

Romancing the Banshee

Alecia Monaco

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Chapter 1

Damn. She really didn't want to kill this one.

From her perch on the fire escape outside, Aisling stared through the window into the darkened bedroom of her latest assignment and sighed. Sometimes she hated her calling -- especially when it involved being the harbinger of death for a deliciously gorgeous mortal male.

And this one, she thought with another glance at his sleeping form, might very well redefine the word *gorgeous* forever.

She slipped her hand into the pocket of her handkerchief hemmed white gown, retrieved her PDA and switched it on, smiling when it lit up with a merry digital green glow.

Thank the Goddess for backlighting. At her age, seeing in the dark wasn't the piece of cake it used to be.

With a few careful movements of her stylus, she brought up the file on the current assignment.

Declan Mahoney. Age thirty-two. Yale grad. New Haven resident. Attorney. *No wonder someone wanted him dead.* Former smoker. Cat lover. *Well, that's always a plus.* Never married. No children. Driven. Successful.

Scheduled to die. Tonight.

Might as well get the ball rolling. No point in prolonging the inevitable.

She gathered her long skirt in one hand and, with a blink of her eyes, turned into vapor. She materialized on the other side of the window with ease, and found herself a few feet away from the rumpled bed of one Declan Mahoney.

Mmmm. She inhaled deeply, appreciating the scent of spicy aftershave combined with pure unadulterated male.

Speaking of male. Assignment #327100DM rolled onto his back and revealed an impressive erection tenting the sheets. For a minute, Aisling almost felt flattered. Remembering that human males typically had several meaningless nocturnal erections as part of a normal sleep cycle, she scowled. Had she gone without male attention for so long she was reading hidden meanings into midnight mystery boners?

She rolled her eyes. She could have a vagina growing from her forehead and men *still* wouldn't notice her. The whole "herald of death" thing tended to be a bit of a romance killer. No pun intended.

But it wasn't just loneliness that had her noticing this particular male with such ravenous attention. He was truly beautiful to behold. His hair was cut short, slightly tousled on top, and as blue-black as the birds of Rhiannon. His sleeping profile showed aristocratic features, purely Celtic and lethally sexy.

She wondered what color his eyes were.

The blue sheets had slipped down to reveal a spectacularly muscled chest with just the right sprinkling of blue-black hair. Aisling's fingers itched to run through it, to lie beneath the sheet beside him and see if he felt as warm as he looked.

Aisling bit her bottom lip. Couldn't she let this one slip through the cracks? It would be a crime against humanity to remove such a specimen from their gene pool. If she couldn't have him, she could at least leave him to be the love of some other woman's life.

But Morgan Le Fay had ordered his death herself, signing the decree in ink made of raven's blood. Black smoke had risen from Cerridwen's cauldron when Morgan tossed the death warrant into its iron depths. Declan Mahoney had to die, and she had to start the process.

Yippity-skippity.

Drawing in a breath of air tinged with his scent, she filled her lungs. Her fangs extended and she squeezed her eyes shut. The first note of her keening call sounded, rising up from her diaphragm, roaring through her chest, gaining power in her throat and vibrating forth from her mouth. It was the death call. No mortal could hear it and

live. It fed on their death throes and grew stronger, compelling them to surrender their spirits to the hands of the Goddess.

Aisling threw her head back, letting the call take her. The sound ripped through the small bedroom, shredding the air. A glass shattered somewhere. The windows shook behind her. Still she called, her keening beckoning the soul of Declan Mahoney to leave his body.

When her voice began to give out, she cautiously pried open an eye, expecting to see the misty spirit form of the gorgeous mortal male drifting toward his eternal destiny. Instead she saw a very much alive Declan peering at her in wide-eyed horror.

Well, that answered one question. He had blue eyes.

He continued to stare at her, mouth gaping, the edge of his blue sheet -- it almost perfectly matched his eyes -- grasped tightly in his large hands.

What the hell had happened? What had she done wrong? "Why aren't you dead?" She'd never conversed with an assignment before, but this seemed like the perfect time to start.

"What the hell *are* you?" Revulsion filled his face.

No one had ever asked her that before. She spent all her time either back home in her own realm where everyone knew her kind at first glance, or among the dead -- or soon to be dead. And the dead had a funny habit of not asking too many questions.

"Answer me." He rose up on his elbows, anger beginning to replace terror on his face. "What are you and what are you doing in my bedroom?"

Boy, this was going to take some explaining. She could just glamour him, erase his memories of this night altogether, and go home. Of course, she'd have to find a way to explain her failure to Morgan. The situation seemed to warrant some kind of investigation. Her call had never failed to kill before. What in the blue blazes made this guy immune?

"I'm waiting." He threw back the sheet, revealing a sculpted body clothed in pajama bottoms with a drawstring waist slung temptingly low.

Aisling swallowed. Best to get the introductions out of the way first. "Declan Mahoney..."

He cut her off. "How do you know my name?"

She silenced him with her hand. "If you'd let me finish, you'd know." She cleared her throat and continued. "Declan Mahoney. My name is Aisling. And..."

"Nice to meet you, Aisling." Sarcasm dripped from his voice like condensation from a faulty air conditioner. "So glad you could break into my apartment for a little late-night primal scream therapy."

"Will you *please* let me finish?" She watched him cross his arms over his fabulous pecs. *Goodbye, train of thought.* What was she saying? *Oh, yeah. Introductions.*

She clasped her hands behind her back and tried to strike a professional pose. "Declan Mahoney. My name is Aisling, and I'm a banshee."

His mouth twitched.

"I came to sound my death call so you could cross over to the other side. That's what banshees do. Unfortunately -- or, I guess fortunately, depending on how you look at it -- you failed to succumb to my keening. Therefore, you're still alive and I'm very much confused."

"A death call, huh?" He let out an elaborate yawn. "How much did my brother pay you to do this?"

"*Pay* me?" Huh?

"This has to be a practical joke. What are you, one of those strip-o-gram girls?" He let his eyes rake her over from head to toe. "You've certainly got the body for it."

"I have no idea what you're talking about." She took a step back from the bed and crossed her arms over her chest self-consciously. "I'm a banshee, and you were scheduled to die tonight."

"Seriously, I'll give you fifty bucks to admit that Ryan put you up to this." He reached for the cordovan wallet on his bedside table. "I've got the cash right here." Those piercing blue eyes gave her another once over, sending a shiver straight through her. "Nice costume, by the way. Very sexy, in an Elvira kind of way."

She had to get through to this guy, or she'd never get any answers about what had gone awry with her keening. "What do I have to do to convince you that I'm a banshee?"

He glanced up from his wallet. "Banshees don't exist."

She rolled her eyes again. "Hello? I'm standing right in front of you." She snapped her fingers before his eyes. "Don't you humans think that seeing is believing?"

He huffed out a sigh and tossed his wallet aside. Placing his hands on his knees, he leaned toward her. "I'll tell you what I see." There went those eyes again, making her feel nearly naked. "I see a very attractive, very exotic girl -- despite the white hair -- with a killer body, who's doing her best to cover my brother's sorry behind when it's obvious that he's behind this entire prank."

Time to activate Plan B. Problem was, she'd never needed a Plan B before... hence she had no idea what it was. "All right, Mr. Mahoney. Maybe this will convince you." She blinked her eyes and willed herself to shift into vapor. She watched his eyes widen in surprise as she vanished into thin air, only to reappear on the other side of his window.

He climbed backwards out of his bed, staggering in his haste to get away from the window. Damn, now she'd gone and scared him. Couldn't kill him with her keening, but she just might frighten him to death.

She vaporized and reentered the bedroom in her usual form. He stood with his back against the opposite wall, his fingers curled against it, as if he could clutch it for stability.

"Do you believe me now?" Her voice betrayed her weariness with the situation.

"What mouth of hell opened up and spit you out?" He spoke in a hoarse whisper, fear lacing every word.

"I'm not from hell." She stepped around the bed, holding out a hand to him. "I'm from the fairy realm. It's part of your Celtic heritage, nothing to be afraid of."

"You came to kill me."

"Yeah, but it didn't work. You're still alive, and we have to find out why." She had to diffuse his terror if she hoped to get any answers from him. "You have nothing to fear from me. It's just that you're the first human to survive my call, and I want to know why."

"Can't you just leave and forget this ever happened?" At least he'd stopped backing away from her.

She sighed and sat down on the edge of his bed. "I could, but I need to have some kind of explanation for... my superiors... when I return to my realm. Besides, aren't you the *least* bit curious about why you survived?"

He shrugged. "I suppose."

"Good. Could I stick around a little longer, so we can compare notes?"

His face relaxed a fraction. "If you promise not to start that demonic caterwauling again."

"You have a deal." She exhaled in relief. "If I don't get to the bottom of this, my head will be on the chopping block when I go back home."

A hint of the biting sarcasm she'd seen in him earlier returned to his face. "We wouldn't want you to end up out of a job."

"Hey, banshees have to eat too." She rose to her feet. "Speaking of which, do you have any tea in your pantry? I'm completely parched after all that keening."

He looked at her in surprise. "Sure. I guess I could put on a kettle..."

She dismissed the suggestion. "Just show me where everything is, and I'll take care of it." She allowed herself to give him the once over. "You don't look any worse for wear, but I suspect you could use a cup of something hot yourself." She stepped back and let him lead the way through the open bedroom door into the living room.

"Yeah, maybe mixed with a shot of Baileys." He crossed the living room and led her into a galley kitchen, then flipped on the stove light.

"Hey, you just escaped certain death. It might not be the best time to take up drinking." She stood by while he got a kettle from a cabinet beside the stove. When he handed it to her, his fingers brushed hers, and a sensation completely unknown to her

in her long existence as a banshee swept through her like waves crashing against the Irish coast.

