



# Wish

ASHLYNN  
MONROE

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## Chapter One

Upon opening the box, she was assailed with fragrant memories and her eyes filled with tears. Certainly this was the hardest moment that she had experienced since her grandfather had died. It broke her heart to sort through his treasures and getting rid of them. Lily did not want to face that he was gone, but she knew it was past time for the chore. Her grandfather had raised her and he was all the family that she had. When he passed away, she realized that she was completely alone in the world, and it frightened her. She had no one to rely on. Of course, she had wonderful friends, but when push came to shove, Lily never wanted to be someone who would burden her friends.

Solemnly, she packed everything she was taking with her to her new condominium. She knew that she had to decide what she was going to do with the rest. Gramps had been an antique dealer and most of her fondest childhood memories were traipsing along with him across the country to find rare items for his shop. She had sold the shop with its contents for a nice price, but she had not sold any of Gramps's private collection.

Remembering him sitting with her in his office, telling her the stories behind the items and hanging on his every word, made her heart constrict painfully. When she

was little, she had been convinced that he knew everything in the world and that his brain was like an encyclopedia. She adored him then as she still did now, even after he was gone.

She knew she had to either move his collection to storage or decide what she was keeping by the end of the week, when the new owners arrived to claim the house that she had grown up in. Lily hated to sell the house, but it was just too much for one person and her maintenance skills were sadly, and greatly, lacking. She wanted the house to go to a fresh young couple who could love it as their family had. When she sold it to the Carver family she was delighted to learn that the mother of the boisterous toddler was pregnant with their second baby. She would be sad to leave, but happy to be leaving it with a growing family.

Lily had decided at the age of thirty she was doomed to be the crazy spinster living with a thousand cats! Hopefully, the cats would not eat her dead body when she died old and alone. Darkly, laughing off the morbid thought, she started to remove one dusty relic after another from the ancient cardboard box marked "Special."

Lily had no idea what was special about most of it but several items brought her back to listening to stories at her grandfather's knee and she quickly tucked them into her bag to bring home and display in the condominium. One item in particular caught her eye. An old oil lamp that

always made her think of faraway and exotic places was something she had forgotten about.

It had been introduced to her during a particular bitter winter when she was eleven. Gramps had run out of ways to entertain the snowbound girl during a holiday break that had extended an additional week to accommodate a terrible snowstorm. He had gone to the attic and brought down a strange box that looked like a miniature treasure chest. Lily had been immediately intrigued. Gramps opened the chest to reveal the lamp, and then began to tell his tale.

“When I was a young man in the in the Army, during World War Two, July of forty three, I found myself in Sicily. There was a brutal firefight and I happened upon a young girl, not much older than you are, and I kept her safe until we had secured the area. Her father was so overjoyed that she was alive that he gave me this lamp and told me that his father had been given it by his father and that it had been in the family for longer than anyone could remember.

He told me that the ancestor that originally received the lamp got it when an elderly merchant happened upon the village and in his hunger, he had traded the lamp for food and lodging. He said that the lamp could grant wishes to the pure of heart. He could attest that the lamp had brought the family good fortune and until the war, they prospered. He gave me the lamp in his gratitude, and I secretly brought it

back home with me. I do think that the lamp brought me luck, especially during the end of the war when the fighting seemed the fiercest.

“I think that this lamp is magic and when you are older, I will entrust this magic lamp to you. Until then I have this book, and it has many stories of magic lamps. You had better study how this works, so that when this lamp is yours, you won’t fall victim to a trickster genie!”

Gramps’ ploy had worked for the duration of the storm. Lily had read every word in the book and held the lamp upside down, rubbed it, shook it, called to it, and generally tried everything possible to dislodge the genie or magic that lived inside the lamp. Looking back, she was sure that her grandfather had enjoyed watching her struggle as much as she had enjoyed trying to solve the puzzle.

She no longer believed in magic, but the lamp was just one more treasure that she wanted to retain as a tangible connection to the special man and the magic of his world. Gramps saw things a little more colorfully than others did, and it had given her a legacy of fun that she cherished and hoped never to lose. As sensible as she was, she always enjoyed mischief, because Gramps had shown her how to appreciate it.

She finished exploring the boxes late into the night and stiffly got up with her cash of treasures. She kept more

than she probably should have and groggily went to her little convertible. Dumping her haul into the back seat, she drove the half hour to the new condo and tried not to disturb her neighbors as she clunked her loud load of antiques into the building. Setting everything by the door she went up to the loft, collapsed into her bed, and fell immediately to sleep.

When she awoke in the morning she showered, dressed, and went back downstairs to grab her breakfast. Pausing by the front door, she noticed that the pile of antiques were gone. Panicking, she wondered if she had forgotten to lock the door, or if there had been a break in. She slept soundly and with the stress of selling the old house and the business, she had not really slept on a regular schedule, so she had been sleeping much harder than was her usual way. Looking around at the condo, she saw nothing else seemed out of place. Her front door opened to reveal the nice living area and connected to a small but well laid out eat-in kitchen, spiral stairs led to the two loft bedrooms and an open area that she used for her computer. French doors led to a fenced in private patio area that she planned to use as soon as possible for entertaining. Looking around, she noticed that instead of things being missing, the things that she knew she had left piled by the door now sat mysteriously placed neatly on ledges and shelves, just as she had planned to do. The lamp sat in the middle of her kitchen table.



Lily knew that she had been exhausted and she doubted very much that she had the stamina to have cleaned and organized the many objects. Goosebumps rose on her arms and she resisted the urge to call out for her grandfather. It would be very like him to have his ghost come back from the great beyond just to mess with her. He would be very happy just knowing that was the first thing that she suspected. Shaking off her creepy feelings, she skipped breakfast, grabbed her purse, and quickly left the condo, glad to be away from the mystery.

