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First published in 2009

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Time and Again

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ISBN: 978-1-60088-458-0 Cover Artist: Bree Bridges

Editor: Devin Govaere

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Chapter One

Camden MacGregor's heart leaped when he saw his beloved Therese step from the silver town car. He'd spent a lifetime searching for her. A hundred lifetimes.

He chuckled and leaned closer to the second floor, leaded glass window to watch as she pushed her glasses up her nose and made a slow circle, taking in the scenery. She was nothing like he'd expected. But then, they never were...as the journals made plain.

She moved to the back of the car with Charles, her long gray skirt blowing in the chilly highland wind. Pulling her thin sweater tighter around her delicate shoulders, she pushed her waist-length black hair away from her face. She spoke with Charles, looking as though she argued with him.

Although Camden couldn't hear her, he remembered every nuance of her sweet voice—its soft, west American drawl, the slight huskiness that had slipped in when she'd said his name the first time—the only time—he'd touched her.

Since their meeting in Washington D.C. a few months before, he'd researched her. She was nearing forty, had married and divorced in her twenties, no children and no living family. And nearly every museum in the world sought her because she was the best document preservationist on the face of the earth.

He cared not about her past. Only her future—their future—mattered. But he'd needed to know everything about her that he could find so he could persuade her to come to his

remote castle in the Scottish highlands and spend time alone with him. So he could claim her as his own.

Therese, with eyes the color of Scottish bluebells and hair as dark and rich as a moonless night, was his twin flame. He'd recognized her the moment he saw her. This time, things would be different. Unlike his ancestors, he planned to spend a long life with his other half. His soul mate.

As she pulled her small blue suitcase from the boot of the car and brushed Charles away, Camden turned from the window and headed out of his study.

His biggest challenge, as he saw it, would be to convince Therese of their connection and prove to her he wasn't crazy.

* * * *

Teri Whitmore couldn't believe she was here. Of all the locales around the world she'd ever visited, the Scottish highlands hadn't been one of them. She feared she would freeze to death, but the beauty of the landscape literally stole her breath—or perhaps the wind accomplished that feat.

As Mr. MacGregor's aged driver led her across the drive to the door of the refurbished, thirteenth century castle, her low heels clicked on the smooth cobblestones. The dark gray clouds hung low overhead, and she could hear Loch Ness' waves battering the shore on the other side of the keep.

Her heart perched itself firmly in her throat, and tears stung her eyes. She loved this place, although she'd never laid eyes on it until five minutes ago. Yet, something seemed so familiar about it. Most likely from all the research she'd done about Quhartine and its owner.

The wind whipped around her with a biting force that stung her cheeks and blew her hair across her face. The castle should have seemed cold and looming with its dark gray stone, stark lines, and high tower, but it didn't. She'd never felt such a sense of welcome anywhere.

The tall, solid wooden doors swung open to reveal none other than Camden MacGregor. Her ankle twisted slightly on a rough stone on the stair, she stumbled, and dropped her small suitcase. She would have fallen on her face at his feet if the handsome businessman hadn't lunged forward and caught her against his wide, hard chest.

God, take me now! she prayed, unbelieving that for a second time in as many meetings with the man she wound up in his arms because of her clumsiness.

He smelled of wood smoke and clean male flesh. A scent remembered from a dream. Elemental. His cashmere sweater was soft against her cheek, so warm. She wanted nothing more than to bury her nose against him and breathe him in.

His deep chuckle rushed through her, making her skin prickle. "Now, there, lassie," he said, his voice no more than a soft rumble against her ear. "We must stop meeting this way."

She jerked back, away from the comfort of his thickly muscled arms, righted her glasses, and brushed her hair from her face. "I'm so sorry, Mr. MacGregor. My heel must have caught on the..."

His smile was so disarming she lost her train of thought. Straight white teeth, sparkling green eyes, and beautifully tanned skin. *Oh*, *my*...

"Come in, lass, before ye catch yer death."

And his accent, she thought on a sigh. Sean Connery, eat your heart out.

She turned to lift her bag, but Charles stood behind her holding it, a slight grin tipping his lips and making his ruddy face wrinkle rather endearingly. He was probably trying not to laugh at her, she thought, and pushed her glasses up her nose. *Oh-for-two for Teri*.

Why had Mr. MacGregor hired her for this amazing opportunity? She'd spilled her drink on him the last time they met. Red wine right down the front of his white tuxedo shirt.

"Come in, come in," he urged, stepping away from the doors and holding his hand out in welcome. "You must be near frozen standing out there with only a sweater. I've got a hot meal prepared in front of the fire."

Food! Her stomach rumbled. It seemed as if it had been days since she'd last eaten. Heck, she'd been so long in transit she didn't even know what day it was anymore. Airsickness was her plague, and she made sure she flew on an empty stomach.

She stepped into the warm interior of the keep, and her eyes went wide. She gasped. A tingle of recognition skittered over her skin, raising goose bumps on her arms. Deja vu in its finest. Her tummy fluttered.

In her mind flickered a picture of how it had looked hundreds of years ago, without the heavy tapestries to warm the cold, stone walls, without the rich, white and gray marble flooring. The hall was magnificent now but had once served

as a gathering place for well-trained Scots warriors fighting for their land, their people.

"Laird MacGregor," she whispered.

"You remember?"

Teri jerked back to the present and turned wide eyes on Camden MacGregor. "Remember?" she asked, her voice little more than a whisper. She shook off the eerie sensations coursing through her. This wasn't the first time she'd felt a certain...recognition...to a building or piece of land, but she brushed it off as years of study.

"I read up on the Clan MacGregor before accepting this position, Mr. MacGregor. I'm sorry." She pushed her glasses up her nose and flicked her hair over her shoulder. "Fanciful imaginings of a woman who spends too much time reading about history and too little time experiencing it." She tried to laugh it off, but a chill skittered down her spine.

His rich, emerald eyes watched her with an intensity that made her more than a little nervous. From the moment he'd said her name as she stood behind a marble pillar in the ballroom, trying desperately not to be seen or spoken to by anyone, she felt as if she'd known him her entire life.

But that was silly. He was a Scottish businessman, and she spent ninety percent of her time in the basements of museums. Except for the symposium at the Smithsonian, she would have never had an opportunity to meet such a wealthy, gorgeous man.

Too much fantasy, she told herself now. A healthy imagination that let her fall into the lives of the long-dead people she studied.

Mr. MacGregor's expression softened, and a warm smile spread over his lean face. "Of course, lass," he said. "Please, follow me."

She turned to look for her luggage and Charles, but he was nowhere to be seen. She hadn't even heard him leave the room after he closed the doors.

"Charles took your bag to your rooms above stairs," Mr. MacGregor said as he led the way across the wide room to the table in front of the massive fireplace. "I've put you in my mother's solar. It has a gorgeous view of the gardens, though of course this time of the year nothing is blooming."

He held her seat for her, and she sat down. The scent of roast beef and potatoes hit her hard, making her mouth water.

"Thank you," she said softly, and set her purse on the floor next to her. She glanced at the fireplace to see that it had been converted to gas rather than wood burning. Warmth seeped into her, and she sighed.

Mr. MacGregor took the seat next to her at the long table and smiled at her. He lifted the lid on the silver serving tray in front of her, revealing a thick slice of roast and roasted red potatoes. "I hope the meal is up to your standards, Therese. I have stocked the pantry with American fare for your stay."

"Thank you, Mr. MacGregor, but I don't wish to put you out. And please, call me Teri."

He chuckled, and she closed her eyes for a moment, savoring the rich sound. "Then I insist you call me Camden."

Camden. "You are named after your ancestor, Laird MacGregor?"

He nodded once and lifted the lid to his own plate. "Aye. My mother was a bit of a romantic. Please, help yourself."

She didn't need to be asked twice. Teri dug into her food, nearly moaning at the succulent, tender roast. She could get used to this. How nice to have servants to prepare your meals and serve them to you. She sighed and speared a small potato with her fork. This was nothing like the bologna sandwiches and stale potato chips she normally ate for lunch back home.

Home... She swallowed her bite and glanced at Camden. He watched her with an amused grin. His dark brown hair held glints of silver at his temples, and laugh lines accented his eyes and mouth. Not only had she read up on Quhartine Castle and the Clan MacGregor, she'd also looked up this man. No way was she taking a job from someone who might be an ax murderer...or worse.

He was forty-six years old and a millionaire many times over. He'd been born into a wealthy family but had made his personal fortune in real estate—enough to purchase back the family keep and rebuild it over the last ten years. He'd never been married. His father passed away the year before he bought Quhartine, and he lived here alone with his mother until her death two years ago.

Teri cleared her throat. They were alone, except for his driver, Charles, who she'd learned through asking the right people the right questions, was also his butler. "Tell me why you bought a falling down castle and decided to live in it."

His smile could make a lesser woman swoon. She fought the urge to sigh like a girl with her first crush.

"Would ye not wish to live in such a grand old buildin' if given the choice?"

She conceded the point with a nod. It would be wonderful to live here.

"The Quhartine history dates back to over three thousand years, as ye know, I'm sure."

Again, she nodded then reached for her glass of...beer? She took a sip. Ale, she decided. Dark and rich. Delicious.

"This land was fought over by just aboot every invadin' peoples through history. Since recorded time, the Norse, and then the English. Quhartine was built in the thirteenth century by my ancestors as a stronghold. What better location to keep an eye on intruders coming in from the sea, and also the glen."

"But the MacGregor Clan only held the land for a few hundred years," she interjected. "And then you were run out and many of the clan captured or slaughtered by the English."

"Aye. We were, lass." He took a deep swallow from his glass of ale. "Many of our clan, especially the women, were taken to England and enslaved as indentured servants."

Teri licked her lips and sat back in the chair, her mind churning with questions. "Then how do you come to have these documents you wish to have me preserve? You said they date back centuries and that they are written journals of your ancestors."

Camden tipped his head to the side. "I do believe, my dear Therese, that I will not divulge all of my family's secrets at once." He grinned at her and lifted his glass. "Tomorrow morning I will take you to the vault, and you can look over

the journals. Perhaps some of your answers will be found within the ancient pages."

Teri wrinkled her brow and studied the humor dancing in his eyes. She did love a mystery, and Camden MacGregor seemed to be the most intriguing one she'd ever come across. She couldn't wait to get her hands on those journals.

"Finish your meal, lass, and then I'll show ye to your rooms so you might rest. Tomorrow is soon enough to get down to business."

She was tired—exhausted—from hours of traveling, but for two months, ever since Camden sent her the job proposal, she'd been dying to see the journals he said had never been viewed by anyone outside of his family.

Reaching across the table, Camden lifted the lid to another platter. "Dessert?" he asked, holding out a plate of cookies. "My grandmother's shortbread recipe. Guaranteed to win the heart of..." His words faded away when she raised an eyebrow and put on her most stern expression.

"I hope you do not have seduction on the brain, Mr. MacGregor. I am here for a job, not a tryst."

He schooled his expression, but she still saw humor in those gorgeous eyes. "Win the heart of the most finicky palate, is what I was going to say, Ms. Whitmore." He lifted a cookie from the plate and held it out to her like a challenge. "Go on. If the lass shall not love me, at least she can love my baking."

Her face heated with embarrassment as she took the cookie and bit into it. It crumbled on her tongue, and the sinfully buttery treat melted in her mouth. Oh, Lord, she

thought, he baked this? She glanced at her mostly eaten meal. Had he cooked the entire luncheon? She'd assumed servants, yet other than Charles, she'd seen none.

If she were the type to entertain any thoughts of love, she could easily see herself falling at his feet and begging for his affection. Not only looks and charm and more money than God, but he could cook as well?

Love had passed her by years ago, though, and affairs only led to heartache. She'd learned her lesson well.

Professionalism was all she had now, and she clung to it like a life raft. Wrapped it around her to keep her warm.

"Thank you, Mr. MacGregor," she said after she swallowed the sweet treat and sipped more of the ale. "I'm sorry if that sounded curt, but I..." I'm lusting after your gorgeous body and wondering what it looks like under that sweater and those pressed slacks.

"I understand. Ye're here for a job, not a tryst. I have no intention of foisting meself on a lass who does not wish for me company." His grin was wicked. "I shall keep the teasing to meself from now on."

"I meant no offence. I'm sure you have many women offering themselves..." Why would the floor never open and swallow her when she needed it?

He laughed.

Oh, God, I sound like an imbecile.

"Shall I show you to your rooms?"

She nodded and dropped her napkin next to the plate. "Please." *Please get me out of here before I say anything else stupid.* She reached down for her purse, bumped the table,

and her half-drunk glass of ale toppled over onto her plate. She grabbed for it and, in the process, her elbow hit his glass. The dark beer splashed over the front of his off-white sweater and down the crotch of his tan slacks.

"I'm sorry," she said in a rush as she grabbed her napkin and tried blotting his sweater. "Oh, God, I'm so sorry. I'm such a klutz. I keep ruining your clothes."

His big, warm hand closed over hers. Bolts of lightning seemed to zip through her, and she stopped moving. Her heart beat as if it would jump right out her chest.

"'Tis but clothing, lass. Nothing to get your knickers in a bunch over."

She burst out laughing at his terminology and slowly pulled her hand from beneath his. She bit her lip to keep it from trembling as she took a steadying breath. What the heck was it about this man that made her react so strongly to his touch? Why, oh why did she have the urge to lean into him, breathe him in? Why were her heart racing, her hands shaking, and her body pulsing with a need she hadn't felt in years?

"I'm sorry," she said again, and pushed her glasses up her nose. Careful this time, she leaned over and picked up her purse. "I think I'm overtired from the trip."

Camden's smile seemed to be filled with... God, she didn't know. He looked like a father smiling down at a child who has just done something incredibly cute and stupid. Like eaten a mud pie.

"I'll show you to your rooms," he said as he stood. "You'll feel better after a nap, I'm sure."

* * * *

Therese had to be the sweetest woman he'd ever met. She blushed like an innocent lass when she was embarrassed, yet there was no missing the flame of passion in those big blue eyes. She might deny their connection, but he knew she couldn't hold out forever. She was scheduled to be here a month. He'd win her over in that time, no matter how much she protested now.

Camden pushed open the door to the solar and led her inside.

"Oh, it's beautiful," she said as she spun a full circle, her eyes alight with precious wonder.

He'd lit the gas fire just before her arrival, so the room was cozy warm. The lowered light of the chandelier overhead added to the warmth, even though outside the wind raged on and the low, gray clouds clung to the tops of the nearby hills. The four-poster bed and its red and green tartan down quilt had been his mother's choice.

His mother was the one who had convinced him to seek his mate when he'd become restless with his life. For ten years, ever since moving into Quhartine, he'd sought her out. But where does one find their twin flame?

In the most improbable of places, he reminded himself. When he'd decided to seek out Therese Whitmore to preserve his ancestors' journals, he'd had no idea she would be the *one*. But as all the journals plainly state, there's no mistaking the surge of power, of lust, of hope and dreams that overtake one's body when soul mates touch for the first time.

"Through there," he said, pointing to a door on the other side of the room, "is the washroom. You have yer own tub and shower. All up-to-date, I assure you. And through there..." He pointed to another door that stood open. "Is an office with phone, fax, and computer with Internet access."

She nodded, but her back was toward him, so she hadn't seen him point. She stared out the window. The gardens stretched from the back of the keep to the edge of the cliff. Beyond lay Loch Ness.

"Have you ever seen it?" she asked, her voice soft.
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Chapter Two

"It?" he inquired as he stepped up behind her to look over her shoulder. Her soft floral scent invaded his senses, and he closed his eyes for a moment, savoring. His body tightened, and blood rushed to his groin at an alarming rate.

"Nessie." She turned and looked up at him. "Do you believe it exists?"

He smiled down at her and clenched his fists at his side to keep from reaching out to stroke her alabaster skin. "I wouldn't be a good Scotsman if I didn't believe."

She laughed. "And have you seen it?"

He tipped his head to the side. "Possibly."

She raised her eyebrow at him, her smile so sweet on her pretty, pink lips. "Possibly?"

He nodded. "On stormy days like today, if you watch the water, between the waves sometimes you can see...something."

She turned back to the window and leaned over the sill, her nose practically touching the glass. "If you stare at anything too long, you can see things that aren't really there."

"Aye," he whispered, leaning a little closer to her, feeling her body's warmth, yet careful not to touch. He didn't want to spook her. He couldn't take the chance of her leaving before he had a chance to convince her. "But sometimes it takes concentration to see what is right in front of you."

She made a soft sound that could have been an agreement. "The history books say Quhartine is said to be haunted. Do you believe in ghosts, Mr. MacGregor? Have you seen any?" She turned and looked up at him, her blue eyes so beautiful, so deep, he knew he could drown in them.

"Are you a ghost hunter, also, Ms. Whitmore?"

She grinned and sidestepped him, moving into the center of the spacious room. She turned another slow circle, her gaze skittering over the heavy oak table nearby and the tartan-patterned tapestries covering the walls. "I'll not deny feeling a presence sometimes." She turned back to him, and her grin turned impish. "You do know the Smithsonian is haunted, don't you?"

He gave a nod. "I've heard as much. Have you seen it for yourself?"

She shrugged. "I've heard footsteps when I've been there late at night, alone."

"And did it frighten you?"

She covered a yawn with long, delicate fingers. Then she pushed her glasses up her nose with her index finger; an endearing habit of hers. "Kind of," she answered. "But I've been intrigued by ghost stories my entire life. I don't think I'd mind seeing a couple, and what better place than a thirteenth century Scottish castle?"

He chuckled and shook his head. "My room is just across the corridor if any spooks bother you."

She grinned and sat down on the edge of the bed. "I'll keep that in mind, Mr. MacGregor."

He headed for the door, knowing he must get away from her before he offered to tuck her in...and join her. "The kitchen is well stocked with food if ye get hungry. It's the door under the stairs in the hall. I'll have supper ready at seven tonight."

She nodded. "Thank you." She yawned again.

"One more thing," he said as he held the door in one hand. She raised her eyebrows at him.

She raised her eyebrows at him

"You were to call me Camden."

She smiled and nodded. "Okay."

He gave her a nod and slipped out the door, gently shutting it behind him. Leaning against the smooth wood, he let out a slow breath. How was he going to manage to keep his mind, body, and soul from reacting so strongly to her? She'd been in his home less than an hour, and the ache to take her, possess her, sink deep into her moist heat and claim her as his was so overpowering that he wondered how he'd been able to contain himself.

With a slight shake of his head, he pushed away from her door and the temptation behind it, and went across the corridor to his rooms where he changed out of his stained sweater and slacks. He chuckled as he dumped them in the hamper. She did tend to become a lummox around him. He shouldn't be proud of the fact, but he'd done enough checking on her to know she was nothing short of professional, and there'd never been any sign that her clumsiness extended to her work. She was the best in her field.

He pulled on a pair of jeans and a flannel shirt before heading back down to the hall and gathering up the dirty

dishes. She'd eaten a lot. He liked a woman with a healthy appetite. Hell, he'd like her no matter what she did.

He pushed through the kitchen door and set the dishes in the sink. He had a turkey already slow cooking in the oven, and he'd need to start the potatoes in a couple of hours.

Charles came in from outside, using the kitchen's side door. "So, ye think she's really the one?" He stomped his boots on the mud mat, then peeled off his rubber gloves.

"It's rainin' out there, man. Have you no sense when it comes to that car?"

Charles laughed. "A clean car is—"

"—next to godliness," Camden finished with a shake of his head as he loaded the plates into the dishwasher. "So ye've said on more than one occasion."

"Well, is she, boy?" Charles hung his rain slicker in the corner on a coat tree and then sat in the chair near the door to take off his galoshes.

"Aye. She's most definitely the one." He couldn't help but picture her in his mind. She was tall and willowy, and that long, shiny hair had him ready to beg for the chance to run his fingers through it.

"Seems a bit flighty to me, and she wouldn't even let me carry her bags. American women and their need for independence. Why can't they let a man take care of 'em?" Charles shrugged and wandered to the counter to pour himself a mug of tea from the kettle. "But if ye say she's the one, then who am I ta argue."

"I knew ye should have come to the states with me. You'd be surprised what an independent female can do for a man." Camden wiggled his eyebrows and grinned.

Charles scowled at him over the rim of his mug. "I'm only fifteen years older than ye, boy. So I suggest you watch yer mouth. Won't be long 'til you're in me shoes."

Camden laughed as he dried his hands on a dishcloth. "Old and crotchety? Is that what yer shoes do to ye? Perhaps we'll head to the city to find ye something that fits."

"Ye have a mean streak in ye, boy. Surely you do." Charles laughed and clapped him on the shoulder. "Why don't ye get some work done? I'll keep an eye on supper."

"Thanks." Camden headed toward the door, but then stopped. "Do you think Mum was yours?"

Charles set his mug on the granite countertop and sighed. "I dunno, Cam. I loved her with all me heart. You know that." Camden nodded.

"I miss her. I miss her more than I ever thought possible. And I pray ev'ry day that she's found peace."

"I'm sure she has," Camden said, sorry he'd brought up the subject. "You were good to her. You made her happy in her last..."

Charles nodded. "Get yer work done. I know ye won't be doing much now that yer lady is here."

Camden pushed through the door and jogged up the stairs to his study. He sat down and turned on his computer, but work wasn't what filled his mind.

Charles was still the stodgy old goat he'd always been. His sense of humor was a little off-color, and where he found the

dirty jokes he told during their late-night talks over glasses of fine Scot whisky, Camden never knew, but ever since his mother's sudden death from a heart attack two years ago, the man had never been the same.

It hadn't been until the funeral, and seeing how deeply Charles grieved, that Camden realized their relationship had moved beyond mistress and servant. Not that he should have been surprised. He'd been spending most of his time working abroad in New York, Los Angeles, London, and Paris. Two people of the approximate age and opposite gender, alone together for months on end... Well, after the life she'd spent with his father, how could he blame her for finding comfort with someone gentle and loving?

Since Charles began working for him as his driver nearly twelve years ago, the man had been more than his employee, even more than his friend. He was the father Camden had always dreamed of having.

His own father had been distant and unfeeling. A dreadful man who cared for no one or nothing besides the almighty dollar. His mother had learned of the ancestral diaries not long after they married nearly fifty years ago. She firmly believed, as time went on and the uptight man she'd married became even colder toward her, that the reason for his aloofness was that he never found his own twin flame.

Leaning back in his leather executive chair, he turned and stared out at the windswept glen, at the weeping clouds.

Generations of their family had never found the *one*. Their soul mate, their twin flame. And though he firmly believed every single person born to this earth had one, his case was

special. His family lineage was special. They had the ability to remember, or at least *feel*, parts of their past lives.

He was a reincarnation of his ancestor, Laird MacGregor, and had lived even more lives than that, both before and after MacGregor. As had his Therese. And now, after centuries, they were born in a time where distance—she in America, him in Scotland—didn't matter. They'd still been brought together by whatever higher being existed to urge lovers together.

He never questioned the stories from his father. He'd been brought up to believe, so he did. Not until he met his Therese did he *truly* believe.

He skimmed his hand over his jaw. He'd found his twin flame, but even after Therese read the journals...would she accept the truth?

* * * *

Teri jerked awake on a groan and rolled to her side, slid her hand inside her panties, and flicked her clit with her middle finger to prolong the orgasm her midnight lover had started.

Turning her face into the pillow, she sobbed out her release while at the same time pressing her free hand against her aching breasts.

As the tide of the orgasm receded, she sucked in deep breaths while tears stung her still-closed eyes. "Go, away," she whispered. "I don't want you here."

Of course, there was no one to answer. She was alone.

The faceless lover who haunted her dreams came to her whenever she found herself attracted to another man, as if he were jealous and had to reassert his hold over her. A hold that had ruined her marriage and every subsequent sexual relationship she'd had her entire adult life.

No man could live up to her midnight lover.

"Fuck," she whispered and rolled to sit up on the edge of the bed. He wasn't even real! He had no face in her dreams, always in shadow. She only *felt* him.

She groaned. He had hands that made her come every time she dreamt of him. Lean fingers that toyed her into orgasm. A mouth that ate at hers with a skill that could turn her into a mindless nymphomaniac within the span of a breath.

He seemed so damn *real* in her dreams. She felt the heat of his body against hers, the moistness of his mouth on her nipples, the length and breadth of his cock as he pumped into her, rendering her senseless.

Teri scrubbed her hands over her face. This is ridiculous. She wasn't complaining about the orgasms. Lord knew she didn't have enough of those in her life. But she preferred to have them on her time, when she wanted them with a living, breathing, hot-blooded man—not that that had ever happened. But she detested that they were foisted on her by a dream because she spent too much time imagining what it would be like to be screwed senseless by Camden MacGregor.

Standing up, she stretched and headed for the bathroom connected to her bedroom. She flipped on the water in the tub and then stood at the sink to brush her teeth.

Was it so much to ask her subconscious to let her have a few fantasies of her own? Couldn't she be allowed to daydream about the sexy Scotsman without throwing the midnight lover in her face...into her body?

She stripped out of her nightshirt and panties and stepped under the thundering spray of the shower. She knew better than to mix business and pleasure. She'd never had a personal relationship with anyone she worked with. But that didn't mean she wasn't a healthy, red-blooded, liberated woman who had yearnings and needs like any other.