Oh, no. She groaned to herself, feeling her heart banging away in her throat and her stomach doing a free fall to somewhere in the vicinity of her knees.

She'd never touched a human before. Hell, she'd never even *spoken* with one before. But the minute she felt his skin against hers, she craved...

What, exactly?

Dammit. She had the hots for a human.

Chapter 2

Declan sat down backwards in a high backed kitchen chair and crossed his arms over the top, watching the strange apparition bustle around, making tea like a hausfrau. He'd brought some interesting women back to his place before, but nothing that could compare to the petite fey beauty rifling through his pantry.

"Do we want Irish Breakfast or Chamomile?" She held up a box of teabags in each hand for his inspection.

"Depends on whether we want to stay awake and talk, or ease the shock of your unsuccessful murder attempt." He felt his mouth turn up at one corner.

"Irish Breakfast it is." She turned her back to him and began hunting through his cabinets, locating a pair of hearty ceramic mugs as if by instinct.

She opened his fridge and bent down to examine the contents, treating him to a view of her spectacular backside. He'd always dated women taller than Aisling, but something about her small stature appealed to him. Made her look... bite sized.

"Found the cream." She produced a small pint bearing the face of a cheerfully smiling cartoon cow and placed it on the countertop.

She resumed her pantry raid, giving him the chance to study her, unobserved. She had one hell of a body, delicate but curvy, rounded and ripe. The silky fabric of her white dress clung to every hill and valley, and the black corset nipping in her waist pushed her touch-me-now breasts to hard-on inducing heights.

Granted, he'd never seen coloring quite like hers before. Her hair was white, but not the white of advanced age. No, it was more like the mane of a white lion, wild and full, untamed.

She gave him an uneasy smile over her shoulder, and once again the violet color of her eyes startled him. He'd never seen eyes that shade outside of ads for colored

contacts, and he had a feeling that optometrists were in short supply back in the fairy realm. They had to be her natural color, blue almost to purple, wide and slanted up at the corners, long lashed and seductive.

Then there was that pale skin, the palest he'd ever seen, offset by her pouting ruby lips and pink cheeks. Her skin made him think of cream puffs, soft and sweet beneath his tongue. He wondered how many licks it would take to get to the center of her --

"Honey pot?"

He jerked his head in her direction, his trip to fantasyland suddenly rerouted. "Huh?"

"I was asking where you keep your honey pot." She smiled again, this time revealing a dimple on either side of her mouth. "I like my tea a bit sweet."

"Oh." He rubbed his face with his hand, trying to erase the waking wet dream he'd been about to have when she interrupted him. "Top shelf above the microwave, to the left."

"Got it."

He watched her finish the tea preparations, answering when she asked him if he took cream and sugar or honey, finding himself amused when she became flustered over the lack of lemon slices. Finally, she brought two steaming mugs to the small dinette set and joined him, seating herself in the chair beside him, as daintily as a hummingbird on a feeder.

"I suppose we should get down to business." She took a sip of tea, peering at him over the rim of her mug.

He followed suit, gulping down the much-needed caffeine. "First off, I'd like to know how I was supposed to die."

"When a banshee makes her keening call, the mortal..."

"No, no." He cut her off. "I mean, what would've been my cause of death? I'm healthy as a horse."

She narrowed her eyes. "What did you have for dinner last night?"

He thought back to the business dinner he'd shared with a client. "Porterhouse steak, baked potato loaded with butter, sour cream, bacon bits and cheese... asparagus with hollandaise sauce, red wine, and the *best* French bread, slathered with butter..."

"That would be your answer." She shook her head and took another sip of tea. "You could've clogged an elephant's arteries with that meal."

"OK, we'll cover my eating habits later. I'd rather know why I was scheduled to die."

"Well, that's the interesting part." Aisling set her mug aside, reached into her pocket, and pulled out a small item.

He raised his eyebrows when he saw the object in her hand. "A banshee with a PDA?"

"How else would I access the main database?" She flipped it open and made a few jotting motions on the screen with the stylus. "Just as I thought." She glanced over at him. "Someone ordered your death."

That floored him. "Who the hell would do something like that?"

She looked back down at her screen. "Someone with a lot of pull... enough pull to get an audience with Morgan Le Fay in the first place, and a strong enough case to convince her to sign your death warrant."

"Who's this Morgan Le Fay? The name sounds familiar."

"She's the Celtic goddess of death." Aisling tapped the stylus against her screen. "All mortals have their destined time of death recorded in the Great Book, but the date can be changed if Morgan sees fit."

He digested this in silence. "And someone obviously made her see fit where I was concerned."

"Obviously." She nodded. "Well, what do you know?" She honed in on her screen.

"What is it?" He got up from his chair and stood behind her, leaning over her shoulder to look at her PDA.

"The warrant originated in the green district."

"Which means?"

"I think our plaintiff was a leprechaun." She snapped the lid down on her PDA and placed it on the woven placemat in front of her.

Declan snorted back a laugh. "A leprechaun? What, did I piss off the Easter bunny or something?" He slapped the table top with the palm of his hand. "No, let me guess. Santa found out about my affair with Mrs. Claus and ordered a hit."

She arched her delicate brows at him. "You've got a banshee sipping tea in your kitchen, but it's the leprechaun death warrant that has you laughing?" Her slight brogue thickened almost imperceptibly.

"I'm sorry, it's just..." He sat back down in his chair. "I've never been a big believer in the supernatural."

"Well, you can believe the earth is flat, but that doesn't make it so." She finished her tea and pushed her cup back decisively. "I guess the next step would be to figure out what you did to offend the leprechauns so they would take out a hit on you."

Talk about a baffling question. "I wouldn't even begin to know what sort of behavior offend them in the first place."

She leaned back in her chair and gave him an appraising stare. "Did you steal their pot of gold?"

Declan narrowly escaped choking on his tea. "You can't be serious."

She folded her arms over her chest. "Do I *look* like a kidder to you?"

She looked like a vanilla creamsicle he'd like to lick down to the stick, but that was beside the point. "I can assure you, I haven't stumbled across any pots of gold lately, much less stolen them."

"All right then. What about in your professional life? Have you been involved in any cases that could've angered them?"

He thought back over the last few months, mentally reviewing his caseload. "I'm in corporate law... contracts, real estate issues, things like that. It's not like I brought a member of the Irish mafia before the court on racketeering charges."

"Hmm." She propped her elbows on the table and rested her chin on her hands. "When you don't know their ways, it would be easy to miss some little issue that may have set them off."

"Them being the leprechauns?" Was he *really* having this conversation?

She nodded, her face thoughtful. "Would it be possible for me to take a gander at your case files?"

"My office is closed until nine in the morning, and I'm afraid someone of your..." He allowed himself to study her from head to toe again. "Unique appearance might attract too much attention from the night watchmen."

She bit her bottom lip, the fangs she'd sported earlier having given way to small pearly teeth. "I could take a leave of absence for a day or so. No one is likely to notice I'm gone."

He nodded, slightly dismayed by the feeling of pleasure he experienced at the idea of getting to spend a little more time with her. "You can stay here as long as you don't do any more of that howling."

"You've got my word." She stood up and smoothed her skirt. "After we find out why the leprechauns wanted you dead, we'll have to find out why you're immune to my keening."

He rose from his chair and stretched. "We've got our work cut out for us." They stood across from each other, awkwardly staring. Tension whirled through the room like a dervish.

"Where do I, uh..." She glanced into the living room. "Where do you want me to..."

"Sleep?" Did supernatural beings sleep? "In my bed, of course."

Her magnificent violet eyes expanded wildly, and he realized his blunder. "I mean, you take the bed, I'll take the futon in the living room." Of course that's what he meant. *Nice Freudian slip, jackass.*

She trailed behind him as he went to the linen closet between his bedroom and the bathroom. "You're being awfully generous to let me take the bed." She took the extra blanket he offered her. "I'd be just fine sleeping on the futon."

"It's no problem at all." He grabbed a pillow and blanket for himself and shut the closet door, taking another good look at her outfit. "You're not going to sleep in that, are you?"

"Well, I thought I might take the corset off." She wrapped one of the black laces around her index finger and gave it an absent tug.

Damn. The mental image of her unlacing the corset and slipping it off had his cock harder than granite in a nanosecond.

"Let me get you one of my old T-shirts. It would be a lot more comfortable." He practically ran into his bedroom, thankful for an excuse to give his raging erection the chance to calm down.

A few minutes later, he brought her an oversized Giants jersey he'd bought to wear to games he never had time to attend. "Here you go."

She took it, looking weighed down with the extra blanket he'd gotten her from the linen closet. "Well, I guess this is goodnight."

"I guess so." He stepped aside and gestured to his bedroom door. "Sleep well."

She stepped over the threshold, locking eyes with him as she closed the bedroom door. "Sweet dreams."

The door shut with a click.

"Sweet dreams," he muttered under his breath, tossing his spare pillow down on the futon. More like wet dreams. Even though she'd come to bring him death, the only thing dying was his self-control.

Chapter 3

"Are you sure I don't look too odd in this getup?" Aisling did a full rotation in front of the full-length mirror hanging from Declan's bathroom door.

"You look fine." Declan poked his head out of his bedroom closet. "Anyway, this isn't permanent. It's just something to put on to get you to the mall and back."

She grimaced at herself in the mirror. "I look like a teenage boy in these." At least the baggy navy blue sweats still carried Declan's scent. She'd spent the entire night in his bed inhaling it, letting it tempt her to thoughts she'd never had before. Thoughts of his body against hers, his hands on her breasts, his tongue...

