had much more than the cracks between bricks for finger and toeholds.

As I gawk in horror and gut wrenching pride, he kicks his legs back and upward, arching his spine, then jackknifes and slams in. A human battering ram. Feet first, he crashes through the window and lands in a crouch in a clutter of sharp shards, his muscles bulging beneath a T-shirt and snug jeans.

That's my knight. A glorious, golden blast from the past, clad in his own brand of shining armor. He literally glows—radiates a bright glimmer for an instant as though he's wearing pure light. He is.

Then the light dissolves and he's wearing fangs and a shaggy coat. Lethal claws cap his fingers, and a warning growl rumbles deep in his throat. That fast, that smooth, he's shifted into his feral form—a fur covered man's body with a bestial countenance and the savage ferocity of a wolf.

Someone's in big trouble, and it's no longer me.

Wicked's expression goes livid. He blisters the air with curses. Quite an extensive vocabulary he's acquired in over four thousand years. But not much courage, it seems. He met

Wolfred once before in fang-to-fang combat, and took the worst of it. Something tells me he's not too keen on repeating the experience. Maybe it's the way he charges past us and dives for the broken window.

Wolfred lunges after him, snarling and snapping.

I lunge for Wolfred.

While Hiram—who, I believe, has finally grasped that Wicked isn't your garden variety reanimated mummy—lunges for me.

One-two-three, we reach the window a split second after Wicked sails through it. As he hits the air, a pair of large, black batwings unfurl from his shoulder blades. Harsh laughter rings out, evil and mocking—triumphant in his escape. He shoots us a bird as a parting salute, then vanishes in a cloud of sulfuric smoke.

::Bloody hell. He's returned to his haunt in the fey lands, I'll warrant.:: With the silent statement, Wolfred shimmers and shifts back to a man.

"But at least you're safe," he adds aloud.

"You, too," I say on a ragged breath. I've no doubt he'd cheerfully die for me if needed, but what a pointless sacrifice. Without Wolfred, I wouldn't want to live. "You scared the shit out of me, I hope you know that."

"Ditto, my lady."

His arms wrap around me, and I collapse, weak kneed and trembling, into a warm, strong embrace. Safe, yes, but for how long? Dare I hope this is the last we've seen of Wicked?

Behind us, Hiram clears his throat. Loudly.

"Dorothy Jean Day, you have a lot of explaining to do."

\* \* \*

"Morgan La Fey, have you any last words before your sentence is carried out?"

"None you dipshits want to hear."

"Fine. We've had a bellyful of you, too, pussycat. On the count of twenty, the shift will manifest and you'll be tossed to the Other Side. We've selected an old, empty farmhouse for your landing point. Ought to be plenty of grub on hand if you're quick enough to catch it. Happy hunting. One...two..."

"Are you sure you can count that high? You'll have to take off your shoes, you know." Morgan rolled her eyes. What a bloody bore. She couldn't see the High Council, hidden as they were in the ethers of time and space—disembodied voices swirling about her while she stood naked on a tiny dais suspended in the gray of Nothing between the veils. But they no doubt had a dandy view of her. "Lap it up, lamebrains. Get your thrills while you can."

She wouldn't have her cute, sexy figure to flaunt much longer. Since this was her second offense "interfering with Cosmic Law"—and exacerbated by the Council losing Sir Glendel Goodfellow, their champion Gate Guardian, as an indirect result of her meddling—Morgan's sentence was a lollapalooza. Not only banishment back to the human world, but in a form not her own, thereby burning all her bridges, destroying any chance she might have had to return to feydom. Almost.

A death sentence, in other words.

For an entity born to live forever.

Talk about screwing with Cosmic Law. Hah.

Her days were numbered now and would be spent chasing birds and mice and getting high on catnip. Hmm...that last didn't sound too bad, actually.

Whatever!

Morgan refused to cower. They might have stripped her of everything else—including her immortality and fairy powers—but they couldn't steal her pride.

Besides, for all their talk of laws, the hypocrites seemed to have forgotten one of the most sacred. The Law of Redemption. Her one slim thread of hope, yet not an easy one to clutch. This was going to be a huge stretch for her. However, if she managed it, she'd call into play a higher hand than the Council's, maybe earn enough brownie points to win back her life. All she had to do was somehow, someway perform a Very Good Deed.

Without fairy magic.
While dealing with furballs.
Really, how difficult could it be?

\* \* \*

I've never expected life to be easy, and rarely has it disappointed me in that regard. Sometimes, however, things go better than I anticipate.

This is not one of those times.

Leaving the wreckage of the college's relics room behind

us as a problem to be dealt with on the morrow, we've pulled our composure up by its bootstraps and retreated to Hiram's home. "Where you can tell your story in comfort," he said. As though comfort was an actual option, ha-ha. Hiram had no idea how much there was to tell. If he had, he wouldn't be doubled over now, choking on a mouthful of his wife Ember's fudge brownies.

She calls them Chocolate Death, by the way, lethally luscious stuff. Wolfred, who's only recently discovered chocolate and considers it more miraculous than refrigerators and rocket ships combined, has been groaning in rapture. He's seated beside me on the floor in front of the Sloanes' living room sofa, while behind us, achy and weak, propped up by pillows on the sofa, reclines a former fey-kin Gate Guardian, Sir Glendel Goodfellow of the Astral Realms. Our dear friend Glenn.

"Very dear," I've just emphasized. "Glenn is our lover." Which is why Hiram's choking.

He took the rest of my story in high Hiramesque style—almost salivated at the news Wolfred is a genuine knight from fabled Camelot. So exciting, that, from an archeological standpoint—even niftier than the werewolf business. He exhibited heroic restraint when I explained how Wolfred and I are soul mates who have lived countless incarnations together, and that this time we met and fell in love during a fantasy adventure in another dimension—where we fought and vanquished Odji-Wicked (or so we'd hoped). And where we also met Glenn, who became smitten with us both and

followed us to this world, and we became smitten with him, too, and—

Right about there is when Hiram turned purple. I figured he might, but I had to tell it like it is. Hiram and Ember want us to stay with them instead of trying to renovate a dilapidated farmhouse. They have tons of space, after all. Too much space for me and my guys.

I won't allow our triangle to be broken, and Hiram was planning on putting us in separate rooms. He doesn't care to consider his "little girl" sleeping with one man—gasp—let alone two. Never mind that I'm thirty with enough experience to rewrite the *Kama Sutra*. He'd like me to think the word sex referred merely to gender. I'm sure he wishes I still believed babies are found under cabbage leaves—as if I ever did.

"Oh, for pity's sake." Ember perches on the arm of his chair and pounds him on the back. "You'd never guess he's been married to *me* for almost four decades, would you? He's such an old fuddy-duddy."

Ember is rather the opposite herself—ten years Hiram's junior, which makes her sixty-three, but she looks and acts a lot younger. The woman is an unabashed and unrepentant product of her generation, a free spirited flower child of the sixties. "If it feels good and doesn't hurt anyone, do it," has always been her motto. She's utterly devoted and fiercely faithful to Hiram, but she loves shocking him with brazen behavior.

Ignoring the glower he gives her, she shoots me a wink and rises to her feet. "I'll make up the downstairs guestroom

for you three. It has a *king-sized* bed. And"—she leans over to kiss the bald spot on top of her husband's head—"Hiram will behave himself, or I won't show him the new nightie I ordered online from the Bad Kitty Boutique. It arrived today," she adds in a stage whisper. "Black lace. With little cat cutouts in certain strategic spots. Meow."

"Evil witch," Hiram grumbles at her retreating figure. But I notice his gaze is fixed on her plump derrière. His fuddy-duddy streak extends only so far.

"Yeah," Ember answers with a throaty chuckle on her sashay out of the room. I hear her humming Santana's "Black Magic Woman" as she moves down the hall. Ember and I both know Hiram is more bluff than gruff.

Wolfred doesn't.

I may have made a mistake on the drive here by telling him Hiram is sort of a surrogate father to me, since the Sloanes were friends and neighbors of my folks, and my dad died when I was still in diapers. Growing up, I spent as much time in this house as I did in my own. I was raised by my mother and grandmother, but they're both gone now, so Hiram and Ember are the nearest thing to family I have left.

From a medieval perspective, this makes Hiram look rather like my guardian, a daunting figure to a young knight who knew his place on the social food chain of his birth era and hasn't fully adjusted to the looser class structures of today. Wolfred is sweating in the heat of Hiram's glare, despite the reassurance I'm beaming into his brain. Hiram often has that effect on people.

Glenn, who's pretty unflappable, having been an Eternal until last week, is just sweating. His discomfort is physical—in his back and joints mostly. The pain started a couple of days after he lost his immortality and magic, and has been getting worse ever since. At this rate, he'll hardly be able to walk soon. He's losing weight, his handsome face is haggard, and his beautiful, long hair is graying. I glance at him and see fresh streaks that weren't there this morning marring the glossy black.

He's aging rapidly, almost as we watch—slipping away before Wolfred's and my eyes. We feel so goddamned helpless. And guilty. It's breaking our hearts. But what does Glenn do?

He jokes.

"If it's any comfort, Dr. Sloane, I'm in no shape to do anything in a bed tonight except sleep in it." He punctuates the comment with a dry laugh.

Wolfred winces.

I frown at Glenn. "That's not funny."

"It is to me. I just love irony." With a grunt, he drags half upright, then collapses back onto the sofa. "Ouch. How about one of you kids giving an old man a hand? My plumbing isn't what it used to be. I need to run some water through the hose. And then I *really* need that bed."

"Aye." Wolfred hops up to assist.

"Our room and bath are at the end of the hall," I tell him. "I'll be there in a bit."

"Old?" Hiram snorts as Wolfred eases Glenn to his feet

and helps him toward the open doorway. "A few gray hairs and aches don't make you old, son. Wait till you're my age and then you can complain. *I'm* old. You're only in your middle years. What are you forty-five, fifty?"

An awful observation considering a week ago Glenn looked no more than twenty-five or thirty. But, due to the choking-fit interruption, Hiram hasn't heard that part of my story yet.

"From where I'm sitting, you're still a spring chicken," he declares.

"Whose springs have been sprung, I'm afraid." Glenn pauses on the threshold to flash Hiram a wry grin. "I was old when the Earth was new, Doctor. I've been here since the birth of Creation, guarding the dimensional portals, the gates between time and space. Now I'm paying the price for a billion battles won. If I'd known it would be this high, I might have tried harder to avoid a few of them."

"Good God," Hiram murmurs.

So I've always thought. Although lately I've been wondering how a *good* God could allow what's happening. Through a salty mist, I watch Glenn hobble down the hall, aided by a strong arm, his dark head close to Wolfred's golden one. For several tense minutes neither Hiram nor I speak.

"He's paying the price for daring to love," I finally say. A lump clogs my throat, making the words sound thick. "Glenn is a fey-kin—or he was. The way he explains it, fey-kin are an immortal, magical race similar to fairies but older. They appeared with the Big Bang—every fey-kin who's ever

existed—as fully formed adults, all of them male. What they really are, I think, are what mankind calls archangels. The original seraphim."