And Camden, with his body of a Greek god and a voice that made her tingle all over, was prime fantasy material.

Four years ago, she'd put her longings for husband and family aside. She'd met a wonderful man—a philosophy professor at Johns Hopkins—and she'd fancied herself in love. Until after three months of dating when they wound up in bed together.

The same outcome had happened four times before. The men were all well educated, handsome, interesting. Men she could carry on conversations with. A couple even had a good sense of humor. But as soon as the relationship became intimate, she knew she couldn't carry on with them. Sexual satisfaction was not to be found with any of them. Ever. And some had tried very hard to please her.

The pounding water eased her tensed muscles, and she lathered her hair with shampoo. She breathed in the aroma of berries and flowers swirling in the steam around her.

The only relationship that truly hurt, though, was when her marriage had disintegrated. She'd been young, and he'd been

her first lover. They were both students at Yale when they met—she a history major, he a mathematician. From the first time they had sex, she'd known something was wrong, but she'd brushed it off, believing that eventually they would both learn how to please one another.

On her wedding night, after another round of sex that had left her feeling hollow inside, her midnight lover made his first visit. She'd found sexual gratification only in her dreams when her husband, asleep beside her, had done everything in his power to arouse her.

She rinsed her hair then rubbed in conditioner.

Her marriage lasted all of two years. She'd even sought counseling in that time only to discover that other than her strained relationship with her husband, she was a fairly normal, well-adjusted woman. So she'd tried sex therapy, but nothing had helped. By the end of two years, her husband had become bitter toward her, and she hated forcing herself to be intimate with him.

Since then, she tried to never let herself become too involved with a man before she had sex with him. And invariably, within a couple of weeks after their first sexual encounter, the relationship ended.

So, after her Johns Hopkins professor, she swore off men. Relationships. Hopes for a future that included a husband and children.

Leaning back into the spray, she rinsed her hair once again and sighed. Enough living in the past, she told herself as she grabbed up her bar of rose-scented soap and lathered her body. She sucked in a breath when she brushed her hand

between her thighs. Still sensitive, it wouldn't take much to find another release.

No. She hurried through the rest of her shower and shut off the water. Her midnight lover could just crawl back under whatever rock he'd been hiding under the past couple of years. It was none of his business if she wanted to lust after the sexy Scotsman. None of his business if she wanted to imagine Camden sharing her bed and making love to her. Bringing her fulfillment as no living, breathing man ever had.

She refused to let her midnight lover overtake her life. She wasn't going to actually sleep with Camden. "So you can just go away," she said in a fierce whisper as she swiped the soft tartan-patterned towel over her damp skin. "You will *not* control my life."

Shit. He did control her life, didn't he? He'd made her give up her dreams of a family of her own.

Narrowing her eyes as she gazed at her foggy image in the mirror over the sink, she shook her head. "That was my choice. You hear me?" Her choice to keep from hurting any more wonderful men who didn't deserve to be stuck with a woman who couldn't let herself fully love them in return.

After dressing and braiding her hair in a single fat French braid, Teri took the time to examine the office Camden had set up for her. The computer was new and state of the art. She could see that Camden had followed her instructions to a T. When he'd offered her the job of preserving his family journals, she'd suggested he use the services of a closer museum to help him. One that had all the equipment needed at hand.

He'd asked for a list of supplies she'd need, so she gave him one. She had been curious to see how serious he was about what he wanted. Less than a month later, she received an email stating that all the equipment she'd requested had been delivered and set up.

The wonders of being stinking rich, she thought as she ran her hand over the antique desk. She shook her head and leaned in closer to examine the fine wood grain. "Damn," she whispered. It was in perfect condition. Neoclassical Louis XVI. Brown leather top, three drawers, and gilded bronze escutcheons and mounts. One extension board on each side, four straight legs in gilded bronze sabots. A fine veneer showing superb French woodwork. This little writing desk would fetch at least ten grand at a Christie's auction. Possibly more.

And Camden used it for a computer desk?

Teri sighed and went back into her bedroom. Taking a closer look at the small table under the window, she realized it was also Louis XVI. The bed, though, was modern. Handmade and probably cost a small fortune in itself, but a modern four-poster made to look like an antique.

If one room contained such riches, she wondered what treasures the rest of the keep held.

She wasn't here for the furniture. She wanted to get her hands on the journals. She shoved her glasses up her nose and headed for the door. The clock next to the bed said it was after eight, so she hoped her host was up and ready to let her get to work. Besides, she was starving. Camden hadn't

awoken her for supper last night, though she'd definitely needed the sleep after her hours in transit.

As she headed down the sweeping staircase, she couldn't help but admire the transformation of the castle. She'd done enough research on it to know that ten years ago, when Camden purchased it, it had been in near ruin. The floors had been sound, but the tower had crumbled, and the entirety of it was nothing more than rough stone.

Camden had done well to restore the exterior to its original glory. The inside, however, had been fashioned into a comfortable, albeit richly decorated, home.

She rounded the base of the stairs to the kitchen. The scent of eggs, ham, and cheese greeted her when she pushed open the heavy wooden door. Her stomach rumbled its hunger. Her appetite, however, could be persuaded to forgo food if she could sink her teeth into the man standing in front of the six-burner stove.

Oh my goodness.

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Chapter Three

Camden stood with his back to her, his broad shoulders covered with soft-looking plaid flannel. The loose tails of his shirt covered his butt, but his thighs were thickly muscles and encased in snug denim.

Her heart fluttered. Her face heated. She squeezed her thighs together, and her eyelids drooped as lust, hot and primal, coursed through her.

It had been so long since she'd been with a man. She knew that the real thing was never as good as her midnight lover when it came to satisfying her body, but God, she missed the smell of male flesh. The taste of salty skin. The sound of a deep voice whispering in her ear.

"Charles," Camden called out, and her eyes widened.
"Would ye see if Therese is ready to get up for breakfast?"

Charles's voice came through a door on the other side of the kitchen. "Set the table, wake the guest. Next ye'll be wantin' me to wipe yer ass for ye."

Teri bit her lip to keep from laughing at the terse teasing. "You like yer job, old man?"

"About as well as a kick in the arse." Charles came through the door and stopped in his tracks when he spotted her. His weathered face turned bright red, and his mouth dropped open for a second until he composed himself.

"Good morning," Teri said, unable to hide her amusement.

Camden turned around, a black spatula in his hand, and grinned at her. "Ah, just in time. Breakfast is almost finished."

She tried to smile in return, but her face felt frozen. He was glorious. His shirt wasn't only untucked, it was unbuttoned as well. An expanse of tanned male skin covered in a light dusting of dark chest hair made her fingers itch to touch him. And washboard abs that...that... *Oh, Lord*.

She swallowed.

"Don't mind Charles," Camden said as he turned back to the stove. "He's not a morning person."

"Ye donna listen to him, lass," Charles said as he went to a drawer beneath the counter and pulled out silverware. "The boy has no manners."

Teri giggled. Charles had a gruff exterior, she'd come to realize during her ride with him from Inverness Airport, but he was a big marshmallow inside. He had an almost archaic view of chivalry. He'd insisted on carrying her suitcase, even though she was probably twenty years younger and most likely physically stronger than him.

She moved farther into the kitchen and got a glimpse of the cheesy omelets Camden dished up on plates. He sprinkled some kind of fresh herb over the top then garnished the plates with sprigs of parsley and fresh, sliced tomatoes.

"Looks yummy," she said, taking a peek at his chest again when she drew near enough.

"Coffee or tea?" Charles asked as he picked up a stout black teapot from the counter.

"Tea will be fine." She gave Charles a smile. "Thank you."

Charles made a grumbling noise and shuffled out of the room through the door through which he'd entered.

"You shouldna flirt with the old man," Camden whispered around a chuckle. "I've never seen him blush like a schoolboy before."

She couldn't take her eyes off Camden's chest. Now that she was closer, she could smell his musky cologne above the scent of breakfast.

"Sorry, lass," he said, his voice low. He reached for his buttons and closed up his shirt. "I'm not used to having a lady in the house."

Teri made a sound that might have been an agreement, but she couldn't rip her gaze away from his long, lean fingers as they nimbly buttoned his shirt. He tucked the tails into his waistband. For a rich guy, his clothes were very common. Faded, worn Levi's, and the blue and white plaid shirt looked as if it had seen more than a few washings. She desperately wanted to reach out and touch him. Rub her cheek against his solid chest. Bury her nose against his neck and breathe in his musky, manly scent.

"Come along," he said, lifting the three plates of breakfast he'd prepared. "Charles has set the table in the sunroom." He tipped his head toward the doorway. "I had it added on a couple years ago. The sun is out this mornin' and the lake looks like a mirror. I'm sure you'll enjoy the view."

"I'm sure I will, too," she muttered as she followed him into the room, admiring his firm, round butt encased in jeans that looked as if they had been tailor-made for him.

The sunroom looked like a greenhouse with bushy plants in the corners and grape vines curling around the thick, wooden beams overhead. A fire crackled softly in a stone fireplace built into the wall separating the sunroom from the kitchen. A real, wood-burning fireplace. That's why he'd smelled of wood smoke the day before.

Floor-to-ceiling windows gave a stunning view of the lake. The panorama from the castle's perch on a hundred and fifty foot cliff made it seem as if she could see forever. The sun was just rising, the sky cloudless, and the lake sparkled like a polished mirror.

"Enjoy the view while ye can, lass," Charles grumbled. "It'll be rainin' by this afternoon."

She grinned and sat down in the chair Charles held for her.

"I've always been rather fond of rain," she said as she laid her linen napkin over her lap. "I was raised in Seattle, Washington, and late fall and winter, when it rains almost daily, were my favorite months."

Camden poured her a cup of tea and offered her the small milk carafe. She shook her head. "I'm American, remember? Tea is to be drunk black."

"One custom I never grew used to." He tipped a blop of milk into his own cup.

Realizing that the men were waiting on her, she lifted her fork and took her first bite of the cheesy omelet. "Mmm. Very good."

Charles grinned at her. "Me boy here decided to take up cooking as his hobby since he tried to retire." His voice dropped. "Not that he'll ever stop working."

"Charles," Camden said in a warning tone. "I'm not old enough to completely retire. I've still a few years left in me."

It sounded like an old argument, and Teri tried not to grin. She sipped the strong tea then wiped her mouth with her napkin. "I could sure get used to having meals prepared for me every day," she said and laughed. "I can't even boil water without burning it."

"Cam loves to cook. Especially for pretty young lassies." Charles wiggled his bushy white eyebrows, which made Teri laugh again. She wasn't exactly a spring chicken, but she did love the endearment both men used for her. Made her feel pretty and young; something that hadn't happened in a very long time.

Camden cleared his throat. "Eat yer breakfast, old man. Therese and I have work to get done today."

* * * *

Excitement rode Camden hard as he led Therese down the stone stairs to what had once been underground storage. His heart raced, and his hands dampened with the thrill. He, too, was about to lay eyes on the original journals written by his ancestors, which hadn't been viewed by human eyes for hundreds of years.

He reached the door at the bottom of the stairs and turned to look at Therese. She was coming down the steps slowly, her hand running over the stone wall. She stopped and stared at the rock, her fingertips skimming over the rough surface.

"What is it?" he whispered.

"Deja vu." Her voice was hoarse. "It feels like..."

Camden's breathing sped up. She was remembering. Remembering her past life. Yesterday, when she arrived, she had the same expression of concentration on her face as she stared at the hall. "What does it feel like?"

"Like I've walked this staircase before. Many times before." She leaned forward and pressed her cheek against the wall. "I can almost hear the..." She broke off and laughed, pushed away from the wall.

"What? Tell me?" *Please, tell me you remember; it will make everything else so much simpler.*

She grinned and shook her head. "It's stupid. I get this way sometimes with historical places. I can almost feel the people who've lived here. Hear them talking." She laughed again, but it seemed forced. "I read too much."

He sighed. This was what he'd feared. She'd deny everything. Pretend it wasn't real. She was too logical to let her heart believe. "Do you believe in reincarnation?"

Her eyes widened, and then she snorted. "Right." *Shit*.

"Do you?" she asked.

He nodded.

She took the last four steps down, until she stood right in front of him. "Are you Christian?"

He nodded again.

"Then you don't follow the Bible? Instead of moving on to the Father's house, you believe that your soul is sent back to do it all over again?"

A contradiction no doubt, but he believed what he believed. And there was no other explanation to his family's

legacy. Reincarnation *did* exist. He was living proof. So was she.

He tipped his head to the side. "You believe in one mortal life per soul? You have never walked the earth in another body? When you die, you will move on to the Father's house?"

Therese shrugged. "I claim agnostic. I don't know what comes after death, but I'm pretty sure I'm not coming back here."

"But you know the Bible?"

She raised an eyebrow. "I'm a historian, Camden. I also know the Torah, the Qur'an, and the Book of Mormon, as well as the teachings of Buddha. Shall I go on? There's more. Oddball religions hardly anyone in the world has heard of. I've also studied Roman and Greek mythology. That doesn't mean I believe Apollo flies the sun across the sky every day."

Camden chuckled. "Okay. So is it so impossible that I'm Christian and believe in reincarnation?"

Therese sighed and shoved her glasses up her nose. "Believe what you will. I'm not here to discuss religion, or politics, or any other slippery topic with you. Could we please get on to the journals?"

He nodded. Religion was irrelevant, anyway. "Very well, Therese." He pointed to the keypad next to the heavy steel door. "The code is zero-eight-five-two. Right up the middle." He punched in the code, and the door seal hissed as it released.

"My goodness," Therese said as she preceded him into the brightly lit storage room.

"Temperature and humidity controlled," he said as he moved across the room. "The light table and computer ye requested, as well as two other tables for workin'. And I believe all the rest o' the instruments ye demanded." He grinned at her. "The computer is linked to yer office back in D.C., as we set up last week."

She didn't seem to be listening to him. She'd spotted the chests on the table in the center of the room.

His excitement returned, and he walked up behind her. "So, what do you think?"

Shaking her head, she walked a slow circle around the table, never touching, just...looking.

"They're in here?"

"The oldest ones. Pre-sixteen hundreds."

Teri's heart slammed against her chest so hard it nearly choked her. Tingles raced down her arms, and her fingers literally itched.

Her deja vu was wreaking havoc on her. First the passageway, and now these boxes. She could easily envision the man who placed the items in them. She knew, without anyone having told her, exactly what she'd find within. She could smell the melted beeswax used to coat them after they were locked so moisture from the damp earth beneath the keep couldn't ruin the wood.

They were hidden just before the English invaded and captured a majority of the MacGregor clan and took them away to be indentured servants.

There was another passageway beneath the keep. Narrow and dark, leading north, away from the lake because the ground would be slightly dryer. A small, round room.

Teri shivered. "Where were they? Why are they covered in dirt?" She held her breath, already knowing the answer

"Buried."

"Where?"

"There is a tunnel."

She leaned against the table to keep her balance and bit her tongue from asking anything further. If she asked, he'd... He'd what? Think she was psychic?

She giggled.

Camden grabbed her shoulders. "What is it? What's wrong?"

She shook her head. "Nothing." *Just reconsidering that whole reincarnation thing you mentioned.*

Like hell. She must have read about it. There must have been something she'd scanned in the past several months that mentioned it. That had to be it.

Camden's gorgeous green-eyed gaze bore into her, and she forced a smile. "It's nothing. Just...excited." She pulled away from his big, warm hands. "Did you get pictures of the excavation?"

He shook his head. "No. Why?"

Because if what's in there is what I think it is, this could be the biggest historical document find in years.

She narrowed her eyes and glanced at the boxes again. "How did you know where to find them?"

When Camden didn't respond, she turned around and raised an eyebrow.

He crossed his arms over his chest and leaned back against the table. "A map."

"A treasure map?"

He tipped his head. "If you will."

"And where did this map come from?"

"My ancestors."

Teri huffed. "Why are you being so secretive?"

A slow grin tipped his lips. "Drawing out the anticipation."

Rolling her eyes, Teri crossed her own arms over her chest. "It's working."

Camden chuckled. "Come here." He pushed away from the table and crossed the room. He lifted the lid on what she recognized as an acid free storage box. "These are the newer journals—ones written post sixteen hundred. There's only four I've been able to locate, but I've heard rumors of more."

She peered into the box. One was leather-bound and very worn. From the type of covering, she'd place it somewhere in the seventeen hundreds. The next was in slightly better shape, probably late eighteen hundreds, with gold foil lettering proclaiming *Journal*. And the last one looked like a fairly modern-day, dime-store diary.

Camden drew out the newest one and flipped it open to the back. "This was my father's." He moved closer to her, close enough that she got another whiff of his spicy, sexy cologne. "Here's the map."

She looked at the sketched diagram. It was Quhartine Castle and, sure enough, it showed underground hidden passageways.

"How did your father know? You didn't buy this place until after he died."

Camden nodded. "Each of those journals possesses the same map. It's family legend." He shifted from one foot to the other. "I bought Quhartine to prove it wasn't *only* legend."

"You bought a castle because you heard rumors of buried treasure?" Rich people, she thought with a shake of her head.

"No. I bought Quhartine because it's family legacy. My ancestor, the man I'm named after, built it. But yes, I believed the rumors of these journals. Every child growing up in my family has been told about them."

"Why? What's so special in them? Will they lead you to real buried treasure? Was there a pirate in your ancestry? Will you be the next Count de Monte Cristo? Or is there some long lost secret you're searching for? You're English royalty and want to claim your throne?"

Camden threw back his head and laughed. "Ahh, Therese." He shook his head. "These journals hold..." He sighed. "You must read them for yourself."

"You already know what they say?"

He shrugged. "Maybe. If the later journals are to be believed."

"So, what is it?" She reached for the diary in his hand, but he pulled it out of her reach.

That sexy little smile made his lips twitch, but he didn't answer. He simply looked deep into her the eyes.

"Open the boxes, Therese. Read the words written by my ancestors. Then you'll understand."

He was being awful cryptic. "Let me start with your father's then. I don't have to worry about—"

"No. Start at the beginning. I am as curious as you are."
He shrugged and placed his father's book back into the special box. "Perhaps there is nothing of importance in them."
He moved across the room toward the dirt-encrusted, waxencased boxes. "Then again, they may hold the key to...the future."

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Chapter Four

Camden paced the breadth of the room, quietly going insane. He had, with the help of a close family friend, dug up the chests himself over a year earlier. They'd sat in here since then. Now that his document specialist was here, he wanted to rip into them and view what they held.

Would the journals even be readable after all this time? Would they have disintegrated into nothing?

But no, Therese insisted on taking a million and one notes and photographs. Damn him for following her email to the letter. He shouldn't have purchased the high-resolution digital camera.

"This is going to take a while longer," Therese said as she set the camera on the table and reached for the special gloves—another of her demands—and pulled them on. "You don't have to be here."

"I'm na goin' anywhere, lass."

Her back to him, she shrugged. "Have it your way."

She opened a small plastic bag—yet another thing she'd demanded on her list—and took a tiny scraping of the soil from the side of the box.

"What are ye doin'? Why donna you just open the boxes?"

She turned and raised an eyebrow. "You should have had a professional with you while you were excavating them to carefully document the event. I'm going to do the rest of this the right way."

"To what purpose?"

Therese shook her head. "This should be done in a museum. These boxes, and probably what's inside, are part of history."

"Aye, *my* history. I donna want a bunch of stuffy museum types lookin' at me personal business."

She laughed. "You're being silly. Besides, I'm a stuffy museum type, and you agreed to let the museum keep my documentation for historical data if I took this job."

Camden frowned. "Exactly what are ye going to give them?"

"My photos, notes, and samples to be carbon dated."

"Photos of the actual documents?"

"Of course."

He shook his head. *No way*. These journals belonged in his family, not for the world to see.

"Camden." She sealed the little bag and put a coded sticker on it. "We're talking about something written two millennia ago. This is spectacular. Even these boxes..." She turned and gazed at them. "I've never heard of anyone from three or four hundred years ago having the forethought to seal boxes in a thick layer of wax to preserve them."

"I told ye, these documents are special to the family. They were takin' no chances. They hid them from the invading English forces."

She turned back toward him. "Then tell me what is so important."

Her soft command eased his torment. He couldn't rush this process, couldn't rush her. This was, after all, her profession. She obviously took it very seriously. And maybe, once she

read them, she wouldn't be so insistent about letting the museum see them. He prayed the rest of the family legend was correct; that these boxes held the stories that would help convince Therese she was the one meant for him.

It had been well over a century since their spirits had found each other. He could *not* let her get away.

When he'd gone to the symposium on document preservation, he'd hoped to find something he could do himself to preserve the diaries that his father had handed down to him. He'd had no idea he would walk into a lecture given by his twin flame.

Teri didn't understand Camden's view on these journals. He was standing there staring at her, but not answering. She couldn't deny that her curiosity was piqued. Heck, *piqued* was a major understatement. She was dying to open up the boxes and get her eyes and hands on whatever they held, but there was no way she would rush the process. Maybe she'd be able to convince him of the historical value.

"Give me another half hour," she said before turning back and picking up another forensic bag. "Let me get samples of the wax, and then we'll open them.

"All right, lass." He sighed and moved to the desk where he sat down.

Teri took a careful scraping of the beeswax from each box. She wondered if they'd all been sealed at the same time, but she wouldn't know the answer to that question until they were tested and compared.

Her boss at the Smithsonian had given her a thirty-day paid leave to examine the material, provided the Smithsonian

was given exclusivity on the find. At least until it was determined that whatever was in the boxes was indeed as impressive as she'd suggested.

When Camden offered her the job, he'd told her that the journals dated back to the first century. If the journals had been written on papyrus, there wouldn't be much left of them after all these years. Probably nothing more than a pile of dust. But, if...

If, if, if. Why the hell did she feel as if she knew what she'd find when she opened the boxes? The images in her mind were starting to creep her out. She kept seeing a tall male figure. Dark hair. Blazing blue eyes. He had a deep scar bisecting his left cheek. Laird MacGregor. But he wasn't the one to package these boxes and bury them. The original Camden MacGregor had begun building Quhartine Castle in 1228. If her Camden was to be believed—and she had no reason not to believe him—the boxes weren't buried until the sixteenth century or thereabout.

Her Camden? she thought as she stuck the coded sticker on the forensic bag. Ha. Not likely. He was sexy as hell and made her blood zing to places a man—a living man—hadn't come close to in years. But what good was even thinking about it?

Camden smelled like heaven. When he looked at her with those gorgeous green eyes, she thought she could melt. And he had the sexiest hands she'd ever seen. Long, lean fingers she imagined he knew exactly how to use on a woman. And what woman wouldn't fall for a guy with his looks and deep, accented voice?

Get your brain out of your panties and back on work!

Even now, his scent seemed to envelope her. She wanted to walk over to the desk, straddle his thighs, and ride him like a horny wench.

She giggled and set down her pen, then pushed her glasses up her nose.

"Something you find funny?" Camden asked.

She shook her head and lifted the camera. "Sorry. Mind wandering is all."

She heard his impatient sigh and couldn't stop grinning. If she were the type of woman who went after sexy-as-sin men, she would have jumped his bones yesterday when he stood in her bedroom.

After snapping off a few more pictures of the three boxes from all angles, she decided it was time. First order of business was figuring out how to get the wax off.

"Okay, Camden," she said. "You want to help me with this?"

He was by her side almost instantly. "What do ye want me to do?"

"I was thinking of trying to remove all the wax, but I'd like to preserve the boxes if possible. I think if we can cut away the wax from the lock, and then along the lid, we might be able to keep everything intact." She turned to him. "Can the Smithsonian at least have the boxes?"

He shrugged. "I donna care about the boxes. Only what is inside of them."

She smiled. "Thanks." She picked up the scalpel and carefully cut into the wax near the lock. "Damn," she

whispered. She hadn't thought about the lock. "I don't suppose you have the keys, do you?"

He chuckled. "No. Sorry. I've no idea where they may be." "We're going to have to cut the locks then. What I can see looks like a padlock. Do you have bolt cutters?"

Camden went to the phone on the desk and picked up the receiver. She concentrated on carefully cutting away the wax around the fist-sized lock.

"Charles," he said into the phone. "Could ye please bring the bolt cutters down to storage? Thanks." He moved back to her side. "He'll be here in a few minutes."

Careful not to scrape the face of the ancient-looking iron, Teri cleaned away the wax as best she could. Then she took pictures, cleaned a bit more, and took more pictures. Just as she'd freed the lock from the wax so that it could be moved, she heard the seal on the door release.

"Here ye go, son," Charles said as he entered the room.

"Mind if I stay and see what's in 'em?"

"Ye're family. Of course ye can stay."

She heard the fondness in Camden's voice for Charles and smiled to herself. She'd read enough about him to know he was a cutthroat businessman, but he definitely had a soft side. In fact, the only time she'd felt his toughness was in the first proposal he'd sent her for this job. He'd been all business. But after that, once negotiations began, he'd been kind, and he had a great sense of humor.

Teri silently growled at herself. She desperately needed to stop thinking about him in such a way. He was her employer,

and that was that. He would never be anything more. She didn't want him to be anything more.