Stop this. You can't have him. He's human! That tidbit of info didn't stop her nipples from hardening at the mere thought of his touch.

"Aisling, you might look like many things." Declan peered at her around the bathroom door. "But a teenage boy isn't one of them."

She felt herself blushing. Did he mean that as a compliment? "Here." He tossed her a baseball cap. She caught it deftly in one hand and examined it. "You'll need this."

"Whatever for? To hide my hair?"

"It'll protect your skin." He stuffed his hands in his pockets and leaned his tall form against the doorframe.

"What makes you think it needs protection?" She bundled up her hair and stuffed it under the cap.

"It's so fair." His eyes darkened as he flicked his gaze over her face. "Delicate." He reached out and skimmed her cheek with his fingertips.

She drew in a shuddery breath.

He trailed his fingers down to her jaw. "Soft." He brushed her bottom lip with the pad of his thumb. "You don't want to get a burn."

Something was burning all right, and it had nothing to do with the sun. A surge of pure heat shot from her lips straight down to simmer between her legs.

Her pulse set a new record.

"Mrs. Harris will be here soon." He stroked her bottom lip, and a sound that was half moan, half sigh broke forth from her throat. She could feel the warmth of his body through the suit and tie he wore. She wanted to strip him down to the skin and touch him, soak in his heat, get drunk on his scent.

The intercom buzzed.

He dropped his hand to his side and turned away abruptly. She followed him with her eyes to the intercom. He exchanged a few words with someone through the speaker.

"Mrs. Harris is downstairs." He gestured for her to join him in the living room. "She's been my secretary for five years, and I'd trust her with my life." He opened the front door for her. "You'll be in good hands."

She'd rather be in *his* hands, given the choice. "And she'll be taking me to the shopping mall?"

He nodded. "Mrs. Harris will take care of everything." He checked his watch. "I'll meet you back here in a couple of hours. Be dressed and ready to come to my office so we can start going over my files."

"I can't believe I'm going shopping for clothes at a modern American mall." She shook her head. "Glory be."

An unexpected laugh caught in his throat. "I haven't heard anyone say *that* in a while."

She put her hands on her hips and glared up at him. "And what's so funny about it?"

"Nothing, nothing." He grabbed his briefcase from beside the door. "You just reminded me of someone."

"Who's that?" She took the arm he offered and let him walk her to the elevator.

"My great-grandma, Maeve. That was one of her favorite expressions." He hit the button with the downward pointing arrow. "You sounded exactly like her just now."

Yippee. She reminded him of his great-grandmother. Unless he had a burning desire to rub Ben Gay all over someone, her chances with him were probably nonexistent.

They rode the elevator to the ground floor in silence, and he escorted her to the steel and glass doors that led from his building to a small parking lot.

"There's Mrs. Harris." He pointed out a brown sedan with a cheery-faced older woman in the driver's seat. "I told her you're an old friend who flew in from out of town last night. She thinks the airline lost your luggage, so don't do anything to make her suspicious, all right?"

Not that it mattered, since she could easily glamour the secretary and erase any incriminating memories, but she didn't feel like delving into a full explanation of her powers at the moment. "Got it."

He straightened his tie and gave her a friendly pat on the back. "See you back here around noon."

"See you then." She waved goodbye as he walked to his sleek silver sports coupe. How could she square the one-of-the-guys style pat on the back with the way he'd touched her in the bathroom earlier?

Did *anything* about human males make sense?

Aisling trudged toward Mrs. Harris' sedan, her black slippers scuffing against the parking lot's gravel surface. She *had* to find a way to make Declan see her as more than a supernatural distraction. She'd seen a flicker of heat in his eyes when he touched her, and she intended to do whatever it took to stoke that flame.

* * *

"Honey, I'm home!" Declan tossed his briefcase aside and returned his keys to his pocket, shutting his front door behind him. He'd always wanted to say that. Come

to think of it, he'd never had the chance. Had there ever been anyone waiting for him when he walked through the door?

"I'm dressing," Aisling's voice called from behind the closed bedroom door. "Be out in just a minute."

"No problem." He loosened his tie and checked his watch. "I think we have just enough time to make it to Frank Pepe's for lunch. They're world famous for their..."

Aisling stepped out of the bedroom, and whatever he'd been about to say was lost the instant she appeared in his line of vision.

He sucked in a breath. What had she done to herself?

"I picked up a few new things at the mall." She ran a hand self-consciously over the front of her black skirt. "I hope this will do."

Declan braced himself against the wall, fearing his knees would buckle. Beads of sweat popped out on his forehead, and he didn't even want to think about the surge of blood rushing south of his belt buckle.

"Is something wrong?" She took a step toward him, the scent of her perfume washing over him like a tide of lust. "You look a little flushed."

"No." The word emerged from his mouth as a bark. "Everything is fine. You look..." *Like someone I'd enjoy fucking until my cock needs to be put in traction.* "You look so... different." He shook his head, trying to clear the fog of pure primal desire threatening to overtake the more civilized parts of his brain.

"Good different or bad different?" Her brow furrowed anxiously, and she reached up to twirl the ends of her hair around her finger.

He took in the full impact of her changed appearance. "Good different." He cleared his throat and unfastened the top button of his shirt. "Definitely good."

"I wasn't sure about all this, but Mrs. Harris assured me it was appropriate for a law office." She looked at him expectantly, silently cueing him to give her some form of affirmation.

Too bad she couldn't see his almost painful erection screaming her praises.

"Your outfit is fine. Really fine." Her white hair had been pulled back into a sleek ponytail that hung to her waist in back, gleaming like spun sugar in the midday light. A deep pink shirt hugged her generous breasts, its color accentuating her alabaster skin. Her black skirt was tastefully short, suitable for business attire but still revealing enough curvy black stocking-clad leg to inspire thoughts of at least five different carnal positions.

A pair of black fuck-me pumps added just enough inches to her height to facilitate kissing. Which was what he wanted to do to her, right then and there.

And that was only the first item on his checklist.

"I got everything I'll need to fit into the human race for a few days." She went back to the bedroom and emerged with a purse. "Mrs. Harris took good care of me." She unzipped the handbag and took out a pair of oversized Jackie O. sunglasses. "You should give her a raise." She smiled, her dimples popping out to say hello.

"I'll do that." He shifted uncomfortably. Mrs. Harris wasn't the only one getting a raise out of this situation.

Aisling tied a pink silk scarf over her head and slipped on the sunglasses. "Protection from harmful rays," she explained, pawing through her bag. "Ready for lunch?"

He could think of a few things he'd enjoy doing with his mouth, but his appetite wasn't tuned into the food frequency after coming home to a banshee goddess.

"Oh, I almost forgot." She grabbed his arm.

"What is it?" He needed to have a cold drink, a walk, something to return his temperature to normal.

She dug into her purse, which, in a few short hours, had amazingly become as cluttered as that of any human woman. "Here you go." She held out a hand filled with crumpled slips of paper. "My receipts from this morning."

He took them, feeling her smooth fingers against his. "Very efficient." He glanced through them. Sephora, Express, Nine West. "I don't know if clothing a

banshee counts as a legitimate business expense, but maybe I can find a pooka accountant this year," he joked.

"I'll send you a business card for one when I get back home." She busied herself with her purse, and he glanced through the rest of the receipts, nearly coming in his pants when he saw the last one.

Victoria's Secret.

He swallowed hard, casting a furtive glance in Aisling's direction. She was touching up her lipgloss with the help of a compact mirror, oblivious to the hormonal havoc she'd wreaked.

Thongs. His throat tightened. *Demi bra. Garter belt.* His gaze shot down to her legs. *Holy shit.* Did she have on a garter belt under that skirt?

"I'm starving." She'd put everything back into her purse. "Where did you say we were going?"

He stuffed the Victoria's Secret receipt into his pocket like a guilt-ridden teenager hiding a girly magazine under his mattress. "Uh, Frank Pepe's. The best pizza you've ever had."

"And the first," she added, linking her arm through his.

He led her out the door and back toward the parking lot, retracing the steps they'd taken that morning. How could things have changed so much in a few short hours? He'd wanted her this morning, and touching her lips in the bathroom had him ready to haul her off to his bed. But now, his vocabulary didn't have the words to express the intensity of his arousal.

"You've never had pizza before, huh?" He pushed the outside door open. "I always wanted to be someone's first."

She giggled and buried her face against the sleeve of his suit, her embarrassed reaction tugging at his emotions. Damn if she didn't manage to touch something besides his testosterone level too.

Something like his heart.

Chapter 4

"I can't believe you have so many files." Aisling sat on the floor of Declan's corner office on the third floor of the building occupied by the law firm of Goldman, Mahoney & West. Manila folders in various states of disarray surrounded her, covering the floor in a semicircle.

"I still can't believe you never had pizza before." He shook his head in mock disbelief, looking down at her from behind his desk. "Any luck?"

"None at all." She leafed through a stack of legal documents. "Not a single clue about what might've brought about the wrath of the leprechauns."

"In that case," he rose to his feet and stretched, admiring her cleavage as seen from that angle, "I think we should take a break."

She yawned, covering her mouth with a delicate hand. "I could stand to stretch my legs."

Declan ambled over to the small kitchenette in the adjoining room and opened the mini fridge. "How about a soda?"

"Sounds good to me," she called back. He grabbed two cans from the rack inside the refrigerator door and popped the tops. When he got back to his office, he found Aisling studying the framed photos resting on the edge of his desk.

"Is this your brother Ryan?" She gestured to a photo of his eternally grinning brother wearing a purple, green, and gold jester's cap.