She had given up smoking in her early twenties, but when she felt stressed, she occasionally indulged in a cigarette. It was a smelly, filthy habit, but she could not resist the nicotine buzz at her worst moments, and the whole week was one long painful moment! Standing outside in the winter cold and smoking her cigarette, Lily thought with relief about all that had recently been accomplished. She had to finalize the sale of the business and then she could officially be done with the last of her grandfather's affairs. It had been a grueling few months putting everything up for sale and she was very relieved that both the house and business had sold quickly. Many other properties were not so quick to sell with the economic slump that the markets seemed to be in, but the good luck that seemed to follow the family held out and buyers paid full asking price for both

properties. Her Realtor had actually seemed more surprised than Lily was comfortable noticing. It seemed unprofessional for a realtor to exclaim “I can’t believe it!” When she received the offer on the property for the asking price with no negotiation, Lily knew that the woman was as happy as she was.

When the long day was over and the check for the business was in the bank, Lily breathed a sigh of relief. She had called the movers; they had removed the last of the boxes from the house, and now she officially was completely on her own in her own life. It felt lonely and a little scary to have no familiar comforting places in her life. She loved her friends and had a lot of great people in her life, but no one that was really her family, no husband or boyfriend, no cousins or aunts, uncles, parents or any type of blood family. Her grandfather had been an only child, his parents had been only children, and her mother was the only child to survive into adulthood. Her mother had twin brothers who had been stillborn and a sister who had died of a heart defect when she was only two. After the death of the little girl, her grandmother had sworn to have no more children and so her mother grew up with no siblings.

When Lily had been five her single mother had taken a trip to New York. Her Mother, Erin, was a very talented young artist and a gallery was showing her work in New

York. With potential to spare and a bright future ahead of her, she died just short of the realization of all her glory. Every single piece of her work sold, and that was before the announcement came that the artist had died, and Lily knew that if her mother had lived, she would have had her dream of being a recognized artist realized. Having been just a small child when her mother died, she had very few memories of her, but she did very clearly remember her mother painting her portrait by the bright sunny windows in the little loft apartment that they had lived in together.

She remembered her mother's beautiful and intense face carefully filling the canvas with her likeness. She also remembered her own little easel and paintbrushes and canvas that she would paint on when her mother was painting. Erin had told her daughter that her little work of art was being displayed in the gallery with her own and the entire world would enjoy her talent! Lily had felt so important and cherished in that moment. Her little painting had sold as a companion to an abstract piece that her mother had done to accompany it; both pieces had exuberant bright splashes of color and her mother had named the pair *Dance of the Child*. Lily regretted that she did not have a single piece of her mother's work to remember her spirit and talent.

She still felt uncomfortable, but after a thorough search of the condo she found no one else and she decided

that she must have been the one to put everything away. Vowing to never let her body become so tired again, she shrugged of her discomfort and left the house to run some errands. It was Saturday morning and she had a lot to accomplish over the weekend.

She stopped at the grocery store and bought some cheese, bread, and sweet wine for supper. She had grapes and some pesto dip for the bread at home and she knew that the light meal would certainly hit the spot. A few items that she was running out of were on sale so before she realized it she had several full bags of groceries.

Deep down, it was hard not to wonder if she was avoiding going home. When she parked in her spot at the condominium, she began to unload her trunk, and after awkwardly fumbling with the door lock, she stumbled into her home.

It was dusk and the long shadows of the dying sun made the interior appear foreboding. Her fear of the lonely darkness intensified and she regretted her choice not to advertise for a roommate. She didn't need another person to help with the bills because of her inheritance and she had just accepted a job teaching history at the local community college that would provide her enough money to pay her bills without having to take any of her savings for necessities. She lived simply and was happy with her

organized little home; she didn't want some stranger upsetting her balanced order. But right now, another person in the dark would be very welcome, disorganized or not!

She turned on every light that she could find and then began to unpack her purchases. She knew it was a little bit OCD but she had her cupboards alphabetized and so she had everything put away quickly. After eating her simple but refreshing meal and drinking a glass of wine, she decided to go to bed and catch up on all her missed sleep. Yawning, she crawled into her warm and snuggly flannel pajamas, not very sexy, but they were her favorite. Whenever she wore them, she knew she was going to sleep well in the comforting envelope of the beloved nightwear. Crawling into bed, she hit the light switch on the bedside lamp and closed her eyes, pretending that the lonely room was not pitch black.

She had not been lying in the bed for a very long time when the sound of crashing startled her awake. Fumbling dangerously with the lamp, she managed to turn it on without breaking it. Straining to listen, the only sound was her breath coming out in short painful bursts. Her fear gripped her until she could barely move; so frozen with terror, her body was paralyzed. Another loud noise erupted from the kitchen. Fighting for control of her terror, she won, and able to move once more she grabbed a heavy candlestick

and went down the spiral stairs as quietly as she could, ready to attack the intruder. Lily cringed when her foot hit the creaky stair; the sound in the silent room was as shattering as the blast from a gun! She inwardly curled up and stayed as small and motionless as possible. Reminding herself to breathe, she again continued down the stairs as lightly as she could. Her candlestick- turned-weapon held high and ready, she whirled around the room. She could see nothing out of place. No intruder was visible, but the sudden shock of a soft breeze startled her.

Noticing that her patio doors hung wide open, she rushed to shut out the winter cold. When she touched them, she noticed they felt slightly warm, not winter warm, but summer warm, as if the sun had been burning into the metal all day. In shock, she pulled her hand back and looked out into a summer scene that looked as inviting as it did horrifying.

She had never lived in the condo during a summer yet, and the sight made her glad of the little patio. It was going to be a wonderful summer! Shaking off the sidetracked thoughts, she stared out in wonder. How was this possible? She peered out a crack in the fence as the full moon's light made the snow on the other side clearly visible! Her little patio was a magical spot of summer.

A sound made her turn to her right so quickly she

was amazed she did not have whiplash! Looking out, she saw that a very tall and muscular man. He was definitely dressed for summer, if you could call his attire dressed. Lily had never seen a man like him in real life. He was as sculpted as a delicious male model! Lily saw that the corner of her patio was now a posh Moroccan style lounge. It looked awesome. If she had not been completely terrified and mystified, she would have been very impressed.