Yeah. Whatever. Keep telling yourself that, girl, and maybe you'll believe it someday.

"Okay, Camden," she said as she stepped away from the table. "Go ahead and cut that lock, but be careful and try not to scratch the box or do too much damage to the lock other than cutting it off."

He raised an eyebrow at her, and she laughed.

"Please?"

He grinned. "I'll do me best."

Charles moved in a bit closer, and she spared him a smile. He tipped his head, and his ruddy, wrinkled face split into a wide grin. "Me boy here is as excited as a child with a piece of candy."

She laughed and leaned in close to whisper in his ear. "So am I, but don't tell Camden."

"I heard ye," Camden said as he carefully placed the bolt cutters. "As slow as ye work, I have to doubt your word."

Mmm, Teri thought as Camden's biceps bulged beneath his shirt when he squeezed the bolt cutters. Then with a loud pop, the lock dangled free.

Her heart thudded against her breastbone again. "Hold on," she said when Camden reached for the lock. "Let me bag it."

He rolled his eyes but stepped back. "Hurry it up, lass. You're makin' me crazy."

"Drawing out the anticipation," she said, throwing his own words back at him. She put the lock in a forensic bag and labeled it.

"Killin' me, more like."

Teri took a few more pictures then picked up the scalpel and carefully cut into the wax around the lid of the box.

"Okay," she finally said and handed Camden and Charles each a pair of the cotton gloves to keep the oils from their hands off the boxes. Not that it probably mattered much, since the boxes had been handled while being dug up and moved.

After the men had donned the gloves, she stepped aside. "Go for it."

Camden grinned. Charles scowled. "Dinna come down here to work."

Teri laughed. "The big, strong men can do the hard work." She winked at Charles.

He blushed.

With a bit of grunting and wiggling, Camden and Charles lifted the lid. Teri bit her tongue and fought the urge to push them out of the way when they both peered into the box. But when Camden went to reach inside, she shouted, "No!"

He jerked back and turned around. "No?"

"Don't touch." She pushed between the two men and peered inside. Disappointment flooded her. This wasn't right. She'd expected wooden tablets. But what she saw was books. Leather-bound, paper-paged books. She snapped a few pictures, then reached in and drew one out. Moving to the

light table, she carefully set it down and opened it. Camden and Charles stood on each side of her.

The paper was yellow, the ink faded but still legible. "Fifteen thirty-three," she said, reading the date neatly scrawled across the top of the first page. She scanned the writing. "Scottish Gaelic."

"Do ye read Gaelic?" Charles asked.

She nodded.

"Let's open the rest and find the oldest ones," Camden suggested.

An hour later, after Teri went through the process of logging and photographing the second box, she moved away from the table so Camden and Charles could open it.

"Oh," Camden said on a soft sigh. "This is..."

Teri pushed her way between the men again and peered into the box. "Ooh." *Much better*. "Those are codices," she told the men. "I don't want to touch them, because I don't know how stable they are and don't want to take the chance of them falling apart."

"What's a codice?" Charles asked.

"A book." She grinned when he scowled at her. "Singular is codex. Plural, codices. Just a fancy name for a book. The pages will be made of vellum or parchment, though, not paper."

"What years?" Camden asked, and she could tell he was itching to get his hands on them.

"Can't tell for sure. Probably sometime in the middle ages."

He grinned. "Come on, Therese. At least open the cover and find a date. "These could be the ones written by Laird MacGregor."

With a sigh and a shake of her head, Teri grabbed the camera and clicked a few shots. After setting the camera aside, she carefully reached into the box and ran her gloved hand over the parchment cover. Stiff. She prayed it wouldn't crack when she opened it.

Slowly, painfully slow, she raised the cover of the book. She swallowed hard. The handwriting, again in Gaelic, looked...familiar. "Twelve hundred ten," she whispered as she read the date. "Oh, God, Camden."

"What?"

She jerked her hand back and the cover flopped shut. Her breaths came in hard puffs. What the hell was happening to her? Her skin prickled. Flashes of...memory? *No*. But she could see him. Tall and broad. Bright blue eyes. A rakish grin.

"Lass? Ye donna look so good." Charles put his arm around her shoulder.

She turned her head to look at Charles, opened her mouth to ask what was wrong with her, but then snapped her teeth together and shoved her glasses up her nose. Then she forced a laugh and moved away from his gentle touch. "I'm fine." Picking up the scalpel, she started picking at the wax around the lock on the third box. "Let's get this done, okay?"

Camden exchanged a glance with Charles. Charles raised his eyebrows and shrugged.

Something odd had just happened with Therese, but he couldn't begin to guess what. Was she truly remembering her

past lives? Did she remember his ancestor, Laird Camden MacGregor? Was it possible?

She'd whispered his name and gone as white as a ghost.

"Therese?" he said softly as he stood right behind her, so close he could smell her warm, womanly, flowery scent.

"Hmm?"

"You remember when we were coming down the stairs and you said it felt like you'd walked the corridor before?"

Meticulously she picked away at the wax over the lock on the third and final box. "Mmm hmm."

"Have you ever had that feeling before today?"

"A few times. It's just deja vu. Or something."

Camden cast another glance toward Charles. Charles grinned.

"Where were you when it happened before?"

Through the long pause, Camden was sure she wouldn't answer, but finally she said, "Salem, Massachusetts. I was on vacation and checking out all the touristy stuff around the city. I went to The Witch House, where the witch trials took place, and then took a drive to Gallows Hill."

Charles' eyes went wide. Camden grinned at her back as she leaned over the table concentrating on her work. He wanted to grab her and kiss her. Hell, he'd wanted to do that since the first time he saw her months ago. "Anywhere else?"

"A couple different places. Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. I was doing research on the Underground Railroad." She stopped and looked over her shoulder. "You know, how the slaves escaped the south."

"Aye, I know what the Underground Railroad is," Camden said.

"Right. Anyway..." She turned back to the box to continue dissecting the lock from the thick layer of wax. "The only other one that really sticks in my mind was a medieval dungeon in Scarbany Castle in North Yorkshire on the English moors."

Camden wanted to jump for joy. She did know. Deep down, hidden from conscious thought, she remembered. Every place she mentioned, she'd been in a past life. At least, that was what the journals said.

Before she'd married Laird Camden MacGregor in a secret ceremony, around the year twelve hundred eight, she'd lived in Scarbany. Her father had been Lord Brandon Alchort of Scarbany.

In sixteen ninety-two, John Grady, her father, had died in prison, accused of witchcraft. And in the eighteen-fifties and sixties, she and her husband, Clifford Gregory—of whom he was a direct descendant—had helped thousands of escaped slaves on their way to Canada. After that, the Gregorys returned to Scotland and took back their ancestral name of MacGregor.

And there were so many more.

Charles clapped him on the shoulder. When Camden looked at him, Charles nodded his head as if he should go on with the questions.

"What did you feel when you were in the Scarbany dungeon?"

Therese let out a gusty laugh. "Scared out of my wits. But then again, it had been refurbished to its original gory detail. I'd read about it before I ever saw it, and it was worse than I could've ever imagined. I mean..." She visibly shivered and paused in her work.

She turned around and narrowed her eyes at them, a small smile tipping her lips. She pushed her glasses up her nose with the back of her wrist. "You think I'm nuts, don't you?"

Camden shook his head. "No. I'd never think that, Therese. Tell me what ye felt."

"It's silly." She glanced at Charles.

He took a step closer to her, blocking Charles from her view. "Not silly." How hard could he push? Could he make her remember? She seemed so close.

Therese looked up at him with those big blue eyes. She could melt him with just a glance. When she turned her full attention on him, his knees went weak. He shoved his hands in his jeans pockets to keep from reaching for her, taking her in his arms and claiming her as his own.

"I'm a historian. I read a lot. I've read the horrors that happened in the places I've told you about. Is it any wonder that I feel something when I visit them?" She shrugged. "Maybe it's some kind of misplaced empathy or something."

Camden licked his lips. "Is that what you truly believe?"

A frown wrinkled her brow. "What the heck else would it be?"

Aye, what else except the truth that she didn't believe in?

How big of a mistake had he made bringing her here? Would it have been better to stay in D.C. and court her like a normal man? Date, fall in love, marry...

His shoulders slumped. If he said anything more, she would think he was the one who was insane, and she'd probably run from Quhartine as fast as she could.

How could she not feel what he did when they touched? At that thought, he withdrew one hand from his pocket and reached out to tuck a lock of hair behind her ear that had slipped from her braid. "I'm glad ye're here, Therese."

Teri's chest tightened, and the breath whooshed out of her. Camden's voice was so low, so damn sexy, it made her tingle all over. His feather-light touch made her yearn for more. More of him. She felt such a connection with this...stranger. He gazed at her as if she were the only woman in the world.

A smile tipped his lips. What would they taste like? Feel like?

A flash of her midnight lover came to mind, and she dropped her head forward and squeezed her eyes closed. *No, you bastard. Leave me alone. Go away!*

"Therese?" Camden said, his voice no more than a whisper.

She pulled away from the fingers toying with the hair behind her ear. "Please don't touch me," she whispered.

"Right. Sorry." He dropped his hand, and she wanted to snatch it back up and hold it against her cheek.

Instead, she turned back to the final box left to open, picked up her camera, and snapped a few pictures of the lock she'd released from the wax.

She heard a sigh and thought it came from Charles. Was the old man hoping to match make 'his boy'? How unfair it all seemed right now. Sure, there had been times over the past few years that she'd been lonely and wanted a real live man by her side. But she got over it. She knew what always happened, so she didn't spend too much time dwelling on the fact she wasn't meant to be with anyone.

On the other hand, ever since the tragic end to her last relationship, she hadn't come across anyone with eyes that seemed to search her soul. Hands that made her long for his touch. A body that could make an angel sin.

Lust at first sight.

"Camden. You want to cut the lock?"

She stepped out of the way so he could snip the lock with ease. Damn, he was strong.

After he moved, she bagged the lock and labeled it, cut around the edge of the lid, took her pictures, then nodded to the men to do their part.

The men lifted the lid. She moved between them and raised her camera to snap off the pictures, but her heart lodged itself firmly in her throat. "Oh, my God."

"What are they?" Charles asked.

Tears stung her eyes, and she had to blink them back. What are they? The find of the century! She'd never seen anything so beautiful.

Then again, she'd *known* they would be in there. It was what she'd pictured when she opened the first box containing the books.

"These have to go to the museum," she said, her throat tight.

"No," Camden said.

"These... Camden..." She couldn't take her eyes off of them. "They're stylus tablets." She raised the camera to take the pictures. "They've been excavated from archeological sites all over Britain, but only about three hundred of them. And none..." She set the camera aside. "...that were in this kind of preserved condition."

Afraid to touch for fear they would fall apart, she lightly ran her gloved hand over the edge of the thin wood tablets. At least a hundred of them lined up on end.

She didn't want to remove them. She wanted to bundle this chest and send it to the Smithsonian so they could be dealt with by a team of professionals, not just herself. She needed her assistants, other specialists to work with her to make sure they were handled properly. Why was Camden so insistent that they not go to a museum?

"I can't do it," she said, pulling her hand away from the tablets. "I..."

"I hired ye to do a job, Therese. Are ye backin' out now?" She flinched and glanced up at Camden. His jaw was set firm, a frown marring his perfect, high forehead.

"You don't understand," she said, keeping her voice even.
"You have no idea what kind of find this is. There could be something written on them that will help historians

understand the Roman civilization. The connections between Rome and the British Isles. They need to be studied. Catalogued. Stored where they won't deteriorate."

"How do ye know they're Roman?" Charles asked, peering into the box.

"The wood. Silver fir. I mean, I can't be positive until they're tested, but that's what the others are made of that were excavated. Silver fir isn't a native of the British Isles. And every other one found was Roman."

"They're Roman," Camden said, sounding so sure of himself. She frowned at him. "You disbelieve?" he asked. "I told ye the first of the journals were written by an ancestor. If ye check the dates, I'm sure it will be somewhere in the first century."

Carbon dating, Teri thought. They needed to be carbon dated. She picked up a clean scalpel off the table and a new forensic bag. She leaned over the box and searched for a rough edge on one of the tablets. Finding one on the third leaf, she used the fine blade to clip off the tiniest piece of wood.

She sealed the bag, labeled it, and jotted down a notation to herself. She'd send the bags off tomorrow and get the forensic guys at the Smithsonian started on this immediately. There was that tiniest possibility this was all a hoax.

But she didn't believe Camden was pulling some elaborate scheme. If he were, he would have had the entire institute already working on this. They'd dealt with enough charlatans in the ten years she'd worked there. She knew what to look

for. Camden was...different. Acting as if he'd prefer no one ever knew about his ancient journals.

"Are ye done with the bagging and pictures?" Camden asked.

She nodded. "At least for the moment."

"Good. Then we can have a look." Before she could stop him, he reached into the box and drew out the first leaf.

"No," she shouted and wanted to grab him, but he'd already lifted the thin wooden tablet. If she touched him now, he might drop it.

"What kinda writin' is this? It looks like hieroglyphics."

"I can't believe you just did that! For crying out loud, Camden, that wood is two thousand years old. You can't just go around—"

He turned the tablet so she could see the perfect handwriting etched into the soot-dyed wax.

"Ohh, my."

"What do you think, lass?" Charles said. "Can ye read it?" She shook her head. "It's a form of Latin. A lower-case Roman cursive."

"You canna read it?" Camden asked.

She stepped closer. "Not much. Well, a little, I guess. I think it's a letter... But why would anyone write a letter on a tablet when they had access to papyrus, which was much more common?"

She glanced up at Camden's face. He was smiling at her. "For posterity's sake? To keep it for all time? To pass it down to later generations?"

Staring at the tablet he held, she tried to formulate the words. She hadn't studied much of this form of Latin. Not since fifteen years ago when she wrote her thesis about the Roman influence on the modern day world.

A name, she realized she could decipher. Wenda.

"Do you know who Wenda was?" she asked.

Camden grinned. "Aye."

She frowned at him then glanced back at the tablet. A shiver tickled down her spine. Her hands went cold. She blinked. "Titus Marinus." She bit her tongue to keep the next words from escaping her mouth because they made no sense even as the thought rang loud and clear in her mind.

He was my life, and I died protecting him.

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Chapter Five

"I'm hungry," Teri said then glanced at her watch. "It's lunch time. I say we take a break, okay?"

Camden frowned at her and then cast a quick glance at Charles, who shrugged.

She had to get out of this room for a while. Figure out why her brain was playing these weird tricks on her. She'd never heard the name Titus Marinus. It wasn't inscribed on the slab Camden held. *Where* had the name come from?

Camden carefully placed the tablet back in the box.

"Charles put on a pot o' soup this morning. It should be done.

And we have a lot of turkey left over from last night."

With a nod, she took off her gloves and laid them on the desk near the computer. She'd spend the afternoon searching for anything about Titus Marinus. She needed to figure out where the name came from. Obviously, she'd read it before...somewhere.

Wenda.

Crap, she was losing her mind. A chill passed over her, and she rubbed her arms. *Wenda. Wenda. Wenda*.

She followed Charles to the door and waited until he opened it before she preceded him out. Forcing herself to walk at a measured pace up the steps, she kept herself from running. She wanted to sprint away.

But from what?

Wenda. Titus.

Her chest tightened, and she stumbled. Charles grabbed her by the waist before she tumbled down the stairs. "Careful, lass."

Nodding, she pulled away from him and rushed the rest of the way up the remaining steps and into the gorgeous hall. She took a few deep breaths as she crossed to the fireplace.

Once again, scenes invaded her mind of how this keep had looked hundreds of years before.

Squeezing her eyes closed, she let out a long, slow breath. Nothing like this had ever happened to her before. She'd traveled all over the world, been to hundreds of historical sites. Only the few she'd mentioned to Camden had affected her at all, and that had been nothing compared to what was happening now.

"Therese?"

"I told you to call me Teri," she snapped at Camden.

"Aye. Sorry." He tipped his head and looked into her eyes. "Are ye all right, lass?"

"I'm sorry," she said, embarrassed she'd barked at him. Lacing her fingers together, she stared at her knuckles. "Maybe it's jetlag."

"Why donna ye tell me what's goin' on in your head, and maybe I can help." He touched her shoulder for the briefest of moments, then pulled away.

She wanted to lean into him and tell him all the crazy thoughts swirling in her mind, but she straightened her spine then pushed her glasses up her nose. "Jetlag," she repeated.

With a sigh, Camden shoved his hands into his pockets. Her gaze drew back to his wide chest, the muscles just barely

perceptible beneath his shirt. She wanted to touch him. Curl her fingers into his resilient flesh. Feel his warmth. Taste his mouth.

"Something has ye spooked."

Her heartbeat hitched for a second, but she carefully schooled her face to keep from letting him know he'd hit the nail on the head. "What are you talking about?"

He pressed his lips together for a moment then shook his head. "Ye're spooked. But there's nothin' to be afraid of."

She almost laughed. She was having visions of the past, of people she knew nothing about, of names she'd never heard, things she shouldn't be able to know, and he told her not to be afraid? Nothing to be afraid of except losing her mind, maybe.

Teri shoved her glasses up her nose again. "Excuse me. I believe I need to freshen up before we eat." She turned on her heel and all but ran up the flight of stairs, escaping into the relative safety of her bedroom.

"Spooked?" she whispered into the empty room. She laughed at herself and her foolishness. There was nothing wrong with her that a little sleep wouldn't cure. "It's just jetlag."

He was my life, and I died protecting him.

She shivered and rushed to the bathroom to splash water on her face.

Ridiculous. Insane.

"Your imagination is running away with you, silly girl." She stared at her reflection in the gilded mirror over the marble

sink. "It's time you got out more and spent less time living in the history books."

* * * *

"Why donna you just tell the lass what's goin' on and be done with it?"

Camden stacked thinly sliced turkey on thick, dark bread. "Because she's scared, and if I dump all the details on her, she's goin' to think I'm crazy and leave before I even have a chance." He sighed. "I should stayed in D.C. and dated her like a normal person. Now I'm afraid there's no hope."

"If she's yer twin flame, son, she's the one meant for ye, so what has ye frettin'?"

Camden placed his palms against the countertop and met Charles' steady gaze. Dropping his voice, he said, "This isn't the middle ages, old man. I canna throw her over my shoulder, haul her back to the keep, and hold her prisoner until she realizes she's madly in love with me."

Charles chuckled then turned to the cupboard to pull down soup bowls. "It worked for centuries. Why not now?"

"Women's liberation."

Charles shook his head and gave a snort of disgust. "Aye. A terrible thing that is. Willna even let a man carry her bag."

Camden grinned. If Charles were in his position, he'd no doubt keep the woman prisoner. Good thing Camden was a bit more worldly in his views of the "weaker" sex. "Weaker, my arse," he growled as he lifted the plates of sandwiches and carried them to the sunroom. "Women control the world, and they like it that way."

He set the table, then glanced out the wall of windows. The clouds had moved in and a slow drizzle fell, turning the world, which that morning had been bright with greens and blues, to monochrome shades of gray.

Perhaps the ancestors had it right. Keeping her prisoner for a few weeks—or months—and convincing her who she was and that she belonged to him could be rather...fun.

He shook his head and sighed. Turning to throw another log on the fire, he caught sight of her entering the room. "Feeling better?"

She nodded but didn't look at him. Instead, her gaze was drawn to the windows and the grayness beyond. "Charles was right. It's raining again."

"Charles grew up on the loch. He knows the weather here better than any barometer." He moved up behind her, his gaze drawn to the curve of her sexy neck. He inhaled her soft, womanly scent. He wanted nothing so much as to pull her into his arms and kiss her, touch her, convince her she was his.

Instead, he raised his arm and pointed to a spot down the shore. "His family grew up in that cottage down there. His father was a fisherman, and his father before him for as far back as they know."

"Does he have any sons to carry on the tradition?"

"No, lassie," Charles said as he came into the room. "I never married." He set the soup tureen on the table.

Teri turned around and smiled at the old man. Camden pulled her chair out for her and then waited until she sat before he took his seat.

"I'd think a fine man like you would have women falling at your feet," Teri said with a wide grin.

Charles blushed and chuckled. "When I was younger, lass. When I was younger." He took his seat and held the soup pot for Teri to dish herself. "Why do ye think I never married?"

"What about this one?" she asked Charles as she tipped her head toward Camden. "Do you think he'll ever settle down?"

Camden raised an eyebrow at Charles when the old man looked at him.

Charles laughed. "Aye, lass. And I believe he's got his eye on someone."

"Really?" Teri asked as she picked up her napkin and spread it over her lap. Such a commonplace action, yet she made it sexy. Her motions so smooth and easy. But then she ruined the image of sophistication when she reached for her water glass and almost tipped it over. She grabbed for it with the other hand and put her elbow in her bowl.

"Damn it," she whispered as she swiped at her sweater sleeve with her napkin. "I don't know what's wrong with me. I'm not normally so..." She broke off on a laugh, her cheeks pink with embarrassment. Pink and beautiful. "Like you'd ever believe that."

Camden smiled and got up to fetch her a fresh bowl. He found her clumsiness around him endearing. It meant she wasn't immune to him. He made her nervous. Maybe he just needed to keep her off balance.

He returned to the sunroom with a clean bowl, took hers from in front of her, and dished her up more soup.

She cleared her throat. "Thank you."

"My pleasure, lass." He took his seat and lifted his mug of tea. "This afternoon you will begin reading the journals? You are done with the photos and scrapings and such?"

Teri shook her head and met his gaze. "No, there is more documentation to be done. But I see no reason why I should have to read them."

"What?" both Camden and Charles said in unison.

"You have to read them," Camden said, his heart in his throat. It was imperative for her to understand her history. Her past lives. Her place in life by his side!

"Isn't that part of your job?" Charles asked.

"Camden wants the documents preserved," she said, answering Charles with a little shrug. "I don't have to read them to make sure they'll hold up for another few centuries."

Camden searched his brain for something to say as panic rose up inside him. "I need to know what they say. You can translate them, can't you? Transcribe 'em for me? I sure canna read Roman."

She turned to him with a gentle smile. "It's actually ancient Latin, and you could probably find someone much more proficient at reading it than me."

He shook his head. "We had a deal."

Her brow wrinkled. "Uh huh. For me to preserve the documents, and you'd let the museum keep my documentation of it."

Folding his arms over his chest, he narrowed his eyes at her. "For what I'm paying you, you'll damn well translate them for me."

"Oh? I will?" she picked her napkin off her lap and dropped it on the table. "I don't think I like you're tone, Mr. MacGregor." She pushed her chair back as if she meant to stand.

"Oh for cryin' out loud, Camden. Threatenin' her isna gonna get you anythin'," Charles said. "Lassie, please. Ye've no idea how long Camden has wanted to see those journals. He wishes to compare them to the family's oral history. The stories passed down through the generations."

Camden watched Teri closely. She tucked her bottom lip between her teeth. He didn't understand why she'd suddenly decided not to read them. She'd been talking about it all morning. She'd wanted to read them as much as he wanted her to.

"I think you'd do better with someone more fluent in the ancient text." She shook her head. "It'll take me too long to fight my way through the Latin longhand and, although I can read Gaelic, I'm not fluent in it."

Camden sighed and closed his eyes for a moment, trying to pull his thoughts back together. She had to read them. *Had to*.

"Please," he said, keeping his voice low. He opened his eyes and leaned forward, picked up her hand from her lap, and clasped her cool, smooth palm between both of his. "Please do this for me, Teri. It is very important to me that no one else views the journals."

She opened her mouth, the look in her eye telling him she was going to argue.

He cut her off. "I'll double your fee."

Her mouth snapped shut so fast her teeth clicked. Her eyes widened. "You can't be serious. You're already paying me double what anyone else would."

"Triple."

She blinked slow, like an owl, then pushed up her glasses with her free hand. "I have to think about it."

He released her hand when she tugged against his light grasp.

"I don't understand you," she said softly. "The way you're acting—so secretive you won't let anyone else see them—I'm not so sure I want to know whatever those journals say."

"'Tis nothing bad. Just private family...stuff."

She scowled at him. Then she shook her head and lifted her spoon. "I said I'd think about it."

* * * *

Teri yawned. Pushing her glasses up on her head, she rubbed her eyes with her fingertips. Her eyelids felt as if they were coated with sandpaper. She dropped her glasses back into place and checked her watch. Only nine, but her body wasn't going to take any more. She yawned again as she shut down the computer.

She'd finished the preliminary documentation, packaged the samples to be sent off in the morning to the Smithsonian, and she'd sent an email to Stanley Harper, her boss back home, advising him of her findings.

After pestering her for more than an hour following their rather tense lunch, Camden left the room and only returned

to bring her a plate of food for supper. The man could sure cook, she thought as she picked up her empty plate.

Camden insisted she read the journals, but before lunch, she'd decided to simply do the preservation on them and be done with it. After her scary-strange reaction to them earlier, she didn't want to know what they said. The sooner she got her job done and she got out of Quhartine—out of Scotland and away from Camden—the better.

Now she didn't know what to do. The money wasn't important to her. Not really, anyway. The original fee he'd agreed to pay was outrageous; equal to one year's salary at the Smithsonian. She'd thrown it out, ready for him to negotiate, so she could see how serious he was. He'd agreed without argument. Now he offered double and triple that original fee if she'd transcribe the journals so he could read them.