"Yep, that's him." He sat down in the swivel chair behind his desk and passed Aisling the other can of soda. "Taken at Mardi Gras in Galveston, Texas, a few years back."

"What about these people?" She held up the other photo.

"That's me and my mom and dad at Fenway Park when I was about ten." He took a gulp of his soda and exhaled.

"That's in Boston?" She put the frame back down on his desk.

"Yep." He glanced at the photo and felt the beginnings of a smile forming. "Where I grew up."

She studied the picture, her eyes thoughtful. "You look happy."

He nodded. "I was." He looked at the smiling boy holding up a prized foul ball in his right hand. "The first thing I want to do with my kids -- when they're old enough -- is a Sox game at Fenway."

Her expression changed, like a cloud passing over the sun. "You must really want to have children someday." She leaned against the inside edge of his desk, her voice uncertain.

"Well, sure." Not that he'd ever given it much thought. Didn't everyone want to have kids? It had always seemed too far in the future to give much consideration. He'd have to settle down first, which had never been an appealing prospect.

"You think Mrs. Harris will find anything for us in your archives?" The abrupt change of subject along with a quiver in her voice hit him like a chill wind.

"Did something upset you?" He waited for her answer, but she turned her face from him, studying the view of downtown New Haven from his window with sudden interest.

"Aisling?" He stood up opposite her. "Answer me."

When she remained silent, he cupped her chin with his hand and tipped her face up to look at him. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing. I..." She threw her hands up in a nervous gesture, overturning her can of soda in the process.

Declan felt the wet splash hit him. With an amused groan, he looked down at the cola-colored stain soaking through his shirt and tie.

"Glory be!" Aisling grabbed a handful of tissues from the box on his desk and dabbed at his shirt with flustered fingers. "I'm so sorry. I can't believe I did that."

"It's no big deal." He tried to pry her frantic hands from their assault on his stained shirt. "Seriously, I have a clean T-shirt in my gym bag." He clasped both of her hands in one of his, stilling their motions. "It's right there in the closet."

"But I..."

"Aisling, come on." He had his shirt halfway unbuttoned and the tie tossed onto his desk. "My dry cleaner can have the stain out like magic."

She didn't speak, but hot color crept into her pale face. He followed her gaze and found it fastened on his bare chest.

Without a word, he lifted her hand and placed her palm squarely against the flat plane of his chest. She drew in a rapid breath and curled her fingers in, reacting to the feel of him like someone who'd accidentally touched a scalding stove.

"Don't stop." He moved in closer, forcing her backwards, until her rear end bumped the edge of his desk. He lifted her and sat her on its surface, careless of the piles of paperwork.

She bit down on her bottom lip, her chest rising and falling at an alarming pace. He brought her other hand up to his chest and planted it there, hissing when he felt her skin against his.

"I've been thinking about this..." He bent his head down, whispering in her ear, drowning in her scent. "Fantasizing about this... since the moment you stopped trying to kill me."

A wary laugh bubbled forth from her throat. He answered by leaving a row of kisses down the length of her neck.

"If I can't kiss you, you might as well start your keening again." He moved into the vee of her legs, whispering against the soft skin exposed by the open neckline of her shirt. "Because either way, I'm a dead man."

"Declan." She ran her hands over his chest and shoulders, going higher until her fingers were plowing through his hair. That was all the encouragement he needed.

"Aisling." He brought his mouth to hers, crushing her lips in a kiss that held a night's worth of the most intense desire he'd ever known.

She twisted her fingers through his hair, shyly parting her lips, granting him access to the wet cave of her mouth. He plundered with his tongue, tasting her indescribable flavor, commanding the mating of their tongues in a rhythm resembling what he wanted to do to her with the rest of his body.

He broke the kiss and she gasped his name again, throwing her head back when he strove for access to her neck. He brought his mouth lower, kissing each inch of skin he exposed as he unbuttoned her shirt.

"If you're wearing a garter belt beneath this skirt..." He pulled away long enough to run his hands over her stocking covered thighs. "You're going to have to call 911, and it won't have a damn thing to do with you being a banshee."

She lifted her backside from the desk slightly, a mute invitation for him to push her skirt up. He slipped his hands beneath the hem and inched it up, exploring every inch of her silky thighs as he went. When he revealed the spot where her thigh high stockings were attached to her black lace garter belt, every ounce of oxygen drained from his lungs.

He muttered an expletive and pushed her legs apart, massaging her inner thighs with trembling hands. She wrapped her arms around him, pulling him closer, letting him nestle his face between her lace-covered breasts.

He dragged air back into his body, his tongue tracing the outline of her cleavage. He had to see her breasts or he'd die from longing. Without further hesitation, he reached for the front clasp of her black lace bra, preparing to open it and set her breasts free.

A small sound escaped from her mouth and he jerked his head up. She ducked her chin, averting her eyes from him but offering no protest.

"Aisling..." He relaxed his hold on the clasp of her bra. "Don't be embarrassed. Especially not with me."

"No one has ever seen me like this before." She put her hands over his but kept her gaze to the side.

"That's fine because no one else could want you more than I do." He caressed her through the cups of her bra, pressing his throbbing erection against the apex of her thighs. "Do you feel how hard I am right now? It's all because of you." He angled his head and captured her mouth again. "Let me see you." His lips moved against hers as he spoke.

As if in slow motion, she moved his hands from the clasp of her bra and unfastened it herself.

He shook like a fragile sapling in gale force wind as he pushed the confines of her bra aside, exposing the succulently full mounds of her breasts.

They were like snowdrifts, scoops of vanilla ice cream topped with cherry colored nipples. Pre-ejaculate poured from his cock and his head spun with need, his entire being distilled to one single desire. Cupping her breasts with his hands, he lifted one ruby nipple to his mouth and suckled.

Her breathing changed to panting. She clasped the back of his head with her hands, bringing him closer to the plump curve of her breast, moaning when he took the entire outer rim of her nipple into his mouth, drawing on it, flicking it with his tongue.

He grabbed for his belt. He had to get out of his pants and into her panties right then, that instant. If he didn't, he'd keel over from sheer frustration. "I've got to get inside you." He ripped his zipper down.

"Take my skirt off." She unfastened the waistband for him and wiggled forward to facilitate the process.

"Sir, I've got those files you were looking..." Mrs. Harris burst through the door, loaded down with a stack of folders. The words died on her lips, and her usually cheery face turned beet red at the sight of her employer and his oddly pale out of town guest half naked on top of the desk.

"I'll just put these down, uh..." Mrs. Harris spun around like a top, seeking a place to dump the files so she could escape the scene of the crime. Aisling had already jumped up and was hastily buttoning her shirt. Mrs. Harris dropped the files into the chair by the door and left without another glance in their direction.

Silence filled the room, hanging between the two of them like a ghost. The sounds of their passion-fueled breathing supplied the only background noise. Aisling, completely dressed again, crossed her arms over her chest and stared at the floor.

Dammit to hell. What had he been thinking? Aisling was a foreigner in this realm, new to sexual exploration, at least with men of the human persuasion. He should've had better sense than to tear her clothes off in an unlocked office like some rutting beast who wouldn't spring for dinner and a movie first.

Hell, she at least deserved to make love in a bed, not on a hard desk in front of a window in scenic downtown New Haven.

"Aisling, I..." He stopped. He couldn't say he was sorry, because it wasn't true. He'd enjoyed every minute his mouth and hands had spent on her, and his attraction for her wasn't something he regretted.

"I guess I should go change into that T-shirt now." He cleared his throat and shrugged out of his shirt.

She nodded, fiddling with the top button of her shirt. "I'll check those files Mrs. Harris dropped off for us."

Dropped being the key word. He groaned inwardly and staggered to his closet, fishing out his gym bag.

This sex-crazed behavior had to stop. If Aisling wanted to have sex, it needed to be on her terms, when she felt ready for it, not because he let Little Declan run the show. He pulled the spare T-shirt over his head, lurching when his erection demanded an explanation about being left high and dry.

"Declan?"

"What's up?" He raked his hand through his hair. *Think about cold water. Think about Aunt Gertie wearing night cream and curlers.*

"Were you involved in this land deal to acquire Kelly Orchards for corporate development?"

Aunt Gertie did the trick every time. He stepped out of the closet, finding Aisling with her nose buried in a file. "Yeah, why?"

She looked up from the folder, her eyes growing round with horror. "Declan, didn't you know it was a clover field?"

He thought back, trying to remember what the place had looked like. "Honestly, I don't recall a single thing about it."

"I think we have the answer to our question." She waved the file at him, accusation hanging from every syllable. "You sold the leprechaun's clover field to a developer!"

Chapter 5

"I can't *believe* you did this." Aisling flopped down in the nearest chair.

"How the hell was I supposed to know I'd piss off the entire first fleet of the little green army?" Declan shut the closet door behind him with a little too much force.

"Just tell me they haven't completely destroyed the place." She counted to ten, waiting for his answer. The bulge in his pants had almost disappeared, but she could remember the way it had felt against her. The knowledge that she'd done that to him sent her pulse spiraling.

"They didn't *destroy* it." He flopped down in his swivel chair, propping his feet up on his desk, near the exact spot where they'd almost... "They *developed* it," he finished with a scowl in her direction.

"Can you be a bit more specific?" She tried to picture herself explaining this one to Morgan Le Fay.

"They built an Olive Garden over it." He tapped a pen on the glass top of his desk.

Aisling felt an inner fuse crackle and pop. "An *Olive Garden*? They covered the leprechaun's home with an *Olive Garden*? And you went along with this?"

He shrugged, continuing the pen tapping. "It was just business."