"Good God," Hiram repeats. "Fiery agents of the divine."

"More like the police force of the cosmos, I gather."

"Not much difference, little girl."

"Yeah, I suppose so." I take a deep breath. This isn't getting any easier. "Sexual energy, as the underlying creative force of the universe, is a large part of their power. But, initially, they had no one to join with except one another—unless you count some prehistoric algae and amoebas, which Glenn says weren't the least bit titillating."

"I can understand why." Hiram rubs his temples as though he's getting a headache.

Join the club. My skull has been throbbing for days.

"They were homosexual until the first fairy races evolved, followed by humans. Once they had access to them, though, many fey-kin discovered they enjoyed sleeping with females, too."

"Happens to a lot of us," Hiram mutters.

He's not being very helpful, is he? I heave a long-suffering sigh and stumble on.

"Of the ones who are left, most are bisexual now." It seems important I mention this. I want Hiram to understand that Glenn loves me *and* Wolfred, that our triangle isn't one woman flanked by two men, but three people who all love and support each other.

Hiram, however, appears to have already reached a

grudging acceptance of my ménage. He's part Scots and practices the "wha' canna be cured mun be endured" philosophy. Besides, I've given him so much else to contemplate.

He frowns at me—not in reproach but hard thought. "What do you mean 'the ones who are left'? What happened to the rest of them?"

"Turned human," Ember answers from the doorway. "When a fey-kin falls in love with a mortal, he becomes one. Wolfred and Glenn explained it to me while I helped them get settled."

"Good," Hiram says. "Then you can explain it to me."

"Not here, Papa Bear. Upstairs. It's bedtime."

"Bossy witch," he fusses, but hauls out of his chair to oblige.

"Yeah, aren't you lucky?" Grinning, she rakes a hand through her thick curls—still fiery red as ever, though the color comes from a bottle these days—and saunters into the room to give me a goodnight hug along with a brown glass vial. I climb to my feet to receive both.

Ember started out to be an anthropologist, actually, but early on gravitated into what some call the "Craft of the Wise." She reads Tarot cards, nurtures a large garden, and is the author of a modern-day classic titled *The Kitchen Witch Guide to the Magick & Medicine of Herbs*. It's a bestseller in the neo-pagan community. New Age bookstores can't keep it on their shelves. Hiram hates it—but only because he's been tormented by Ember's earthy concoctions for so long.

"This tastes like tree bark!" he usually complains.

"It is," she often replies.

"Here's some lavender oil for Glenn," she now says, pressing the vial into my hand. "Very soothing for inflammation and pain. Just rub it in wherever he hurts."

"Which is everywhere." I sigh as I pocket the oil. "Did he tell you what's wrong?"

"He didn't have to, honey. I know a severe case of osteoarthritis when I see it. Degenerative joint disease affects millions. On the bright side, there's a lot that can be done about it. For starters, I've fired up the hot tub on the back deck for him. A good soak followed by a little lavender will work wonders, you'll see."

"I hate to admit it, but she's right." Hiram slips one arm around Ember, the other around me, and gives us both a quick squeeze. "Cheer up, little girl, everything will be fine."

"You betcha." Ember plants a kiss on my cheek, then tugs Hiram into the hall and up a flight of steps to the left of the arched doorway. "C'mon, Papa. You have a busy day ahead of you tomorrow...explaining to the college what happened to your mummy."

I hear Hiram groan as they mount the staircase. "Thanks for reminding me."

And me. The mere mention of Wicked raises goose bumps on my arms. I'm not sure I agree with Wolfred that our vampire nemesis has retreated to his den of inequity in the Astral Realms, but, frankly, I've bigger concerns. I'm more worried about the living right now than I am the undead.

Ember wasn't quite correct in her diagnosis. Glenn's arthritis is only a symptom, not the disease itself.

His real problem is that he shifted from fey-kin to human too fast. According to Glenn, the metamorphosis usually occurs over the course of several days, at the end of which the transformed fey-kin can expect to live out a normal human lifespan.

In his case, something went wrong—what, we're not sure—and he was catapulted into mortality within seconds, which created a metabolic imbalance that's making him age years for every day. As a fey-kin warrior his body regenerated; he could be injured, but his wounds healed almost instantly. Now it's the opposite, and as he degenerates, he's suffering the cumulative ache of every blow he's ever dealt or received.

Wolfred and I can't help feeling it's our fault since we're the mortals he fell in love with, which precipitated his shift. If there was any way we could save Glenn—even if it meant giving him up—we would. But a reverse metamorphosis doesn't seem to be an option. It's so damned unfair because we're going to lose him soon, regardless. He's dying of premature old age.

::Then we must love him all the better whilst we can,:: Wolfred transmits from the back deck. Wherever he is, he's never far from my mind. ::Come join us, my lady. This wondrous bath has revived him, he says—and by appearances, he speaks true.:: The telepathic equivalent of a chuckle underscores the news. With it, Wolfred projects an image of Glenn, naked and aroused in the hot tub, into my head. ::'Tis

so hard to keep a good man down.::

And so good to see this man hard again. My heart hitches. The way things have been going, I'd thought sex was pretty much over for us as a trio. I know Glenn thought it was over for him personally. Far more painful to him than the arthritis has been a sudden onset of impotence.

::Aye, but that's no worry now, it seems.:: An almost desperate optimism tinges Wolfred's mind-talk. He wants so much to believe Glenn can be cured somehow. ::Methinks I sense a bit of magic afoot. Mayhap 'tis the beauty of this place. The heavens hang heavy with stars above us and sweet herbs scent the air. The water is warm and the breezes soft. 'Tis a night made for love, dearest lady. Will you join us?::

I'm already stumbling out the door—the front one so I can slip around the house and approach the deck from the backyard. I need a moment of cool, quiet dark to steady myself or I'll hit the hot tub like a piranha in a feeding frenzy. When Wolfred waxes poetic, I ignite.

The same thing happens when he speaks bluntly, come to think of it. And when he says nothing at all. There's not much about Wolfred that doesn't fire my furnace. I'm flint to his steel. Touch us together and watch the sparks.

Outside, I pause to stare up at the stars he mentioned. This is the sky I grew up under—a jeweled expanse stretching on forever, open and free, untainted by the artificial lights of city and suburbia. This is the land of my birth, pure country. Wolfred's right, it is magic.

Bordering the Sloanes' huge yard stands a waist high,

white picket fence, on the other side of which the weeds grow wild these days. How fast Mother Nature reclaims her own when people retreat from the picture. What was once my grandmother's vegetable garden is now a tangled mass of vines and scrub.

I rest my hands atop the fence and gaze across the Lilliputian jungle to what's left of my family's old farmhouse, just a shadowy silhouette in the starlight, a crumbling two-story structure sitting gray and forlorn in an overgrown field. I should probably sell the place and grab what little money it would net me, but I haven't the heart to evict its current tenants. A colony of feral cats claimed the grounds after my mom followed her mother to the grave, and I left home to seek my fortune on the road.

The cats are one of Ember's pet projects. She sets out fresh water and food to supplement their natural diet, catches those she can and has them fixed to help control the population, even finds homes for the tamer ones. Ember adores cats. So do I. Given the rural setting, there's always been a steady supply on our neighboring properties. Unfeeling idiots just dump them out here. Kinda makes me wish public floggings could be reinstated.

"Mrrroww..." a tiny voice trills, startling me—although maybe its owner is simply agreeing with my thoughts. According to Wolfred—who has the inside scoop on such matters, being part wolf—all animals are natural telepaths. He can converse with them, but my psychic skills don't extend that far. Wolfred is the only one whose mind I can read. A

pity, because I have the distinct impression my unseen visitor wants to tell me something.

Weeds rustle and a ball of black fluff steps with queenly grace through the fence pickets and sits by my feet. Large, luminous, emerald green eyes stare up at me, unblinking. She's a pretty little thing—full grown, I think, but pintsized, the type of cat Ember calls a "furry fairy" due to the dainty build.

"What's up, kitty? Are you hungry?" As she seems anything but skittish, I lean over, intending to let her sniff my fingers before petting her. A sharp hiss freezes me in midreach. Without warning, she springs upright, her back arched and her tail fat as a bottlebrush. Before I can react, she bounds past me and disappears into the dark.

Quirky critters, cats. What spooked her? Me? I don't hear or see anyone else. Maybe she scented a stray dog. There are always a few in the area; people dump them out here, too. Yeah, that must be it. I refuse to believe there's anything worse lurking in the shadows. I don't want to ruin the magic with fearful imaginings. This is my home territory, and Wolfred is near. I know I'm safe.

I shrug off a nebulous chill and hurry around to the back deck. I could really use some warmth right now. A tryst in a hot tub with hotter men is sounding better and better. Shove worry aside and seize the moment.

Outdoor sex is one of the perks of country living. Other than the cats, our nearest neighbors are a mile away. Hiram and Ember are here, of course, but a glance at the house's

second story shows me their bedroom light is already off. The night is ours—Wolfred's, Glenn's, and mine. I don't want to consider how many more chances like this the three of us will have. Far too few, I fear.

The pale yellow glow of the bug lamp that illuminates the deck beckons me—Miss Moth to a flame. The second I spot it, I start stripping. Like a trail of breadcrumbs, I scatter clothes behind me, littering the lawn with sandals, shorts, tank top, bra and panties. Phantom breezes brush my skin. Airy fingers tickle and stroke, feathering my hair, stirring my nipples to tight peaks. By the time I climb onto the redwood deck, I'm wearing nothing but night shadows and desire. I'm naked and wet—dripping—and I haven't even entered the hot tub yet.

I know what's happening inside it, though. Mesmerized, I stop a short pace away and inhale the scene along with the herbal-scented vapors that shroud it. More than Jacuzzi jets froth the surface of the water. My guys have begun without me. I'd feel slighted if they weren't such a turn-on to see.

I have a profile view of two beautiful males, Wolfred like a young, blond Hercules, and Glenn like a dark angel—a fallen one—battered from his hard landing, but still an eyeful. The sight of them immersed in steam and each other, deep in a coital embrace, sizzles my circuits. Electric tingles sweep me from my toes to my hair roots, leaving fried flesh in their wake. I can smell my own smoke.

It's a spacious tub with a luxurious diameter and depth. Glenn sprawls on the bench that circles the inside, leaning back, his head resting on the rim, his eyes closed and lips

parted in ecstasy. Wolfred kneels on the bench, facing and straddling him, almost sitting on Glenn's lap, but carefully. Wolfred's keeping his weight supported on his own knees. I can tell by the way his thighs tense and bulge as he rises and sinks in the water. He's impaled on Glenn's cock, milking it with inner muscles, riding it into an orgasm. Red hot stuff.

I'm amazed neither man notices me—that Wolfred, in particular, doesn't sense my brainwaves and smell my lust. Probably he does and is trying to drive me nuts with this display.

If so, it's working. I break out in a sweat. My cunt spasms, and my clit swells. *Hey, boys, when's my turn? I want some cock, too, y' know.* One step closer, and I could reach out and grab Wolfred's...if I could trust my legs. In the state I'm in, I could also fall into the tub headfirst and ruin his rhythm.