An outdoor bar had cushy benches padded with material that matched the fabrics that draped to form a canopy over several very comfortable looking lounge chairs. Little dark wooden tables sat scattered around the chairs and held beautiful colorful candleholders. Candlelight and moonlight enhanced the magical charm of what she was seeing. Unable to run or scream, Lily just visually consumed the moment.

God-like model man sat very composed and comfortable and he tilted his head to one side and smiled as he watched her expressions go from fear to awe to fear to shock and back to fear again. Her face was very expressive it made her terrible at cards. She could see that he was completely in his element; he was used to surprising people and it did not bother him.

Finally, she found her voice. It cracked, but she managed to use it.

“What in the world is this...this stuff and weather and stuff, and you, and what is going on?” She blurted the words across the patio at him.

He smiled. Effortlessly, he sprang forward and she was in his arms so quickly she had not time to notice the red gleam in his eyes. Moonlight bounced off his taut, perfect features as if it was made of metal and not skin. He was hard like metal too, and his body was not soft but not unpleasant. He wore pants that looked like he picked them up at M. C. Hammer's garage sale. His bare chest gleamed in the unnatural summer light. He was the most beautiful man she had ever seen, with his gleaming black hair and large blue eyes. She noticed his feet were bare and her mind focused on how perfect his toes looked; she had never seen someone so gorgeous all over!

Her breath came out in little pants and she absently wondered if she had morning breath. Shaking herself, she reminded her befuddled brain that he was uninvited and instead of a guest, he was a possible rapist or murderer and that she should be screaming and struggling! Instead, she blinked up into his face in a wonder that she had never felt before. Her heart beat and fluttered as if it were a humming bird instead of a heart. His eyes, a brilliant blue, better than the sky or the sea, smiled down at her. His mouth was wide, but not too wide. His nose was straight and just the right



size: Not too large or long. His hair tickled her forehead and it came to his shoulders in a silken black cloud. She felt short and petite next to his mammoth hunky-ness! Held firmly in shocks betraying grasp, she did not even scream when she realized that he was going to kiss her.

His mouth descended. Lily was not a deformed hunchback in a tower, but she had been somewhat sheltered. Her grandfather had protected her and threatened every boy or man who had ever taken her out. Her own strict morals had kept her from sleeping with many of them, but she was no virgin. Now she found herself kissed in a way that melted her as it burned in her blood like fire. He was like brandy; his kiss swirled in her belly. Unprepared for its impact, sensation ripped her apart with desire. His lips were firm and this was not a sloppy, desperate grope. This was a real kiss, the kind she had seen in the movies, but never thought was real. If a kiss like this existed, was the tooth fairy really a hoax? Her shattered mind let the crazy idea slide across the mush of her conscious thought, now swimming in the insanity of true passion.

Groaning, Lily kissed him back with a ferocity that surprised both of them. She clung to him as if he were a life raft in the sea of crazy that she was willingly drowning in. Her hands found his soft hair and she found herself holding the base of his head, holding this stranger, desperately in

place! He groaned against her lips and she felt him lift her up, as if it was nothing, and press her against the amazingly warm wall of the building.

Her flannel nightgown hiked up; she felt his hand sliding up across her hip, and when it slid across her side and brushed her sensitive midsection, she hissed her shock and let the delicious ripple of sensation heighten the new experience to a new level of pleasure. She wrapped her legs around his slim, manly waist in a wanton move that she never imagined herself capable. His hands tangled in her long brown hair and he pressed her pale soft body to his very tan and hard frame. His fingers found the nub of her clitoris and she gasped, never having been touched like this by a strange man before. She was shocked by the invasive and intimate sensation, yet once he began, she heard herself beg him not to stop. Her voice sounded strange to her ears. Just as she began to shatter and she could see stars behind her eyelids, everything stopped.

Lily lay in the center of her bed sweating and panting, sheets tangled around her waist and her feet flat on the mattress. She was half sitting and half laying on the bed with her knees bent towards the ceiling when she came awake. In startled agony, she looked around the dark room, desperately confused. It was just a dream, just a very vivid and scary intense dream! How had a sheltered girl had a

dream like that? She had been reading too much romance, watching too much television, or going to too many movies. She was going to abstain from all forms of media if they had that kind of power to give her that kind of a dream! Flopping back on the mattress in frustration and fear, she huffed out a tired breath and let her eyes flutter close.

A loud crash brought her eyes open again; this time she knew she was awake. In her panic, she tumbled out of her bed tangled in her disheveled bedding. Embarrassed even though she was alone, she shrugged out of the confining bedding and put on her slippers. Grabbing her terry cloth robe, she quickly went down the stairs, this time avoiding the squeaky one, *thank you, wet dream*, and began to look for the source of the noise.

Everything looked fine until she noticed that the lamp that she had lovingly placed in the middle of the kitchen table on a lacy table runner was lying on the floor. Lily scowled down at her cat, Muffin, because she was the only possible culprit; that cat could not leave a table runner alone! Sighing in relief, she placed the object out of the cat's reach and went back to bed. For the rest of the night, she tossed and turned, unable to sleep. Something was nibbling at her consciousness, bothering her. It was as if she had left something undone, or someone was waiting for her to come for him or her, and she was the only one who could. Lily felt

uncomfortable and discontented by the sensation. She finally fell into a fitful and uncomfortable sleep, still tingling with the nagging feelings of incompleteness.

In the morning, she quickly showered and chugged down a steaming cup of coffee. She had a lot to do and a lot to worry about and yet that nagging sensation was still with her, so much so that even in her rush, it made her pause to think. She felt as if she should not leave the condo until she had finished the vague task.

Lily had a lot on her to do list. She had to prepare for her new life as the youngest history teacher that the local community college had ever had. Delighted that the teacher before her had decided midyear to go to Europe to work on his book that he was writing. She had applied for the position. She wished him luck but was delighted that he had left the position. It was the perfect time in her life for the opportunity. She had always been a major history buff and her fluid personality made her a natural teacher. Her college degree had been collecting dust since her graduation and she felt it was time to use it. Her family's good luck had come to her aid again.