"It was a violation of the leprechauns' civil liberties!" She tossed the file onto the end table beside her chair and jumped to her feet. "Besides, haven't you ever heard that old Joni Mitchell song? You don't pave paradise and put up an Olive Garden!"

"Last time I checked, leprechaun civil liberties were not addressed by our Bill of Rights." He tossed the pen down on the desk with a clatter. "Secondly, forgive me for not being up on random folk music lyrics. I was too busy going to law school and trying to make a living to memorize the entire works of Ms. Mitchell."

"You realize their pot of gold is probably buried somewhere beneath the restaurant?" She began to pace, rubbing her forehead with her hand. There had to be a way to straighten out this mess.

"I would have no idea." His voice was tight with suppressed anger. She sought him with her eyes, feeling a pang in her heart when she saw the look on his face.

"I don't want to fight with you." She treaded over to his desk, avoiding eye contact.

"I suppose I'm a little..." He coughed. "Frustrated. And it has nothing to do with this leprechaun situation."

"What happened between us --" She was about to tell him it didn't have to happen again. After all, what future could there be between a banshee and a lawyer? Especially a human lawyer who wanted children, something she could never give him. She winced at the pain shooting through her heart.

"What happened between us shouldn't have happened the way it did, and I'm sorry." He reached across the desk and took her hand. "You deserve more than a quickie on top of a desk."

"It's not that at all." *That was his idea of a quickie?* "I don't want you to feel like you owe me a repeat performance."

"You call that a performance?" His mouth turned up at the corners. "That was just the opening act." He stood up and gave her hand a warm squeeze. "What do you say we go home so I can change, then we have a little tour of Italy for dinner?"

"Maybe my banshee sixth sense will figure something out from being on the property." She followed him to the door, relishing the feeling of his hand around hers.

She'd made a huge mistake in letting this human get under her skin, but she couldn't stop herself. She'd drink every last drop of togetherness until she had to return to her realm, leaving him to find a woman who could give him everything she couldn't.

And probably taking a broken heart back with her.

* * *

Declan flipped on the living room light switch. "I don't think I've ever seen anyone put away Fettuccini Alfredo at that speed before."

"We banshees have generous appetites." Aisling hung her purse up on the coat rack and sighed.

"You nervous about the email?" He couldn't quite absorb the fact that she'd just emailed the leprechaun king about their situation.

She hugged herself, shuddering. "He's hot tempered, and I know he must've been furious to present a case for your death to Morgan." She gave him a weak smile. "But I think your plan will turn the tide."

"Hopefully." He drew her into an embrace. "Everything will be OK."

"It has to be." She melted against him, and he savored the sensation of her body against his. "I won't permit any banshee to come near you."

"Are you planning to become my one-banshee security force?" He tightened his hold on her and rested his chin on her head. The idea of keeping her around, for security or any other reason, appealed to him more than he'd ever thought possible.

The beeping sound of her PDA rang through the air. With a sigh of regret, he released her. She made a beeline to her purse, snatched it open, and took out the device.

"Incoming email?" He sat down on the couch, suddenly tense.

"It's from Seamus." She scanned the screen. "That's the king," she clarified. "He and Queen Maeve are coming to meet with us tomorrow." She exhaled. "He's willing to hear your thoughts on the matter."

"Queen Maeve?"

"Yes, she's the queen of the fairy realm, which makes me one of her subjects." She snapped the PDA shut and dropped it into her purse. "She's coming to mediate, in case King Seamus gets a little hot under the collar."

"Maeve." He smiled. "Just like my great-grandmother."

She sat down on the couch, a careful distance from him. "It's a noble name."

"What time can we expect the supernatural duo tomorrow?"

She played with the end of her ponytail. "Around noon. We're serving brunch."

Declan nearly swallowed his tongue. "We're making brunch for the leprechaun king and the fairy queen?"

"I thought I'd make colcannon and soda bread." She stood up unsteadily. "I guess we should get ready for bed. Tomorrow's going to be a long day, and I need to go to the market across the street and get some groceries early in the morning."

He pulled himself up and followed her into the bedroom. "Do I want to know how a banshee learned to cook?"

She opened a pink and white striped shopping bag perched on the end of his bed. "Like I said, banshees have to eat too." He watched as she extracted a handful of filmy black silk and lace.

"I'll change in there." She indicated his bathroom. "You can put on your pajamas out here." She turned on her heel and disappeared behind the bathroom door.

Declan puffed out his cheeks and sighed, snatching a pair of cotton pajama bottoms from the top drawer of his dresser. As if he'd be able to sleep, trying to picture her in whatever she'd pulled out of that bag.

He shed his clothes and slipped into his pajamas, tossing his discarded jeans and shirt into the laundry hamper before leaving the bedroom. He shut the door with a decisive click, letting Aisling know it was safe to come out.

He heard the bathroom door open and shut as he was settling onto the futon for the night.

"See you in the morning, Declan." She peeked out of the barely cracked bedroom door, her violet eyes glowing in the semi-darkness.

"Goodnight, Aisling." Their gazes locked for a second, then she shut the door on him.

He rolled over on the futon and punched his pillow, praying sleep would come, since he obviously couldn't.

Chapter 6

The sound of thunder worked itself into his dream, taking the form of an angry leprechaun throwing little green rocks at his head.

Declan tossed on the futon, kicking his blanket onto the floor. He woke, sitting bolt upright when a strike of lightning crashed outside the living room window.

He screwed an eye open and saw rain pounding against the window. Thunder rolled in the distance, and lightning joined the ambient glow of the city to fill the apartment with a pale illumination.

The clock hanging over the entertainment center read 2:11 AM. He'd been sleeping for hours, having fitful dreams of Aisling mixed with leprechaun inspired nightmares.

Aisling. His head turned involuntarily to the bedroom door. Had the storm awakened her too?

He stood up and raked a hand through his hair before shuffling to the bedroom door. He pressed his ear against it.

Nothing.

He turned the knob and opened the door with a faint creak. Blinking, he saw that Aisling had raised the blinds on the row of windows that looked out over Long Island Sound.

But it wasn't the blast of lightning cutting a jagged path across the dark sky that made his breath hitch in his throat. It was Aisling, her form bathed in smoky light from the exposed windows.

She had on a black silky nightgown, held up by the thinnest of spaghetti straps on her milk white shoulders. It barely skimmed the top of her thighs, leaving him to imagine what she wore under it. It was the kind of sleepwear made to hit the floor. Her

frost colored hair hung unbound, almost to her rear end. An impulse stronger than reason took hold of him, building with every passing second like the gathering winds swirling around the building.

Hearing him, she turned just as another crash of thunder and lightning collided outside. "It's storming." She parted her lips to say more, then stopped.

But he wasn't stopping. Not this time.

He crossed the room to her.

She gasped when he picked her up, cradling her against his chest. Thunder sounded like a sonic boom, and lightning threw her startled face into sharp relief.

"What's happening?" She wrapped her arms around his neck.

"I'm going to have you or die trying." He carried her over to the bed and sat her on the edge of it. Kneeling before her on the floor, he cupped her face with his hands.

"If someone from the fairy realm sees to it that I'm dead tomorrow, I want to go having made love to you first." His lips sought hers, finding them warm and willing beneath his. "Give me this tonight, and I promise I won't disappoint you."

She twined her fingers through his hair. "You couldn't if you tried."

He joined her on the bed, parting her legs with his hands and easing himself down between them. Looking down at her, he drank in every facet of her beauty, memorizing her eyes, her lips, her face, her hair.

"What are you doing?" She traced his lips with her fingers.

"Burning you into my mind." He braced himself with his elbows and gripped her shoulders. "I never want to forget a single second of this night."

He tugged down the straps of her nightgown, kissing her bare shoulders. She shifted beneath him, wrapping one leg around his.

This was actually going to happen. He had one chance to brand her, to claim her for his own, and the moment had finally arrived.

Aisling's heart beat faster than it ever had in her long life. The man she'd fallen for at first sight was about to make love to her.

He pulled back from her, kneeling between her legs. He caressed her inner thighs, tracing small circles that went higher and higher, toward the center of her pulsing desire.

"This is beautiful." He rubbed the hem of her nightgown between his fingers.

"Thank you." She took a shaky breath.

"But it's got to come off." With that, he pushed it up until her breasts were unveiled for his viewing.

Her nipples hardened, growing painfully sensitive, and a pool of wet heat saturated the thin fabric of her black thong panties. A bulge formed in the front of his pajama bottoms, and she reached for it, stroking it through the fabric with a tentative hand.

He moaned her name and placed his hand over hers, guiding her strokes. He found her breasts, rolling her nipples between his fingers while his erection lengthened beneath her hand.

"Too many clothes." He helped her to rise up so he could pull her nightgown over her head, leaving her naked except for the thong. He put her hands on his hips, and she grasped the waist of his pajamas, yanking them down and setting his hardened cock free.

She stared, shocked by the size of him. He kicked his way out of his pajama bottoms, leaving them to join her nightgown on the floor, then returned his gaze to her face.

"Don't look so scared, Aisling." He took her hand in his and wrapped it around his shaft. "This is going to be beautiful, I promise."

"You're so big." She let him guide her hand up and down his cock, showing her his rhythm. He felt like satin and steel. His entire body was a work of art, from his broad shoulders tapering to narrow hips, his abs bisected by a trail of dark hair, hard muscle covered with smooth skin.

She could never tire of looking at him, touching him.

"You turn me on so much that I've doubled in size." He gently removed her hand from his cock and lowered himself to her. "But enough about me..."

She giggled, welcoming the weight of his body on hers.

"Let's talk about you." He supported his weight with his elbows, leaving his hands free to cup her breasts. "And how you have the most exquisite pair of breasts I've ever seen." He cradled the undersides, lifting them to capture a nipple with his mouth.