I touch myself instead—slip a hand between my legs and pretend it's Wolfred fingering my nub. If he is reading my mind, as I suspect, I'm now giving him a bit of a show. Only fair, right?

Glenn's eyes open into smoky slits. His gaze meets mine, then slides down my front and stops like a heat ray focused on my pussy. Here's one person who seems to appreciate my performance. He shudders as a climax strikes him. His groan rumbles out, throaty and thick with passion. My groan echoes it. I came with him. Breathless, I stagger forward and grip the tub's rim to stay upright.

"So, Sir Glenn..." Between panted words I manage a smile. "I understand you're feeling better. Hope you saved

some of it for me."

Equally winded, he half chokes on a chuckle. "Why? You looked like you were doing fine on your own, Lady Dee."

"Too fine." Wolfred pushes away from Glenn to face me, evil intent in his eye.

Uh-oh. I begin backing up, one cautious step at a time. I recognize his look.

So does Glenn. He chuckles again. "You're in trouble now, sweetheart."

"Aye. Naughty ladies who cannot wait their turn must be punished." Slowly, like an avenging Poseidon rising forth from the sea, Wolfred climbs out of the tub and stalks forward, dripping danger and water droplets all over the deck. "Methinks a spanking is in order."

Methinks so, too.

I swivel and make a mad dash for the stairs that lead down to the yard.

Wolfred catches me before my foot hits the top step. A powerful arm lassoes my waist and drags me back toward the tub. En route, he grabs a deck chair with his free hand. In three swift moves, he plants the chair in front of the tub, himself in the chair, and me belly down over his knees with my bare bottom pointing skyward.

Oof. You'd never guess I was the Amazon type, only a couple of inches shorter than him, and athletically built. Wolfred handles me as though I were a doll. It's pretty thrilling, actually. So is the massive erection I feel grinding against my hip. Anticipation scorches over me like a lava flow

even as I squirm and struggle. There's no point making this too easy for him. Where's the fun in that?

Skin to skin, we tussle, me trying to shove upright, Wolfred pinning me in place with a forearm on my back. I hear the slosh of water and realize Glenn is angling himself for a closer view.

"Oh, good, a ringside seat," he says. "Whack her a few times for me, will you? She made me come too fast before."

Smart-aleck.

"Unhh..." A low, guttural grunt rolls out of Wolfred.

My bad. In my struggles, I accidentally bumped an elbow into his erection.

"Ouch. I'll bet that hurt," Glenn murmurs in sympathy.

"Not as much as this will," Wolfred growls.

I gasp as he lands a heavy swat on my upturned ass. *Slap!* Hard hand to soft cheeks. In rapid-fire succession, he rains down a torrent of sharp smacks. I'd expected a playful paddling, but this is the real deal, a genuine bun-burner.

I'm kinky enough to enjoy it.

"Aye, I figured you would," Wolfred answers the thought. He knows me so well. "We're all enjoying it, methinks."

"I certainly am," Glenn agrees.

"An apt reason to continue, then," Wolfred whispers—and suddenly I understand what he's doing, see where all this extra sizzle is coming from, and why. I see it in his mind. If sexual energy is the underlying creative force of the universe, he's hoping sex will regenerate Glenn. Hell, it's worth a try. We couldn't have attempted it while Glenn was suffering

impotence, but Wolfred's right, that seems no problem tonight.

::Give it to me, baby,:: I tell him, silently. ::Let's make love while the stars shine.::

And maybe we can also make some magic while we're at it.

Wolfred responds with several more solid slaps, and after each he smoothes his palm over the stung flesh, runs his fingertips up the line of my crease. A tantalizing blend of pleasure and pain. Every blow, every stroke sends a firecracker jolt through me. It's as though my ass is hardwired to my clit. Molten heat fills my core and floods out through my limbs. Much more and I'll explode.

"Ah, no, not so soon. We're but beginning, my lady." Merciless, Wolfred halts, just as I'm on the edge of an orgasm, and hauls to his feet with me in his arms. Two strides forward, and he drops me into the hot tub. Splash! Then he climbs in after me.

I surface, sputtering and frustrated, to the sound of masculine mirth, husky baritone laughter in stereo. Very funny. I shoot both men black looks, but I'm biting back my own laughter. Revenge will be so sweet.

Quickly, so as not to give Wolfred time to read my intent, I reach under the water. I'm aiming for two thick cocks, one for each hand. I'm ambidextrous—heh, heh. Once I've grabbed them, I'll hang on till they crow.

I'm fast, but Wolfred is faster. He grabs first, yanks me into a hard hug, then spins me around so I'm trapped against

him, my back to his front. An ominous chuckle vibrates against my spine.

"Where are your wrappings?" he asks Glenn, who sits facing us and seems to guess what Wolfred is thinking. I can tell by the grin on Glenn's face.

"To your right," he says. "Want me to get them?"

"Nay, I can manage." Wolfred locks me in one arm and reaches out of the tub with the other. "Save your strength. You'll need it."

Oh. shit.

They're talking about the elastic bandages Glenn has been wearing on his knees the past few days. Earlier, I noticed them on a small table alongside the tub. And now I read in Wolfred's mind what he plans on doing with them. I'm in hot water in more ways than one.

I twist and turn, splash and thrash, trying to break free. I put up a valiant resistance, but two things work against me. One, Wolfred's incredibly strong, and second... I don't really want to escape.

The scuffle is over in moments. When the dust clears—or the steam, in this instance—I'm sitting on the tub's bench with my hands tied behind my back, my legs spread, and each ankle lashed to one of the bench's underlying support poles. There were only two bandages, but Wolfred turned them into three by wrenching one in half with a sharp tug. Showoff.

He's pulling out all the sexual stops tonight, isn't he? Our lovemaking is often rough and tumble, but we've never before carried it to this extreme. Not that I'm complaining. I'm just

surprised. I thought I knew Wolfred inside and out. I've shared his thoughts, his memories. So why didn't I realize he had such a devilishly delectable Dom streak?

:: Mayhap I've just discovered it meself.:: He flashes me a wink with the thought.

Sin in his eye and a smug smile on his lips, he sits beside Glenn at the opposite end of the tub and lounges back to survey his handiwork. Together they ogle me, like little boys at a dessert buffet, debating which dish to sample first. Unlike little boys, however, they appear to be in no rush to decide.

The suspense is killing me.

"Mmm," Glenn murmurs. "It's so difficult to know where to begin."

Wolfred slants a sideways glance at him. "I've an idea...if you think you can bear her weight."

"I think it would be way fun to find out." A predatory gleam in his gaze, Glenn starts sliding, inch-by-inch, around the circular bench toward me.

The water temperature seems to spike upward.

Wolfred stands, gathers two more objects off the nearby table, and holds them up for my perusal. "One for each end."

Gulp.

"We can't have you screaming and disturbing the master and mistress of the house, now can we?" With the quip, he inserts object number one, a small rubber ball, into my mouth.

Shit.

Object number two, a tube of lubricant, Wolfred hands to Glenn.

The bath begins to boil.

Object number two, by the way, is why I would have screamed, given the option. For all my sexual expertise and kinks, I'm not keen on what's approaching. If it were a finger or tongue, yes, but I draw the line at anything larger. I tried a rear invasion once years ago and couldn't handle even the tip of the assault. Once was more than enough. If others enjoy it, fine. I admit it looks damn sexy. But watching and doing are two different things. I like watching horse races, for instance, but that doesn't make me a jockey.

::You'll like riding Glenn, though. He's wonderfully smooth gaited,:: Wolfred jokes.

I'm not laughing.

::We flipped a coin to see who'd pleasure what part of you. Glenn called tails...and that's what he got.::

I'm still not laughing.

::You planned all this,:: I accuse.

::Aye, but only a short while ago when I saw Glenn recovering his vigor. I planned it for him—and for you as well. You've no idea what you've been missing by avoiding the act.::

I'm not so sure about that, but I understand he means well. Wolfred wants to do something special to supercharge the sexual energy between us in case it can heal Glenn. God knows I want Glenn healed, too. I'd just like to have had some warning. How did Wolfred slip this past me? Why didn't I read it in his mind before now?

::Because I knew you'd balk at the prospect. I dared not

spook you. I buried this thought beneath the ones you did read.::

And I didn't probe deep enough to see it. Telepathy is so darned tricky. I'm new at it and not very adept yet.

::Practice makes perfect.:: Wolfred's arm curls around my waist and lifts me to my feet, then holds me steady since I'm off balanced with my ankles secured to the bench supports.

I'm even wobblier for other reasons.

He strokes a hand over my ass. :: If at first you don't succeed, try, try again.::

Hint-hint, huh?

I never should have bought him that kids' book of classic tales and sayings to help him learn to read modern English. All the old adages are so new to him, he's been spouting them left and right. It's like living with a walking *Poor Richard's Almanac*.

::No Richards. Two men in your life are enough.::

A teasing lilt tinges his mind-talk, yet I detect a trace of something else also. The bite of envy? A twinge of regret? If my attitude toward anal sex is about to be revamped, it won't be him doing the upgrade, and I'm sure he wishes it were. Despite our triangular relationship, that's gotta sting.

Wolfred loves Glenn as much as I do, but not the same way we love each other. Wolfred and I are true soul mates, bound together by fate. It's what attracted Glenn to us, I think; he loves us as a couple more than as individuals. To him we're male and female halves of the same whole. I doubt he can separate us in his mind or heart. When it comes right down to

it, neither can Wolfred or I.

And there lies the darkest part of our guilt regarding Glenn, the part we don't dare discuss, that we're afraid to admit even to ourselves. Deep down inside we're worried the reason Glenn's metamorphosis backfired is because our love for him is lacking somehow—maybe it's not enough, or not the right kind. The way I understand it, no one, magical or otherwise, knows exactly how or why the change occurs, but I'm guessing it takes more than just a fey-kin pledging his heart to a mortal. What if it's the mortal's acceptance of and returning the fey-kin's devotion that completes, seals, and strengthens the transformation?

::Then we'll prove our devotion tonight by offering a lover's sacrifice to show how much we care. You're going to give him your virgin ass, my lady—that's your sacrifice. And I'm going to let you. That's mine.::

The arm about me tightens and a smoky blue gaze bores into my soul. Of the two, the latter holds me firmer. Only Wolfred could take the poignant, poetic notion of a "lover's sacrifice" and the hot, sticky eroticism of being bound, gagged, and sodomized, and blend them into such perfect harmony. He's made up his mind and mine, too.

What can I do but surrender? I have the heart of a romantic and the libido of a bitch in heat. I'm a sucker for idealism and kinky thrills both. Give me the two together and I'm putty. My pulse speeds, and fire races through my veins. At this point, he and Glenn can fuck me anywhere. Everywhere.

Wolfred's eyes narrow. :: Oh, we intend to.::

A silky smooth threat laced with wicked promise.

My knees nearly buckle.