When her grandfather died, she had no interest in continuing with the store; it was just far too painful to be in his shoes every day, missing him. She had a lot to do to prepare for the coming weeks with the new semester only a

week away. It would be a very short time until the new semester and her new job would be a reality! Even with her happy excitement, the constant nagging of her forgetful feeling made her uncomfortable. She could not pin point the source of her anxiety, but as the day progressed, she wanted to be home more desperately with each passing minute.

Greatly exaggerated relief filled her to the brim as she pulled into her parking spot and barely managed to shut off the ignition as she leapt out of the car and barreled into her home at full speed. Absently, she wondered if any of her neighbors saw her odd behavior. When she had shut and locked the door behind herself, she felt a quick and surprising jolt of disappointment; the sense of disquiet was still with her. She did a three hundred and sixty degree turn around her living space, looking, searching for what was calling to her.

Something wanted her to find it; she just had to listen. Suddenly, her eyes arrived at the lamp. It was nothing that should have had power over her, no reason for her to need or want the object so very badly, and yet she felt a gratifying sense of completion as she reached for it and held it in her hands. Somehow this object was something that she needed very desperately at this moment and an overpowering sense of dread encompassed her psyche at the realization.

For a long moment, she stood holding the lamp, lost in consideration. Her trance-like state broke and she realized that she wanted to keep holding the lamp, but had no reason to be doing so and no idea what to do with it except look at it. Deciding that the stress of the last couple of weeks must be having an impact, she set the lamp back on the counter. A physical sense of bereavement coursed through her, and went up the stairs to lay down and rest. Tossing and turning on the bed, she got up several times to readjust her clothing, the lighting, and even to get a cool cloth to place on her forehead, but none of her comforting measures helped relieve the sense that she needed to be with the old lamp.

After a trying hour of tossing and turning, she gave in to her desire to go and get the lamp. She brought it upstairs and set it next to her bed on the nightstand. Lily, disturbed by the fact that she felt immediately better and comforted, wanted to cry. What was wrong with her? Had she snapped? For a long time she lay on her side staring at the object in the dark and occasionally touching it reverently. Something was very wrong with her. Closing her eyes, she was startled when she felt a presence. Gasping, she turned on her bedside lamp and her eyes darted around the darkening room. Twilight was descending and it was bringing an odd sense of danger.

Completely awake, but strangely lethargic, Lily lay

in the bed watching the room darken into night. She felt the urge to hold the lamp, to cradle it! In all thirty years of her life, she had never acted the way she was acting or felt the way she was feeling. As a child, she had never had a favorite blanket or teddy bear; she was not the kind of person who needed an external source of comfort, but now she found that the lamp's mere presence was necessary to her sense of comfort and wellbeing. It was really giving her the creeps.

Turning on some soft music and the bedroom light she sat on the edge of her bed and with a sigh, picked up the lamp. Slowly, tenderly, she began to stroke the smooth bronze surface with the pad of her thumb. Feeling the years of wear and the nicks and dings of many years of service, she smiled down at the plain object, remembering her grandfather and his stories. Suddenly, she felt the lamp begin to vibrate and an electric current seemed to run along the surface like static electricity. It zapped her fingers and Lily helplessly dropped the lamp onto the carpet. She began to lean down to retrieve it when suddenly a strange grayish pink gas started to pour out of the old object in an ominous rolling cloud. With a startled gasp, she pulled her legs up off the floor and began to crawl backwards away from the growing cloud.

Turning to run, she heard a sound that made her pause and look back unconsciously for verification. It was

the man from her dream and he was speaking to her. Her world started to wobble. His mouth was moving and she could hear words, but in the fuzzy jumble of the surreal moment, nothing was making sense. Her consciousness was slipping away and blackness washed over her to protect her mind from the unrelenting insanity of what she was seeing. Her body gracefully slid to the carpeted floor in a thump as the nothingness came to wash away the unbelievable.



## Chapter Two

It was dark and quiet when Lily opened her eyes. She was lying on her back in the middle of her bed and her arms lay stiffly at her sides. She always slept on her stomach so waking up in such an unnatural position made her feel stiff and uncomfortable. She closed her eyes and laid the back of her hand against her forehead, trying to make sense of her unbelievably weird dreams. With a sigh, she lifted her hand and rubbed her overly- tired eyes. Sitting up, she tried to make sense of how she had fallen asleep in such a strangely formal position and why the lamp was so much a part of her thoughts.

Sliding limply out of bed she gracelessly let her body flop towards the stairs and then down towards the main bathroom. She wanted a shower and fresh pajamas to make the rest of the night a little more restful. Her hand was on the bathroom door handle when she heard a tinkling sound. Lily spun around so quickly that she almost lost her balance. It had not been a dream, or maybe she was in some kind of crazy coma, because she felt completely awake and yet the unreal was sitting comfortably on her couch eating her fruit and watching television as if he was a welcome guest and not a spooky stranger.

“Who are you and what do you want? I know self

defense, buddy so don't try anything!"

Lily practically shouted the words as she backed away towards the door. He smiled but gave no indication that her threat gave him any sort of concern. That really irritated Lily.

"Mistress, I am the genie of the lamp and your will is my command. As you are now my new master you are entitled to three wishes." Anger glinted in his eyes but his words came out carefully and calmly and even though he spoke perfect English, he had a little bit of an accent that she could not place. It was pleasant, sexy, but definitely foreign.

"Yeah, right, I really believe that you are some kind of magic genie that is going to give me three wishes. Besides, I know how well genies work out in stories; wishes backfire on the wisher! I am not stupid enough to play into this delusion, or reality show, or nightmare or whatever. You are not real!"

Lily sat down across for her unwelcome guest and watched him slowly bite and chew and savor a slice of orange. She had never seen anyone who could eat sexy! He had to be an actor, maybe her friend Annette had signed her up for a new reality show. Annette loved those things and had a wickedly warped sense of humor; this would so totally be just like her!