She picked up the package addressed to Stanley and glanced around the room. Everything seemed in its place. Then she headed for the door and punched in the code.

Turning down the money he offered would be insane. She had a small nest egg built, even after putting up the down payment last summer on her cute colonial in Bethesda. But what Camden was offering—if he really meant it—would be enough for her to almost pay off her house.

As she pushed open the door to the dimly lit stairwell, she glanced back at the boxes on the table against the far wall. What harm could be done by reading some words? This afternoon had just been some weird...something. The curse of an overactive imagination.

She made sure the door sealed behind her and then climbed the stairs to the great hall. All was quiet. The fireplace was on but burning low. She set her package to be mailed on the long dining table in front of the fireplace, and then took her dirty plate to the kitchen.

She pushed open the door and reached for the light switch, but caught sight of Camden. All she could see was his silhouette, but there was no mistaking his wide-shouldered frame leaning over the sink, staring out the window into the darkness.

"I thought everyone had gone to bed."

He didn't turn around. "No. I don't sleep much."

Teri stepped into the room and let the door swing closed behind her. "What are you doing in here in the dark?" She set her plate on the island.

Camden chuckled. "Watchin' for Nessie in the moonlight." He turned around then, and she saw the glass in his hand. "Care for a drink?"

She shook her head. "No, thanks. I think I'm going to head to bed."

"Have ye thought about...?"

She sighed.

"I donna mean to push," he said as he set his highball glass on the counter and leaned against the dark granite. With only the cloud-filtered moonlight coming in the big window over the sink, she couldn't see his face clearly, couldn't read his expression.

"Why me?" she asked. "Why is it so important that it's me and not someone else?"

His voice dropped to just above a whisper. "Ye wouldna believe me if I told you."

"Try me."

The room was so silent, she could hear his every soft breath. He didn't answer for a long time. She waited, standing across the island counter from him. Slowly, he moved to the side and around the end of the counter until he stood next to her. She looked up at him, could feel the heat radiating off his body, smell his spicy cologne and his unique, musky scent mixed with a slight hint of whisky. Her heart stuttered, and her chest tightened. Or was that her nipples?

She fisted her hands at her sides so she didn't reach for him. Camden seemed to have no such compunction. His big, warm hands cupped her cheeks when she looked up at him. In the darkness, his eyes shone like onyx. She should pull away. Step back. Physical contact with this man was a very, very bad idea. She wanted it too much.

"I want you to read the journals so you'll understand why I must do this."

Before she had time to reply or even contemplate formulating words, his warm, soft lips brushed hers.

Sensation exploded through her body. Her skin seemed to tighten. Heat flared in her belly and between her thighs. She whimpered and grabbed the counter with one hand so she didn't fall over.

"Feel that, Therese?" His lips brushed hers as soft as a butterfly.

Dear God, he wasn't even really kissing her, yet she'd never felt more electrified. She couldn't breathe.

His breath was gentle and warm against her cheeks. "Read the journals, Therese. Read them and understand this." His mouth closed over hers.

Lightning bolts zipped through her veins. Her lungs quit working. Her legs turned to jelly. She cried out in surprise at the intensity of her body's reaction to a simple kiss.

By the time she realized it was over, Camden was gone, the kitchen door swinging silently on its hinges. Teri collapsed against the cool, granite counter and sucked deep breaths into her deprived lungs.

"Holy shit," she gasped. Her body tingled and throbbed. "What the hell was that?" No single kiss had ever made her feel like this. Hell, the best sex she'd ever had in her entire life hadn't left her feeling this... "Holy shit." She swiped her hand over her mouth, then pushed her glasses up. Only her midnight lover could do this to her, and he wasn't real. Camden was very, very real.

"Jetlag," she said, desperately trying to convince herself.

"Just jetlag."

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Chapter Six

"Please!"

Teri's own cry awakened her, and she sat bolt upright, panting in the darkness. Her body hummed with arousal. Her pussy throbbed.

"You fucking sonofabitch." Tears stung her eyes. She pulled her knees to her chest and hugged her arms around herself. "Get out of my head!"

Wenda...

She yelped and jumped from the bed. "Who's there?" She flipped on the bedside lamp. The room was empty.

Wenda...my love.

Her heart leapt into her throat, nearly choking her. Who the fuck was saying that? She went to the small office connected to the bedroom and flipped on the light. Empty. Computer off. Silent. Still.

She laughed at herself.

Her own voice made her jump.

"I don't believe this place is haunted," she proclaimed, even as goose bumps popped out on her arms.

Wenda...

"Shut up! I'm not Wenda. I don't even know Wenda."

The gentle male voice seemed to sigh. Wenda...

Teri jerked open the top dresser drawer and pulled out her fleece jogging suit. She tugged it on over her T-shirt and shorts. A fluffy pair of socks followed, and then she grabbed

the door and jerked it open. The hallway was dark, but the bedroom door across from hers stood open.

Standing in the doorway of her bedroom, she sucked in a deep breath. This is stupid. I'm not afraid of the dark.

Silent on the stone floor, she tiptoed across the hall and peeked into Camden's bedroom. He'd said she could come over if she got scared, right?

Wenda...

Shut up! I don't hear you. Lalala.

Sheets rustled. Camden let out the softest little snort, then settled again.

"Camden?" she whispered.

He was obviously asleep.

Remember me...my love... The voice faded away.

She shivered. Standing in the doorway of Camden's bedroom, she didn't know if she should jump into bed with him and hide under the covers or do that in her own room...alone.

Crossing her arms, she hugged herself. *I am not some* needy, frightened woman. Camden will think I'm a big baby if I wake him up and tell him I heard voices.

"This is stupid," she whispered as she turned away from Camden and his big, four-poster bed. Subconscious playing games with me to get me into bed with him?

She almost laughed. Not her subconscious; her libido. A thing that had no business here. So what if he kissed like a god? So what if he smelled like heaven? He was a man, and she knew what always happened after she slept with a man.

Hell, she hadn't even had sex with him yet and the midnight lover was making his presence known.

"Bastard." Before she shut the door of her room behind her, she stopped. She was wide-awake and knew sleep would be a long way off now.

Who the hell was Wenda, and why was she hearing some... No, she didn't hear voices. The castle wasn't haunted. It was all a dream. She'd just awoken with the name in her head, that's all. But she obviously wasn't going to get rid of it until she solved the mystery.

She grabbed her glasses off the nightstand, slipped on her tennis shoes, and headed for the storage room in the basement. Looked as if Camden's would get his way, she thought as she punched in the code and heard the seal release.

After turning on the overhead lights, she went directly to the first chest, slipped on her cotton gloves, then lifted the lid. From when she took scrapings in the afternoon, she knew that the ones at the back of the box were older than the front. She lifted out the back five tablets, moved to the long light table, and very carefully laid them out side-by-side.

She picked up her notebook and a pen from the computer desk, then sat on the stool in front of the light table.

* * * *

I tell my son and his son's sons this tale to remind them that nothing is more important in this world than the love of the woman of your heart.

Teri jerked her head up and frowned. "You've got to be kidding me," she muttered as she stared at the words she'd just translated into English.

She looked back to the tablet to make sure she'd read it correctly. She hadn't been lying when she told Camden she hadn't read Latin shorthand since college over fifteen years earlier.

No, she was fairly sure she'd translated it correctly. She read on.

* * * *

I met my Wenda on a hot summer day during Emperor Vespasian's reign. My father bought her to save her from a vile merchant named Farberous. The streets of Rome, supposedly paved in gold, were a hell worse than death to the slaves captured in and brought from the north. Sweet Wenda was one of those women.

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Chapter Seven

Rome, 74 A.D.

"Titus! Son, where are you?"

Titus pushed away from the desk and his calculations of their finances when he heard his father's panicked tone. "Here, Father," he said as he entered the atrium from the office.

Quintus Marinus stood behind the small form of a woman. Her long black hair draped her shoulders, trailing in matted locks over her curves barely concealed by a shredded tunic. Her hands were tied together in front of her by rough rope, and a gag remained in her mouth.

"Father?" he asked as he approached the nearly naked woman. "Why is she still bound?"

"She is frightened and was fighting; almost took my eye out." Titus saw the scratch on his father's cheek near his left eye. "She does not speak our language." Quintus shook his head. "She's—"

Titus reached out to push the woman's hair back, but she growled low in her throat and threw herself at him, raising her hands with fingers curled to do maximum damage.

He ducked to the side, grabbed her bound wrists, spun her away, and banded her up tight against his chest, her back to his front. "Shh," he whispered in her ear as she struggled against his hold.

She screamed through the gag, clawed at his arms with her broken fingernails, and kicked at his shins. She smelled of

sweat and filth, and he did his best to hold his breath to keep from inhaling her stench.

"I'm not going to hurt you," he said, keeping his voice low and steady, even as pain shot up his leg from her attack. He'd dealt with enough terrified slaves to know that only tenderness and time brought trust. His first objective was to get her to stop fighting him so he could remove her bonds and check her for injury.

After long minutes, she slumped against him, breathing hard, growling low in her throat like a feral cat.

"Good girl," he said softly as he loosened his hold and, with one hand, reached for the ties of the gag.

As soon as the dirty cloth dropped from her face, she let out a blood-chilling scream, turned toward him, and clamped onto his bicep with sharp teeth.

He tightened his arm around her again and growled through gritted teeth at the pain. He stood still though, waiting. Waiting. Blood trickled down his arm, but still he waited for her next move, afraid he'd lose a chunk of his flesh if she didn't release him soon.

"She was the only woman on the ship," Quintus stated, watching, hovering, and fidgeting in his nervous way that Titus usually found amusing.

"Do you blame her for being afraid?" Titus asked. If she had been the only woman on a slave ship for weeks, he wondered if she even wished to live. She was so tiny, barely reaching his shoulder. He didn't wish to think on what horrors she'd survived.

Teeth still clamped on his arm, she turned slightly and looked up at him through her stringy, greasy hair. He was met by the most startling set of blue eyes he'd ever seen. Dark blue, like the sky at sunset. In their depths he saw her fear, her pain, and it hurt his soul.

"You are safe," he whispered. He let go of her waist and slowly brought his hand up to her cheek, pushing her hair away then cupping her bruised, battered face. "Safe, little one."

Her brow furrowed, and he felt the loosening of her teeth around his flesh. He stifled a groan against the painful rush of blood where he'd been going numb.

She wasn't young, as he'd first thought. Perhaps twenty and five, or closer to his thirty years. Behind the bruises, she had a fine bone structure, high cheekbones, milky-white skin.

Pulling back from his arm, she glanced at the teeth marks she'd made, then back at his face. She spoke rapidly in her native language, her voice spiked with panic but husky and lyrical. His own blood marked the corner of her lip where she'd punctured his skin.

Her bottom lip was bloodied and swollen, the top one cracked and chapped.

"Safe," he said again in no more than a whisper. He knew she couldn't understand him, but he hoped he could convey to her that she had nothing to fear from him.

Her gaze never wavered; she kept him snared with her startling eyes as she raised her bound hands between them.

Nodding, he found the knot then forced himself to look down at her hands in order to remove her binding. He

unwound the rope and cringed at her raw, torn skin. "Poor woman," he whispered as he turned her hands to look her over. Her nails were broken, and blood encrusted her fingers, but he didn't know how much was hers and how much was from fighting. Her forearms were badly bruised.

She moaned, a soft kitten-like mewling, when he ran his finger over a particularly bad one that looked like the marks from a large man's grip. Titus' heart clenched at the pitiful little sound.

"I will take her to the bath," he said to his father. "See if you can find Domitilla and send her with her medicines and some fresh clothes."

Quintus nodded. "Farberous was bidding on her. I could not let her go to that beast. But he bid high, and I spent all our coin on her. She has the spirit of a she-tiger and was so terrified. She fought so hard against the bastard slave trader." He shook his head. "I refuse to contemplate what she has endured. She was the only woman among dozens of men."

Titus' stomach soured, and it had nothing to do with the stench surrounding the woman. "We will take care of her and get her on the first ship we have going north. From her looks and the sound of her words, she's from the Isles." He touched her cheek again, realizing she hadn't taken her attention off of him.

Her eyelids fluttered, and he barely caught her before she collapsed against his chest.

"Oh, no," Quintus murmured. "She is not going to survive, is she?"

Titus hefted her negligent weight into his arms. "She will be perfectly well once she's cleaned, fed, and had plenty of time to rest and heal."

* * * *

"I should not have spent so much on that poor woman." Quintus shook his head and paced in front of Titus' desk. He swiped his hand over his mostly bald head. "But Farberous..."

"Father, please sit down. You are giving me a headache with the pacing and worrying." Titus waited until his father took the seat at the side of the table. "We have enough to hold us over until the ship docks in two days. You know that the coffers will be filled within hours of its return."

"I could have freed a half dozen men with what I paid for her."

Titus leaned over and gave his father's shoulder a quick squeeze. "You saved her life. That is our goal, is it not? Besides, Father, with the people already slated to board the *Sherintine* before it departs again, every berth is filled. We've got fourteen—fifteen if you include this woman. They'll be doubled and tripled per berth as it is."

Quintus made a face and shrugged. "Does it do any good, Titus? What we do?" He scrubbed his hands over his face, and Titus could see his exhaustion. Ever since Titus' mother was killed while trying to help three slaves escape their abusive master, Quintus' only goal in life had been to take over her cause. But Titus could see how the years of secrecy and treachery had eaten away at his father.

As merchants with four ships and some of the best trade routes imaginable, they made a fortune, and most of that money went to buying slaves their freedom, in one way or another. Purchasing from the slave ships then freeing them was perfectly legal. The other things they did in the dark of the night to help those whose freedom they could not legally purchase... It took its emotional toll on both of them, but his father was not so young any longer.

"Mother would be very proud of you, Father. I am proud of you."

Quintus gave him a sad smile. "I miss her."

Titus nodded. Never in his life had he met another couple as in love as his parents. His mother had been gone ten years, and still his father mourned her. "I do, too."

Quintus sighed. "Sometimes it is difficult to make the decisions. This woman..." He shook his head as his gaze slid away. "One woman opposed to a half dozen men. Whose life is more important? One life chosen while others are sent to their fate wherever they may go."

"But you said Farberous was bidding on the woman. I would have done the same. He is harsh with his male slaves, but we've both seen what he can do to a woman." Titus leaned his elbow on the desk, propped his chin against his fist, and sighed. "You know that not all the buyers harm their slaves. Out of the six you passed up, some of them we will help later, others will choose to stay."

Quintus nodded. "It is as you say."

Titus wrinkled his brow. His father seemed more despondent this evening than normal. "Are you feeling well?"

"Hmm?" Quintus raised his head and looked at Titus. "Yes, of course. I am well. Simply tired. I believe I will make my way to bed."

"All right, Father," Titus said. "Sleep well."

With only a slight nod, Quintus rose and walked out of the office. Titus leaned back in his chair and sighed. There was nothing more he could do for his father. In the past eight years since finishing his studies, he'd taken over the business so Quintus did not have to worry over the finances, but that did not stop him.

Out of their business coffers, they set aside a certain amount to put toward their philanthropic endeavors, a much smaller amount for putting food on the table and paying Domitilla for her services, and most of the rest went back into the business. They had very little left over, but they didn't need much. Nothing coins could purchase, anyway.

Titus scrubbed his hands over his face, pushed to his feet, and blew out the lamps lighting his desk. He'd give anything he had to bring some real happiness into their lives. To make his father's eyes shine as they once had when his mother still lived. To take away the aching loneliness that filled his own soul.

That, however, was not to be. He could not bring his mother back to life, and as for his personal life...? He walked out of the office into the atrium, checked that the front door was bolted, then headed up the stairs to the second level which held the bedrooms. As he walked along the balcony toward his room, he heard soft whispering.

Stopping, he tilted his head and listened. It was the slave woman; he recognized her foreign language. Turning, he looked over the balcony railing to see her in the peristylium, kneeling next to the fountain but faced away from it, almost hidden between bushes.

The faint light of the moon overhead shone off her black hair, set off by the light-colored, sleeveless dress—the peplos—Domitilla had clothed the woman in after she had bathed her.

As he watched, the woman lifted her face to the sky, still whispering. She held her hands clasped together just below her chin. Was she...praying?

After she'd fainted, he'd taken her to their private bath and helped Domitilla bathe her, clean her hair, and check her wounds. She had no broken bones as far as they could tell, but her body was bruised from feet to forehead.

As he'd eased her into the bath, she came awake fighting again, this time nearly ripping off his ear when she got a hold of it. He smiled and rubbed his still slightly aching lobe. His father was correct; the woman had the fighting spirit of a she-tiger.

His grin faded as he slowly walked back toward the stairs. She would make it past whatever she'd endured. She hadn't let Domitilla examine her thoroughly, so they couldn't be sure if she had been raped or not, but he had difficulty trying to convince himself she had not. He had yet to meet a female slave, brought to Rome after capture in another country, who had not been sexually forced.

After her bath, she'd eaten enough to feed two grown men. Domitilla told him that as soon as the woman had lain down on the bed, she'd fallen asleep. That was only a few hours past. Why was she awake already?

He turned at the base of the stairs, walked through the office and out into the garden where the woman still knelt on the grass.

When she heard his sandals crunch on the loose stones of the path, she surged to her feet and ducked behind the sculptured fountain.

Titus moved to the wide bench near the fountain and sat down, stretched out his legs, and slouched, making himself look as relaxed and least intimidating as possible. He waited for her to decide her next move.

Long minutes went by. He listened to the quiet night. The soft trickle of water in the fountain. The chirp of night bugs. He kept his gaze focused on the stars overhead and away from the fountain and the woman trying unsuccessfully to hide on the other side of it.

The soft sound of her feet against the stones told him she was coming closer. He shifted slightly, and she stopped walking. She sucked in her breath.

"Safe," he whispered as he shifted his gaze toward her, using the same word he'd said to her repeatedly during her bath and meal. He maintained his lazy pose, but patted the seat next to him, silently inviting her to join him.

Domitilla had braided the woman's long black hair, and the heavy plait reached almost to her butt. In the glow of moonlight, her features seemed softened, the bruises less

harsh. She was simply gorgeous. Her curves were full, yet she was too thin.

"Safe," he said again, keeping his voice low. In just a few days, he'd put her on their ship heading north and return her to her home, or as close to her home as they could get. He would like her to be comfortable until then and hated that she was frightened of him. He'd cut off his right arm before he harmed a woman.

The woman took a couple of tentative steps to the bench and sat down on the far end, putting as much distance as possible between them. "Safe," she whispered, repeating his word. Her accent made the word roll, and he found it beautiful.

He nodded. "Safe."

She tucked her cut lip between her teeth, then winced. A burst of foreign words rolled off her tongue. She raised her hands, motioning to herself, but Titus could only shake his head. He didn't understand a single word.

She stopped and sighed. Dropped her hands to her lap and frowned.

Titus shifted to sit up straighter, and she surged to her feet, obviously ready to run. He smiled and shook his head, patted the seat again. "Safe." Turning sideways to face her better, he laid his hand over his chest. "Titus."

Slowly, carefully—which made him wonder just how much pain she was in—she lowered herself back to the bench and stared at him with eyes the color of the sea. Big, bright eyes that showed her confusion, pain, fear. And then understanding. "Titus."

He nodded then reached out and touched her hand as it sat on her lap. She jerked away. As not to frighten her, he wrapped her small, fine-boned hand in his much larger one, and brought it to his chest. "Titus."

She nodded. "Titus."

He grinned. Still holding her hand, he placed it over her chest and waited.

"Wenda," she whispered.

"Beautiful."

She shook her head and slowly annunciated, "Wen-n-n-daa."

Titus chuckled. "Wenda," he said. "Wenda, safe."

Her dark blue gaze never moved from his as she raised their hands and brought his to her cheek. As he had earlier in the day, he cupped the side of her face.

"Titus. Safe," she said as she closed her eyes and leaned into his touch.

He felt the tension leave her body on a long sigh, and he had the most overwhelming urge to pull her into his arms and cradle her close. To let her know that she was completely safe with him. No one, as long as she was in his home, would ever be able to hurt her again.

"Wenda, safe," he whispered as he skimmed his thumb along her cheek.

The glint of moonlight shone off the thin ring she wore on her left hand. He'd seen it earlier when she was unconscious, but now he lowered his hand from her face and lifted her fingers to examine it. She jerked her hand back and tucked it behind her back, hiding it from him.

He frowned and met her eyes. "Do not worry, Wenda. I will not take it from you," he said as he shook his head. He was surprised someone hadn't taken it before, but it was a cheap bauble made of nothing more than iron. But it had a strange design that intrigued him.

He held out his hand, silently asking to see it. After a long moment, she brought her hand back around and laid it in his palm. The ring was on her third finger, a series of four intertwined circles with a diamond shape in the very center. He wondered what it meant. Was it a wedding ring? She wore it on the correct finger for that purpose, but he had no idea about the customs of her people.

He had a million questions he wanted to ask her, but the language barrier was too complex. From the little he had gleaned from other slaves captured in the Isles, there were several dialects. He had no idea what hers might be.

He wondered if she had a husband. A father. Children. Was someone searching for her, or had she been taken like so many after their families had been slaughtered?

She fought with such strength from her tiny, battered body. His father had questioned the wisdom of saving this one woman over several other slaves, but Titus knew his father had chosen wisely. Seeing this woman broken by a slave master such as Farberous would be a crime against nature.

Another series of foreign words tripped off the woman's tongue in a soft lilt of rolling syllables that made Titus sigh and smile, even though he didn't understand. Her voice was

soft and a little hoarse, probably from screaming, but he loved the sound.

He shook his head and furrowed his brow. "I wish I knew what you were saying, Wenda."

She frowned right back and gently pulled her hand from his. She glanced around the garden, up at the balcony where the bedrooms lay, then pointed toward the kitchen where'd she eaten roast lamb for supper before Domitilla took her to her room.

"Are you hungry?" he asked, motioning toward his mouth with his fingers.

She nodded and placed her hand over her belly.

Domitilla left a basket of fruit and dates in Wenda's room. Perhaps she had not seen them with the lamp extinguished.

He stood, and she flinched. He smiled and once again reassured her she was safe, then held out his hand to her. She stared at his open palm a moment, then looked up at him.

"Safe," she whispered, and took his hand.

He led her up the stairs and stopped in front of her open bedroom door.

She jerked her hand from his light clasp, her eyes went wide, and she backed away.

Did she think he was going to attack her? Force himself on her? The poor woman. She had no real reason to trust him, and he understood her fear.

He motioned to his mouth again, the sign she'd recognized for food, then motioned into her bedroom. She frowned at

him. He smiled and went into her room and then returned with the small basket of fruit, nuts and dates. "Food."

After a quick glance at the basket, she looked back at him with a look of confusion. He pulled a grape from the basket and ate it. "Food," he repeated after he'd swallowed, then plucked another one from the stem and held it out to her.

She snatched it from his hand and stuffed it into her mouth. Her eyes widened again, this time with a look of pleasure as she chewed. She moved forward and dug into the basket, pulling a few more grapes and some dates out and stuffing them in her mouth. Small sounds came from her throat as she chewed, all her attention focused on the basket and its contents.

How long had she been on the slave ship? How little had they fed her?

"Food," she murmured around a mouthful.

He grinned and nodded, though she paid him no mind and reached into the basket once again for some nuts.

When she slowed in her eating and looked up at him with a small smile tipping her dry lips, he motioned into her room once again.

She shook her head.

"Sleep."

"Food."

He chuckled. "Sleep." He moved into the room and set the basket on the small table near the bed. He lifted the pitcher of water Domitilla had left for Wenda and poured her a cup. The room was dark, but there was just enough light from the bright moon filtering through the door to let him see enough.

He brought the cup out to the balcony and handed it to Wenda. "Drink."

She took the cup and greedily drank until it was gone. A trickle slipped down her chin, and she swiped it away with the back of her hand. She held up the cup as if asking for more.

He motioned into the room.

She shook her head.

She was still afraid he'd follow her in and cause her harm? He sighed. "Good night, sweet Wenda." Once he left her, he was sure she'd go in on her own.

She frowned at him, her pretty brow pulled into a confused furrow.

He smiled at her and touched her cheek, elated that she didn't jerk from his touch. "Sleep." He closed his eyes and tilted his head, then when he looked at her again, he pointed into her room.

She shook her head once again and didn't move.

He turned away, which was more difficult than he ever thought it would be, and walked along the balcony to his room. When he looked back, she still stood outside her room holding the empty cup. "Sleep," he said again, then went into his room, but left the door open so he could hear her if she needed him.

* * * *

Titus couldn't sleep. He lay in bed worrying about Wenda. What if she tried to leave? If she thought she could escape, her fate would be worse than imaginable. On the other hand, he thought he should give her the benefit of the doubt. She

was obviously intelligent, and she knew she was safe here with food and shelter.

He would simply go to her room and check on her, he thought as he threw back the thin sheet covering him, lit the lamp on his bedside table, and pulled on his robe. She wasn't a prisoner in his home, but she might not realize that yet.