The water, which is chest high when we're seated, laps about my thighs, its rising steam teasing my crotch. Little waves ripple the bath's surface and hard shins bump my calves as Glenn slides onto the section of bench behind me and maneuvers his legs between mine. I can't see him, but I sense his body heat, feel the whisper of his breath on my wet skin. His face must be almost level with my rump.

"Don't lower her yet. Just bend her over a bit," he tells Wolfred. "This view is too delicious to not taste."

I bend, I've no choice. Wolfred presses a palm between my shoulder blades and folds me forward at the waist, bracing me with an arm under my breasts.

A pair of warm hands—Glenn's—spread my cheeks. I jerk as his tongue spears my ass. Then jerk again as the tongue is replaced by a finger slick with lubricant. He's not wasting any time, is he? A second finger joins the first, then—ye gods—a third. Digital persistence, pitiless probing. Fingers that won't take no for an answer, pumping and reaming, forcibly stretching a tight passage.

*Ow...* This hurts more than I expected. My muscles contract in involuntary resistance. A muffled moan escapes me.

"Easy, sweetheart. It gets better, I promise." Glenn allows me only a second of respite while he squirts extra lube into my crease. The goo is cool, but the digits that work it into me burn like branding irons. "The trick is to relax."

How? Some pain is titillating, but not this kind, not to me—and we've barely begun. Glenn's dick is a lot bigger than his fingers. He and Wolfred are both huge in that department. Help...

Panic prickles me, and with it my previous resolve fizzles. Cold dread replaces hot desire. I strain against my bonds and Wolfred's hold. Neither give an inch. Shit. I don't want to be a wimp, I know how important this is, but suddenly I'm not sure I can go through with it.

::Isn't there something else I can sacrifice? Please?::

::No.:: Wolfred sounds way too determined in his reply.

::Why not?:: I sound desperate. Probably because I am.

::Because you agreed to it, and I'm not letting you off the nail... I mean screw.::

::It's neither. You mean hook.::

::No, in this case, methinks 'twould definitely be a screw.::

Glenn pats my ass. "Okay, let's bring her in for a landing. I think she's as ready as she'll ever be."

A scream that I can't release strangles in my throat. ::I'm not ready at all!::

::You will be .::

In almost the same move, Wolfred pulls me upright and sinks to his knees. My scream turns to a groan as his mouth lands on my pussy. A direct hit and no pausing for preliminaries. He goes straight to the heart of the matter, so to speak.

I'm sucked, literally, into a whirlpool of shivery sensation

while he sucks my clit, and I drown quickly—topple, trembling, into sudden orgasm. My vision blurs and I collapse backward with Wolfred's hands gripping my hips, supporting my weight, controlling my descent. Glenn's hands guide me onto what feels like a baseball bat.

I'm too dazed to fight it. I'm limp and liquid as the water around me. With little resistance, Glenn pushes deep into my ass. Suddenly I'm shish kabob. I've been stuffed and skewered like a fresh plucked pullet. I expect nothing else now but a slow roasting over hot coals.

::Aye, with plenty of basting.:: Wolfred leans forward and licks a sizzling line up the side of my neck.

"I love you," he whispers in my ear.

"Mmm...me, too," Glenn murmurs.

"Umph-mmph," is all I can manage aloud. Which reminds me...

::I'm not screaming,:: I mind-talk to Wolfred. ::Don't you think you can take out this damn ball-gag now?::

Wolfred chuckles.

"She wants us to remove the gag," he informs Glenn, who lost his telepathic ability when he morphed into mortality.

I have to admit, though, the rest of Glenn seems to be recovering. He's still weak, but sounding stronger all the time. There's certainly nothing wrong with his dick. Dare I hope we've managed a miracle? Sex-magic really works? It's hard to believe, but you can't argue with results. This is one miracle of an erection I'm sitting on.

"Not till we're through," he answers Wolfred. "Her lungs

are too good."

"True." Wolfred chuckles again.

I make a strangling noise in my throat. But they may be right. I can't always contain my orgasmic shrieks, and—God help me—I feel a new climax building already. I feel better than I thought I would, in fact. A lot better. Whoever would have guessed it?

"Me. Now you see what you've been missing," Wolfred says. "She's enjoying herself," he adds to Glenn.

"Of course she is. I've been doing this for eons and I haven't had any complaints yet." Fey-kin or human, Glenn has never been burdened by false modesty. Or any other kind of modesty, come to think of it.

His hands stroke up my sides and cup my breasts, while Wolfred's hands on my hips lift me several inches, then lower me back onto the full length of Glenn's shaft. Again and again, he repeats the action, setting a smooth rhythm of pull out and push in, rise and fall. He leans in, on his knees, and rubs his own erection against my pussy, stirring ripples in the water and waves of tingling warmth in me.

So begins one of the strangest but most erotic lovings I've ever received, sandwiched between two hot male bodies, the one providing the meat and the other the motion. Bound as I am, I can't do anything but accept both. If this is what's helping to heal Glenn, I can understand why. Whether it's real magic or not, I don't know, but it's sure doing magical things to me. Thrilling things.

I look into Wolfred's eyes and see he's as powerfully

affected. I do believe our love has reached a new level with this joint sacrifice, and I hadn't thought it could soar any higher. It just goes to show you how boundless love is. The more you give, the more you get.

::Aye,:: my knight agrees. His gaze drives deep into my core—almost sends me over the edge. I bite down on the rubber ball to forestall a premature climax.

That's Wolfred—heart of my heart—who can melt me with a mere glance.

"Ahem..." Glenn clears his throat. "Excuse me, but am I still here? I'm starting to feel a little like a vibrator. A jumbo, deluxe one, of course."

Not funny. Wolfred and I were so lost in each other for an instant, we almost forgot Glenn. How horrible. Guilty embarrassment stains Wolfred red, and I'm pretty sure I match his color. A husky laugh breaks the tension; Glenn sounds more amused than slighted, thank God.

"Never mind, kiddies. I'm teasing, not complaining." He reaches around me, grips Wolfred's shoulders and draws us all closer. "What I love the most about you two is how much you love one another. Frankly, I can get off just basking in your glow."

"We love you, too," Wolfred's quick to declare.

"I know," Glenn says—and the sexual action surges forward, intensifies.

Rubbing and stroking, pumping and rocking, we move into a three-part harmony crescendo of a climax. Together.

But even in the midst of it, a small part of my brain stays

active, wondering. There's a certain loneliness inside Glenn, some hidden heartache he won't admit to, and that Wolfred and I haven't been able to ease. I've always sensed it. I used to think it had something to do with his immortality. Glenn once told me "Forever" was a lonely place and I should be thankful I didn't have to go there.

However, he doesn't have to go there anymore either. Glenn's human now—and hopefully healed so he can stay that way for a good long while. He has two people he loves enough to have *become* mortal for. People who will never desert him, who love him back as much as we're able, which is no small thing. Yet it doesn't seem to be enough. If we've fixed Glenn's outer aches, I'd like to fix the inner one, too, but I don't know how. Apparently he needs something we can't give him.

What?

\* \* \*

Cats weren't supposed to be able to weep, but they had tear ducts, didn't they? So why the heck not indulge in a good cry?

The small ball of fluff hiding in a corner—just one more shadow among all the others on the dimly lit deck—swiped a dainty, black paw over her watery eyes and sniffled. She wept because she was happy, that was all.

Yeah, sure, and if you believed that one, she also had this great bridge in Brooklyn she could sell you.

She swiped her other paw over her eyes. Actually, she was

beginning to understand why cats didn't cry even if they could. Crying really fucked up your fur. She blinked back the rest of the tears and spent several minutes licking her front paws and cleaning her face.

All things considered, she ought to be happy. Fate had given her a marvelous opportunity tonight. Imagine seeing Sir Glendel and Sir Wolfred and Dee here. It must be fate. Especially with Sir Glendel looking so ill, and herself being one of the few creatures who could recognize his dilemma and know how to treat it. She'd saved his life.

A Good Deed.

Very good, she hoped. Although, since she was still a cat, the "very" part was beginning to seem a bit doubtful. Maybe she'd lost points for using magic to perform her deed—but not in some grand, flashy display, for pity's sake. That would have been impossible, of course. This was just simple herbal magic, the kind humans themselves had practiced for ages.

Granted, she had used rather a lot of it. But only because there were such a lot of herbs so close at hand...er, paw. Everything she'd needed, herbs for love, lust, healing, longevity... The red haired woman who lived in this house obviously knew her stuff. The entire backyard was a veritable witch's garden.

Such an easy matter it had been for a little cat—who also knew her stuff—to flit between garden and deck, dropping a tiny pinch of this and a wee dab of that into the hot tub while the men were inside undressing. It wasn't the quantity of an herb that mattered so much as the intent you put behind it.

She'd harvested only a teeny bit of each plant. However, since many herbs were multi-purpose and bolstered each other's effects, she'd culled from every one she could reach in the short time allotted her. Except the mugwort. She didn't like mugwort's odor, never had—and it smelled even worse through a cat's nose.

Whatever. The magic bath she created had rebalanced Sir Glendel's metabolism so he'd age normally now—for a human, anyway. There was no way to return him to fey-kin. Once, she could have offered him a different kind of immortality...if he'd been willing to accept her heart along with it. Once, she had offered him the latter.

But he'd refused.

And she'd fled, insulted, to bury her ache in the unworthy arms of a magician-priest. Who'd turned out to not want her any more than Glendel had. She did have lousy luck with men, didn't she? Pooh. What a twisted chain of events they'd all begun back then. How bloody ironic to see where it finally ended. Here. Fate had a very warped sense of humor.

Her tail swished back and forth and she heaved a feline sigh. Glendel was still in danger, along with Dee and Wolfred, which was why she kept watch, as much as it pained her. That she was partly responsible for their steamy play didn't make the scene any easier to bear. Sexual energy would rejuvenate Glendel, thus she'd included many lust herbs in her magic bath brew. Too many, perhaps. Glendel looked younger already.

He looked so good, in fact, her little cat heart raced and

fresh tears stung her eyes. In the last several millennia she'd glimpsed him only one other time before tonight—just briefly and from a distance, his image blurred by a psychic screen she'd woven to hide her presence from him. How could she have guessed it would hurt so much to see him like this?

Close. Naked. Making love.

To see him, hear him, smell him...almost taste him. Memories stung her without mercy. How could she have guessed? With thousands of years between them, she should have forgotten him by now. She thought she had. He'd said she would, scoffed at what he called her "fickle fey nature."

How very wrong they'd both been.

There was no hope for her now, no solace to be had except to finish her good deed by guarding him and his new lovers. Well, stand lookout for them, at least. Without her natural powers, that was all she could do; herbs took you only so far.

Fortunately, she liked Sir Wolfred and Dee. She'd helped bring them together, which made her sort of their unofficial fairy godmother. Ha-ha. Unfortunately, Wolfred was probably still pissed at her for turning him into a werewolf back in Camelot—centuries ago for her, but only a short span for him, what with his time jump.

He'd better heed her, regardless. Of the four of them here on the deck, Wolfred was the only one capable of defeating the danger her cat nose had scented when she'd greeted Dee in the yard. She could have alerted Dee then. She would have, if Dee were able to understand animal telepathy, which was the only kind of telepathy this little pussy had left.