Lily scanned the room for cameras and then started

to overturn vases and baskets looking for any signs to prove her theory. Annette knew how important the teaching job was for her, she could not believe that she would do this to her during such an important time of transition.

Her uninvited guest watched her inspection with interest but said nothing. Assuming that this meant she was getting closer to the camera, she stepped up her search taking everything off the shelves and even inspecting her book bindings for any signs of tampering. After exhaustion overcame her and after realizing that it was almost midnight, Lily sat down in her comfy chair across from the “genie” and asked, “So what do I call you, Mister Genie?”

“Whatever you wish, Mistress.” His reply was flat but she saw his eyes burn with pain at the words.

“What is your *real* name?” Lily questioned.

“My name is Xavier.” He replied. A hint of pride colored his words as if she should recognize the name.

“Hello, Xavier, and how did you come to be the genie of the lamp?”

Lily decided that with his dark good looks and strange accent, the name fit this Goliath perfectly and she did love a good story, no matter how contrived it might be.

“Mistress, I was the beloved youngest son of a wealthy merchant in a time when the world was younger. My father and I would travel the seas going from one exotic

port to another looking for riches and treasures to bring home. It was a different world in my days as a human and I had been strong and a good fighter. My father brought me along as the muscle, for often thieves would set on us, as we were foreigners in strange lands with much money and little protection. Our crew and slaves looked to me for protection. I grew in reputation as a fighter and this kept many who would try to set upon our party at bay, but with respect came pride and with the pride came the illusion of invincibility and my fall was not a sword, but a beautiful pale woman from the north.

“We had been trading in a Roman port that was controlled by my father’s good friend. He offered us food and drink and comfortable lodging so we rested in his grand villa and ate his food and drank his wine. I had noticed the beautiful, pale slave woman who had been taken from the north and her fiery hair intrigued me. I had never seen a woman with her coloring before and desired her. She was a slave, and our host insisted that I take her to my bed. She fought. I was stronger and drunk and had never experienced servitude against my will so I did not understand how my actions felt for her. I see now that I wronged the beautiful girl from the north, but at the time she was property that I was borrowing.”

Lily flinched she had never heard of anything so

brutal explained in such a casual and excused way.

Continuing in a quieter voice, her unwelcome guest had the courtesy to look ashamed.

“I forced myself on the girl. I could have gone out and found a willing woman, and I could even have had another of our host’s more willing slaves, but instead I took the pale woman from the north because of her exotic beauty and it was the worst mistake I have ever made.

“She was the daughter of a druid who worshiped the earth and the elements and she was not stranger to the power of fire. After I had my way with her, she spoke to me in a strange language. I asked her what her words meant, but she just shook her head and insisted that her Latin was not good enough to translate. I slept well and thought no more of her, nor did I feel remorse that I had violated her. We left the next day and I did not see the girl or think of her again until we found ourselves out in the open water and I began to feel ill.

“I was young and strong and I had never experienced much illness, but I was suddenly gripped by a wrenching sickness that frightened me and my father. Our crew became worried that I had contracted some evil spirit and wanted to throw me overboard to spare the rest from my wretched illness. My father refused, and he told the crew to start for shore. They began to row towards the shore as I became sicker and sicker; my father despaired and was sure that I

would die. Suddenly, the boat caught fire. I choked on the smoke and it woke me from my sleep.

“Our crew started to jump out and my poor father, who could not swim, tried to reach for me and it was in that moment that I realized that I was the fire. It engulfed me and filled me and I was powerless to stop it from destroying my beloved father and our precious cargo. I let my body fall overboard. I realized that when I hit the water I would die just as the fire would die and I began to panic.

“Somewhere in my head, I heard the foreign sound of the pale woman’s voice asking me if I wanted to live and I cried out for her to save me. She promised that I would live in servitude and as I felt the water touch the flames that made up my new body, I felt myself dying and I begged her to save me. Her strange final words whirled around me and I was in the dark, alone, unsure of my father’s fate. I hurt and I could not move. I could hear sounds and if I concentrated, I could understand what they meant and where I was, but I could not see or feel. It was a wretchedly cold and lonely feeling and for the first time since I was a boy, I felt true fear.

“My lamp was found by a Roman soldier and when he tried to burn oil in it, I found myself free of the lamp, but I also found myself a prisoner of it. She had cursed me to forever serve whatever master held my lamp with wishes and no matter how terrible, I had to grant the wishes.

“My first master wished for me to kill the husband and young children of the girl that he had loved in childhood. He had returned from his first campaign to find that she had married when he was away. His love was selfish and I was unable to disobey. I knew the pain now of the pale girl that I had violated and as I let the magic that allowed the selfish Roman’s wish to come true, I felt violated as well.

“He next wished that the girl would fall madly in love with him when next she laid her eyes on him. All of this came to be and he was happy. For many years he held onto my lamp but did not use his final wish. Much time passed after he had married the girl. They had a son together and he no longer served in the army as he had been injured in battle, losing an arm. He made his last wish and it undid all of his other wishes. His wife had lost many children in her womb and was despairing of losing her latest pregnancy. She had the first son, but she wanted to have more children. She desired as large of a family as she had with her first husband.

“My master wished simply that I make his wife happy by giving her all the children she longed for. It was the first selfless thing that he had done for his young and gentle wife, whom I could see he did genuinely love. I let the magic go, but unfortunately his words brought him incredible pain as the children she longed for he had wished death upon and so she longed for children that she could not

have in life. Her young son that was living she also loved dearly, and the only way that the magic could unite all of her children was now in death.

“So in the morning, the Roman found his wife and child dead in their beds forever at peace, but also forever lost to him. His third wish was made and so I was again trapped in the darkness and as he was no longer my master, fate left me lost and waiting for another to find my lamp. I traveled the world for many years and learned many languages and felt the world changing from my dark prison. I saw many greedy people hurt themselves by wishing for things that were not right for them, but held no power to change the outcome of what their wish would bring. In the end I am nothing but a tool for the cruel bitch, fate, and I am forced to exist just to watch folly and disaster.