When he stepped out his door, he nearly tripped over her. She sat on the floor, her back against the wall to his room, her head tipped at an odd angle, and she was sound asleep. His heart tumbled a bit. The dear, silly woman. She felt safer sleeping on the floor by his room than in a comfortable bed down the hall.

He knelt down next to her and lightly touched her cheek. She came awake with a yelp and tried scrambling away.

He caught her hand and whispered shushing sounds until she calmed. When the fear left her eyes, he smiled. "Safe."

She nodded. "Safe," she said a bit breathlessly, and he could see her rapid heartbeat at the base of her neck.

He stood and, still holding her hand, helped her to her feet. "Sleep," he said, and motioned into his room. Surprisingly, she went in without a bit of hesitation.

He didn't understand her. He'd thought she feared him, but she was afraid of her own bedroom? A private room which had a bolt she could lock to keep others out?

Then again, perhaps she didn't know that.

Titus followed her into his room. She went to the lamp on the table and touched the base. Was she afraid of the dark? Is that why she wouldn't go into her own bed?

She sat down on the edge of his wide bed, and then lay over on her side, her gaze never leaving the flickering flame of the lamp.

What was he supposed to do now? Give up his own bed to her? She pulled her knees to her chest and wound her arms around them, curling into a small ball. She looked so...alone, and so miniscule lying on the big bed.

Slowly, he approached her, wondering what she was thinking as she stared at the flame. She didn't move a muscle when he sat on the opposite side of the bed. Then he stretched out on his back and sighed. She didn't stir. Maybe she didn't want to be alone.

He pulled the thin blanket up over them, and yet she stayed still. "Good night, sweet Wenda," he said softly.

"Sleep," she said in a husky whisper.

"Sleep," he agreed and closed his eyes. The urge to roll over and gather her in his arms was strong, but he fought it. She did not want to be alone. He would do nothing to frighten her.

Some time later, Titus startled awake when a hand touched his chest, slipping between the parted edges of his robe. Wenda. She was sound asleep, her body not touching his, but her one small hand had sought him out.

Tenderness like nothing he'd ever felt before washed over him. He rolled to his side, facing her, and carefully wrapped his fingers around hers, tucking her hand against his chest. It had been a long time since he felt the touch—any touch—of a woman.

She sighed softly, her chapped lips slightly parted. Dark shadows underlined her eyes, and her skin was pale. A few strands of her pitch-colored hair had come free of the plait, and he tucked it behind her ear, careful not to wake her.

He doubted he'd ever seen such a beautiful woman before. One who fought like a she-lion, yet was afraid of the dark. One who had nearly bitten a piece out of his arm just hours earlier, but now lay in his bed with him, sleeping as peaceful as a babe.

His father had chosen correctly. The only choice he could have made was to save Wenda.

He touched her cheek with his fingertips, and she turned into his touch. He wished he could take care of her forever. Wished he could keep her. He'd protect her with his life. But she might have family searching for her. Possibly a husband.

He moved a bit closer to her, until he could feel her breath against his neck. He'd do what he could to give her back the life she'd once known.

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Chapter Eight

Titus awoke alone, and his heart lurched in panic as he shoved out of bed. Wenda was gone. The room was dark; the lamp long guttered out. Had she been frightened and fled?

He pulled on his clothes and hurried out onto the balcony. She wasn't below in the garden. Her room was empty, the door still standing open, when he passed. The sun was high, and he couldn't believe he'd slept so long.

He found her in the kitchen with Domitilla and his father, all laughing like old friends. He stopped in the doorway unnoticed, and all he could do was stare.

They sat at the table. Domitilla and Wenda were cutting meat and vegetables, probably for that evening's meal.

His father picked up a slice of vegetable and, looking at Wenda, said, "Celery."

Wenda picked up another piece. "Celery," she said nearly flawlessly, except her rolling lilt made a simple food sound exotic.

"Very good!" his father exclaimed, and then the three laughed.

Then his father lifted a hunk of meat and waited.

Wenda licked her lips and stared at it for a long moment. "Meat."

"Yes!"

To see his father's eyes so bright, to hear his laughter again, brought a lump to Titus' throat.

Wenda reached into a bowl and drew out a grape. "Food," she said, then stuck it in her mouth.

Domitilla and Quintus laughed.

Wenda cut the vegetables with clean efficiency, as if she'd spent a lifetime doing such a task. As though she felt his gaze, she looked up and grinned at him.

His heart tumbled onto its side. She was the most exquisite woman, even with the still chapped lips and bruised flesh.

"Good morn," he said as he moved into the room.

Domitilla stood and moved to the counter to fetch his morning meal.

"It is almost past noon," his father said, but there was no censure in his tone. Quintus smiled when he looked at him. "Wenda is quick minded."

At that, Wenda delved into the bowl and brought out a date. "Food," she said with a saucy grin and popped it into her mouth.

"Date," Titus said with a grin and sat on the bench next to her. Domitilla set a cup and small platter of bread, olives, and fruit in front of him.

"Date," she repeated.

Domitilla sat back at the table and continued chopping meat and tossing it into a pot. She'd been with the family for almost twenty years, since he was just a boy. She was only a few years older than him, and had never spoken a word. His father had purchased her when her own parents decided they couldn't take care of her any longer and sold her into slavery. The sad fortune of children who weren't perfect. Being born

mute had sealed her fate. Sometimes he wondered if she was lonely. Most women her age had a husband and children—grandchildren—of their own.

She'd always been a hard worker, even when she was young. She was part of their family, though they paid her well. They'd never treated her as a slave, and she was free to leave if she ever chose to do so.

As he dipped a piece of bread into wine, he watched Wenda. She smiled at Quintus, and the two of them kept up the game of naming items on the table. Platter, cup, bowl... She was quick, and seemed very proud of herself that she could answer Quintus correctly.

Titus ate his breakfast, feeling more content than he had in years. Wenda added a bright light to a life that had become dark and lonely. He'd stayed awake hours the night before, holding her hand, watching her sleep. He had been afraid if he fell asleep and Wenda awoke, she'd be frightened.

She was sweet and gentle, and the fact that she could laugh after everything she'd just endured... She was special. He hoped Rutilius, the captain of the *Sherintine*, would be able to get her close to home. He spoke a bit of the British dialects because they were on the trade routes. Perhaps he could find out where she belonged.

As he watched her smile at Quintus, and saw his father light up in delight, Titus wished she didn't have to leave. Nothing in years had made his father laugh aloud.

Domitilla touched his hand, and he looked at her. She smiled and tipped her head in Wenda's direction. He patted

her hand and nodded. She saw it too, obviously. He wondered if female companionship would be good for Domitilla, also.

No. He could not think of that. With the life he and his father lived, with the risks they took on a daily basis, he could not bring another woman in. Domitilla knew everything that went on, and she kept their secrets.

He'd given up on the thought of marriage for himself the one and only time he'd been serious about a woman. When she found out what he and his father did to help free slaves, she'd nearly turned them in to authorities. He'd had to pay her an exorbitant amount for her silence and, even years later, he worried she'd show up either asking for more money or to have him arrested.

"I must see that the supplies are readied when the ship docks tomorrow." He stood up to leave.

Wenda reached out and caught his hand, startling him. He looked down into her upturned face, and she grinned. She said something in her own language and then looked at him expectantly. He shook his head.

She let go of him and waved, then motioned toward the door.

"Good bye?"

She nodded and repeated the words.

With a chuckle, he touched her cheek before leaving the kitchen.

* * * *

When Titus finally made his way home that night, the hour was late and most of the lights extinguished. He found a

platter of food left for him in the kitchen, and picked it up to take it to his room. His father and Domitilla were obviously already abed. He briefly wondered how Wenda had fared all day, but she'd been content when he left. She would be fine, he assured himself.

As he neared his room, he saw the door open and a light coming from within. As he rounded into the chamber, he was met by Wenda lying on the bed, fast asleep.

His heart melted. He walked over to the opposite side of the bed from her and sat down. She didn't even stir. Setting his food platter on the bedside table, he removed his sandals and then took a hunk of cheese and stretched out on the bed. He was exhausted, but what bothered him wasn't the tiredness that seemed to overtake him the moment he was prone, it was the fact that tomorrow night, he'd have to take Wenda and put her on a ship to be sent back to her homeland.

He had no claim over her. Legally he did, he supposed, they'd outright paid for her and owned her. But he'd been raised by parents who abhorred slavery, and therefore he couldn't, in good conscience, keep her bound to him.

The trust she placed in him, sharing his bed knowing he wouldn't take advantage of her or hurt her, was more than he'd ever expected. The people they bought from the slave ships were always angry and frightened. They stayed in their rooms until it was time to leave. Sometimes they even refused to eat, preferring to starve themselves rather than be captives in a strange land.

Wenda was different. She fought when she was afraid. Ready to take on a man twice her size. And with just a bit of kindness, she gave her trust.

Titus reached for a couple of grapes from the plate. She wouldn't trust him so much if she knew the effect she had on him. Even now he was partially aroused simply from her nearness. The fact that she was in his bed. It had been so long since he'd taken a woman. Since he'd heard the soft moans as he brought her pleasure. Since he'd allowed himself the warm, gentle indulgence of a female body.

Rolling to his side, he moved close enough to her to feel her warmth. She smelled spicy; the scent of Domitilla's healing oils. Where her *peplos* exposed her arms and shoulders, he could still see the bruises that marred her body. Her dark hair fanned over the pillow, leaving her long, lean neck bare. If he moved just a bit closer, he could place a kiss there...

Titus closed his eyes against the temptation. She was not his to take. To have. To keep. She didn't belong in Rome. She didn't belong to him. When he took—if he ever again took—another woman, she would be willing. And it would be by her choice, knowing exactly who and what he was.

Wenda stirred, and she rolled over to face him. Her eyelids fluttered and then her blazing blue eyes opened. She smiled a soft, sweet smile, reached out for his hand, and then tucked it against her breast. She drifted back to sleep as if she belonged.

His body raged with a need to possess, to sink into her softness, but he fought the urges spiking through him like

lightning, and closed his eyes. He would do nothing to scare her, to make her believe he was anything less than honorable. For all the pain she endured on the slave ship, he would at least give her one good memory of this time.

He leaned over slightly and touched his lips to her forehead. She was warm and sweet. Her skin as smooth as a child's. She deserved more than the life he could give her.

* * * *

Wenda gripped Titus' arm so hard he wondered that her short nails didn't draw blood. As he led her up the gangplank onto the *Sherintine*, he could feel her body tremble with fear.

"Safe," he told her. "Wenda, safe."

She shook her head when they reached the top of the gangplank, refusing to step onto the ship. He turned and, wrapping his hands around her waist, physically deposited her.

"No," she said, her voice low but filled with terror.

"Safe," he said again, and then took her hand to lead her down to the belly of the boat, to the berth he had set up just for her. The other slaves were in quarters three or four to a room, but he wanted Wenda to feel safe in the fact that she had her own space, and that she could lock the door to keep anyone out.

"No safe," she said, her tone pleading as she tried to pull from his grasp.

He pushed open the door to the single berth, grabbed the lantern from beside the door, and gently tugged her inside. When he released her, she turned and tried to flee, but he

caught her around the middle and pulled her back against his body. "Safe," he whispered in her ear as he hung the lantern from a hook on the wall. "Safe."

Frantically shaking her head, she clawed at his arm, as she had upon their first meeting.

Titus sighed and relaxed his hold a bit, but kept her firmly against his body. "Home," he said in little more than a whisper, wishing he could make her understand. "You are going home, Wenda. Home where you belong."

She spoke in rapid bursts in her native language, her voice rising between each pause, her struggles with his arms banding her waist more frantic.

"Stop," he commanded when she clamped onto his arm with her teeth. He growled but didn't move. He felt like they'd gone back to the beginning. She was terrified again. This time of him leaving her on the ship.

She released his flesh and slumped against him. The soft little sob that escaped her tore at his gut as if she'd wielded a knife.

"Good evening," Rutilius greeted as he stepped into the doorway of the berth, his barrel-shaped body taking up most of the space. "Is this the special one?"

Wenda's demeanor changed in an instant. She ducked her head and, when Titus released her, she stepped behind him, as if hiding.

"Yes. This is the one. Her name is Wenda, and she's from the Isles. I am hoping you might know her dialect. She's learned a few words in the past couple of days, but not many.

Rutilius frowned, then he spoke in a foreign language that had similar sounds to the one which Wenda used.

She peeked out from behind him, gripping his arm, looked up at him, then shook her head.

"Another?" Titus said to Rutilius.

The man spoke several more sentences. Finally, Wenda responded. The conversation went on for a few moments, then Rutilius focused back on Titus. "She understands now that we are taking her home, and because of the dialect, I have a good idea from where she comes."

Relief flowed through Titus, and he sighed. "Good. Tell her this is her private berth, she can lock the door and will be safe here."

Rutilius translated, and Wenda nodded.

"I must check a few more things before we sail," Rutilius said. "The others are safe in their berths."

"Thank you," Titus said, once again. As he was every time this ship set sail carrying human cargo, he was relieved to have such a friend as the captain.

Rutilius gave a polite nod, then left.

It was time to say farewell, but Titus didn't want to.

Wenda still gripped his arm, and she still shook with fear.

"Safe," he whispered. "Wenda safe."

She nodded. He heard her sniffle. When he lifted her chin with his finger, tears streaked her face.

"Do not cry, sweet Wenda." Cupping her face in his palms, he brushed away her tears. "Rutilius will take care of you, see you safely home."

"Home," she said, her voice raspy and low.

Titus nodded. "Home."

"Titus home."

"No, Wenda home."

She gripped his wrists and closed her eyes. "Titus safe home."

His heart broke. He couldn't guarantee her safety if she stayed in Rome. At any moment, he and his father could be found out, someone could turn them in for what they did every day.

Titus leaned down and touched his lips to hers. One sweet kiss to remember her by. "Goodbye, Wenda," he whispered, then released her and turned toward the door.

"No!" she screamed and grabbed the back of his tunic. "No goodbye! No goodbye!" She wrapped her arms around his waist and held him. She wasn't strong enough to physically keep him there, but her pleas, her tears, stopped him.

"Wenda," he said, "you must go home."

"Titus safe home. Wenda, Titus home. No goodbye!"
Gripping the doorframe, he closed his eyes and dropped his head forward. He couldn't leave her like this. She was terrified. What if she didn't have any family left? What if she was alone? She couldn't survive on her own, no matter where he sent her. She was a small woman, and she wanted to stay with him. Maybe after she learned the language and they could communicate, he could find out about her family, if she had a husband or father still to care for her. Perhaps—

"Titus home safe," she said, her face against his back, her arms around his middle. "Safe. No goodbye."

He swallowed. How could he make her go? Wasn't that what he fought against daily? Humans—all humans—had a right to live free, do as they wish. He could not force her to stay on this ship and go back to a place where she might suffer.

"All right, Wenda," he said. "I will take you home."

"Titus home?"

"Yes. Titus home."

* * * *

When Titus walked into his house with Wenda clinging to his hand, his father's face showed his surprise and pleasure.

Wenda let go of his hand and ran to his father and hugged him. "Home," he heard her say against his father's shoulder.

Quintus' eyes filled with tears as he hugged Wenda and stared at Titus.

Wenda pulled back from Quintus and let go with a string of words in her language. Quintus seemed too stunned to worry over the fact he couldn't understand her. He cupped Wenda's face in his hands and stared at her, as if unbelieving.

She threw her arms around Quintus for one last, hard hug, then ran off toward the kitchen, to find Domitilla, Titus assumed.

"What happened?" his father asked as he swiped at moist eyes. "Why is she still here?"

Titus sighed, his heart aching for his father. It was very obvious Quintus was thrilled that Wenda had returned, but Titus feared that one day soon she would come to see that

she didn't belong there. He cleared his throat and motioned toward his office.

"She did not wish to leave," he said simply as he poured himself a tumbler of wine Domitilla had left on his desk.

"Did she understand that she was to go home? Back to her home land?"

Titus gulped down the watered wine then poured another. "Yes. Rutilius was able to communicate with her, said he even knew from what area she came because of her dialect, but she refused to stay on the ship. She was determined to come home with me. She kept repeating the word 'safe'."

Quintus scratched his forehead then dropped into a chair. "As much as I've come to love the girl in the two days she's been here..." He shook his head and looked up at Titus with his brows pulled into a worried frown. "I do not know how safe it is for her here. What if—"

"I know, Father. I know. I am worried. But what if her life on the Isles was worse than it is here? What if she has no one left to go back to? She would be a single woman left to her own defenses. As we know—"

Quintus held up his hand as if he didn't want to hear the words tumbling through Titus' head. Prostitution... Death... Another slave trader...

His father suddenly sat up straight and clapped his hands on his knees. "It is done then. Wenda shall have a home here as long as she wishes to stay. We will teach her the language, and we will teach her our customs. And then, if she wishes, we will find her a suitable mate."

Titus nearly dropped his cup. "We will what?"

"The girl is too young and beautiful and high spirited to live as a slave. She needs a strong, steady man to take care of her. We will find this man and see that she is cared for." Quintus stood then and gripped Titus' shoulder. "It is done."

Titus stood in stunned silence as his father walked out of the room looking younger and more sure of himself than Titus had seen since his mother died.

Then he dropped his cup to the table and stared at the etchings on the wall. "I will reside in Hades before we find her a mate," he muttered. If Wenda stayed, she was his. Only his!

Later that night, after Titus had spent hours working on the ledgers, he made his way to his chamber. As had become habit for her, Wenda lay on the other side of the bed, facing the lit lamp. He sighed. How long was he supposed to endure sleeping next to her without touching her? If she knew she was safe now, why did she refuse to sleep in her own room?

He stood in the doorway, looking at her curled up in a ball, wondering if he should use her bed.

She rolled to face him, her eyes open. A small smile curved her lips, and she held out her hand to him.

How could he refuse such a sweet invitation? He moved across the room and sat down on the edge of the bed, then lay down.

She set her palm against his chest and met his eyes. "Safe," she whispered.

No, she wasn't safe. He didn't feel very protective at the moment. He wanted to take, possess, own. He'd been raised

by his parents to treat women as equals, as souls to be cherished.

He wanted to cherish, but not the way Wenda expected of him. With a hard swallow, he laid his hand over hers. "Safe." He would not take advantage of her trust—even if the denial to his body caused him agony.

Her eyelashes lowered, but then opened again, her eyes wide, her lips slightly parted.

"It is not something I can control around you, sweet Wenda," he muttered, even though he knew she couldn't understand. She had obviously seen the tented fabric over his hardened cock.

She whispered soft words in her native tongue and moved just a bit closer to him.

He shook his head, let go of her hand, and set it against her shoulder to keep her from getting even closer. If she touched him with her body, snuggled against him the way she'd been this morning when he awoke aching with a need he'd thought had deserted him ages ago, he could not be responsible for his actions.

She turned her head and kissed his fingers against her shoulder.

"Wenda. No." The words came out as a pained groan. He turned to sit up, to leave the room, to escape his own urges toward her, but her arm snaked around his waist, and she pressed up against him, her soft breasts against his bicep.

"Titus," she whispered. Lowering her hand, she found his cock with unerring ease, and wrapped her fingers around it through his clothing.

Titus grabbed her wrist and moved her hand away. "No. Wenda." He had no idea why she did this, but he feared it was in thanks for him saving her, bringing her home with him. He couldn't take this kind of payment from her. It would be wrong, no matter how much his body demanded it.

"Home," Wenda said, then leaned up and pressed her soft lips against his.

He tried to push her away, he did, but she opened her mouth just a bit and touched the tip of her tongue to his lips, and that was all it took to push him over the edge. To shove him beyond the ability to think ahead to tomorrow, to what this meant to her, to what he would feel when he realized he'd taken her body in payment of a good deed.

"Home," Wenda whispered as she moved over him, her small, curvy body so light and soft as she sprawled on top of his. She melded her mouth to his, her tongue dipping into his mouth as she straddled his waist, her *peplos* riding up. He gripped her waist, ran his hands up her sides, and felt her heat through his tunic.

His cock surged to fullness, but he lay still, not pressing against her, letting Wenda show him what she wanted, expected, needed.

She wrapped her arms around his neck and pressed her breasts against his chest. He moaned when she ground her pussy against his cock. She kissed his lips, his cheek, his ear, his neck, and all he could do was hold her against him, savoring the sweet warmth of her body, the scent of the herbs she still pasted on her injuries, and the weight of her body pressed onto his.

She pulled his tunic up and ran her hands over his stomach, up his chest. Curled her fingers into his muscles, making him bite his tongue to keep from shouting at the exhilaration her touch fired through his body. So long... It had been so long since he'd been touched by a woman.

She pushed his clothing up to his armpits and nibbled his chest, flicked her tongue over one hard nipple. She grabbed his wrist and brought his hand up and pressed it against her breast.

"Ahh, sweet Wenda," he murmured as he cupped her, molded her, raised his other hand and flicked both nipples through the light material covering them.

She mewled and bucked her hips against his cock. She whispered something in her own language and sat up to look him in the eye.

"What is it?" he asked, his hands still on her breasts, teasing her nipples through the fabric.

She licked her lips, then reached down to clasp the bottom of her *peplos* in her fists, then tore it over her head, knocking his hands away as she did so.

He sucked in a startled breath. Though he'd seen her naked when he and Domitilla cleansed her and tended her wounds, this was so much different. The bruises were fading, ugly yellow, but her skin was smooth and shone in the lamplight. Her midnight blue eyes studied him as he took in her lovely body. Her breasts were high and firm, yet...

He reached out and traced tiny marks at the top of her breast.

She looked down, frowned, shook her head. Then she laid her hand over his and pressed his palm against her hardened nipple.

He looked over her closer this time, ignoring the bruises, and saw more of those same marks on her lower abdomen.

His heart stuttered. She'd had a child. These were the marks of stretching due to pregnancy. He knew, because the woman he'd been betrothed to had them. She'd mothered two boys by her first husband.

"Where is your baby?" he asked, looking back into her eyes.

She made no response.

He laid his hand over her belly. "Baby."

She shook her head with vehemence, leaned over, and pressed her mouth to his, but not before he saw the glitter of tears in her eyes.

"Sweet Wenda," he muttered as he wrapped his arms around her and held her tight.

Her kisses grew urgent, her whimpers pleading as her fingers pulled at his tunic, trying to get it off of him. He sat up and helped her.

No longer did he think she did this because she felt obligated. No, she did this because she needed it, possibly even more than he did. Perhaps this was her way of reclaiming something she'd lost.

When they were both naked, she wasted no time. She wrapped her hand around his cock, stroked him twice with long pulls, then positioned herself over him.

"Wenda, wait."

She didn't listen—probably didn't understand. With deliberation, she lowered herself over him and sank down, taking him in.

"Ahh..." Her head fell back, and she didn't move, as if having him fill her was the most wonderful thing she had ever experienced.

He covered her breasts with his hands once again, abrading her stiff nipples with his palms. Her skin was so smooth it felt like the most expensive of silks. His cock throbbed within her tight, heated sheath, yet he kept himself from thrusting into her. If this is what she needed, then she must take it. He would do nothing to scare her. Later, once they knew each other better, he would have her in every way he dreamed, but for now—

She rose up and sat back down, hard, and cried out. Her cunt squeezed his cock so tight it took all his will not to shout at the exquisite torture.

He squeezed her breasts, toyed with her nipples. She moved then, leaning forward, bracing her palms against his shoulders.

On each stroke, she mewled like a kitten. As her movements gained speed, and she rode him hard and fast, he dropped one hand from her breast and flicked his fingers over the tight, sensitive bud between her thighs.

She cried out something in her native language and thrust herself over him harder and harder. Her fingernails dug into his shoulders, and it took everything inside of him to keep from spilling within her. Her breasts bounced with each jerk of her body. Her slick juices coated his cock, his fingers as he

stroked her clitoris. Sweat blossomed on his brow as he gritted his teeth to stave off his own release.

And then she jerked hard, threw back her head so her plaited hair whipped against his thighs, and screamed. Her cunt spasmed around his cock, and he could withstand no more. He thrust just once, raising his hips and burying himself so deep within her they became one, and then pulled her into his arms as he spilled his seed within her and made her his.

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Chapter Nine

One year later...

Titus lay abed, Wenda's back pressed to his stomach, his hand over her distended belly as he felt the baby within her kick and stretch. He smiled and buried his face in her hair, so happy and full inside he wondered that he didn't burst. He would have a child with the woman he loved more than life itself.

"Titus, my love?" His sweet Wenda said, her voice low, her soft accent something he never tired of hearing, especially when she said his name.

He raised his head and propped it on his hand. She rolled to her back with a soft grunt, her hands supporting her huge belly as she did so. He chuckled.

"Why have you never asked me about my life before I came to you?"

His humor fled, and he met her eyes, those eyes bluer than the ocean. He rubbed his hand over her bare belly, up to her full, pouting breast. "I admit I have always been curious, but I did not wish to bring back memories you would rather not relive." By the time she spoke his language fluently, he'd decided that she'd made her decision to stay with him and that was all that truly mattered.

"I live with those memories every day of my life, Titus. I feared you did not want to know, since you have never asked."

"I will listen, if you wish to tell me." He took a deep breath. "You had a husband?"

She nodded.

"And a child?"