She let out a broken moan. He lavished the stiffened peak, then pushed it upwards with his tongue, the sweet torture with his mouth a potent mix of pleasure and painful anticipation.

He turned his attention to her other breast, his tongue fluttering over the sensitized tip of her nipple before sucking it into his mouth. She ran her fingers through his silky dark hair, tugging it when the sensations grew too intense. Her hips rose toward his, undulating in a steady motion of arousal.

He took his mouth from her nipple, leaving it reddened and unbearably hard. Inching between her legs, he hooked the sides of her panties with his thumbs, and pulled them down.

When he exposed her sex, he let out a whispered expletive. She propped herself up on her elbows, tracking his gaze to her mound.

He looked up at her, his eyes revealing surprise. "Don't tell me they have Brazilian waxes in the fairy realm."

"Banshees don't need them." Her wetness increased beneath his gaze.

"Forget the keening." He ran a hand over her smooth mound, parting her slick folds with his thumb and index finger. "You could kill a man just by showing him this." He murmured another curse and lowered his head until his cheek touched the soft skin of her pussy.

She held her breath, going dizzy when he stroked his stubble roughened chin and jaw against her bare outer lips. When he parted them with his hands, she threw her head back on the pillow, embarrassment warring with excitement.

"You are so perfect." He sighed, stroking a thumb over the aching bud between her legs. "You have the most beautiful clit." He circled it with his thumb, eliciting a whimper from her. "It's like a ripe, juicy little berry that I just want to lick..."

He followed his words with the corresponding action.

"And suck." He took her clitoris into his mouth, rubbing it between his lips, flicking it with the tip of his tongue.

She spread her legs further apart, all reticence fleeing at the feel of his mouth on her clit. He made her mindless, a slave to her body's commands, her hips pumping to meet the ministrations of his tongue.

Tension wound itself inside her, threatening to burst. "You're going to make me climax all by myself." She managed to get the words out between broken breaths.

He trailed a row of kisses on her outer lips.

"I want us to come together." She reached down and tugged on his wrist. "And I want to have you inside me when I climax."

"I want that too." He arranged himself on top of her, letting the tip of his cock tease her clit as his tongue teased her lips. "I want to feel you around me when you come." He grasped her breasts with his hands, kneading them with his fingers. "I want to feel every spasm..." He positioned his cock at her entrance, barely breaching her pussy.

"Every flicker..." He pushed the head of his shaft into her, and she drew a deep breath.

"Every tightening clench around my cock." He slid further into her, until the thatch of dark hair around the base of his erection brushed her smooth sex like angel kisses.

He clutched her breasts, holding onto them like lifelines in a maelstrom. "I want to be inside you all the way." A rasping moan of pleasure wrenched itself from him. "Bend your knees deeper."

She pulled her knees back as far as they'd go, and he inched himself into her even more deeply. She groaned with the pleasure of it, the feeling of oneness with him.

She could feel him pulsing and alive, deep inside her, following the beat of her own heart.

"Wrap your legs around me." He shifted slightly on top of her, letting his pelvis make contact with her pounding clit. She clasped her legs around his waist, locking her ankles behind him.

"Hold me." He withdrew his shaft from her a fraction, then thrust back in to the hilt. She wrapped her arms around him, stroking the sweat-slick skin of his back with her hands. "You're so tight and hot." He ground against her clit, making her shake. "So wet." He withdrew again, pushing back into her at a painfully slow pace. "I've never felt anything like this before."

She lifted her head from the pillow and kissed his lips. "Me either."

He increased his thrusts, pushing against her clit with a delicious friction with every stroke. She brought her pelvis up to meet his, feeling the wave of pressure growing inside her with every second.

He stopped, still deep inside her, and removed her arms from around him. Cuffing her wrists, he brought her hands up over her head and pinned them there.

"You're mine now." He thrust into her again, lacing his fingers through hers. "Say it."

She couldn't speak, couldn't breathe, couldn't think about anything but his cock inside her, his chest rubbing her nipples, his pelvis tormenting her clitoris, how close he was to her.

"Say you're mine." His face contorted with pleasure. "Say it, or just go ahead and keen me to death right now."

She tightened herself around him, massaging his cock with the walls of her sex. "I'm yours."

"Swear it." He slammed his cock into her. The headboard hit the wall with a vicious thwack.

"I swear it." She pumped her hips and let out a hollow cry before throwing his hands off hers to grasp his backside, nearly weeping at the increased friction.

"You have to stay with me." His voice broke on the last word. He put his hands beneath her, lifting her rear end until they were completely fused. "I need you. No one will ever..."

Her voice lifted in a cry almost like her keening, drowning out the sounds of his words as the first tremors of her orgasm erupted.

"Let it out, baby." He thrust faster, carrying her through the height of her climax. "Let it all out."

Her wailing reached a fever pitch as her sex pulsed around his cock, and he succumbed to his own release, spilling his hot seed into her. They rode through the aftershocks of their mutual pleasure, lips and tongues groping each other blindly. When he finally grew soft, he rolled onto his back, drawing her on top of him and into his embrace.

"I can die happy now." He stroked her hair, his breathing and pulse still speeding like a bullet train.

"But you won't die." She trailed her fingers through the smattering of dark hair on his chest. "I won't let that happen." She wanted to ask him if he'd meant what he'd said, about her belonging to him and staying with him, but she didn't want to break the spell of the moment. Instead, she allowed herself a sigh of contentment and snuggled closer to him.

"It's still raining." He stared out the window at the steady drizzle falling.

"Just barely." She let her hands roam his magnificent body, luxuriating in the contrast between his hard planes and her soft curves.

"Ever made love in the rain?" He lowered his gaze to her face.

"Would I want to?" She rose up on an elbow and threw him a teasing smile.

He had her in his arms, carrying her toward the window before she had the chance to think straight.

"Declan!" She pounded his chest with her fist. "Have you lost your mind?"

"In a word?" He balanced her weight against one hip and unlocked the window.

"Yes." He threw the window open and set her down on the sill. "Climb out."

"We can't just go out onto the fire escape naked! Someone might see..."

"And do what? Call the police and report a naked banshee sighting?" He pointed to the window again. "Let's go."

She scurried out the window, onto the fire escape where she'd been standing when she'd first seen him. If she'd known how he would change her, would she have gone through with it?

When he emerged on the other side of the window and took her in his arms, she knew the answer was a resounding *yes*.

* * *

The minute he slid his hands over Aisling's rain dampened breasts, Declan knew he'd made the right decision. Sex with Aisling was incredible. Wet sex with Aisling promised to shatter his concept of reality.

She stood on tiptoes, stretching for a kiss. He bent down and met her lips, mating their mouths, thrusting his tongue over hers. Reaching down, he cupped the round globes of her backside and lifted her, shuddering with need when she wrapped her legs around his waist.

He dragged his mouth from hers. "You would just dematerialize if you began to fall, wouldn't you?"

She narrowed her eyes at him. "You're banking on my ability to dematerialize to keep me from falling to my death?"

"Call it the banshee version of safe sex." He backed them slowly toward the railing, until her back pressed against it. Supporting her with his arms beneath her thighs, he drew away from her enough to place his cock at her entrance.

She parted her legs further, inviting him in. He slammed his cock into her tight cave without prelude. She threw her head back and whimpered, and he realized the advantage of their position. He had full access to her breasts and nipples as well as her clit.

Rain sluiced over her shoulders, leaving trails over her collarbones, down to her breasts. He bent his head to lick a droplet from the swollen tip of her nipple, eliciting a sound of approval from her.

He leaned her back against the rail, allowing him to tease both nipples to the heights of swelling and sensitivity. All the while, her sex pulsed around his cock, quivering every time his tongue swirled around one of her hard peaks.

She clamped her legs around him and clutched the railing behind her with her hands, displaying her entire succulent body for him. Flashes of lightning struck in the distance, giving him a glimpse of her face. Her lips were swollen from his kisses, and patches of stubble burn reddened the usually flawless surface of her skin. She looked like a woman who had been marked by a territorial male during mating season.

Which wasn't too far from the truth. His cock jerked inside her pussy at the thought, causing her to swivel her hips in return. She was his, fairy realm be damned.

"Now you know why I wanted to do this." He ran his tongue along her shoulder, tasting rain mixed with the flavor of her skin. "I can see you and taste you in an entirely new way."

"I think..." She shook her head, rain flinging itself from her wet hair. "I think I can come again." She looked at him with dilated eyes, breasts straining with each breath. "And if you don't let me, I'm going to scream."

"We wouldn't want that to happen." He shifted his hands to her rear end, grinding against her. "Hold on tight."

She spread her arms out along the railing, clutching it in a white knuckled grip.

With her weight leveraged by her hold on the railing, he freed one hand from supporting her and slipped his thumb into the space where their bodies joined, seeking her clit. He found it and was rewarded with a ragged cry from her.

Instead of the deep thrusting of their last lovemaking, he ground against her, circling, working his thumb against her hardened bud with the same rhythm. She followed suit, rolling her hips in the opposite direction, writhing against him.

His cock glistened with her wetness, making it more slippery than the finest state of the art lubricant ever could. Rain collected at the place where their bodies met, pooling, running down the base of his cock and down their legs. Beads of water collected on her nipples, and he licked them off faithfully.

“Lay me down and make me climax.”

He picked her up and carried her to the window, helping her inside. He followed her through, then carried her to the kitchen, laying her out on the table where they’d shared tea the night before.

She gripped the edges of the table in her hands and spread her legs for him. He stood between them, pulling them around him and moving her to the end of the table. Then he drove his cock into her pussy, deeper than ever before.