“You are now the owner of the curse my magic will bring you, and I am sorry. I remember you as a girl; your grandfather is the only master I ever had who did not make a wish. He, like you, suspected that with wishes, one misspoken word could spell disaster. I respected him greatly and I was sorry to hear of his loss. He is blessed. Death is a release, immortality is a curse., Never doubt that.”

For a long time, Lily was speechless. This was one hell of a story! She had to give the producer of this reality show major kudos! What a terrible but interesting tale! She



sat for a long time looking around, trying to understand why she had been chosen to be part of such an insane moment. Television show or not, his story had left her melancholy and cold. Finally she spoke to him and her tone was angry.

“It’s really mean to bring my dead grandfather into this reality show! Annette must be a part of this crap and I will never forgive her for that! You need to leave now. I don’t want to play your game. I’m tired and I’m sad enough about my own loss. I don’t need to mourn fictitious ancient Romans, too! Get out!”

He was quick and she was surprised to find him next to her, wiping moisture away from her eyes with the pads of his large thumbs. Her breath stopped; she had never been so close to such a good-looking man before. His eyes spoke of his sorrow as well and his voice was apologetic.

“I am sorry, Mistress! I cannot leave you until you make three wishes. I do not want to see you hurt; I can go back to my lamp until you are ready to wish, if you would like, but you must order me back by telling me to go to my lamp. I will never go back in of my own will.” Lily saw the pain in his eyes; he was a damn good actor. Even fake pain was not something that she wanted to cause, so she did not order him back; instead, she decided to play up the whole reality show thing and make a wish just to see what would happen.

Her eyes shot angry sparks at him as she said, “I wish that I had an early American Highboy right over there in the corner!” he pointed to the bare corner and knew that she had busted him. There was no way that he could have known she was going to request something so hard to find and substantial.

Xavier smiled slowly and while her eyes were fixed on the corner she saw the piece materialize right before them. Jumping up, she cautiously walked to the piece and inspected the dove tails and wood. Her grandfather had taught her well, and to her amazement the piece was authentic and pristine. It looked new and the normal patina that she would expect to the wood was not present. She looked at him questioningly. He laughed and answered the unasked question: “Circa 1800. It had just been finished by the craftsman. Right now, he is looking around in surprise and sure that a witch is involved.”

“You can’t steal this! It’s wrong. Please put it back!”

“Do you wish me to put it back?”

“No, I don’t want to wish anything ever again! I believe you, I just don’t want to deal with this right now. I’m going to bed. Put that thing back. I don’t want stolen goods.”

“If it makes you feel better, the owner died one hundred and eighty years ago and the police will not come looking for it.” Laughter shaded his words.

“I don’t believe in stealing from the past or the present. I am sorry that I made you do that. Forgive me, Xavier I will not be so careless with your ability again.”

He was surprised; she could tell by the look on his face. It was a relief to know that she could throw him off balance, too.

“Mistress, do you want me to return to the lamp?”  
His voice was tight.

“Please don’t call me ‘mistress.’ I don’t believe in slavery and my name is Lily. Just call me Lily and I will call you Xavier. I don’t want you to go back into the lamp unless you choose to. I will not be part of you slavery!”

“I have no choice. The lamp possesses my soul. I am a slave and at this time, you possess me until you make your next two wishes, and then another will find me.” He sounded resigned but relieved.

“There’s a bedroom around the corner. It’s small, but it’s yours until you leave. Please don’t feel it necessary to do anything that makes you uncomfortable while you are here.”

“Thank you, Miss...Lily, you are a good and honest woman. I will return the highboy and it will not cost you a wish.”

“Good night, Xavier. Have a restful sleep.”

Then she turned and went to bed.

He watched her go, then used his power to return the

highboy and got up and walked in the direction of the room she had granted him use of. He was delighted to see that it contained a real bed and a chair, television, dresser, and radio. A small private bath surprised him even more, she was a generous mistress and it surprised him. Her grandfather had been kind, but even his kindness did not extend so far. In his long existence, no one had given him such freedom.

When Lily got up in the morning, the condo was quiet and the highboy was gone. She doubted what she had experienced the previous night. With blurry, sleepy eyes, she hopped into the shower and then got dressed. Her hair was still wrapped in a towel when she walked out of the bathroom and into the main living space. There was no sign of anything out of place, so she went into the kitchen and started to forage for breakfast. There was nothing that indicated that she had not just dreamed Xavier. She had just opened the fridge when she heard a sound that startled her, and she bumped her head as she pulled away and slammed the door in her panic.

“Good morning, Lady Lily. Did you have a restful sleep?”

“You are real! You scared ten years off my life!”

“I am sorry. Yes, I am real.” His face broke into a wide, handsome smile and he threw his head back in a deep masculine laugh.

“Now, what am I going to do with you?” She asked more of herself than to him.

“Whatever it is that you wish to do with me, Mistress.” His words held all kinds of double meanings and he put the emphasis on the word ‘wish.’ She raised her eyebrow at him but said nothing as she prepared bacon, eggs, and toast.

He ate appreciatively and with gusto. Lily smiled. She knew she was a atrocious cook, and now she knew the secret of making her cooking taste good: Keep someone in a prison for a few thousand years! Shaking her head, she watched him eat and made him seconds and then thirds. When he had finished, he smiled and leaned back in his chair. Lily began to do the dishes and she was uncomfortable when she noticed how intensely he was watching her. She turned and asked him about his preoccupation.

“Why are you staring at me?”

“You fascinate me.”

“Why do *I* fascinate *you*?”

“You are a puzzle to me. You have been kind to me and I have given you nothing that you have kept. You treat me like a guest and not a slave; this makes you different and interesting. I know that you are attracted to me and yet you do not demand I please your body.”