Wolfred would hear a cat's mental warning, though—as soon as the sex calmed enough for her to penetrate his mind. She'd been trying to break through to him for a while, but it was difficult to make her projected thoughts heard over the carnal din in his head.

::Wolfred? Sir Wolfred?:: she attempted again.

No response. Pooh. Her tail switched in agitation. Her ears perked up and her nose suddenly twitched.

Uh-oh. The danger lurked closer than she'd thought.

Way closer.

"Wolfred!" she shrieked aloud. Or tried to. It came out sounding like a banshee feline yowl—and too late, covered by a lightning crack. Horrified, she watched a new scene unfold...saw a figure diving into death.

No, no, noooo-

Tiny fangs bared and kitty claws outstretched, she sprang out of hiding.

\* \* \*

What the...

I hear an electric crack, and that fast my world collapses. From orgasmic bliss to blind terror in an eye blink. This is a hell of a time to be bound and gagged. A muffled scream clogs my throat as a body flies out of the hot tub over Glenn's head and mine.

Wolfred's body.

I don't know what struck him. Some kind of energy bolt came out of nowhere and knocked him up in the air and

straight off the deck. A heavy thump sounds and wood crunches. I think he hit the fence. I expect to hear more crunching instantly, the noise of him scrambling to his feet.

I hear nothing.

My heart stops dead in my chest, then races forward in erratic pounding, trying to hammer a hole through my ribs.

"Fuck!" Glenn struggles to his feet, knocking me face first into the water in the process. Needless to say, I can't right myself. I could drown. And a part of me doesn't care. If I've lost Wolfred...

No! I can't think that. Won't. Please let him just be stunned. Please, please...

I'm still praying—frantically, fervently—as Glenn hauls me up and pushes me back onto the bench.

"Stay there," he orders.

Like I can go anywhere?

Fighting down panic, straining at my bonds, trying to spit out the ball-gag—failing on all counts—I watch him climb out of the tub and peer over the deck's railing, his dark eyes searching the denser dark of night. He moves stiffly—not fully recovered yet—but leaving no doubt he's a seasoned warrior, his posture tensed for battle.

This does *nothing* to calm me. In his fey-kin form he could have defeated fire-breathing dragons—and probably did—but now he's naked, weaponless. And mortal.

Shit. I redouble my efforts to break loose. ::Wolfred? Wolfred, please answer me.::

"Wolfred?" Glenn echoes my mind's cry, but softly. A

wary call.

Evil laughter answers him, sounding so close I'm pretty sure the one it came out of is standing right by the hot tub.

And we know who it is, don't we?

::Wolfred—Wolfred—Wolfreddd!:: In my head I scream bloody murder while twisting and squirming. To no avail.

Glenn spins toward the direction of the laugh, a grim smile on his lips. "Show yourself, Wicked. I don't have the patience for your invisibility crap tonight."

"You don't have much of anything anymore, do you, Glenn? I can smell your human blood. It made it easier to track the three of you here, gave me a wider trail to follow. You've shifted, haven't you? What a pity." In a cloud of sulfurous smoke, Wicked materializes on the deck, midway between Glenn and me. "Y'know, for a fey-kin, I thought you were a pretty cool dude. But now"—a sneer exposes his fangs—"you're a snack."

"And you're history." With the words, Glenn lunges.

Crash! Two bodies hit the deck. Amazingly, neither is Glenn's. At the last instant, a black streak shot out of the shadows and landed on Wicked's face, yowling and clawing like a tiny demon, bowling him backward. Good God, what has Ember been feeding the feral colony? This cat thinks she's a mountain lion.

Too bad she's not.

"Arrrgh!" Wicked grabs her by the scruff of the neck and flings her aside like a Frisbee. The poor thing sails over the railing, while Glenn dives into Wicked.

No! This is not a fair fight. Glenn's still recuperating, damn it.

"Unhh...bloody hell," a voice grunts from the yard.

Either the cat can talk, or-my heart leaps-Wolfred is okay.

::Of course I'm okay,:: he answers, but he sounds aggravated. Small wonder. ::Just tangled in a bramble patch is all. There are some man-eating weeds this side of the fence. I was knocked senseless for a bit, but I've taken worse knocks in jousts. Are you okay?::

A vibration rocks me as Glenn's head hits the side of the tub. Thwack!

::I've been better.:: So has Glenn. ::How soon can you get up here?::

::Another moment. Lady Morgan became tangled as well, when she fell on my head and roused me, and there are too many predators about for me to leave her unguarded. Stray dogs, overly amorous toms... I must free her first.::

Um...I didn't understand half of that. Say what? Who? On the bright side, surprise gives me the added ounce of impetus I need to spit out the gag. It lands with a plop in the water and bobs about like a cork. *Gasp*. What a relief.

"Morgan La Fey?" I sputter. She does turn up at the oddest times and places, doesn't she?

"Morgan?"

"Morgan?"

Is there an echo out here?

The repetitions came from the wrestlers beside the tub.

"Fucking fairy bitch," Wicked grouses.

"That's no way to refer to a lady. Asshole." Glenn slugs Wicked in the mouth.

Our former invalid seems to be regaining his strength rapidly. Or maybe something's just given him an adrenaline boost? His strength at its best, however, is only human and no match for a vampire's.

Wicked returns the blow with a wallop that drops Glenn, unconscious, to the deck. Then he turns glowing eyes on me. "You're lucky, babe. You get to watch while I drain him—quickly. Then I'll take you somewhere cozy for dessert...at a more leisurely pace."

I think I'd rather drown myself in the tub, thank you. I also think another moment for Wolfred's arrival will be a moment too long. But most of all, I think I'm hallucinating as a bedraggled fluff ball zooms across the deck, leaps the tub, and lands, hissing and spitting, on Glenn's chest, as though warning Wicked away.

Holy shit... That crazy cat is back for more.

::Not so crazy. Trying to protect the one she loves. 'Tis an endeavor I can appreciate since I'm likewise engaged.::

A canine growl mixes with the mind-talk, and Wolfred, wearing his fur and fangs, vaults over the deck's railing. In a clawed hand, he grips one of the pointed pickets from the fence. Oh, shit... I know what that's for. But I wasn't expecting it. I figured he'd just want to scare Wicked off.

::And have him return later? Nay, I'll not risk your safety for the sake of my conscience. 'Tis time to get tough, my lady.

I will end this matter here and now .::

He's serious. My stomach knots with sudden, sick alarm.

"Fuck a duck. Just when things were starting to get interesting." Vampire lips curl in a snarl. Wicked's leathery wings unfurl.

Wolfred howls—wolf talk for "Oh, no you don't, buddy."

"Sit on it and spin, Fido." Wicked launches into the air. But not fast enough.

Wolfred in his wolf form is a powerful jumper. He springs from the deck to the railing, then straight up—catches Wicked around the ankles. Amidst savage growls and curses punctuated by a solid thud, the two of them crash-land on the other side of the tub from Glenn and the cat.

A furious scuffle ensues. Werewolves and vampires don't like each other very much, do they? There appears to be some kind of inbred animosity between them, which goes beyond individual disputes. This has the feel of a tribal blood feud. Miss Kitty seems fascinated. She pounces up and perches on the rim of the tub to watch. I do believe she'd applaud if she could.

With my hands tied, I can't applaud either, but I wouldn't in any case. I'm worried about Wolfred. Not that he'll lose—trained knight plus wolf equals almost unbeatable. I dread his coming victory when, goaded by his inner beast and desire to protect me, he plunges the wooden picket into Wicked's heart.

I'm afraid Wolfred will hurt himself, too. He's such a curious enigma. A medieval athlete more than a warrior. He likes fighting as a sport—he was a tournament champion in

Camelot—but he loathes killing of any kind, won't even eat meat, on general principles. He's a contradiction in terms, a pacifist knight and a vegetarian werewolf. And I love him just the way he is. I don't want to see him *toughen up* for any reason. Especially not for me.

My chest constricts as he pins Wicked to the floor and straddles him, with one hand on Wicked's throat and the other holding aloft the makeshift stake, like a dagger ready to drop. Both werewolf and vampire freeze, locking gazes, heavenly blue eyes staring into the black panic of hell. No sounds but the rustlings of the night and the heavy rasp of labored breathing. Then swiftly, without warning, the stake drives down.

And stops with its point touching Wicked's chest.

At the same instant, Wolfred shifts back to a man. Iron edged words slice the silence. "I give you a choice, bloodsucker. Return to the magic realms where you belong. Or"—the stake presses down a notch harder—"be destroyed. 'Tis your decision, but make it fast."

My breath whooshes out in relief—not for the one who's been offered a reprieve, but the one bestowing it. Wolfred's just given himself a reprieve, too, found a way to end the matter without compromising ideals. He's a clever guy, my knight.

:: Was there ever any doubt?:: A gravelly growl punctuates the quip. I realize it's covering a chuckle, but no one else would. Wolfred's man-growl sounds almost as lethal as his wolf's.

"Okay! I'll leave! Is now soon enough?" Wicked obviously knows a good deal when he hears one. "Just get off me. I can only do dimensional travel from the air."

Wolfred doesn't budge. "Tis a pity then we cannot clip your wings once you've crossed over, for that would anchor you in place. Instead, you must make a solemn oath. Swear you'll depart and never again return to the mortal world. Oh...and you'd best convince me you mean it."

Yeah, there's the tricky part. I'm disinclined to trust Wicked as far as I could throw him. Hmm, I wonder if making him swear on Osiris would keep him in line, being that he was once a priest of that god—although not for a long, long time. Too iffy, I decide. Thinking of his ancient Egyptian heritage does give me another idea, however.

"Make him swear on Djal-en-Menetnashté." I focus my gaze, deliberately, on Wicked's crotch. "His *staff of power*."

From the evil look he slants me, I believe I've deduced the true meaning of that title. Sexual prowess. I must remember to tell Hiram; he'll be so scandalized.

"You heard the lady. Swear by your *staff*. And may it wither and fall off if you break your word." Wolfred leans over Wicked, increasing the weight on the stake.

Wicked lets out a scratchy squawk. "All right, already! I'll swear!"

And he does, spewing naughty words like a snake spitting venom. But eventually, he chokes out the swear we want to hear. The fact he bitches about it so much adds credence to the act. If he didn't believe the power of a pledge, he'd have made

his more easily. I think he's genuinely afraid he'll lose his prick if he breaks this oath.

::Aye, and if I e're see him again, he will.:: Wolfred hauls to his feet, dragging Wicked up by the throat, then spinning him around and booting him in the butt. "Be gone, bloodsucker. Dally a moment and I'll be all over you, like flies on shit. I can shift faster than you can fly high enough to escape me."

"Yeah, but you can't catch what you can't see, Woofwoof."

Pop! Wicked disappears.

"Rrrowww!" Yowling, the cat rockets into the air, hoisted by the scruff of her neck, trapped in an unseen grip.