"Two sons," she whispered, and her bottom lip trembled slightly.

He brushed his thumb over her mouth and kissed her cheek.

"Were they killed when the slave traders took you?"

She shook her head. "No. My husband was killed while out with a hunting party two years before they took me. My boys and I lived with my father and mother." She swallowed so hard he heard it. "They were just babies, though. Three and four years old. Too young for the slave traders to want. They killed all the babies in the village, and the old people...my parents. They took only the young and strong, and then we were divided, and by the time the ship reached Rome, there was no one left who I knew." A tear slipped from her eye and trickled into her hair.

Titus kissed the salty trail and murmured, "I'm sorry, Wenda. Is this why you didn't go home when I took you to the ship? You had no one to go back to?"

She nodded. "Also, you and father and Domitilla were so kind. I didn't want to leave you. I loved you even then."

He ran his finger over hers still on her belly. "This ring. From your husband?"

She nodded. "It is the symbol of our clan." She paused for a long moment. "Family. It is the only thing I have left of my...of where I am from."

"You were going to say your home, weren't you?"

"Yes, I was. But this is my home now. With you. I do not wish to be anywhere without you."

Titus wrapped his arms around her, snuggling her against him as well as he could with her giant belly in the way. "Marry me, Wenda. Let us bring this child into the world as husband and wife."

She sighed. "I am but a slave."

"No. You are not. You never have been. You have been free since the day Father brought you home. You know this. You are a Roman citizen, and as such, we can marry, and that is all I want. I want you. I have asked before, yet you refuse me. Why?"

She touched his cheek and stared into his eyes. "I was afraid before. I did not understand. And you have not asked since I came to learn that I would not affect your station in Rome society. I thought you would be unable to help people like me who were taken from their homes, ripped from their families. If you married someone so beneath your station, I did not know what would happen. I only considered all those poor souls you might not be able to help if you lose face in the community."

"Wenda..." He smiled, his heart softened by her. She gave so selflessly. "I should have asked you every day to be my wife." He tapped her nose. "You should have told me why you denied me."

"I love you. You love me. We are going to have a child, and we will raise this child with all the love inside of us. What is the difference if we live this way, or if we have a marriage

sanctioned by the state?" She gave a sad smile. "In my heart, you are already my husband. I will live the rest of my life with you. Your family is my family. Your father is my father. I am happy. I will marry you, though, if that is what you wish."

He cupped her cheek and gently kissed her lips. "I am happy with you. You are my life, sweet Wenda. Always."

She smiled against his mouth. "Then make love to me, Titus, before I have to give birth and we cannot touch for weeks."

He chuckled. "Tomorrow we will wed, then, yes?"

She rolled her eyes. "Yes, love. *Tomorrow*. Tonight I am need of your body."

"Do you think of nothing else?"

She laughed and ran her hand down his chest to his cock, which was already partially hard just from her closeness, her soft, lilting voice. When she wound her fingers around his length, he closed his eyes and groaned.

"Make love to me," she whispered before she kissed him again.

He stroked her tongue with his, held her bountiful breast in his palm and flicked her nipple.

She sucked in a quick breath, then moaned. "Your touch is the most wonderful thing my body has ever experienced, Titus."

"Roll over," he whispered and helped her adjust her belly so she lay once again on her side, her back to his front. He lifted her leg and draped it over his thigh, aligning the tip of his cock with her warm, sweet dampness. "Always ready for

me," he murmured in her ear before he took her lobe between his teeth and nibbled, just the way she liked him to.

"Always," she said on a whimper as she arched her chest forward into his palm and pressed her ass against his pelvis. "Please..."

Slowly, he slid into her welcoming cunt, the hot, slick glide as he possessed her made him close his eyes and savor the moment. He longed for the day he would hold his child in his arms, but dreaded the time when he wouldn't be able to feel her body tighten around him as he took her. Made her his. Every time was as precious as the first. He would spend eternity with her and never have her enough.

"You are too gentle," she cried. "I need more."

He pressed deep into her body, fearful of harming the child. Her pussy clenched around his cock, sucking him deeper. She reached back, grabbed his butt, and pulled him tighter against her while her short nails dug into his flesh.

With a grunt, he thrust hard, as she asked, and she cried out, her nails scoring his skin as she clung to him. He buried his face in her herb-scented hair and slid his arm under her neck, to wrap around and hold her breast, while with his other hand he reached down and spread her soft, plump pussy lips and delved his finger into her hot dampness to find the tense bundle of nerves.

"Yesss!" she cried as she bucked against his hand and his hips. He barely moved, didn't need to, for she couldn't keep still. Her breaths were heavy, labored, tipped with sweet, erotic sounds of need and lust, as she rode both his hand and his cock.

Titus gritted his teeth and squeezed his eyes shut as the torture of her eroticism became almost unbearable and he fought his own release. He flicked her clit with his fingertips, hard and fast, squeezed her nipples, tugged on them, wished they were face to face so he could suckle them before they became the property of his son or daughter.

With a series of grunts and squeals, Wenda found her release, her hips still pumping. When her inner muscles tightened around his cock, he could not wait a moment more. A low groan came out of him as he spilled his seed within her, pressing her body against his as tight as he possibly could, holding her with all the love in his heart and soul.

"My Wenda," he whispered, wondering if she even heard him because of her frantic heartbeat and her panting breaths. "Always my Wenda."

* * * *

Two years later...

Titus ducked behind a statue in the peristylium. Little Quint giggled, his tiny sandal-clad feet crunching the fine gravel as he searched for his father. The boy was the joy of his life.

"It is time for supper," Quintus called from the archway to the kitchen.

Titus jumped out from behind the statue with a roar and grabbed his giggling son into his arms. "Coming, Father," he called back as he tickled Quint's belly, loving the way the boy giggled and squirmed in his arms, yet at the same time clutching Titus' shoulders.

Quintus grinned as he watched them come toward him. "The boy grows every day. He will be a fine young man."

"That he will, Father," Titus readily agreed. At only two years old, the boy was a hefty little man, full of energy and muscle. Titus flung the boy over his shoulder as if he were a sack of grain, which made Quint burst into another round of giggles.

In the kitchen, they found Wenda working with Domitilla to lay out their evening meal. Roasted lamb, cheeses, olives, figs and fruit. Ever since her very first meal in their household, Wenda insisted on having figs and fruit with every meal. She said they reminded her that when she was starving and near death, this family had taken her in and fed her, made her one of their own. She turned and smiled at Titus when she heard his footsteps.

He kissed her forehead and squeezed her shoulder in a sign of affection before taking his seat at the long worktable. They were an informal family, and only when hosting guests—which wasn't often—did they use the dining room. Mostly they supped in the kitchen, sitting on benches on either side of the worktable. Titus set Quint on the bench beside him, but the boy scrambled to his feet, leaned over the table, and grabbed a handful of cubed cheeses.

"How was your day, Titus?" Wenda asked as she sat down opposite him and touched her foot to his under the table.

"Very well. The ship will sail at dawn. We had room for nearly twenty this time." His heart light, he rubbed his toes up her calf and grinned at his beautiful wife.

Quintus sat down at the head of the table, and Domitilla slid onto the bench beside Wenda.

When Quint reached for another handful of cheese, Wenda tilted her head, raised an eyebrow, and stared at the boy. Quint stopped mid reach and sat on his knees.

Titus hid his grin behind his hand. Wenda commanded this house with a firm, gentle hand. With just a look, she stopped Quint in his tracks when he would misbehave. With just a tilt of her head, she could get Titus to give her anything she asked. Mostly, she asked for his love and his body. Both of which he readily gave her in abundance.

Titus tore off a chuck of lamb from the plate in front of him and gave it to the boy, who sat down and gnawed on it. Then he took a bite himself. "Mmm. This is very good," he said to Domitilla. "Different, but good." The seasoning was not her normal choice.

Domitilla shook her head and pointed at Wenda.

"I agree," Quintus said as he chewed his food. "This is very good."

Wenda blushed a bit under their praise. "Thank you. There were some herbs from my homeland I had asked Rutilius to try to find. He had a boy deliver them yesterday not long after you left to see to the ship."

"I hope you have more," Quintus said, licking his fingers.

Wenda's laugh was sweet and musical. "Yes, he brought many varieties and much of it. We will be eating it for quite some time."

A banging at the front door made Wenda jump and Quint turn wide, frightened eyes on Titus.

Titus ruffled the boy's silky black hair—which he got from his mother—and smiled. "I will see who it is."

The banging continued, and he frowned as he threw the bolt and pulled the heavy wooden door open.

"Titus Marinus?"

Titus wrinkled his brow in confusion. The man asking the question was a friend of his. Realization dawned in the next moment when he looked beyond Petrovia's shoulder to see six guards standing at attention. His stomach clenched, and his heart clattered against his ribs. Petrovia was his friend, but he was a guard...the law. He had helped Titus avoid detection in the past, working to keep Titus' quest for freeing slaves a secret.

Titus met Petrovia's eyes, and in them Titus saw sorrow and apology.

"Titus Marinus?" Petrovia asked again.

"Yes. I am Titus Marinus. May I ask what you are doing on my doorstep while my family and I try to eat supper?"

"You are under arrest," Petrovia said. "You and your father, Quintus Marinus."

"The charge?" he demanded, even though he knew.

"You are accused of stealing two slaves from the merchant Farberous with the intent of smuggling them out of Rome on your merchant ship *Sherintine*."

"He didn't do it."

Titus whirled around to see his wife standing behind him. "Wenda. Go back to the kitchen and stay there."

"No," she said, raising her chin. "I will not let you or your father be arrested for a crime you did not commit."

Titus gritted his teeth, his nostrils flaring. "Go to the kitchen, woman!"

She shook her head at him and took a step forward. "No, my lord," she said just loud enough for Petrovia to hear her. She had *never* referred to him as her lord. Then she sidestepped him to stand in front of Petrovia. "I am Wenda, a former slave from the Isles. And I am the one who snuck into the merchant Farberous' house yestereve and freed the woman and her son."

Titus gripped her shoulders to get her to shut up. What was she doing? The only reason she even knew what happened was because, when he arrived home late, she'd waited up for him and demanded to know what he'd been doing.

Petrovia cleared his throat, looking between Wenda and Titus. "Is this true?" he asked Wenda.

Wenda said, "Yes," as Titus said, "No."

"My lord," she cried, wrenching away from Titus' grip. "I am the one who did this deed. You will not take the blame for something your wife has done. I snuck out after supper and did this. I will take the punishment."

"The punishment is death," Titus gritted out between clenched teeth.

"Yes, it is," she said, her voice barely more than a whisper. In her midnight blue eyes he saw her conviction, but he didn't understand it.

"I can't let you—"

She smiled, which was sad and didn't reach her eyes. "You take care of that son of yours. Take good care of him." And then she turned back to Petrovia. "I am ready."

Petrovia gave Titus a look of helplessness, as if asking what he should do. Petrovia had supper in Titus' home several times in the last two years. He knew Wenda was Titus' wife. Knew Wenda was the mother of his child.

There was a message in her words, though. But how could he care for his son without her? She was Quint's mother, his wife. His life. "Wait," Titus said.

"No, my lord," Wenda said. "It is better this way." She kept her back to him, but he heard the slight quaver in her voice.

"Mama!" Quint cried as he ran into the foyer and wrapped his arms around Wenda's leg.

She bent, hugged the boy, then whispered something in his ear, which made him smile. Then she whispered something else, and nudged him toward Titus. She looked up at Titus then, tears in her eyes. "Take care of your son, my lord." And then she stood and walked out the door to be surrounded by the six guardsmen.

"Petrovia," Titus said as he lifted Quint into his arms.

The man hung back a moment. "You know the punishment," Petrovia whispered. "There is nothing I can do for her. She will be tried in the morn. She confessed in front of six guards."

Titus leaned against the wall as the full impact of what had just happened hit him between the eyes. "No," he whispered,

clutching his son to him. "No. She cannot be put to death. She did not do this."

Petrovia laid a hand on his shoulder. "I will do what I can, but—"

"She confessed," Titus finished.

"Mama!" Quint cried when the door shut between him and his mother. "Mama!"

"Why did she take the blame?" Quintus asked, and for the first time Titus realized his father stood with him in the foyer.

Titus shook his head. "I do not know. I do not know..."

* * * *

The trial was over in minutes. Wenda was led into the court shackled hand and foot like some crazed criminal. Her hair hung in lank strands down her back, and dirt smudged her cheek. The judge stated her crimes and asked if she was guilty. With her chin held high, she said, "Yes." The judge pronounced her guilty of thievery at night and sentenced her to death at Tarpeian Rock three days from now.

Titus gritted his teeth to keep from calling out, but his father's pained groan as he gripped Titus' arm echoed the agony in his heart. Her death would be quick. She'd be thrown from a cliff.

She turned and made eye contact with him, offered one of her sweet, gentle smiles, then was forced out of the court by the guards who shoved her in front of them.

Titus sat, his arm gripped firm by his father, and watched her go.

"We will break her out of prison tonight," Quintus stated.

"Put her on the ship and send her away before they can kill her."

The thought had crossed Titus' mind, but it was impossible. The prison was too well guarded. If they were caught, they would be put to death also.

Take care of your son.

Her words echoed in his head, and he was at a loss.

Quint had cried for hours for her last night. Had slept beside Titus in his bed once he got the boy to sleep. Titus had not slept, and now his tired brain did not know what to do.

"I must speak with her," Titus said, standing. "You go home and see to Quint. I must speak to my wife."

It took two days to arrange the meeting. Petrovia led him into the prison and relieved the guard, telling him to take a break, that he would stand guard while Titus spoke with his wife before her execution.

The stench of unwashed bodies nearly choked him as he walked among the cells, searching for Wenda. Petrovia handed him a single key and told him she was at the far end, and that is where he found her. She was dirty, sitting on the floor at the back of her tiny cell, her knees pulled to her chest, hugging herself.

"Wenda," he whispered.

Her head snapped up, and those dark blue eyes bore into him. She scrambled to her feet as he slid the key into the lock and released it. He stepped into her cell.

"Wenda..."

She shook her head. "Why are you here?" she whispered, or perhaps her voice was hoarse from lack of use. "You should not be here, Titus. You must go. You cannot be caught—"

He stepped up to her and pulled her into his arms, silencing her by pressing her face into his shoulder. "My love, why?" A sob ripped from his throat on the last word. He'd fought so hard for composure these past few days, but now, with her back in his arms, it was impossible not to let the feelings surface. The anger and fear and despair.

"Why, Wenda? Why did you do this?"

"What would my life be without you? I am but a woman. If you were put to death, I would be alone—"

"Stop lying to me!" He gripped her shoulders and shook her. "Why did you do this? Is life so horrible here that you would rather die?"

"Because I *love* you. I love you and cannot bear to see *you* die." Tears streamed down her dirty cheeks. "You are such a good man. You and your father. You've helped so many of us who otherwise would not have lives worth living."

Titus pulled her against his chest again and held her tight as his own tears burned his eyes. "What about Quint? He needs his mother."

She shook her head against his shoulder. "He needs you to teach him. Teach him to be a strong, righteous man."

"I..." He swallowed hard. "I cannot let you do this. I will go to the court and tell the judge the truth."

She pulled back and looked up into his eyes. There was no disguising the love she had for him, and his heart bled.

"The choice is simple, my love. You and your father, or me. Without you, I have nothing. Quint and I would have nothing—"

"Without you I am nothing!"

She placed her fingers over his lips. "Listen to me, Titus. Listen."

He kissed her fingers, cupped her hand, and pressed his mouth against her palm. Her breath hitched, but she went on. "If you were to die, I would be trapped here at the mercy of whoever paid the state the highest amount of money. And who knows where your son would wind up."

Staring into her midnight blue eyes, he could not bear the thought of living without her. This woman laid down her life for his and his father's. "I cannot go on this way. I cannot keep helping these people. If you die, and I am caught, then our son is at the mercy of the state. He will be sold." He shook his head. "What am I to do without you? What about Father? He...he..." His thoughts scattered. His love, his Wenda, would be sent to death in the morning. He wanted to take her away from this place, and perhaps Petrovia would let him—or perhaps not.

"Go north to my homeland. Take my ring and find my clan." She pulled back enough to be able to twist the ring off of her finger. "Tell them who you are and who our son is. Tell them you loved Wenda. They will take you in. They are family."

He shook his head. "You said you had no family left. That they were all killed."

She licked her lips. "Clan *is* family. I told you this. The slave traders killed my mother, father, sons and brothers, but the clan is still there...I hope." She placed the cheap iron ring in his palm. "Take this and go north. Find them. Find my clan and make a new home where people do not own other people. Fight beside them for what is right. Fight and...and *live*."

He cupped her dirt-smudged face in his hands. "Wenda..."

"Go before morning. Just go. I know you have a ship in dock now. Get on it, take Quint, Father and Domitilla, and go."

"But tomorrow—"

"No! You will not watch me die. You will not. Take our son and go. Do not come to the cliff, Titus. I beg of you. Do not. In your heart, keep me safe and remember me as we were just days ago."

"Titus," Petrovia whispered from outside the cell. "The guard returns."

Titus pulled Wenda into his arms and kissed her hard. Held her tight. Poured all his love into this last touch. When he lifted his head, he kissed the tears from her eyes. "You are brave, and our son will know this. He will know that you died for his safety."

"I love you, Titus. I have from the moment you sat in the moonlight and told me I was safe."

He kissed her again, but it was Petrovia's hand on his shoulder that made him pull away.

"Leave tonight," she whispered as he backed out of the door and Petrovia turned the lock. "Leave now. Promise me."

"I promise, my love."

As Petrovia led him back through the cells, Titus slipped Wenda's ring on his smallest finger and closed his hand. His heart was in tatters, and as much as his conscious told him to exchange places with her, he knew she was right. What he hoped and prayed would be a quick death for her would be better than whatever might happen to her at the hands of the state.

As Titus walked into the cool evening air, Petrovia said, "I am sorry, my friend. If there were anything I could do..."

Titus nodded. "I know this, friend." He clasped Petrovia on the shoulder. "And you have been a good friend."

"Will you do as she requested of you?"

"Yes. We will be gone by morning."

"I believe it is for the best. After this..." He waved his hand toward the prison. "...I am unsure if you could continue on your quest as you have. There have been too many close calls, and now you will be watched, your ships searched often."

Titus nodded, extended his hand. Petrovia clasped his forearm in a sign of friendship.

"Be well, Titus."

"And you." Titus walked toward home, his eyes burning from tears he refused to shed, his chest aching from the cry of anguish he withheld. There would be time to mourn later. By morning they would be on the ship sailing north. Rutilius would know where to take them. He prayed that Wenda's clan still existed, because if they didn't, he was not sure how the

four of them would survive in a strange land where their people were hated.

He was glad, now, that he and his father had learned to speak Wenda's tongue. It might be the only thing to save them in the end. That, and the son of one of their own.

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Chapter Ten

Present day...

Teri's head jerked up at the sound of the pressure seal being broken on the room. Her heart thundered in her chest. Tears wet her cheeks. When Camden stepped through the door, what she saw scared the living hell out of her. Not the man who had hired her, not even the Scot laird she'd thought him to be. No, she saw Titus. Her Titus. The man she'd died in order to save.

She stumbled when she tried to stand, her legs numb from hours of sitting on the stool. Her heart thumped so hard she thought it'd break a rib. Her brain was fried. Totally, unbelievably, screwed. Her back thumped against the wall when she stumbled away from Camden as he came toward her. She held out her hand to warn him off.

"Please. Just...stay there."

Camden frowned. "Lassie, what's wrong?"

Her hand shook as she held it out, so she curled her fingers into a fist and lowered it to her side. Drawing in several slow breaths, she tried to compose herself and bring her brain back under control so she could think logically. She lifted her chin, pushed her glasses up her nose, and was very proud of herself when her voice came out strong and steady as she said, "Excuse me, Camden, but I need to freshen up." And then, without bothering to wait for him to say something because she so desperately needed to be away from him, she sidled past him and out the door. Keeping her tread steady,

she didn't run up the stairs, even though she wanted to, and made it to her room where she shut and locked the door. Then collapsed against it and slid down it till she sat on the floor shaking.

What the hell was going on with her? She'd *read* the story, but she felt as if she'd *lived* it. She knew Wenda. Knew her on some strange, primitive level that scared the hell out of her. As if she *remembered* living that life.

No, she didn't remember. She didn't! This was just some weird, stupid... Her imagination got the best of her. She'd just been so enthralled by the story, she'd...

"Oh, God," Teri whispered and wrapped her arms around herself. "I am *not* going crazy."

Titus Marinus. She loved him. Loved him to the depths of her soul. He'd saved her from certain death at the hands of a slave merchant. He'd saved her, then loved her. And she'd given her life for him and their son.

She shoved to her feet and paced to the window. Shook her head as she glanced out at the dusk. She'd been down in that room for at least twelve hours reading that story.

Wait! She spun away from the window and looked at the digital clock on the nightstand. It was five in the evening. That wasn't possible. The most experienced historian couldn't decipher all those stylus tablets in twelve hours. She wasn't that fluent in the ancient Latin script. No way. She couldn't have done it. It was physically impossible.

Leaning back against the windowsill, she closed her eyes and dropped her head forward. She was exhausted. As if she'd lived years in the last hours.

Titus.

When she closed her eyes, she saw him. But how could that be? The story was written by him with little actual description except of Wenda. So why could she see him so clearly? Him, the house, smell the earthy scents in the courtyard, the way the flowers perfumed the air, the sound of the trickling fountain and the twitter of little birds. She could see Quintus and Domitilla. And, oh, God, she could see the baby. Little Quintus. A hefty boy with black hair and the brightest blue eyes.

Teri wrapped her arms around her waist and tilted her head back to stare at the heavy wooden beams of the ceiling. Titus.

Sandy blond hair. Long, elegant fingers. Eyes a mossy green flecked with gray and gold. The soft whorls of hair on his chest that felt so good when she rubbed her cheek against it. Gentle hands that held her, soothed her, excited her. That long, lean body, so hard when she sprawled over him. His little beard tickled when they kissed. And when they made love...

Therese whimpered and pressed her hands against her breasts as her pussy heated and pulsed. Titus had loved her so thoroughly, physically and emotionally.

She gasped and dropped her hands. What was she thinking? It wasn't *her*. She'd *read* a story! Got involved in the story and let it invade her mind in a way she never had before.

Which brought back the thought that there was no way she read those tablets in so little time.

Sleep. If she slept a good ten hours, she'd be fine and could think straight. She went across the room, pulled back the covers on the massive bed, and reached for her waistband to push down her sweats when someone knocked on the door.

"Therese?"

Damn. She wasn't ready to see Camden yet.

"Therese, I have some food. Ye must be starved."

Her stomach growled to prove the point. She went to the door, flipped the lock, and pulled it open. Camden stood there with a tray loaded with a carafe of wine, a pot of tea, a half loaf of dark bread that smelled fresh baked, and a bowl covered with a towel. Her stomach set up a howl then, and Camden grinned.

Teri stepped aside, and Camden walked into the room, to the small table near the window, and set down the tray. "It's lamb stew."

"Thank you. I am hungry." She sat in one of two chairs at the small table and lifted the towel from the bowl. Steam rose from the thick, tomato sauce based stew, and her mouth watered. "Oh, that smells good. Thank you, Camden." She lifted the bread, broke off a piece, and dunked it in the stew the way her dad always had. Moaning, she slowly chewed. It was sooo good. While she took another bite, she poured the dark burgundy-colored wine into the glass on the tray. After she swallowed, she took a sip, then a bigger sip, and closed her eyes as the full flavor burst on her tongue and mingled with the essence of the stew and heavy grain rye bread.

Vaguely she heard the door shut, but the delicious meal in front of her kept her enthralled. She couldn't remember ever being so hungry, and she couldn't ever remember anything tasting so very yummy.

* * * *

Camden closed the door to Therese's room and leaned against it a moment while he tried to coax his body back under control. Such a simple thing as watching her eat was enough to make his cock hard and his heart pound. His fingers itched to touch her skin. His mouth watered not from the aroma of the food but the need to taste her lips again. That one, tiny sip the other night had been nowhere near enough.

When he could walk without injuring himself, he made his way back to the kitchen where Charles waited with an expectant look on his ruddy face. Camden shook his head and moved to dish up bowls of food for them.

"What does that head waggle mean, boy?" Charles demanded. "You said she remembered."

Again, Camden shook his head. When he'd gone down to the storage room and found her cheeks wet with tears and a look of fear and disbelief in her eyes, he'd been so sure she remembered. But now, up in her room, she'd been composed and more worried about food than anything else. "I donna think so." He shrugged and broke off a chunk of the bread he'd pulled out of the oven just minutes before, dropped it in a bowl, and then did the same for the second. He turned and

handed his friend the stew. "Perhaps she willna remember. Maybe..." He shrugged. "Maybe it is useless."

Charles dipped his bread then took a bite of it and chewed thoughtfully.

Camden set his bowl on the counter, unable to eat. "I donna know what ta do."

"I told ye from the beginnin'."

Camden rolled his eyes.

"If ye lock yerselves in the tower fer a while, and show the lass what a good lover ye are, then all will work out. Ferget 'bout the blasted journals. What do they matter? If she's the one ye're meant to be with, then she's the one. Ye're still sure 'bout that, right?"