Lily flushed three shades of red at his words. She felt

sorry for the crimes done to him by others. How could another person force someone to do such an intimate act against their will? She was not the kind of person who would ever do something like that. “I don’t believe in cruelty and I also don’t believe in punishing someone for their past sins. I will not cause you more pain.”

He smiled a funny half smile that made it clear to her that he did not believe her but said nothing. They spent the rest of the morning in silent contemplation of each other.

Over the following weeks and then months they fell into a routine and a strange truce. It was oddly pleasant. Lily had never had a roommate other than her grandfather, so it was definitely a learning experience for her. She realized that she was overtly territorial and it amused Xavier more than Lily cared to admit. He purposefully would move objects just to watch her move them back. As much as it irritated her, she came to enjoy the little game that it had become.

They were becoming friends and that frightened her. She knew that such an attractive man would never have given her the time of day under normal circumstances, so she just did her best not to think about the unbelievable way he had come to be in her life. And that he was not with her of his own free will. She often times would wonder as they sat in quiet companionship watching television or while they ate

a meal together if he would still want to stay with her if he wasn't a prisoner of fate in her home. In those moments, her plan to free him began. He deserved to be free.

Lily had been enjoying her new teaching position, and it gave her access to the college's vast library. She spent hours researching ancient tales of genies and also the druids hoping that it might give her some kind of clue as to how to break his spell. After months of daily research and no answer she turned to Plan B, her second wish.

It was a tricky thing, the phrasing of a wish, but she knew with her selfless intent she could get it right, and then Xavier of the lamp could be Xavier of the Midwest. He could go off to live the life of a modern man, probably a male model, and she could try to get on with some sort of a semblance of normalcy. It was far too comfortable to have him with her and far too easy for her to feel the deepness of their growing connection.

She didn't want a man who was her prisoner; she wanted the man she could share her life with to be with her willingly, and she knew if she kept Xavier, she would put her search for Mr. Right on hold forever. Life was too short. She wanted love and she knew in her heart she was falling in love with the handsome genie, forsaking her rational mind in the process. It was certainly a recipe for an irreparably broken heart with a side of misery for dessert! Dragging her

thoughts out of the self-pity menu, she started to write various phrasing for the wish in her notebook. She wanted her words to be perfect and unable to backfire in any way.

Winter's death had allowed spring to be born and now it was already late spring. Lily relished the warming weather. She could see the longing to leave in Xavier's eyes and when he had told her that he had to stay in the condo as long as the lamp was inside, she proceeded to take it outside and tell him to enjoy the weather. When he came back and waited for her to return the lamp indoors she saw the degrading effect that it had on such a once proud man. Her decision to act came more certainly than she had imagined it would. She would give him freedom, that very night! Smiling at the thought she began to plan a wonderful going away meal and surprise him with the priceless gift of the last wish he would ever grant.

Zavier came into the kitchen and sat at the table. He looked perplexed and asked, "You are in a very good mood. What has brought you such joy?"

"I have a present for you! I think you will really like it. This meal was my grandfather's favorite and I wanted to share it with you."

She saw the panic in his eyes at the finality of her words. Smiling, she ignored it, sure that he was just worried that she was planning to force him back to the lamp. She was



going to enjoy his squirming; it was her last chance to get in a few licks for all his teasing before he was gone. Thinking of him being gone left a lump in her throat and made her heart ache, but she ignored the pains and continued thinking of nothing but his happiness at her coming actions.

They ate with happy music and her jubilant attitude slowly rubbed off and replaced his wary emotional state. She smiled when he finally and truly relaxed. He even helped her with the clean up. He had never done such a modern thing as help with a chore. She smiled and they joked and teased until everything was spotless again. Smiling, she pulled him into the living room and insisted that he sit down. He sighed and complained that he was getting to be a fat old man from all of her overfeeding and she laughed, wondering where such a hard body would start to get pudgy. He was a lean muscle machine, at least the parts of him she had seen so far. That thought brought a blush to her cheeks that she quickly tried to hide. Getting her notebook and sitting across from him, she began very formally. "Zavier, I have one final wish and after this wish you will never have to be trapped again. You did a terrible thing, but your long suffering has been penance enough for the crime and as one woman took away your freedom, another is prepared to give it back. I expect nothing in return, but hopefully your friendship. Zavier I wish that you could have a modern life and all the freedom and

happiness that you deserve.”

## Chapter Three

He looked ill, stricken. She flinched as if he had slapped her. Why was he not shouting his joy to the roof tops? He should be elated.

“What have you done, Lily? Why have you done this foolish thing? You should have told me what you wanted to do. We could have planned this. Now it is too late for you. You have wished and I am fate’s bitch and must do this. Forgive me, Lily, you have cursed yourself.”

Before she could respond, he had picked her up and swung her over his shoulders and he also quickly snatched the lamp up. He was running to the outdoor pool that the condo village shared. She felt him throw her into the pool and she angrily began to sputter as she stood up in the freezing water. He removed the lid on the lamp and set it at the edge of the pool looking infinitely sad.

She was unable to process his actions until the terrible pain overcame her. She screamed. It burned, and she was screaming her throat raw. Luckily, the pool was far enough away from the buildings and behind a fence, her neighbors did not come to investigate. Pain shattered through her body and radiated out of her extremities.

Her eyes were blinded by the brightness of her own body and she began to beg for the pain to stop. At that

moment, she was in a cool, dark place. Cramped and alone, she began to strike the walls with her palms and the soles of her feet, but the cool metal that surrounded her did not give. Lily screamed but no sound came out. Thinking back to her fear of being buried alive, she began to cry and fight, but all it accomplished was to make her panic more intensely and keep her from being able to breathe normally.

Cramped and cold in the darkness, Lily wept. Her good deed had definitely just bit her in the ass! What would happen to her? Did Xavier even have the lamp and if he did, would he try to save her? She had to admit she barely knew him. Had she made a fatal mistake in trusting him? Her panic grew as her worry spiraled out of control. Then as suddenly as she was trapped, she was free.