"I swore I'd return to the fey lands, but I never said I wouldn't take a souvenir back with me." Wicked's cackle rains down from high over our heads. "I'm going to hang this *pussy* by her tail and skin her alive. Slowly."

Whiz! Wham! Like a miniature cannonball, my round, rubber gag shoots upward and hits an invisible something near the cat's furiously struggling little form.

"Arrgh!" Wicked yells, and evidently drops her.

Splash! Kitty lands in front of me in the hot tub.

It all happens so fast, there's no time for the coronary I'd just planned to have.

Wicked reappears above us for an instant, clutching his Djal-en-Menetnashté with both hands. "You might be human, Glenn, but you still got your pitching arm," he moans. "Damn, that hurt"

"Good," Glenn says, and fishes the cat out of the tub—a much gentler action than the way he'd snatched up the ballgag and let it fly. When, exactly, he regained consciousness I never noticed since I've been rather distracted by other events.

A lightning crack sounds as Wicked vanishes again. From the sulfurous cloud he leaves behind, I know this time he's really vanished—dematerialized—retreated to the astral realms, I hope. If he's smart, he'll stay there. Wolfred's idealism may not stretch far enough to save Wicked a second time.

"Oh no, I'll not destroy him if he returns." Wolfred climbs into the tub and starts removing my bonds. "I'll just make him wish I would."

"And I'll help you." Glenn stands by the tub and cradles the cat, who now looks like a drowned rat, against his chest.

She squirms, but doesn't try to bite or scratch. When he firms his hold on her, Miss Kitty surrenders and settles into the crook of his arm. Pretty docile behavior for a feral. She must be stunned, poor baby. Through large, luminous eyes she stares up at him while, with his free hand, he strokes between her ears.

"Little fool. Did you think I wouldn't know you?" A pained expression on his face, Glenn returns her scrutiny. "I'd recognize your green gaze anywhere, puss."

"Mrroww," she trills—a tiny, weak sound—and turns her head to flash Wolfred and me what I'd swear is a panicked plea for help, if I didn't know better. Then again, I'm not sure I do know. I feel a twinge of panic myself. An odd chill

prickles me, but I'm not yet ready to admit what it means.

"Lots of cats have green eyes," I say.

"Not this green." Glenn lifts the small creature and holds her nose-to-nose with him. "Have your brains been scrambled along with the rest of you? What the hell did you think you were doing? You almost got yourself killed. *Why*?"

"If you can't figure that for yourself, 'twould be no use anyone explaining it." With a sharp yank, Wolfred breaks the last of my bonds.

A piece of my heart also breaks. That which he won't tell Glenn, he can't hide from me. I see the truth of the matter in his mind—the whole sad story—what he learned telepathically while freeing himself and another from the weeds. If I'd been less hysterical at the time, I'd have seen the truth earlier. Now, I see too much. I understand Glenn's loneliness, realize that Wolfred is just full of ideas tonight. Once again, I half regret buying him that damn storybook. If his latest trick works, we'll lose our triangle.

::Not quite, my lady. We cannot lose what we never had.::

::Glenn loved us enough to become human for us.::

:: Aye, but he loved a wayward fairy lass first.::

And never stopped, it appears. It's written all over him. If they hadn't quarreled ages ago, said lass wouldn't have seduced the wrong man in retaliation and been banished to the mortal world as a result—which ruined any chance of a reconciliation for her and Glenn. Such a crying shame because their only real problem was a minor ego clash.

Glenn feared she was a bit too flighty and daring even for

a fairy, and she balked at him—the older, wiser Gate Guardian with rules to enforce—trying to rein her in. He called her irresponsible and fickle, and she called him stuffy. Their romance sounds like the tales Ember has told me about her and Hiram's courtship. But, like Hiram and Ember, they'd have come to terms, I believe.

If the banishment hadn't separated them, love would have won out in the end. Which means Wolfred and I might not have met in our current incarnations, since it was a green-eyed exile's magic that brought us together this time around.

:: Every cloud has a silver lining,:: Wolfred quotes.

He's taking things aggravatingly well, isn't he? I feel like a selfish bitch by comparison. The romantic Dee thrills at the prospect of long parted lovers reunited. I care for Glenn enough to want him happy at any cost. But the bad Dee is thinking how much I'll miss him.

::There is no 'bad Dee.':: Wolfred reaches under the water and pulls me against his side. Bath heat bubbles about us, yet his heat warms me more. ::Sacrifices are supposed to be difficult. They'd not be worth much otherwise.:: The arm around me tightens.::This is just one more we'll give him. The last.::

"Glenn," he calls, "do you remember that story you were helping me read the other eve? The one about the frog prince?"

Glenn goes rigid. Not in the good way. *Oh shit*, his expression says.

"What about it?" he forces out through his lips.

Miss Kitty starts wriggling in his grasp. They both know what's coming. I see it in their eyes. Reunions can be scary things—especially when you haven't had one for over four thousand years.

"Oh, nothing much." Wolfred lounges back in the hot tub. Mr. Innocence. "I was just wondering if a kiss would work on a cat the same as it did on the frog."

"Yeah, that's what I figured you say." Glenn stares at the cat.

The cat stares at Glenn.

"Kiss her, for godssake!" I shout. Sorry. Patience isn't one of my virtues.

Glenn flinches as though my voice were a whiplash that stung him.

"Damn, it's worth a try, I guess." Looking nervous as a boy on his first date, he plants a small smooch on Miss Kitty's furry cheek.

And nothing happens.

"Shit," both he and I curse.

"Bloody hell, you call that a kiss?" Wolfred grabs my face between his hands and lays one on me that sizzles my hair roots and spins my eyeballs around in their sockets.

"Now that was a kiss," he tells Glenn.

"And this is a cat," Glenn drawls.

"Not if you kiss her right." Wolfred's so sure this will work. "Do it like you mean it."

"Mrrow." Is that an agreement? Miss Kitty bats her eyes in feline seduction. I swear she almost puckers her lips.

"Cute." Glenn gives her a small, sour grin. His breath heaves out in something between a sigh and a groan. "Oh, what the hell, at least she's not an amoeba."

He cradles her high in his arms, ducks his head, and touches his mouth to hers—then pulls back in nearly the same instant. "Just don't get any ideas, puss. I'm trying to break a curse, no more. It took me centuries to recover from your last blitzkrieg through my life. I don't have that kind of time any longer. If this works, I want to see the back of you. Understand? It'll be bye-bye, and you're outta here."

I don't believe him, but I'm afraid Miss Kitty does. Moisture fills her eyes.

"No crying either," Glenn growls, and presses home the kiss.

I'm blinded by a sudden brilliance, a burst of light like a hundred flashbulbs exploding. It takes a lot of blinking for my vision to clear. When I can focus again, I see the kiss continues, but deeper, harder—the breaking of a dam—four millennia of pent-up, long denied desires poured into one hot and thirsty embrace.

So much for "bye-bye."

In big, bold capitals, this kiss spells H-E-L-L-O.

Glenn stands naked by the tub, crushing an equally unclad Morgan La Fey against his chest, her alabaster skin a sharp contrast to his tan, her delicate, fey beauty the perfect complement to his masculinity. Her dark hair spills about them like a veil as they cling to each other, their mouths fused together. Morgan's soft moans mix with Glenn's guttural

groans. Such a beautiful couple, such pure passion. Such love.

My heart wrenches at the sight, but it's a sweet, tender ache. Now I know what Glenn experiences when he watches Wolfred and me. I will miss him, but with no regrets. It feels too good to see the emptiness inside him finally filled. Wolfred and I can't love him like Morgan can—because Glenn doesn't love us the way he loves her. That's obvious.

::Very. Mayhap 'tis what went wrong with his transformation. As much as he cared about us, he wasn't able to shift properly, for the core of his heart still belonged to Lady Morgan.::

Hmm, that makes sense. Wolfred's cleverness is on a roll tonight.

::Maybe he loved us because we reminded him of what he once had.:: I add.

::Aye, and has again. I find it most inspiring.:: A devil of a grin on his face, Wolfred pulls me into our own embrace. His lips brush mine in a light tease, a hint of things to come. Literally. ::Have you had enough bath? There's a grand bed inside that awaits us.::

I've had so much bath I feel like a dish of stewed prunes. Cool sheets and warm man sound divine. But what about Morgan and Glenn?

::They can have the tub.:: Wolfred nuzzles my neck.

Very funny.

A horrible thought suddenly stiffens me in his arms. Glenn and Morgan were both immortal when they first met. Now she is, he's not. Even though he seems healed... Um, more than

healed, actually. I'm staring at him over Wolfred's shoulder. Boy, he recovered fast. Glenn looks completely rejuvenated, and then some. But he's still human, right? He'll die someday, and Morgan will be left to spend the rest of eternity without him. Does that suck, or what? For thousands of years they've been parted, and when fate finally reunites them...

The irony here makes me want to scream.

Wolfred fastens a lip-lock on me to ensure I don't.

::If Glenn could turn human for us, perhaps Lady Morgan can do likewise for him,:: he mind-talks with the kiss. ::'Twould mean her death, too, in time, but give their souls a chance to find each other in future lifetimes—as ours do.::

Now there's an idea. Does falling in love with a mortal have the same effect on a fey as it does a fey-kin?

"No. It's the opposite, damn it," a male voice answers my thought.

Wolfred and I almost choke. We jerk out of our kiss to stare at Glenn as he lowers Morgan to her feet and steps away from her.

"You read my mind," I rasp out.

"Yeah, I have my powers back. How 'bout that?" Glenn's lips twist into a parody of a smile. "I seem to have metamorphosed again."

"To fey-kin?" My jaw drops. "I thought that was impossible."

"It is." His gaze slants from me to Morgan, accusation in the look. "I've been turned into a frigging fairy instead."

Morgan pouts. "Well, you don't have to sound so grumpy

about it. I couldn't have shifted you without your cooperation. You know how these things work."

She turns toward Wolfred and me. "It always happens one way or another in affairs of the heart between mortals and immortals. Has something to do with maintaining the Cosmic Balance...I think," Her brow furrows, "Whatever."

She flutters her hand in the air. "The fey-kin are a limited edition race. Once the originals were made, the blueprint was destroyed—the mold broken—so no more can be created by any means. Therefore, when a fey-kin and a human fall in love, the fey-kin turns human, since the human can't be shifted to fey-kin. Whereas, when a fairy becomes deeply, seriously involved with a mortal, we transform our lover into a fairy like ourselves."

"Why?" I ask, meaning why not the other way around.

"Because we *can*, of course." Morgan gives me one of those looks generally reserved for the dimwitted. "Good heavens, Dee, surely you don't expect a fairy to become human." She shivers at the thought. "No one gives up feydom if they can possibly avoid it."

Of course. I should have realized that. Stupid me.

Glenn glares at her, his hands fisted at his sides as though to keep them from ringing her neck. "It's traditional for the fairy to first *ask* the mortal if he or she will *accept* the change."

"A mere formality," Morgan fires back. "You shifted smoothly didn't you? That proves your acceptance," she declares. "The transformation won't happen unless the love

bond between mortal and fairy is strong and true," she explains to me. "Magic calls forth the shift, but love completes and seals it. Love *is* magic in and of itself, the greatest force there is. In essence, it's the *only* force. All magic begins and ends with love."