He pumped into her like a dying man seeking the gates of heaven, his thumb stroking her clit until she broke into a high-pitched cry.

He heard the crystal goblets in his china cabinet splintering. Her cry continued, an aria of passion as she began to come.

His voice joined hers, a rough note sounding from his dry throat. As her inner walls milked his cock, he shot his seed into her, filling her, its warmth mixing with her own wetness, knowing it would seep into the deepest parts of her womanhood. He collapsed on top of her, spent almost to exhaustion, ready to weep on her breasts.

What had she done to him? He’d had plenty of sex in his life, but none had ever reduced him to a quivering mass of tangled emotions. He’d known this woman, this supernatural sprite, for somewhere around twenty-four hours, and already the thought of living without her seemed like the dreariest scenario he could conjure.

She’d somehow managed to climb right through his body, making a door through his heart, straight into his soul.

Chapter 7

She was gone when he woke up.

For a minute, fear stabbed at his heart like icy needles. Then he remembered she'd said something about going to the market early to get groceries for their interview with the leprechaun king.

He rolled over in his bed, running a hand over the impression she'd left beside him. They'd slept in a tangle, unwilling to lose skin on skin contact for even a moment. He'd planned to wake her by putting his tongue to good use between her legs, but she'd gotten the jump on him and left.

Dragging himself out of bed, he stretched, feeling at once strained and relaxed. He stumbled to the bathroom, hoping to rouse himself with a hot shower.

When he emerged later, freshly showered and shaved, he heard the sounds of Aisling unloading groceries into his kitchen cabinets. Throwing on jeans and a green sweatshirt, he joined her, wrapping his arms around her from behind as she peeled potatoes over the sink.

"I missed you this morning." Her cotton candy hair was in braids, wound about her head like a coronet, leaving her neck bare. He nuzzled it, appreciating her clean, flowery scent. "I wanted to wake you in a special way." His blood turned hot at the thought of it.

"I needed to get food for brunch." She turned off the faucet and extricated herself from his arms, carrying the pot of potatoes to the stove. "We should discuss a few things before they get here."

OK, so she's not feeling especially romantic this morning. Maybe banshees were night people... or creatures. "Go ahead, I'm listening." He grabbed an apple from the bowl of fruit she'd placed on the table and took a bite.

"First, you need to let me do the talking. I'll make your case to them, and you just smile and speak when spoken to." She put a head of yellow cabbage on the cutting board and hacked it in two with a knife.

"All right." He had to give it to her in the knife-wielding department. She had him beat, hands down. "Anything else?"

"Yes." She had the cabbage chopped at warp speed. "I think it would be a really, really bad thing if they found out what happened last night."

"What do you mean?" He feigned a yawn, stretching his arms over his head. "You talking about our dinner at the Olive Garden?"

She dumped the cabbage into the steaming pot of water with the potatoes. "You know exactly what I mean."

"Oh, all that spectacular fucking that went on between 2:00 and 5:00 this morning?" He polished off his apple and tossed it into the trash. "I'd forgotten all about it." Something about her attitude bothered him, making him want to provoke a response from her. They'd spent the entire night locked together, with him inside her body for most of it. Why was she acting like an annoyed babysitter?

"Call it what you want, just don't tell them about it." She shoved a loaf of bread into the oven and slammed the door.

"Won't that make your bread go flat?" He intercepted her as she tried to storm out of the kitchen. "You know it wasn't just spectacular fucking."

She raised her eyebrows at him, calling his bluff.

"All right, it was spectacular, but it was far more than fucking." He caught her by the wrists and took her in his arms. "You know how I feel about you." Looking down into her unreadable face, he continued. "Don't you?"

"I'm a novelty." She stared down at the floor. "I'm not someone you can make a life with."

"I can't believe you'd say that." He let go of her. "You're so much more to me than anything I can even put into words."

She stuffed her hands into the pockets of her pink velour track suit. "You don't owe me any pretty words. I stare death in the face every night, remember? I can take it straight."

Dammit to hell, why was she doing this? "You want it straight? OK, here you go. I'm in love with you. How's that?"

Her face crumpled just as a swirl of glittering white mist appeared in the living room. Aisling regained her composure at once, ready to greet Queen Maeve and King Seamus as their forms began to materialize.

* * *

"So, do we have a deal?" Aisling held her breath and waited for King Seamus' answer.

"Let me make sure I'm understanding you." The leprechaun king, rather awkwardly seated with a pillow beneath him in a dinette chair, turned his blue eyes to Declan. "You're saying you'll give us the land near Boston, free and clear, if we call off the death warrant against you?"

"That's exactly what I'm saying." Declan used what Aisling imagined to be his most persuasive attorney voice. "My great-grandmother, Maeve Connor, left the land in a trust for me. It's a beautiful old homestead on the outskirts of Boston, with plenty of clover and a wine cellar in the house available for your personal use."

Seamus sat back in his chair, giving Declan an appraising stare. "I see you've studied our lore, young lad."

"I've had an excellent teacher." Aisling felt Declan's eyes on her, burning like embers. She forced herself to ignore the magnetic pull, to focus on the meeting at hand.

"Dear, your colcannon was excellent." Queen Maeve fluttered her wings and gave Aisling a gentle pat on the hand. "Let me help you with the dishes."

"Oh, no, Mother Maeve, it's no trouble." Aisling stood up with the intention of gathering the plates and silverware littering the table, but a wave of the queen's hand cleared the table. She sat back down as the dishes appeared in the cabinet, washed and neatly put away.

"That, my dear, was no trouble." Maeve smiled at Aisling.

"Tell me this much, son." Seamus unfastened the gold buttons holding the ends of his green vest together. *"How came you to have such a glorious bit of land going to waste? Why haven't you married a fine lass and had you a passel of babes to make good use of the property?"*

Declan's eyes darted from Aisling back to the king. *"Well, sir, I've been focusing on my career for the past few years."*

"Do you plan on getting married, lad?" Seamus peered anxiously at Declan.

Declan looked straight at Aisling. *"If the right woman will have me."*

"And you'll have some young ones with her?"

"I'd like nothing more." The man she loved continued to stare at her, and Aisling felt the same twist of the knife in her heart she'd experienced every time he mentioned his desire to become a father someday.

"Then consider it a deal, son." Seamus jumped down from the dinette chair, puffing up to his full three feet of height. *"You and your brood may visit the homestead whenever you wish. Just leave the clover field be, and we'll call it even."* He extended a small ruddy hand to Declan, who gave it a hearty shake.

"That still leaves one matter unsettled." Aisling knew she should feel relieved that Declan was out of danger, but knowing she was fast losing any reason to remain with him blotted out any happiness his safety might have brought her.

"Why is Declan immune to my keening?" Aisling turned to Maeve with her question. *"He should've died on the spot, but as you can see, he's very much alive."*

The queen glanced from Aisling to Declan and back, her violet eyes fathomless with hidden knowledge. *"There could be several causes of his immunity,"* she finally said, speaking slowly as she folded her hands on the table.

"We have nothing to go on." Aisling clasped her hands, pleading. *"He needs to know for his own safety, and I need to know for my own future as a banshee."*

"But, dearest," Maeve smoothed down the front of her wispy violet silk gown, *"Are you sure your future lies in being a banshee?"*

"What other options are there?" Aisling didn't dare hope.

"There are *always* options." Maeve gave a nod of her regal auburn head.

"That still doesn't tell us why he didn't fall to my keening." Aisling wanted to get this over with, to make a clean break if she could, for Declan's sake if not her own.

Maeve turned her gaze to Declan. "You must be sure you *want* to know the reason." She tilted her head, her amethyst studded diadem catching the light from the kitchen window. "I promise you, my son, you will never be harmed by a banshee's cry. Your immunity is eternal."

"That's good enough for me." Declan rose to pull out Aisling's chair. "What about you, Aisling?"

"It's your life." She lurched forward out of the chair and said her goodbyes to Seamus.

"Thank you for being so understanding." She shook the king's tiny hand.

He let out a merry laugh. "He's a fine lad, Aisling, a fine lad. We had a bit of a misunderstanding, that's all." Seamus made his way over to Declan to iron out a few last minute details.

"Are you all right, dear?" Maeve stood at Aisling's side. "You look terribly unhappy."

"I'm just..." She screwed up the last ounce of bravado she could muster. "I'm just homesick, Mother Maeve. Nothing a few days back in the fairy realm won't cure."

"If you say so." Maeve stroked Aisling's cheek. "Come home and take some time off. This situation seems to have taken quite a toll on you."

"I'll be fine, Mother, honestly." She looked up to see Declan watching her from across the room. Her heart accelerated to the point of pain.

The man could undo her with a single glance. What hope did she have of ever getting over him?

* * *

"All's well that ends well, as Seamus said. He and Maeve should be meeting with Morgan Le Fay right about now to cancel the warrant." Declan settled into the couch, mulling over the events of the day. "I'm just glad it's over."

"Over," she muttered, her back to him as she gazed out the window at the mellow Connecticut afternoon.

"How about we celebrate?" He stood up and stretched. "You, me, a bottle of champagne, and no clothes. What do you say?"

"Declan..." Her voice hid a barely suppressed sob. An alarm sounded somewhere in his head, a bell of warning, alerting him to impending pain.

"Don't." He crossed the room in three steps and grabbed her, spinning her around to face him. "Don't even *start* with talk of leaving."

"You know I have to leave. We've just been living a dream here together the last few days."

Shock turned into pain, and pain boiled over into anger. "Why in the hell would you walk away from what we have together?" He shook his head in disbelief. "This hasn't been a dream. You *wake up* from dreams. This is living, breathing reality."