"With every passing moment, even more so."

"Well then, ferget the blasted journals! So what if ye know and she doesna?" His voice rose and he set his bowl down none too gently, slopping some sauce onto the counter. "Ye might just waste yer only chance with the woman by pushing this on her. Did ye think of that? If she's not a believer, you'll scare her off. Then where'll you be? Here. All alone. With me."

He had a point. Therese had been adamant about not believing in reincarnation and past lives. She had that strange look come over her at times, and he just knew she was remembering, but she brushed it off as her imagination.

But she'd been crying in the storage room. Crying and very upset. Wouldn't let him get near her. He thought maybe when he brought her food, she'd talk to him, but she'd obviously

gone too long without eating and only concerned herself with the meal.

Camden conceded that Charles was right. Tomorrow, he'd give up on her remembering their pasts and move on with the future. Their future. He'd work with her on the preservation—since he was paying her a small mint to do it—and while they worked, he'd put on the MacGregor charm. By the time she was done with the preservation, she'd be madly in love with him.

He grinned at Charles and lifted his bowl. "I'll only say this one time, old man. Ye'er right. It's time to approach Therese in a different way. It's time to...woo her."

Charles' laugh was gravely, and his eyes crinkled in delight. "That's me boy."

* * * *

The midnight lover was upon her, in her, pinning her to the soft feather bed as he pumped that long, thick cock into her cunt and suckled her nipples.

She cried out and thrust her hips up to meet each strong, deep stroke, his pelvis grinding against her clit on each penetration, bringing her closer and closer to climax. His hands, so big and hot on her flesh, held her wrists above her head so she couldn't move.

She wrapped her legs around his hips, gripping him tight, bringing her knees up high so she could take him even deeper...deeper. His lips and teeth tugged on her nipples, his hot, moist tongue laved her.

She panted. She whimpered. She tugged against his grip on her hands, trying to free herself so she could wrap her arms around him and hold him. This was the best it'd ever been, and damn, sometimes it was great.

He held her firm, though, and she couldn't pull her hands away. Leaving her breasts, he moved up, never breaking the steady, rhythmic strokes of his cock into her, and suckled the side of her neck.

Teri cried out again and bucked, the need more urgent. If she didn't come she'd die, she was sure of it. "Please..." she whimpered.

"Shh, sweet Elsbeth," he whispered in her ear the instant before he drew her lobe between his teeth to nibble.

Teri stopped moving, and the heated flush covering her body turned to ice. The words were spoken in Gaelic. She tried to open her eyes, to end the dream. That hot mouth of his moved back to her neck, nibbling, teasing, but tears streamed from her eyes now, all sense of pleasure gone.

Who was Elsbeth, and why had her midnight lover spoken to her? Spoken! Not like hearing a voice in her head when she'd heard the name Wenda the first time. No, this was a voice spoken to her from someone else.

Wake up, wake up!

"Sweet, sweet, Elsbeth," he murmured as he licked her neck then to her other ear. "I have missed you so."

She opened her eyes and...saw his face.

"No!" she screamed, and jerked her hands free of the grip anchoring her to the bed.

The door to her room burst open, and just like that, she was alone in the bed, but only for a moment. In the next second, Camden was there, holding her against his chest.

"It's all right, love. Ye had a nightmare."

She shook and sobbed and gripped Camden's shoulders to steady herself. Who the fuck was Elsbeth, and why did her midnight lover suddenly have a face? A voice? She felt confused. She felt ill. But Camden's wide, solid, bare chest felt so good as she rested her cheek against it. His arms so strong as he held her, his hands tender as he stroked her back.

"Ye're all right, love. Everythin'll be okay."

She couldn't quite catch her breath, and the tears still flowed. Why couldn't she have a normal life? Why couldn't this man who held her so gently and soothed her be someone she could love and be loved by? She sobbed harder and wound her arms around his waist. All she'd ever wanted was a normal life. Things had never been normal for her, not since her wedding night. And now, it was getting worse.

Her midnight lover was Camden McGregor—the thirteenth century laird.

Sucking in a shuddery breath, Teri tried to calm herself.

Maybe this wasn't her midnight lover. This could have just been a female version of a wet dream. That had to be it. Her midnight lover didn't have a face, didn't have a voice.

Camden's arms around her loosened, and he cupped the side of her face, stroked away the dampness from her tears with his thumb. "Are ye all right, lassie?"

She nodded. Everything was fine. She wasn't losing her mind. She'd just had a fantasy about this Camden that translated into her image of him as his ancestor. "I'm okay." Though she was loath to let go of him. It felt so right in his arms. More perfect than she'd ever experienced with a man.

But it wouldn't last. If they moved beyond a simple touch or that rather spectacular kiss the other night, they'd both be disappointed. She wasn't sure she could handle that much disillusion anymore.

Elsbeth...

The name echoed in her mind. "Um...Camden?"

His chest rumbled with a sound of query even as that gentle thumb stroked her cheek, her chin, her bottom lip.

She licked her lip and tasted the tip of Camden's finger. He sucked in a breath, and a quick spurt of excitement bloomed inside of her, which really wasn't difficult because she'd been so close to orgasming from the dream.

No. Concentrate. "Um..."

"What is it, lass?"

Had he called her *love* earlier, or was she imagining things?

"Therese?"

"Right." She forced herself to let go of Camden and sit back. She wiped the back of her hand over her eyes and then her palms over her cheeks. She sniffled. When she got the courage, she opened her eyes and was surprised to see a faint bit of light filtering through the window. Dawn was here.

"Do you have something to say?" Camden asked. He sat on the bed at her hip, one leg drawn up next to her, his knee

bent. Oh, good God, he wore nothing but a shiny, silky looking pair of dark colored boxers, and he had a hard-on. His hands now lay on his thighs, and she wanted them back on her.

"Yes, I have a question, but I think maybe I need a shower first. And some coffee. Very strong coffee." And to not look at him with his cock hard and so easily accessible.

He grinned. "Very well, Therese. I will let you shower, and I will brew you a pot of very strong coffee. Some breakfast?" he asked as he stood up and went to the table that still held the empty food tray from last night.

"Yes. Thank you, Camden."

He lifted the tray after setting the wine carafe and teapot back on it. "You're very welcome, lassie." He didn't turn and look at her again as he left the room.

Teri let out a shaky breath and hugged her knees to her chest. She did much better in the basement of the Smithsonian. There she didn't have to deal with many people. Just her assistant and her boss, mostly. Since her last failed relationship, she didn't go out—anywhere. She worked, she went home, she worked. She got takeout dinners or ate grocery store frozen dinners. She thought she liked her solitude, but...

Her chin quivered, and she forced herself to abandon that train of thought. Just because this man had the ability to make her feel so good when he held her, and just because he was the sexiest piece of male flesh she'd ever laid eyes on, did not mean she wasn't content in her regular life.

She knew that men were out of the question. Even this one. She was perfectly fine alone and had been for several years. In fact, she was better off alone. Less heartbreak that way.

Pushing off the bed, she headed toward the bathroom. She showered, dressed, and headed down to breakfast and a conversation with Camden she wasn't sure she was ready to have. She feared what he'd say in response to her questions. She suspected she already knew the answers—and that scared the hell out of her.

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Chapter Eleven

Teri took her seat in the sunroom and spread the napkin over her lap. She felt better after her steaming hot shower, and the seasoned scrambled eggs Camden had made smelled like heaven.

"Where's Charles?" she asked as Camden sat down at the end of the table and poured her a cup of coffee.

"He had some errands to run. He'll be back in an hour or so."

She nodded and picked up her fork. "I'd like to apologize for my actions last night and this morning."

"Donna think anythin' of it, lass. Everyone has nightmares now and then."

She gently scooped some fluffy eggs onto her fork. "No. I mean the tears and such. It was very unprofessional of me." She forced herself to meet his eyes. "I am not a weak woman, and I don't want you to think this is normal for me."

His smile was sweet and sincere. "It's all right, Therese."

She nodded and smiled. She saw no censure in his face or eyes. "Thank you." They ate in silence for a short while, and then she said, keeping her voice conversational, "What was the name of Laird MacGregor's wife?"

Camden's teacup, which he'd been lifting, stopped halfway to his mouth. "Elizabeth Alchort." He frowned. "Why do you ask?"

Elsbeth... Elizabeth. Could have been a pet name. Could be that a Gaelic-speaking person couldn't annunciate Elizabeth.

Teri licked her lips, her heart skipping a beat. "Alchort as in the Alchorts of Scarbany in Yorkshire?"

Camden nodded. "Yes. The daughter of Lord Brandon Alchort of Scarbany."

A cold sweat popped out on Teri's lower back. Her stomach churned, and she set her fork down on the edge of her plate. "How..." She took a sip of her coffee and cleared her throat. Her heart pounded harder, and her hand shook slightly as she set the cup back on its saucer.

Pictures flashed through her mind. The face of Laird MacGregor she'd seen in her bed this morning. Scarbany Castle, which she'd visited a few years ago. The memory of how she'd become physically ill when she'd stood in the Scarbany dungeon. The sense of loss and loneliness and absolute sorrow she'd experienced while walking the halls of the castle.

"How did a Highland laird wind up with an English lady as wife? Was she bartered?"

Camden's eyes were dark and intense, as if he searched her to find out what she was thinking. She wouldn't tell him, of course. No way in hell would she admit to whatever strangeness went on inside her. She was not weak of spirit or mind, and she sure as hell didn't want her employer to think she was. Crying all over his chest this morning had gone far beyond the boundaries she'd set. She wouldn't go any further. Ever.

"Laird MacGregor was almost finished buildin'," Camden said, and motioned with his hand to indicate the keep in which they sat. "But he'd run out o' money. He sent his men

on raiding parties." At Teri's frown, he chuckled. "Common practice back then, lassie. Nothing serious. A few sheep here and there, a robbery now and then if they found a rich wanderer." He waved away the thought with his hand. "Anyway, the pickin's were gettin' rather slim in the neighborhood, and they began to range farther and farther away, into England. Young Elizabeth was out ridin' with only one guard, so they kidnapped her. They figured MacGregor could use her for ransom."

"Instead, MacGregor kept her prisoner for good," Teri finished, even though down in her gut she knew that was not the case, but she needed to hear the story. Prayed she was wrong and didn't already know the tale.

Camden shook his head. "Love at first sight. When Elizabeth's father offered practically everythin' he had in exchange for his cherished daughter, MacGregor turned 'im down."

"But you're only telling your ancestor's side of it. Maybe he fell head over heels for her, but that doesn't mean she did for him. I mean, history is filled with caveman tactics, and as we all know, cavemen didn't exactly take into consideration the feelings of the women they kidnapped, raped, impregnated." Her stomach flipped. She knew she was off base. Way off base. Fear coiled through her, and she fisted her hands in her lap to keep them from shaking.

Camden laughed. "Disparagin' my lineage, Therese?"

She clamped her teeth to keep her mouth shut. She wanted to argue what she already knew, and that she knew it in the first place. That she *felt* it.

"Nay, lassie," he said with a good-natured smile on his lips and a sparkle in those gorgeous eyes. "When Elizabeth became pregnant, MacGregor decided it was time to make peace with his father-in-law. You see, MacGregor and Elizabeth were secretly wed just weeks after she was taken. So, MacGregor took a very small contingent of men and rode to Scarbany."

Where he was captured and held in the dungeon.

"Lord Scarbany invited MacGregor into his home, and then had him beaten and chained in the dungeon."

Teri thought she was going to throw up. The sorrow pressed down on her the way it had when she'd been to Scarbany. "But then Elizabeth was free to go, right? Surely MacGregor's men wouldn't hold her if he wasn't there, would they?"

Camden shook his head. "Nay, they would've traded 'er for their laird if that had been her wish, but she was their leader's wife, they loved 'er and respected 'er, and she refused to leave 'til their child was born. She wanted her son to be a Highlander."

Trying desperately to keep her voice steady, Teri asked, "How did it all end?"

"Sadly, of course. Durin' the last months of her pregnancy, she wrote 'er father many, many times, begging for the release of her husband. Lord Scarbany was furious his daughter had been defiled by the skirt-wearing barbarian. For nearly a year, she kept up the letters, but when 'er father refused ta even respond any longer, she decided she must take the situation into her own hands. So, ye left the baby in

the care of MacGregor's mother and came after me yerself. Which led to yer capture and my death."

"What?" Teri jumped up so fast the wooden chair tumbled backwards and crashed on the floor. "What did you just say?" Her voice was high and filled with the panic racing through her. Surely she heard him wrong. He hadn't just referred to them as Elizabeth and Laird MacGregor.

Camden didn't move, but he did have a look of stepping in a pile of sheep droppings. His face paled a bit. "Lassie..."

She held up her hand. "Did you say 'you' and 'me' as if you were talking about us instead of your dead ancestors?"

He stared at her a long moment then slowly stood. She stepped back and shook her head.

"Therese, it was a slip o' the tongue. I didna—"

"That's not a normal slip of the tongue. Why did you say it?" Her back was literally against the wall by then, her heart thudding so hard she feared it would choke her, and she was a bit lightheaded. Having strange memories was one thing, having someone else make a comment such as that was too unnerving. Too scary. Too—

"Donna ye feel it, lass?" His green eyes were the color of northwestern pine. "Donna ye know?"

"Know what?" she asked, her voice squeaking.

Camden closed his eyes a moment, dropped his head forward, then looked back at her. "You have lived those lives, lassie. As have I. We have been together for—"

"No! No. No, no, no." She straightened her back. This, she could deal with. "I told you before, I do not believe in reincarnation, past lives, or any such thing. And if you think

that you and I have been lovers through the ages, you're insane."

"Therese, please listen."

"No. I am sorry, Mr. MacGregor, but I am unable to remain under your employ. This conversation has broken every boundary that I live by with regard to work." She had to get the hell out of there because part of her—a small part, but a part nonetheless—believed this bullshit. How could she not after the memories? After seeing Laird MacGregor in her bed that morning and him calling her Elsbeth, which she was positive now was MacGregor's pet name for her—for Elizabeth. She just knew it.

"Fuck the job!" Camden shouted. He grabbed her shoulders and hauled her body up against his.

She fought, tried to twist away, but he was so much bigger and stronger than she was.

"This is why I brought you here." And with that declaration, he slammed his mouth down on hers in a bruising, punishing kiss.

She opened her mouth to scream at him to let her go, but his tongue swept into her mouth and the most tantalizing, mind-numbing sensation coursed through her body. An electrical charge like lightning, only more like a wave, no, like...like...

He jerked back and panted as he held her against his body, his erection digging into her pelvis. "This is why I brought you here, Therese. Because we belong together."

It took about three seconds for his words to sink in, and then she twisted away from him. She scrubbed the back of

her hand over her mouth and shook her head. "Please, Camden," she said softly, the fight gone from her but not the fear. No matter if she wanted to believe him or not—which she didn't want to, but she really kind of did—she couldn't have a relationship with him. She couldn't have one with anyone. No matter how well he kissed or how fast her body responded to him, because in the end it would be pain and heartbreak, and she was too old to go through it again. She genuinely liked Camden, and Charles, and she loved Quhartine, but none of it was for her.

"Please what?" he asked. "Lassie, I'd do anything for ye. Believe me, I've spent a lifetime searchin' for ye."

She wished it were true. Shaking her head, she fought back the overwhelming disappointment and desolation in her heart. She swallowed to make sure she could speak. "I will make sure I find a competent replacement to finish the preservation of your journals." She had to swallow again because she felt sick again.

Camden shook his head and reached for her.

She backed away, toward the door to the kitchen. "I'm going to go pack. Please have some kind of transportation ready for me within the hour to take me to the airport."

"Therese, don't. I'm sorry. I take it all back."

Licking her lips, she could still taste him, and because she wanted more, she backed through the doorway. "There are some things you can't take back, Camden. Trust me when I say that if I were a different woman, I would be very happy to..." She cleared her throat. No need to finish that sentence. "I'm sorry. I am. But I can't stay here."

Before he could say anything more, she made a dash through the kitchen and up the stairs to her bedroom.

* * * *

Camden MacGregor's heart plummeted when he saw his beloved Therese step into the silver town car. He'd spent a lifetime searching for her. A hundred lifetimes. And now she was slipping away, and there was nothing he could do about it. He'd blown it, and totally by accident. How he'd slipped up and referred to them instead of his ancestors, he wasn't sure, but as he told the story, he felt it.

He'd always felt his past lives. Never remembered them, per se, but *felt* them. As if he knew the people intimately on a very deep level, even though he didn't actually remember meeting them. And once he grew older and learned the stories, it all made sense. He knew for a fact he had lived those lives, because he knew all the stories from his ancestors, all the way down to his father and grandfather. There were the ones he'd connected to, and ones he hadn't. And whether her name was Therese, Katherine, Mary, Elizabeth or Wenda, she was meant to be his.

But this twenty-first century twin flame of his didn't believe—refused to believe. And that left him here, in this keep, alone, while she flew back to Washington D.C. and found him another person to salvage the delicate proof of their pasts.

What difference did they make if she wasn't with him now? Without her, he would have no children to pass them on to. The story of their lives would end here, with him.

The icy wind buffeted him as he watched Charles place her bags into the boot of the car. His friend glanced his way, shook his head in disgust, then rounded the car and got behind the wheel.

Therese wouldn't even look at him. She stared straight ahead. He knew she'd felt the spark between them when they kissed—hell, whenever they accidentally touched. But she refused to open her mind to the possibilities.

He'd fucked up the most important thing in his life.

He wasn't sure how to fix it. But he had to. He couldn't live without his other half now that he'd met her, touched her, taken her into his heart.

* * * *

Wenda stood at the top of Tarpeian Rock, the early morning sunlight warming her back, the cool sea breeze brushing her hair from her face. She breathed in the sweet, salty air and let out a slow breath while the guards read her execution orders.

She blocked their voices from her mind and stared out at the sea beyond the sprawling city. Ships dotted the horizon, and she hoped with all her heart that Titus, Quintus, Domitilla, and her son were out there, moving north toward the Isles on one of his ships. She needed to know her son was safe. Her heart bled that she would not be there to see him grow into a man. She wouldn't know his wife or hold her grandchildren. But she knew Titus would care for their boy, raise him into a man who would follow his father's and grandfather's footsteps. And Titus would find a new cause.

Her clan would take them in as one of their own because she had once belonged to them. Alongside her extended family, Titus would fight for the freedoms that had been stripped from her by slave traders.

She closed her eyes as the words of the guard died away on the breeze. Rough hands turned her, faced her toward them, but she did not wish to see them. She kept the memory of her family in her mind, in her heart, as the tears streamed down her face. She'd tried to be strong and not let the agony in her soul show on her face, but it was useless. She did not fear death. Three years ago when the slave traders put her on the platform and auctioned her, she'd determined to take her own life rather than live with whatever horrors her owner placed on her.

Titus had been a blessing sent from the gods. A love so deep and true she would never have believed it existed. She had been blessed with Quintus, her dear father-in-law, and Domitilla, her friend. But most of all, she'd had the chance to once again hold a baby and nourish him with her body, to watch him take his first steps...

This son would not die at the hands of barbarians who called themselves civilized. This son would grow and fight by his father. Of this, at least, she was sure.

A sharp pressure hit her chest, and she was falling...falling...falling...

* * * *

Teri hit the rug, her own scream ripping her from the nightmare. Her eyelids popped open and she stared up at the textured, eggshell ceiling in her bedroom in Bethesda.

She was not lying beneath Tarpeian Rock in ancient Rome. She was not dead.

The tears coursed down her cheeks and into her hair as she lay there, trying to convince herself it was just a bad dream.

Night after night after night for the last three weeks, she'd dreamed of death, sadness, heart-wrenching agony. She was exhausted from lack of sleep, and she prayed her midnight lover would come to her to relieve her, to give her something pleasurable to dream about instead of the horrors she envisioned every night. She was sorry for ever trying to banish him from her brain. He was all she had left. And now he'd disappeared.

Teri sobbed and rolled to her side, burying her face in the crook of her arm. The midnight lover had abandoned her the day she left Scotland.

When her tears eased, she pushed herself into a sitting position and reached for the notebook on the nightstand. She wrote a question in regard to the dream she had. She had pages of questions. This time she wrote: Execution at *Tarpeian Rock*?

She had so many questions that had arisen from her nightmares. Names, places, was all of this actually real? Was she a reincarnation of the women she dreamed about? Not just dreamed, but also experienced their emotions, their fear, anger, heartbreak. And if she was this woman—these

women—had she ever lived a life where she wasn't dying or watching her mate die? Or someone else she loved deeply? Children, parents, husbands, friends.

No, no, no. She did not believe this. It was her overactive imagination. She was *obsessed* with the idea of reincarnation, she didn't think it was actually true.

She set the notebook back on the nightstand and climbed to her feet. She'd need one hell of a hot shower and about a gallon of coffee to get her going this morning. Three weeks with so little sleep wasn't healthy. The thought of seeing a doctor for some sleep aids became more insistent each day she dragged her exhausted butt to work.

She thought of calling Camden, quizzing him on the names, but just hearing him over the phone, that low, seductive voice with the bone-melting accent, would be too much to bear. She missed him, badly.

She should have fucked him before she left Scotland, just to prove to herself he wasn't any different than any other man she'd ever been with. Ever since she stood in the airport terminal in Inverness, saying goodbye to Charles, she'd wondered if, by some far off chance, some remote possibility, that he was right and all the nonsense about past lives was real. She'd wondered if she was walking away—flying away as the case were—from her one and only chance at the fulfillment of the life she'd once dreamed about and eventually given up on. A husband, children. A warm home filled with love and laughter.

The tears fell yet again as she stood under the steaming, stinging spray of the shower. She needed to move on and

stop thinking about it—about him. Camden was out of her life for good. And she did *not* believe in past lives!

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Chapter Twelve

Camden couldn't sit still. He should have called, gotten some idea how she'd react to seeing him again. Instead, he'd waited nearly three weeks, until he couldn't stand her not being near him, hopped a flight to D.C., and now here he was, sitting in her office, waiting for her to return from a meeting.

His leg jiggled with agitation. Maybe it was five cups of coffee he'd had since getting off the plane two hours before, but he doubted it. If he blew this, it was over. If he said the wrong thing, looked at her the wrong way, she'd toss him out on his ear and he'd never see her again.

The tissue paper around the bouquet of roses he held rattled with his aggravated movements. He set them on the seat next to him.

"She should be back any minute," the helpful, middle-aged receptionist said.

He smiled and nodded. Then he drew in a few deep breaths and slowly exhaled each one. Splaying his hands over his thighs, he forced himself to stop jiggling.

Then she walked through the door, her floral-print, calflength skirt swishing around her long legs. Her back to him, she didn't see him sitting by the wall as she crossed the outer office toward the door to her private sanctum.

Camden surged to his feet and took a couple long strides toward her. "Therese..." was all he said, his brain going blank

of all the things he'd rehearsed on the endless hours in transit from Scotland.

She spun. The mug of coffee she held in her hand leading the turn, and the steaming liquid swirled out of the cup. As if in slow motion, he watched the dark liquid fly toward him and nail him in the chest. It took only a second for the scorching heat to filter through his thin button-down dress shirt.

"Fuck," he growled as he hunched his shoulders forward, snatched the tails out of his slacks, and pulled the stinging fabric away from his chest.

Therese gasped and stared at him, her lips parted, her big blue eyes wide. Then she rushed the few feet to her receptionist's desk, grabbed a box of tissue, and thrust it at him. "I'm so sorry."

By then the coffee had cooled, though his skin still burned beneath the cold, soggy mess of his clothing. He chuckled as he plucked a few tissues from the box and blotted his shirt. "Glad to see some things never change, lassie."

Her cheeks turned bright red, and she pushed her glasses up her nose. "What are you doing here, Mr. MacGregor?"

He held the box of tissue in one hand, and a soggy, brownish clump of them in the other. Her eyes were red rimmed, and dark smudges marred the tender skin beneath. As the heat of her embarrassment lessened, her skin seemed too pale. She looked exhausted.

"Camden?" she prompted as she gripped the mostly empty coffee mug between her hands.

He moved to the receptionist's desk, set the box down, and gladly handed over the used ones when the woman held

out her hand. "I came to speak to ye, Ms. Whitmore. It's very important."

Therese frowned. "Is the preservationist I sent to replace me not fulfilling her duties to your satisfaction?"

She spoke as if they were strangers. As if he were nothing more than a client. This made him tense. Had he upset her so much she truly never wished to see him again?

"Ms. James is doing a fine job." He licked his lips. Here goes... "But she's not you."

Therese dropped her gaze to her hands.

"I need to speak to ye regardin' something personal. Could we do so with some privacy?" He glanced at the receptionist who watched them both with apt interest.

"In my office," Therese finally said, turning away without looking back at him and walked into her office.

Camden grabbed the bouquet of flowers from the seat and followed her into the room. By the time he crossed the threshold, she was at her desk, behind it taking her seat. He shut the door behind him, and Therese pushed her glasses up her nose again in that sweet, cute, innocent motion he'd come to love.