"But it can be twisted and ill-used by the unscrupulous and selfish," Glenn grits out through clenched teeth. "Hate is part of love. They're mirror images of the same power."

Morgan winces at his words, all the bravado knocked out of her. "You know I don't hate you, Glendel."

"I know your kind of self-centered love does just as much damage. I know what's over is over," he tells her. "Did it occur to you that there was a good reason why I was human?"

Oh, shit. He means Wolfred and me. But we don't want him to give up Morgan for us. Shit, shit, shit...

"I don't offer my love lightly, but when I do, it's forever," Glenn continues. "My love is *loyal*. If I make a commitment, I intend it to stick. I don't fly off with another or go skulking about *ancient Egypt* looking for cheap thrills the first time things hit a bump."

But that was thousands of years ago, for godssake. Morgan must have cut him to the quick when she fled from their quarrel to soothe her own anguish with a rebound affair. He's still bleeding. So is she.

Morgan stares at him like a wounded doe facing a huntsman's arrows, her emerald eyes wide and rimmed with tears. "I didn't mean to really leave you, Glendel. I was so young then...and hurt. I wanted to make you jealous. I thought

you'd come after me. When you didn't..." Her voice catches on a sob.

She shakes her head. Defeated. "I'm sorry. I've obviously thought wrong again. I...I'll help you return you to human if you wish. But we'll have to wait a bit. One shift on top of another could damage your system. In an hour? We ought to be able to manage it safely by then. It...it's all I can do to make amends."

"Yes, I think that would be best." Glenn folds his arms over his chest. Matter closed. "One hour, no longer—and no more tricks."

God, he sounds grim. And Morgan looks devastated. My heart twists for both of them. I can't believe Glenn's about to toss away their future for the sake of his pride and misguided loyalty. He must know Wolfred and I would gladly release him to a greater love, that we want only his happiness. I can't believe how fast the situation has deteriorated. Human, feykin, or fairy, men are all idiots, aren't they?

::Wolfred,:: I plead, ::we have to do something.::

:: Aye. Stay silent. They must settle this on their own.::

Say what? I'm not sure I like the tone of that reply.

::You don't have to like it, just obey it. A good lady defers to her lord's judgment.::

Since when? I realize Wolfred's upset over the situation, too, which is probably why he's being so stern. I realize he's from an era when males gave the orders. But I'm not. He doesn't usually pull medieval rank on me like this.

::'Tis high time I started then.::

::You are treading on thin ice,:: I warn. As much as I adore him, I have certain hot-button issues, and m'lord has just pushed one of them. I've never responded well to heavy-handed orders—not from anyone. And I'll be damned if I'll sit here quietly while Glenn and Morgan ruin their chances. Again.

::Hush!:: Wolfred hisses into my head. ::Or the next spanking you get will be with my belt and not my hand.::

::And the next sex you get from me will be when hell freezes over!:: Splashing water everywhere, I shove away from him and scramble out onto the deck.

Glenn and Morgan turn to stare. I ignore the former.

"So, Morgan, we have an hour to kill, huh?" I snatch a towel off a chair and start scrub-drying myself with a vengeance. "I don't know about you, but I could sure use a drink. Magic up some clothes for yourself and I'll drive us to the Honeydew Tavern."

"Not without Glenn and me, you won't." Wolfred reaches out of the tub.

I sidestep his grab, and leave him holding an empty towel. "Definitely without you. That's the whole point of this. We're escaping male egos."

"Uh-huh. And what are we supposed to do in the interim?" Glenn demands

"You could always find a couple of crowbars and try to pry your heads out of your butts," I suggest.

Well, he did ask.

Morgan's eyes meet mine in woman to woman empathy.

"How about a fey bar instead? There are lots on this side of the veil. I'm not the only expatriate fairy. We have quite a thriving community here, hidden among the mortals."

"Oh, shit," Glenn groans.

"Sounds fascinating," I say. "Can you magic up an outfit for me, too? I have no idea what to wear to a fey bar."

Morgan grins. "No problem. For the place I'm thinking of, we don't need clothes."

Uh-oooh...

She waves her hand, and the deck dissolves out from under my feet. Everything dissolves. Including us. The echoes of baritone curses follow us into the swirling mists of ethereal travel.

Whoosh-

The next thing I know, Morgan and I are standing in a vast, cavernous chamber with multicolored crystalline walls and ceiling. The pungent perfume of sorcery and sex steams the air. We're surrounded by rainbow sparkle and incandescent glow.

And naked bodies.

We seem to be in the middle of an orgy, in fact. I'm being groped up, down, front, back, and four ways from Sunday. Hands stroke up my thighs, pet my pussy, fondle my ass, squeeze my breasts...

"A friendly bunch, aren't they?" I yell to Morgan over the din of music and laughter.

"This is the hottest fey club in the mortal world—Merlin's Crystal Cave," she yells back. "It's Group Hump and Bump

Night."

I sort of guessed that. I'm swamped by lust. Unfortunately, it's not mine. Well, not enough of it, anyway. I wouldn't be me if I wasn't experiencing at least a little arousal from all the pawing. I'm hemmed in by magical creatures of all sizes and shapes. A dwarf in a pointed cap and nothing else is licking my navel. His long beard tickles my crotch. Eek. Two identical satyrs with horns, hooves, and wicked leers press in on either side of me.

"Hey, blondie, wanna dance?" the one on my left asks.

"I saw her first," his twin fusses.

"Boy, boys," a deep bass booms from behind me. "There's plenty of her for *all* of us."

I feel the touch of steely scales against my spine. A snaky snout nuzzles my neck. Ye gods, I think it's a dragon.

"I'm a shapeshifter, doll," he answers the thought. Hot breath singes my skin with the words. "But for parties, I always wear my beast. I got a bigger dick in dragon state." He bumps an armor plated nuclear warhead of an erection against my rear. "You'll love it. All humans do. Some of them even survive it."

"Morgaannn!" I holler.

"Sorry, guys, we're not here for the sex, just the booze." Morgan grabs my arm and yanks me out of the tangle. I almost trip over the dwarf as she drags me forward.

"Merlin's bartender makes an ass-kicking honey mead cocktail," she says while steering me through the throng to an empty booth in a far corner. "They serve them in holy grails.

Quite a religious experience."

Good. I'm already praying I make it home alive.

"Don't worry." Morgan slides into the side of the booth facing the dance floor and pulls me in after her. "A couple of knights to the rescue ought to be here any moment. I left a trail of fairy dust for Glendel to follow."

I should not be happy to hear this. After all, we *were* trying to escape Wolfred and Glenn. But my breath, of its own accord, wheezes out in relief.

"You don't mind then?" Morgan gives me a small, rueful smile. "I just couldn't let things end so easily, Dee. I know Glendel's angry with me. I know he cares deeply for you and Wolfred, but..."

"He's loved you a lot longer." I pat her hand. "It's okay. We want you two to be together. Wolfred and I have each other. We adore Glenn, but we don't need him the way you do—and he doesn't really need us, not if he has something better."

Which he does, if we can just get him to admit it.

Speaking of Wolfred, I wonder if he's forgiven my recent temper flare up as fast as I've forgiven his. We don't usually argue, so I'm a little uncertain on that score. I glance about the club, nervous and distracted by all the crazy activity.

"Morgan, are you sure they'll come after us?" This ploy didn't work the last time she tried it.

"No. Once, I was sure Glendel would follow me, and he didn't. Now, I only hope he will. I made a big mistake back then when I left him—but so did he by letting me go. We both

screwed up and suffered for it. If I'm repeating my mistake, it's mainly to give him the chance to *not* repeat his."

Bringing things full circle? Kind of curious logic. However, I think I understand her point. Will Glenn?

"We'll find out." Morgan chuckles, but with little humor, then puts two fingers in her mouth and whistles for service.

Instantly, a Tinkerbell sized sprite holding a miniscule order pad appears before our faces and hovers there like a hummingbird, her butterfly wings beating the air.

"Two grails and a nosh?" an itty-bitty voice chirps.

"Four," Morgan corrects. "We're expecting company. And if they don't show, I'll need the extra drinks for myself."

"Whatever you say, hon." The sprite scribbles the order, then pockets the pad in her frilly little froth of an apron and retrieves a tiny star tipped wand from behind her ear. *Poppop-pop-pop!* Four golden chalices brimming with a heady scented brew materialize on the booth's table.

I blink.

Morgan smirks. "Well, you didn't expect her to carry them here on a tray, did you?"

Another *pop*, and a big bowl of what looks like miniature, multihued potato chips manifest under my wondering eyes.

"Crisp fried flower petals," Morgan explains.

"Anything else?" Our winged waitress inquires.

Yeah, a new backbone. Mine has just melted at the sight of Wolfred and Glenn elbowing their way toward us through the gyrating mob. Unlike the rest of the hedonistic crowd, they've dressed for the occasion. Both look like sin-on-a-stick in black

leather slacks and studded vests. My mouth goes dry. In a room full of nudity, clothes become a seduction by contrast—that which you itch to peel away to discover the treasures beneath.

"Right, and two can play the game." Morgan waves her hand and attires us in white satin miniskirts and halter-tops.

"Sexy," the waitress chirps, and flies off.

"Very," a nearby male fey agrees. Tall, dark, and determined, he slides onto the bench across from us. My dragon friend joins him.

"I've been looking for you," lizard breath tells me.

Aren't I lucky?

"Look elsewhere," a husky baritone growls.

"Aye," another adds.

"One, two, *heave*—" they say together.

"Yeoowww—" dragon and fey squawk. Propelled by knightly muscles, the pair sail across the room. Whiz, crash!

Wow, that happened fast. Laughter bubbles out of me. I can't suppress it.

"Nice toss," I compliment Wolfred.

"What took you so long?" Morgan asks Glenn.

There's a wealth of meaning in those words. Is she talking minutes or millennia? What took you so long tonight...or four thousand years ago? You'd never guess her heart has been teetering on the brink of breaking. You'd never guess Glenn was the cause. She flutters her lashes at him—Miss Flirty Gerty—while he tries hard to fasten a scowl on his face. But his lips won't cooperate; they keep curving up at the corners.

"Grrr..." With a throaty grumble, he reaches across me, yanks her up out of the booth and into his arms.

Uh-huh. That happened fast, too. Correct me if I'm wrong, but wasn't it just a short time ago he was ready to send her packing? Now he's hugging her like he intends to never let go. Can I take this to mean he's had a sudden change of attitude? Why? Don't tell me Morgan's ploy worked.

"Okay, I'll not." Wolfred slides onto the bench next to me and captures my mouth with his. No quarter asked or given. This kiss is a genuine sensory assault. I gather he's not angry with me anymore.