"It's not *my* reality." She wiped her tears with the back of her hand. "You saw *my* reality today when Seamus and Maeve showed up."

"Do you think I'm going to try to stop you from being a banshee?" Emotions stronger than he'd known he could possess spilled over like toxins from a beaker. "You can go out on the prowl 'n howl every night for all I care, as long as you wake up beside me."

"It's more than that." She pushed him away. "I have to go. Just trust that I'm doing what's best for you, please?" A sob choked her. "Declan, you have to believe that I'm doing this for you."

"I don't know why you're doing this, but it damn sure isn't for me." He had to stop her. He felt like a train careening off its track, derailed from the only destination he'd ever wanted. Grabbing her, he pulled her to him and pressed his lips to hers,

feeling their tears mingle. "Tell me you don't feel anything when I kiss you, and I'll let you walk away."

She let out a cry, and he kissed her again, this time with more force, sliding his tongue into her mouth, stroking it against hers. He broke the kiss, staring down into her eyes. "Tell me you don't love me and I'll let you go."

She wrenched herself from his arms. "I don't love you."

Her eyes never left the floor.

He backed away, feeling something rip apart inside his chest. "Then go." A bitter laugh tore itself from him, grating against his ears. "You came to end my life, and you've done it." He made a clumsy stab at wiping away his tears. "Mission accomplished, Aisling." He gave her a mock salute.

She held onto the window, giving him one last look. "I'm sorry, Declan." Tears infused every word. "Someday, I hope you'll understand." She unlocked the window and pushed it up. "Have a happy life."

And in a whirlwind of mist, she was gone just as suddenly as she'd appeared.

Declan fell to his knees, wondering if heartbreak would prove more fatal than the cry of a legendary banshee could ever hope to be.

Chapter 8

"How long are you going to keep this up?"

Aisling looked up to see Maeve standing over her. She blushed, willing the image in the crystal gazing ball to fade away. She'd taken it out of the cottage she shared with another banshee to study it in secret beneath her favorite apple tree.

"It's been almost a month." Maeve tapped the surface of the crystal with her fingernails. "How long are you going to continue watching him this way?"

Aisling sighed, trying to ignore the wave of sickness she felt every time she thought of losing Declan. Even the green splendor of the fairy realm, with its eternally blooming flora and endless rainbows, failed to soothe her sadness. "Until I see that he's moved on with his life."

"And is he doing that?" The queen folded her arms over her violet gown, batting her gossamer lilac and gold butterfly shaped wings furiously.

"He needs time." She didn't want to admit that Declan looked as miserable as she felt whenever she chose to spy on him with her crystal gazing ball.

"He needs *you*." Maeve sat down on the oversized red and white spotted mushroom beside Aisling. "Dear, how long has it been since you went out on assignment?"

Aisling slunk down on her mushroom seat. "Not since my return, Mother Maeve."

Maeve nodded, looking as if none of this surprised her. "Aisling, have you ever considered retiring from the banshee life?"

Her jaw dropped. "How could I even consider such a thing?"

The queen shrugged. "Your heart isn't in it anymore. Maybe you should follow it to its true destination." She indicated the fading image of Declan in the gazing ball.

Aisling closed her eyes and exhaled. It would be such a relief to tell Maeve the truth. "I would, Mother, if I wouldn't end up hurting him more by returning."

"My child, how could he possibly suffer more than this?" She peered down at the ball, where the last fleeting glimpse of Declan could be seen, sitting at his desk with his head in his hands.

"He wants to be a father." Aisling felt tears rising in her throat. "We both know that humans and banshees can't breed. If I went back to him, he'd want me to stay, and he'd lose any chance of ever having children of his own."

For a moment, Maeve looked stunned. Then she burst into hysterical laughter.

"I hardly see the humor in this, your highness." Aisling stood up, tugging the skirts of her white banshee dress into place, preparing to leave in a proverbial huff.

"Dearest, dearest." Maeve grabbed Aisling and pulled her back to her seat. "Hear me out." The queen cleared her throat and tried valiantly to stop laughing. "Did it ever occur to you that your Declan Mahoney isn't quite human himself?"

Aisling's mouth formed a perfect round circle of surprise.

"Don't you see that it was the fey blood he carries in his own veins that made him immune to your keening?" Maeve clutched Aisling's hand in a maternal grip. "I thought it was your attachment to the banshee life that kept you from going to him. If I'd known..."

"How could he possibly have fey blood?" Aisling felt all the air go out of her lungs. "He feels as human as any other. My banshee senses would know if he was fairy kind."

"I'll admit it's just a trace of our blood running through him, but it's strong and true." Maeve gave Aisling's hand a friendly squeeze. "His great-grandmother, Maeve Connor, was my Goddess-Daughter."

"You mean she was..."

Maeve cut her off. "Named for me. One hundred percent flower fairy. Which means your Declan has just enough fairy blood of his own for you two to be able to have as many children as you desire."

A rush of joy shot through Aisling with the force of a tidal wave. "I have to go to him. Oh, my Goddess." She leapt up from her mushroom stool, gazing around the emerald green fields of the fairy realm. "I'll miss this place, but..."

"You can come back anytime you wish." Maeve stood up and embraced the banshee. "This will always be your home." She pointed west, to the portal leading into the human realm. "Now go, bring some happiness to the man you love."

"I'm not sure how he'll take the news about being part fey." Aisling bit her bottom lip.

"I think he'll accept any amount of shocking news if it brings you back to him."

"Yes, Mother." Aisling gave the queen a quick kiss and prepared to pass through the portal.

"Hold up there just a minute, missy."

Aisling looked up to see a giant white bird circling overhead.

"I have business with you before you depart." The bird came to a smooth landing on the toadstool she'd used for a table, perching on top of her gazing ball.

"I'm in a major hurry to get back to the earth realm." What on earth did the giant fowl want with her?

The bird peered at her over its beak. "Been feeling a little queasy lately?"

"Well, yeah," she admitted, putting her hand over her stomach. "But I've been going through a rough time."

"Is that so?" The bird let out a cackle. "I think you'll want to hear what I have to say before you go."

* * *

It had been a month. She wasn't coming back.

Declan wandered around his apartment, the same way he'd done every night since she'd gone. She'd left all of her new clothes behind, including the black nightgown she'd worn the first time they'd made love. He kept it under the pillow that lay on what he'd come to think of as her side of the bed. It helped him to have hope, to hang on to every shred of belief he could conjure.

Belief was all he had.

It had been the longest month of his life. Everything that had seemed so important before Aisling seemed trivial and pointless without her. She made his life vital and worth living, and now that she was gone, he went through his days like the corpse he should've become when she sounded her death call.

But maybe it was time to give up hope. How could such a deep wound ever heal when he rubbed the salt of his futile dreams into it on an hourly basis?

Sighing, he shed his clothes and tossed them on the floor. After tugging on his pajama bottoms, he crawled into his unmade bed and shut off the lamp on the bedside table.

He stared up at the ceiling, reliving every second of the night of the storm, when he'd picked Aisling up in his arms and carried her to his bed.

At least he had his memories.

Something scratched at his window. Ignoring it, he turned to his side, giving his pillow a sharp right hook in the process.

The scratching grew louder, demanding his attention. Annoyed, Declan sat up in bed and opened his bleary eyes. "What the hell?"

A familiar whirlwind of white mist formed and passed through the window, materializing into the face he'd longed to see more than anything in this world... or any other world, for that matter.

* * *

"Declan." Aisling rushed to the bed, reaching his side just as he stood up.

"Oh, God." He pulled her into his arms, locking her in an embrace from which she couldn't escape if she wanted to... which she didn't. Not ever. "Don't tell me you've come to try to kill me again."

She shook her head, feeling tears form in her eyes. "Never. It wouldn't work if I tried, remember?"

"If you've come back to me, it had better be to stay this time." He clutched her upper arms, pushing her away so he could look into her eyes. "Because I'm not ever letting you go."

"I'm here as long as you want me." She ran her fingers through his dark hair, trying to convince herself that he was real, that this moment was real and not another dream she'd wake from in despair.

"I want you forever." He kissed her, hard and breathless. "You're going to marry me and stay right here until I finally die of non-banshee related causes."

She blinked back tears of pure unadulterated joy. "There's a lot I have to tell you. I found out some things while I was back in the fairy realm."

"We have the rest of my natural life and your unnatural existence to talk about that." He bent down and picked her up in one fell swoop. "All I want right now is to make love to my future wife."

"Wait." She put her hand on his chest. "There's something else."

He stopped in his trek for the bed. "This sounds serious."

Aisling swallowed back a sudden surge of panic. "It is." She took a deep breath for courage. "How do you feel about getting a bigger apartment?"

Surprise registered on his face. "Why would we need one?"

She gave him a shaky smile. "We'll need another bedroom soon."

He shook his head, uncomprehending.

"In about eight months." She counted to ten, waiting for her words to sink in.

He let out a yell that could rival her finest banshee call and spun her around in the air. "I'm going to be a dad!"

Relief flooded her. Reaching into her pocket, she pulled out a tiny garment. "What do you think of this for her first dress?"

He took one look at the outfit, a baby-sized replica of Aisling's banshee dress, and laughed. "I think it's perfect for her. She can wear it home from the hospital."

"Midwife," she corrected him, bursting into a giggle when he laid her down on the bed and began unlacing her corset in a frenzy.

“Right.” He nodded, pulling off his pajama bottoms and tossing them aside, laying down to embrace her. “She can wear it home from the midwife.”

And eight months later, that’s exactly what little Maeve Connor Mahoney did.

The End

Alecia Monaco

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