He moved forward. There were no windows in the office, since they were below street level. But the walls were painted a light peach color and covered with photographs and paintings of prominent historical spots from around the world. The Coliseum in Rome, the pyramids in Egypt, and one of Scarbany Castle.

When he turned his attention back to Therese, she sat there, her hands folded together on her desk, and stared at

the roses in his hand. He stepped forward to her desk and held them out to her. "I wasn't sure what color is your favorite, so I got a bit of everything. I hope they suit."

She stared at them without lifting her hand to take them. The bouquet was a riot of every color the little floral shop offered. Pink, red, yellow, white, even some purple. Since she didn't take them, he gently set them on the desk. Her gaze never left them.

Finally, she raised her eyes to meet his. "Why are you here?" she asked, her voice low and hoarse, and the sound cut a swath through his heart. In her tone he heard such sadness and...defeat? Had he hurt her so badly? Scared her? Did she think he was now stalking her that she wouldn't take his peace offering?

He stepped back and sat down in one of the two cushioned chairs facing her desk. "Therese," he said softly. "I'm here, doing what I should have done when I first met you. I'm just a man askin' a sweet, intelligent, beautiful woman to please have dinner with me. I'm askin' you to give me another chance."

She looked back down at the flowers, raised one finger, and lightly caressed the petals of a white rose. "You could have called. You came an awful long way. What if I say no?" She didn't look at him, just concentrated on the blooms.

"I've missed ye, lassie. More than I can say. I wanted ta see ye again. If ye say no, I will go, and I willna bother you again."

"How's Charles?" She looked up then.

"He misses ye too. He told me if I didna bring ye back, I wasna welcome back either." He grinned. Charles had been adamant that he go get the lass.

Therese frowned.

"I didna mean that as it sounded." He sat forward, wanting to reach across the desk and touch her, but she looked very...fragile. "What has happened, lass? Why do you look so tired, as if ye havena slept in days?"

A dry, tortured laugh slipped out of her, and his heart twisted. "I blame you," she said, her eyes serious. "I haven't slept a full night since leaving Quhartine."

His lips parted in surprise.

"Every night I dream—"

Her phone made a buzzing sound, then her receptionist's voice came over. "Teri, your next appointment is waiting."

She raised her hand, her elbow propped on the desk, and laid her forehead in her palm as if her head were too heavy for her neck to hold up any longer. Then she reached to the phone, pushed a button, and said, "I'll be right out." She heaved a sigh, plucked a sticky note off a cube, and scribbled on it. Finally, she raised her head and looked at him. "I can't miss this meeting." She held out the little yellow square to him. "Seven o'clock tonight. I'll have dinner ready. I need some questions answered."

"Of course." He frowned. "Are you sick, lass?"

"Sick in the head," he thought he heard her mutter as she seemed to need the support of the desk to push to her feet.
"I'm fine. I just have a lot of questions that you might be able to answer."

He stood as she came around the desk. "I will be there," he said, holding up the note with an address written on it.

They stared at each other for a long moment, and in that time he saw such pain in her eyes. It killed him to think he'd put it there, and he resolved to do everything he could to take it away.

"See you tonight, then," she said in that soft voice that flowed over him like a caress.

As she turned toward the door, though, he couldn't let her go without a touch. He caught her hand in his, making her stop, and brought it to his lips where he kissed her fingertips.

"Whatever I have done to cause ye pain, sweet Therese, I will try to reverse. I never meant—"

She tugged her hand from his. "Don't," she said, an edge of desperation in her voice. "Just come and answer my questions. After that, we'll see. Okay?"

He nodded. "Aye."

She turned and led him to the door, opened it. "See you tonight."

He nodded once toward the man in a business suit seated where he'd been just moments before, then strolled out of the outer office to make his way through the maze of tiled hallways back up to the main floor of the museum.

He had no idea what questions she needed to ask, but he'd answer every damn one of them. And if him disappearing from her life for good would take away the pain in her eyes, he'd do it. He couldn't hurt his Therese. Never, ever, would he harm the woman of his heart, his soul.

Meetings, meetings, meetings all day long. Teri rushed into her house at six-thirty, ditched her purse and keys on the little table by the door, set the gorgeous bouquet of roses on the coffee table, and grabbed the portable phone as she dashed into the bedroom to strip off her clothes. She dialed the number of her favorite Chinese place just down the road for delivery as she kicked off her heels and wiggled out of her skirt. She ordered double orders of her favorites and had twenty minutes to shower and change before the delivery arrived.

She couldn't believe Camden had shown up in her office, that he'd asked her for a date. Her heart fluttered as she hopped into the shower.

Terror rippled through her, yet an underlying excitement sizzled in her blood. After tonight, she'd know... She'd have the answers to the questions she needed to ask, and she'd know if it was all true or not.

Closing her eyes, she stood under the spray and tried not to get her hopes up. When he'd touched her hand so gently, she'd gone weak in the knees and wanted to fall against that wide, solid chest of his. She'd wanted him to hold her, kiss her the way he had that last day she was at Quhartine. And she wanted him to make love to her.

Her greatest fear, though, was that sex with Camden would be the same as sex with any other living, breathing man she'd ever been with. A complete and total disappointment. And that just might kill her because he was her last hope. No one had ever made her blood sizzle the way

he did, made her want to grab him and have her way with him. If it all turned out to be a mirage, she knew that any little, tiny last hope she had about having a future that included a husband and possibly children was gone.

She wasn't sure she was ready to find that out.

She rinsed, got out, towel dried her hair, and pulled on some comfortable jeans and a sweatshirt. Pulling a brush through her hair, she went to the kitchen and found a vase for the roses. She couldn't even remember the last time a man gave her flowers, and never anything as beautiful as this particular bouquet. The array of colors was stunning and the scent heavenly.

She arranged the roses in the vase and had just finished braiding her hair when the doorbell rang. Food had arrived. She paid and tipped Victor—an early-twenty's guy she was way too acquainted with since she ordered from the Chinese place at least three times a week. As Victor was leaving, Camden pulled into the driveway.

Her heart did that tumbly, quivery thing, and she stood there in the doorway, holding a bag of food that made her stomach growl, and waited for him to step out of the generic silver rental sedan.

"Hello, lassie," he said in that spine-tingling accent as he walked up the paved path to her door.

"Hi," she said, her throat tight.

"I brought some wine."

Tearing her gaze from his, she looked down at the bottle he held up. "Looks good." She turned then. "Come on in." She went to the kitchen and set the bag of take-out on the

small table, knowing Camden would follow. When she pulled plates from the cupboard and turned, he was there, watching her.

With a nervous laugh, she set the plates on the table and turned to the silverware drawer. "Here," she said, handing him a corkscrew. "You open it, or I might spill it on you."

He chuckled. "I wore black tonight, just in case." His fingers brushed her palm as he took the opener, and she quivered all the way to her core.

Yes, he wore black, and he looked so darn good in it. Black jeans, black cable-knit sweater that set off the hint of silver at his temples and made his green eyes sparkle.

Turning away, she busied herself with pulling food cartons from the paper sack and setting them on the table.

"Glasses?" he asked.

She shoved her glasses up her nose and gave him a blank stare.

He chuckled again. "Wine glasses, love."

Her skin tingled when he called her *love*. "Uh..." She pointed toward the cupboards over the counter. She sat down, ripped the wrapper off her chopsticks, and started dishing her food onto her plate. She was starving, hadn't eaten since breakfast, and had been living on coffee for days—weeks.

Camden poured two glasses of the rich, red wine then sat down across from her at the tiny oak table. "Very pretty home you have," he said as he tore the paper off the other set of chopsticks.

"Thank you," she said as she scooped sweet and sour chicken onto her plate. "It's not exactly a castle, but it's home." When he didn't respond, she looked at him. His lips were pressed tight, his brow furrowed in a frown as he scooped lemon chicken onto his plate with the sticks.

"I'm sorry," she said, setting down a cardboard carton. "I didn't mean that as a..."

He glanced at her, shook his head, then laughed. He held up the chopsticks. "I've never mastered these things."

The tension seemed to melt away from inside of her. The ultra rich, ultra handsome man who might hold the key to her future happiness couldn't use chopsticks. She laughed and scooted out of her chair to retrieve him a fork. "Here you go," she said, still smiling, as she handed him the utensil.

He grinned. "Thank ye, lass."

Dinner passed in a more companionable silence as both ate quickly. Teri finished off two glasses of wine and poured herself a third before she decided it was time to move on to more important things. She had to get it over with. Had to have her answers. "Let's go into the living room," she said as she put the plates in the sink and Camden was closing up the take-out boxes.

"I will help you clean up."

"Just throw those in the fridge, please." She ran hot water over the plates. "Everything else can wait 'til later." After he shut the fridge, she picked up her glass of wine and went into the living room. She waited until Camden was seated on one end of the sofa before she went into her room and retrieved her notebook from the nightstand.

"Okay," she said as she sat on the other end of the couch, downed half the wine in her glass, then set it on the coffee table near the vase of roses. "Who is Katherine?"

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Chapter Thirteen

Camden couldn't keep his surprise at Therese's question hidden. He licked his lips. "How have you stumbled across that name?"

"I'm not going to play games here," Therese said, her voice steady but her eyes showing her distress, as did the way her hands shook ever so slightly as she held a spiral-bound notebook between them. "Please just answer my questions."

She must have done research into his family history. She'd been adamant that she did not believe in past lives, so why was she bringing this up now? "Therese, I meant what I said in yer office today. I would like to start over with ye. We can forget everythin' about yer stay in Scotland if ye wish." He turned sideways in the seat, went to reach for her, but she jumped up and paced out of reach.

"Camden, please!" Her voice quivered a bit, and his heart twisted.

He'd vowed to himself he would answer her questions. He'd vowed he would walk away if that was what she needed to be happy. Glancing down at the flowers on the table—flowers that had meant enough to her that she brought them home and put them in a pretty crystal vase—he said, "Katherine Wardwell was about eight years old when she watched her father hang for witchcraft in Salem, Massachusetts in 1692. When she was sixteen, she married Joseph Gregory, my ancestor."

Therese sank back down on the other end of the sofa from him. Her hand shook worse this time when she raised it to push her glasses up her nose. She swallowed hard, so loud he could hear it in the quiet room. She stared at her notebook and didn't turn to him when she asked, "Who is Mary?"

"There have been two Marys in my family."

She licked her lips, drew in a slow breath. "Gettysburg."

"Mary Hodge." He rubbed his fingers over his forehead.
"The only African American in my ancestry, as far as I know.
A mulatto. The granddaughter of a slave brought over from Africa who worked on a cotton plantation in the south. She escaped the south in 1842 via the Underground Railroad and was on her way to Canada when she met Peter Gregory and they fell in love. His father's home was a stop on the Underground Railroad, and Mary just didn't leave. She stayed and fought for the cause by his side."

She flipped through a couple of pages of her notebook. Shook her head. Flipped back. Then she reached for her wine glass and finished what was left. "I don't need to ask these questions, do I?" She turned then and shoved the notebook at him. "I know the answers, don't I?" she said, her voice rising. "Did any of your damn ancestors have a happy ending? Did any of them ever live a happy life?"

"Yes." He flipped through the pages, looking at question after question, name after name of his ancestors. Locations. Means of death. "Yes, some did. Mary and Peter were together until they were very old. Eventually they moved to Canada where he bought a small farm in Ontario and they spent their last years together there, where their children

lived with them and their grandchildren. It was their oldest son, Victor, who moved back to Scotland and reclaimed the MacGregor name.

"But Mary was so unhappy," Therese nearly cried. "She loved Peter, but her friends, people they tried to help were captured, killed, mobbed, stoned, hung, burned..." She took a shuddering breath.

She stood up again and paced to the window across the room. "It's all true, isn't it? Everything you tried to convince me of? I've lived those women's lives." She motioned toward the book in his hand. "I have spent the last three weeks having nightmares about those women. I've been thrown off a cliff, watched my father hang, watched my husband tortured. I've fucking lived those lives, haven't I?" she shouted as she spun toward him, tears in her eyes, streaming down her cheeks.

Camden pushed to his feet and went to her, pulled her into his arms. "Lassie, shh. Please, don't cry."

She fisted her hands in his sweater over his chest. "I wanted the dreams to be wrong," she sobbed. "I don't believe in past lives. I don't believe in any of this stuff. But every night since I left Scotland I've been shown one horror after another." She sniffled. "Why did you do this to me?"

Camden's heart squeezed tight then seemed to drop to his stomach. She blamed him. He'd exposed her to her past lives, and he couldn't blame her, but how could she ever want anything to do with him romantically now? "I'm sorry," he whispered as he ran his hand over her head in what could be the last time she'd allow him to touch her. "I never meant to

hurt ye, lass. I swear it. I only wanted ye to remember me. To remember us."

He was such a fool. He should have listened to Charles. He should have simply asked the woman for a date the night he met her instead of tricking her into going to Scotland, instead of forcing her to remember things perhaps she should never have to remember. "I am sorry."

Therese drew in a quivering breath and pulled out of his arms. She plucked a couple of tissues from the box on the end table and blew her nose. Then she took off her glasses and set them on the coffee table, which made him frown. He'd never seen her without them except that last morning when she'd had the nightmare. He wasn't sure she could see anything without them.

"You really believe that I'm your...?"

"Twin flame," he supplied, his throat tight with suppressed emotion. He knew he was about to be thrown out of her pretty little house. "I guess I handled this poorly, Therese, and I just want you—"

"There's only one thing you can do to prove to me that all this stuff is true, that you are who you say you are and I am who you say I am."

His knees nearly went weak. She was giving him another chance? "Anythin', love. I'll do anythin'. I believe with all my heart that we belong together."

"Have sex with me." She grabbed the hem of her sweatshirt and pulled it over her head. "If you give me an orgasm, I'll believe you. If you don't, you have to leave and never contact me again."

He sat down hard in the fancy little chair by the window. What the hell was this about? A test?

She unbuttoned her jeans and shoved them down her legs before stepping out of them. Lord above, she was gorgeous. Wearing nothing but a satiny, lacy beige bra and panties, her milky white skin looked as smooth as butter.

It was his turn to swallow hard around the lump in his throat. His cock throbbed in the tight confines of his denims, and he'd be lucky if he lasted ten seconds if he got into her sweet body. "Ye've got to be jestin' me, lass. Ye canna expect—"

She came toward him all long limbs and sexy skin. "I have never told another soul about this, Camden, but I have this...condition." She reached behind her and undid her bra. It slithered down her arms, and she dropped it on the floor. "I've never had an orgasm with a man. Not a real man, anyway, only one who lives in my head, who visits me in my dreams." She hooked her thumbs in the waistband of her panties and wiggled them down her thighs. "The only thing is, since I left Quhartine, he hasn't been around. And the last time he was...well, he looked an awful lot like one of your ancestors." She stepped out of the underwear and stood up straight, just a couple of feet from where he sat.

He opened his mouth to respond, but words failed him. She was the most beautiful—no, exquisite—woman he'd ever seen. The dark triangle of curls covering her apex drew his gaze, and he couldn't look away. His fingers itched to sink into her flesh, to feel her heat.

"Tell me, Camden, what do you make of that?" She propped her hands on her hips and stopped moving.

He looked up into her eyes. "What?"

She rolled her eyes and shook her head. "For my entire adult life, I've been visited by what I call my midnight lover. He's ruined every single relationship I've ever been in. He's the only man in the world who can make me come, and he's not real. Until I was in Quhartine, he never had a face, he was more of a feeling, an essence really, who fucked me silly and made me come so hard I would wake up drenched in sweat and still reeling from the orgasm."

Camden's mouth went completely dry at the image she painted.

"But, at Quhartine, I dream him, and he has a face. The face of Laird MacGregor. So you tell me, Camden, if you believe in this twin flame stuff, if you believe you and I have lived all these lives together, is it you who's been messing up my romantic life for years?"

He'd never heard of this before. It wasn't in any of the journals or anything. On the other hand, the last time they were together as a couple was a couple of hundred years earlier, and women didn't try to have orgasms outside of the marriage bed back then—or at least they didn't talk about it if they did. And even if they had, the journals were kept by the men, and would a woman two hundred years ago admit such to their husband? He doubted it. Damn independent women, as Charles would say.

Camden swiped his hand over his mouth, trying to get is thoughts straight. Having her standing nude in front of him

didn't help. Not at all. What popped out of his mouth wasn't what he expected either.

"So, lass, if I donna make you come, you will rely on yer dreams ta satisfy ye the rest of yer life?"

She narrowed her eyes at him. "I was married, and I never had an orgasm with my husband, who I loved. I've had numerous other sexual relationships, some men I loved, some I simply cared for, and none of them—"

He stood and grabbed her around the waist and dropped his mouth to hers, cutting off her words. He didn't want to hear about her numerous lovers. She was *his*, damn it. *Only his*.

She gasped into his mouth and gripped his shoulders. He kissed her deep, sank his tongue into her repeatedly until her body melted against his and he practically held her up.

Then he lifted his head and said, "Did any of 'em make ye feel like this?"

She stared up at him with those blazing blue eyes. "No." The word was barely audible.

"Maybe yer body was tryin' to tell ye to wait for the right one, then. Yer subconscious knew that every man who touched ye wasn't the one ye needed."

Tears rushed to her eyes and made them sparkle. "Please, Camden," she whispered. "Please be the one."

His heart clenched. "Aw, love." He lifted her into his arms and carried her down the short hall past the kitchen in search of her bedroom.

"Here," she said, and he turned into a room designed for decadent comfort. The rug was thick and dark, the bed high

and covered in a down duvet, the oak posts thick with a sheer canopy spread over the top of them.

He took her to the bed and set her down like the precious gift she was. "Therese," he said as he stood up straight and pulled his sweater over his head. "I will make ye come, lass. I will make ye mine." He toed off his shoes and dropped his pants, his cock springing out straight, which made him sigh in relief. "Before we leave this bed, ye will know ye belong to me and only me."

She held out her arms to him. "Promise me."

He came down over her, covering her with his body. "I swear it, lass." And then he kissed her hard, pinning her to the bed. He had to do as he promised, because he couldn't lose her again.

Spirals of heat and sensation wound through Teri as Camden kissed her lips and his hand roamed her body. So much emotion swirled through her mind, she couldn't decide if she needed to cry or laugh. This was her last hope of salvation from a life alone, and so far so good. That first kiss he gave her that night in Scotland, standing in the kitchen in the dark was better, more fulfilling, than any full-blown sex she'd had with any man. If a kiss was that good, he had to be the one. He had to be. *Please let him be!*

Her body heated under his, her skin tingled. She spread her fingers and ran her hands over his shoulders. His muscles rippled under her touch, and she repeated the motion. To her utter delight, he moaned and pressed his pelvis against hers.

It felt like a dream—like so many she'd had of her midnight lover. The weight of a man's body, so big, pressing

her into the softness of her bed. The smell and taste of him, sweet and tangy, manly.

Spreading her legs, she gasped when the tip of his cock rubbed against her pussy lips.

"Not yet, lassie," he murmured as he moved his kisses from her mouth to her cheek to her ear to her neck, where he nibbled and nipped and made her moan.

"I believe it now, Camden. I swear I do," she said, panting. She did believe. No one had ever made her this hot, this horny in real life. She needed to feel him inside of her. She needed a man filling her—fulfilling her sexually. "Please..." she begged, tugging on his shoulders, trying to get him to move back up and into her.

Instead, he moved farther down, down, kissing her collarbone, her chest. And then she nearly flew off the bed when his hot, moist lips closed around her nipple. Like fire racing through her body, her nerve endings sizzled. She bucked and moaned and grabbed his head so he couldn't move away.

She'd taunted him by stripping naked in the living room. She'd believed then this whole thing would be over in minutes. He'd put his dick in her, she'd be disappointed, and it would end. She would send him away. A small part of her wanted that because this was too scary. This disrupted her life, everything she knew and believed. If he could do this to her, she couldn't help but believe in everything he'd tried telling her. It was the last bit of proof.

He released her nipple with a soft pop of suction and moved to the other. She gasped and thought she might come

right then, without his cock inside of her. His voice, a soft humming sound, vibrated through her, and she sobbed.

"Please. Oh, God, Camden, please."

He trailed his hands down her sides, back up, down again, the slight coarseness of his calluses turning her insides to jelly, making her whole body quiver. Her cunt was hot, moist, as it was after a dream of her midnight lover. She tried to reach between her legs to relieve the torturous pressure building inside of her, but Camden caught her by the wrist and pinned it to the bed.

He raised his head from tormenting her nipple with his teeth and tongue. "I will make ye come, lass."

"I know," she cried, and thrashed her head from side to side, her eyes squeezed tight. His weight pinned the rest of her to the bed, so it was the only thing she could move.

"Do you believe I am yer lover? Yer one and only?" She nodded.

He nipped her nipple, and she cried out and arched. "Yes! You're the one."

"And ye'll ne'er doubt again, will ye, Therese?" She shook her head. "No. Never."

"Look at me, lassie."

She opened her eyes and looked into his, her breaths fast and harsh, her cunt pulsing with need of its emptiness to be filled.

"I have loved ye for thousands of years. I will love ye for thousands more. The only time that matters, though, is now." He thrust into her, deep and hard.

Teri screamed as the orgasm surged through her body. She cried at the sheer joy of their joining, clung to him as he pumped into her body, thrust up against him each time he stroked into her to prolong the pleasure of finally, after a lifetime of waiting, being right where she belonged with the man she was meant to be with.

Camden kissed her deep, his tongue stroking her in the same rhythm as his cock, and she lost all track of time, of everything but the fact that finally, finally, she'd found the man of her dreams—her midnight lover come to life.

She came again and again and again until she fell limp into the mattress and Camden roared her name as his orgasm ripped through him, hot, hard, primal. When he collapsed, he rolled to the side, pulling her into his arms, their bodies slick with perspiration.

He tucked her up against his chest, his heartbeat fast and loud in her ear, his heavy breaths fanning her bangs against her forehead. Within moments, Teri fell into a deep, dreamless sleep.

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Epilogue

* * * *

I met Therese Whitmore on a muggy fall day in the cool air conditioning of the Smithsonian. She was the woman I'd sought for a lifetime, and there she was, by accident or Fate. She was my twin flame, and I'd fight to win her heart, her soul, if it was the last thing I ever did. And my oh my, the woman knew how to put up a fight. But the reward was all the sweeter for it.

Six months later...

"It was so much different in my dream," Therese said as she stood at the top of a cliff and looked down on the Roman street below.

"Well, lass," Camden said, wrapping his arm around her and splaying his hand over her slightly rounded belly. "A lot can change in two thousand years."

She shook her head. "I don't think this was the place. I could see the water from the cliff, smell the sea." Leaning forward she peered down the short drop-off. "This is all wrong."

He pulled her back, away from the ledge. "I donna want a repeat performance," he practically growled. "I canna understand why ye insist on visitin' all these places if they were filled with so much unhappiness."

She turned in his arms and touched his cheek as she smiled up at him. "Because there was happiness too." She

grinned. "You saved a beaten, half dead slave girl. Took her in, cared for her, loved her, made a child with her."

"Aye, and then let you die for me." He scowled. The more he learned the truth about their past lives, the more he hated that she remembered so many details. Over the years, the stories had been twisted a bit to make the men in his family seem a little better than they were. More heroic. He hadn't known that his ancestor Titus Marinus had let Wenda fry—or get thrown off a cliff as the case were—for something he'd done. In the stories passed down through the last few generations, Wenda had actually committed the crime. He sighed and snuggled Therese against his chest.

His Therese.

His wife.

The mother of his child.

She'd finished reading all the journals, and her memories of her past lives grew more and more each day, especially now that she was open and receptive to them. Most of his knowledge came from the oral histories from his father and grandfather. But Therese set him straight, of course. Now that she had quit working for the Smithsonian and moved to Scotland, she had plenty of time to set him straight about many things. They'd spent months traveling, and Rome had been the last stop on her agenda. She'd been determined to stand atop Tarpeian Rock and see where Wenda's life had ended.

He buried his face in her hair. "Are ye about ready ta head home, love?"

She tipped her head back and looked into his eyes. "Aye," she said with a cheeky grin. "It's time to put together the nursery, and I've got to get my resumes in so I can start interviewing once the baby is born."

He rolled his eyes and chuckled. "Damn independent women."

Therese threw her head back and laughed, her long black hair flowing over her shoulders and around his arm.

She was, and always would be, the most beautiful soul he'd ever known.

The End

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Author Note

Tarpeian Rock, the place of Wenda's execution, was an historical place in Rome. While I took some literary license with the purpose for her execution to enhance the fictional drama of the romantic story, the real cliff was used for execution of people found guilty of murder and treason. A person standing on the cliff, which wasn't that high, had a view of the forum, not the majestic view that Wenda sees.

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Author Bio

Anna Leigh has been reading and penning romance for as long as she can remember. After she met and married her very own real-life hero, romance took on a whole new meaning. She now knows married life can sizzle and romance can be erotic—even in her own home. Now her writing has taken on a spicier flavor and, while hubby's off at work, she lets her imagination soar.... Anna loves to hear from her readers. You can email her at anna@annaleighkeaton.com or visit her website at www.annaleighkeaton.com for all her upcoming and previously published works, and meet her alter ego at www.leannekarella.com.

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