::So it seems,:: he mind-talks. ::And, in truth, her trick did work. Not right away, though. Glenn was loath to pursue her till I pointed out that if his love is as loyal as he claims, he ne're should have turned his back on Lady Morgan at all. 'Twas her he'd first pledged his troth to, was it not?::

::An excellent point. But what happened to your insistence we stay out of the matter and let them settle it on their own?::

::It died a bitter death the instant you vanished. I couldn't track you without fey magic...and the only fey I had available was Glenn. I had no choice but to make him follow. Fortunately, he was easy to convince.::

No, shit? That proves he loves her, just as I knew! Forgive me for feeling smug.

::Gladly. But only if I can feel all of you feeling it.:: Wolfred fumbles a moment with my clothes, then gives up and rips them off.

I lose more outfits this way. He hasn't quite mastered the

mysteries of modern fasteners yet, and has little patience with them.

:: I've mastered zippers well enough.:: He demonstrates by unzipping his fly.

A gorgeous erection pops out and nudges my abdomen. However, I can think of better places for it.

::So can I.:: A smoky chuckle vibrates against me. ::Think you it might be snowing in hell?::

Ha-ha. I've been expecting a crack like that, actually. I fake a shiver. Brrr. ::Oh, I wouldn't be surprised if they're having a blizzard down there. I'll bet the whole damned place is frozen.::

::Good. Just so long as you're not.:: He deepens the kiss as his hands rove over me, strong and demanding, stirring instant arousal. I go wet between the legs.

Whoa, there's lots happening fast tonight, isn't there? Not that I'm complaining. I'm a little high, I think—dizzy from the energies, intoxicated by the rainbow lights, the magical sounds and smells. Dizzy with joy for Morgan and Glenn.

Dizzy with desire for Wolfred.

Hot and heavy, he presses me down lengthwise beneath him onto the bench, sandwiching me between hard man and...

Satin sheets?

Yikes, the booth has turned into a king-sized bed. Fey magic, obviously. But whose? Is this part of the general workings of the club, or the act of an individual?

::Who cares? Don't look a gift horse in the mouth.:: Wolfred grinds me into the mattress, digs his knees between

mine and pushes outward to spread me wide. With a solid thrust he slices me up the middle, rams his rod in to the hilt.

God, he's exquisite. A half gasp, half groan escapes me. My inner muscles clench around him. No matter how many times we make love I'll never get used to what Wolfred does to me. He stretches the boundaries of my existence, fills me body, mind, and soul. I melt in the man's heat.

"Mmm...I've been aching all night to be inside you," he whispers into my ear.

His hands burrow under me and clutch my ass, locking us tighter together, chest to chest, belly to belly, cock to cunt. I hug his shoulders and wrap my legs about his waist. We hold motionless a long, luscious moment, letting our thoughts and feelings merge, our breathing and heartbeats synchronize—suspended in the rosy glow between ethereal and erotic bliss.

This is something we've gleaned from Glenn, how to love slowly and deeply, instead of going at it like a couple of adrenaline crazed wildcats or wolves as was our usual wont. Yes, we still fuck rough and tumble, still revel in the hot, sweaty, and athletic like the sexual gymnasts we are. But we also vary our carnal dances with more complex rhythms, richer harmonies of motion. We've gained the gift of subtlety from Glendel Goodfellow. We'll be losing him soon now, but he leaves us with a lot.

"Aye. Each other." Careful and unhurried, with sultry finesse, Wolfred begins to move. One tiny increment at a time, he pulls out till just the head of his shaft remains. Then back in he drives with a sharp, smooth shove—only to repeat the

action again and yet again. An irresistible blend of soft and slow, hard and fast. Tremors of electric warmth rock me.

Bit by bit, we increase the tempo—together—build a volcano from the ground up, but in no rush to see it erupt. The sex is too delicious, all consuming. I could lie here with Wolfred forever, his muscular weight anchoring me in place, his chest hair rasping my breasts, his cock filling me. His mouth finds mine and we sink into a bottomless kiss. Skin beads with moisture, pulses race, and breath grows ragged.

Somewhere in the middle of it all, a small corner of my consciousness remembers where we are, Merlin's Crystal Cave, surrounded by a happy horde of loud and lusty fey folk. Some of them have gathered about the big bed to cheer us on. Some have crowded onto the bed with us.

Somehow I don't care.

I feel hands and lips on me besides Wolfred's, but it doesn't matter. Naked forms press close, caressing, licking, nipping. Fey fingers wander where they will and explore. We're caught in a crunch of hot bodies. They touch us and taste us, yet it registers only on a distant, cloudy level, adds to the sensual excitement like sex toys. Titillation with no strings attached. At the center of our world it's still only Wolfred and me. Everything is fuzzy and unreal, dreamlike, except for us.

We're bewitched, I suspect—drunk on fairy magic and our own lovemaking, riding the crest of a wild wave of community passion. As it breaks on the beach of ecstasy, Wolfred and I break with it—shatter apart into a million sparkling, orgasmic bits—then fall back together, sated and

secure, swept onward by some mystical tide. Hugging each other, we tumble through layer upon layer of swirling mists till we reach the black velvet bottom of *almost*-unconsciousness.

"Sleep...sleep..." I hear a voice whisper. *Glenn?* 

I feel the touch of his hand on my brow and struggle to open my eyes, but my lids seem to weigh ten tons apiece. I can't move. I don't know where I am or what's happening. Yet I know Wolfred's with me, so what else matters? I wonder, briefly, if I'm dying—but, honestly, I don't give a damn. Peaceful lethargy draws me farther into the soft, gentle dark.

"That's right, rest easy," Morgan's voice soothes. "When you awaken, this will all be but a dream."

"You'll remember none of it, which is as it should be," Glenn murmurs. "You and Wolfred will forget me, Lady Dee, but I'll never forget either of you." His lips brush mine. "Farewell, sweetheart. The blessings of the Universe go with you. And my love."

"And mine," Morgan says on a sigh. "You've lived a fairytale, my dear, but the best part is just beginning. You and your knight take good care of each other."

*Mmm*, *yes*, *always*. The black velvet covers me and I drift into deep slumber, wrapped in love and Wolfred's strong arms.

\* \* \*

"Is that it then?" Morgan La Fey sank into the warm

embrace of her lover. "We've cleaned up the mess in the college's relics room, erased Wicked and ourselves from the memories of Wolfred and Dee and the Sloanes, and altered reality. I'm exhausted."

"But happy, I hope." Glendel Goodfellow pulled her close. He stood head and shoulders above her petite form, but they fit together perfectly, Morgan thought.

She wound her arms about his waist and pressed her cheek against his solid chest. "You know I am. I'm just sorry we had to change so much."

Together, she and Glendel gazed at the bed in a downstairs guestroom of a large house outside a small town in Kansas. In the bed slept a young man and woman, the cause and center of all the changes.

"It was for their own protection and ease." Glendel kissed the top of her head. "They'd never have been able to enjoy a normal life as things were. For one thing, Sir Wolfred was more or less what today's humans term an 'illegal alien,' with all the hassles and dangers that go along with the title. For another, if it had been discovered who he really was—a medieval knight and a werewolf at that—he'd have been carted off for study like a lab animal. On top of which, he and Dee had learned far more about the Astral Realms than is safe for any mortal to know."

"Yes, you're right, of course." Morgan sighed. "It's just that I liked him the way he was."

Glendel chuckled. "So did I, my love, but his soul hasn't changed, and that's the core of him. He's still Wolfred, still

handsome, brave, gallant, strong, and true. He'll still look the same, have the same ideals, the same abilities—except for his lycanthropy. He won't be a werewolf any longer, but then he never wanted to be a werewolf in the first place. He'd learned to accept and manage his beast, but he'll be just as happy without it. For all other intents and purposes, he's the same man he always was...with a few minor modifications."

"You call giving him a new background minor?" Morgan pushed away to glare at a meddling, former fey-kin.

He pulled her back into the embrace. "Think of it as a bit of internal shapeshifting. If a fey-kin can become human, and a human can become fairy, why can't a man of the past become one of the present? All I did was create a parallel reality regarding certain events and lay it over the previous one. Both realities are equally valid, but Wolfred and Dee will remember only the latest version.

"Which is the one where, instead of Sir Wolfred of Camelot, we now have the eminent, young English archeologist, Dr. Wolfred Knight of the British Museum in London." Morgan's eyes crossed in the struggle to comprehend.

"Yeah. Dr. Knight's specialty is the Camelot era." Glendel grinned. "All of which solves their financial worries, too. This way, Dee can return to the archeology field, and they can work together—maybe on finding and excavating the original, true Camelot. I have a feeling Wolfred will know just where to dig." His grin broadened. "Oh, and instead of meeting during a fantasy adventure in the fey lands, Wolfred and Dee met

while he was touring the U.S. on holiday. Specifically, they met during 'Camelot Days' at Crompton's Craft Show and Flea Market in west Texas—which was where the original fantasy adventure started, at any rate. Everything make sense now?"

"No. But please don't explain anymore. I'm getting a horrid headache," Morgan moaned.

"Not on our first night together in four thousand years, you're not."

Hoisting her up on her toes, Glendel landed a kiss on her that blistered lips and turned her insides to mush. She collapsed against him, dizzy and panting, when it was through.

"How's your headache?" he asked.

"What headache?" she mumbled into his chest. Heavens, he felt... he felt... Um, what was better than marvelous?

"You," he answered her thought.

Morgan tilted back her head to gaze into eyes dark as midnight and full of sultry promise. Full of passion. His arms tightened around her, strong and sure. Loyal. Arms that would hold on forever, she was certain.

"Wolfred and Dee will be all right, my love. They have a grand life ahead of them." A delicious smile lit Glendel's face. "And so do we."

With the words, two fairies vanished into the ethers, leaving behind them a slumberous, soul-mated couple who'd awaken to a new day and a new life, blessed by much love and the sparkle of magic.

## MIMI RISER

Mimi Riser has been an actress, model, clown, belly-dancer, jewelry designer, editor and publisher, but her first and foremost love is writing. She specializes in offbeat tales where laughter reigns and good always triumphs—but she makes her characters really work for their happy endings. Her books have been said to read like a snowball rolling downhill. gathering size and speed as it goes. But if you think her stories are crazy, you should see her life. Once devout city people, she and her husband exchanged the hustle and bustle of Philadelphia a lifetime or two ago for the natural, rugged splendor of the rural southwest. They were looking for a simpler way of life. They got it. It ended up being so "natural and rugged," they spent their first six and a half years there in a hand-built house with dirt floors, no electricity and no plumbing. This has proved helpful for her historicals as she can now write about the "olden days" from personal experience. They have since rejoined the 21st century and enjoy life on the open range with a house full of eccentric cats and a large, wacky dog who thinks she's a cat, too. Mimi has had five novels published to date along with numerous articles and short stories. Her historical romance, I Do, was a "Top Ten Finisher" in the mammoth Preditors & Editors Readers Poll of 2003, and her contemporary comedy, Every Jack Needs His Jil, won the poll the following year for the "Best Mainstream Novel of 2004," Samantha White and The Seven

*Dwarves* is her first erotic-romance and was one of the winners in Amber Quill's 2007 Heat Wave contest.

To learn more about Mimi and her writing, please visit her website:

http://www.mimiriser.com

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