Standing in condo's living room, she blinked as her eyes adjusted to the light. Lily was completely disoriented and for a moment she did not think she was in the right place; most of her things were gone and in their place was a much more masculine and utilitarian décor. Whirling around to get the full magnitude of the change, she was slowly realizing what had happened and how her terrible wish had backfired. She felt a chill. When she looked down her hands spontaneously flew to cover her body. She was wearing a flimsy translucent flowing bit of fabric that barely covered all the places clothing should cover! Not her first choice in

fashion. Xavier stepped out of the kitchen dressed in modern garb instead of his sexy ancient ‘barely there’ clothing. He looked at her sadly.

“I am sorry, Lily, you are now the slave of the lamp and I am now your master. Search yourself for the truth of my words. It is I who now has three wishes.”

A cold thread of terror snaked down her spine at his words. She was in deep and he did not appear to be ready to reverse it.

“Zavier, please make it alright again and wish me free!” Lily passionately begged.

“I cannot do that. I have not been free for longer than you can imagine. I will not give up my freedom, but let us think on this matter. I will only wish you free if I too can keep my freedom.”

“Please Master, I am scared!” Tears had begun to fall unchecked from her cheeks. She could not even call him by his name; the magic of the lamp forced her to use the word ‘master.’ It was disconcerting to hear the word come out of her mouth when her brain thought his name instead. He put his hand up and looked away. Immediately she was returned to the dark lonely place that was her prison. Slamming her hand angrily against the cold walls, she closed her eyes and awkwardly fell into an exhausted sleep.

Over the course of the following weeks Lily realized

how deeply her wish had given away her life to Xavier. He had pictures on the wall of him with her grandfather, in his new life he had been the grandson and he was now the history teacher. He had lived the history that he now taught, so Lily did not despair of him getting her fired. At first she was still positive that her life would be fully restored when he came up with the proper wish. Then weeks turned to months and he had not made a wish and Lily was annoyed that he had not granted her the same freedom as she had given him. Most days he did not call her out of the cramped prison and she languished her days away. Despair began to overcast her normally sunny disposition until she was becoming a despondent creature that she could not recognize. If she made any protest, he would immediately return her to the horrible cell that was the lamp, so she found herself being quiet and compliant when she was free.

Her sympathy for his centuries of torture battled her anger that he could inflict the same discomfort on her. He was certainly a selfish man! She regretted her kindness when she was left to sit in the cold darkness, uncomfortable and afraid, unable to breathe as she was so cramped up in the impossibly tiny space.

She was still very attracted to him. Lily knew that she had fallen in love with him before her wish and now she had to admit that she still loved him even as she was his

prisoner. Disgusted with herself, she did her best to ignore the fact that every time he called her and gave her time out of the prison she felt a little thrill to see him, squashing it as quickly as she could, did not eradicate it.

Lily noticed that he was starting to keep her in the lamp less and less and she did what she could to be pleasant, even if she wanted to be very unpleasant and demand her freedom. She did all she could to keep him from sending away. Then he stopped demanding that she go into the prison and when she started to sleep in his old room he said nothing and thus began a strained beginning to the camaraderie that they used to enjoy.

Time passed and Lily spent her days researching genies on the internet and trying to find a way to free herself from her wrongly phrased wish. Pureness of heart obviously was not going to help her and she highly doubted most of the mythology that she found, so what did that leave? Her frustration was breeding hopelessness.

Lily was an educated modern woman. She knew she had to remember she was dealing with someone who might appear modern, but still had an ancient mind. Starting off with little things she began by cooking for him without being asked and cleaning up after him. It galled her, but she did her best to act like a woman would have been expected to act in his time. She was grateful for her ancient history

major. She had the knowledge to make him feel at home and stay out of the lamp. Each time she made him a traditional meal from his homeland and time period or knew the right thing to say or the right way to act, he became more comfortable with her freedom.

Soon they fell into a routine. Her modern feminine values felt bruised and offended, but the reward was worth the pain. Each day she could see Xavier growing more comfortable with her as she accepted the role that women had played for men for thousands of years. It irritated her that he had not removed the "master" rule as she had for him, but she dropped subtle hints and hoped that he would realize how degrading it was at some point and free her of the word. Vowing, to herself, that when she was free she would never use the word again, she gritted her teeth and tried to think of creative wording to avoid addressing him by it.

He looked so handsome in his professional attire she would catch herself staring at him like a lovelorn teenager. Lily really was starting to hate herself. Xavier was so confident in his new life and he had fallen into her life like he had been born to it. This made her nervous. He liked who he had become, and she knew it was going to be difficult to make him remember that he was an interloper in the modern world and in her home and life.

They had been watching television quietly and he



had finished telling her anecdotes about the college that made her laugh. He had technically worked there longer than she had now, but she still enjoyed his work stories, remembering her time with the people who amused him; hearing their unknowing foibles and quirks made her feel a little bit human again. She was laughing with genuine humor at a story about the chemistry professor's toupee and some chocolate milk when Xavier leaned into her and kissed her, with a force of unexpected heat that surprised her while fanning her own repressed fire for him.

She had become more elemental since her transformation. Every breath she took brought his masculine scent to her and heightened her awareness in a way she never would have previously experienced. She was able to detect the dilation of his pupils and even the change in his pheromone level as he became more amorous in his desire. It increased her pleasure to see his response to her on such an unconscious level. He could not fake or hide his body's response to her. He was not faking his desire to pacify her or ease his guilt.

Lily responded to him with unbridled passion. She was still very innocent and her heated mind only barely reminded her of the fact as she devoured his mouth and ran her hands over his body. She could feel his hard muscles had not gotten flabby since his escape and she longed to see them

again. She missed his sexy antiquated wardrobe. No matter how good he looked in a suit, she like the way he wore his skin. Shocked at the path her mind had wandered down, she tried to quench the fires his kiss had ignited. She reminded herself that she was playing a dangerous game with him: One wrong move and she could condemn herself for eternity to the lamp. She had to stay in control Backing away from him she scooted to the other end of the sofa. He looked surprised, and a little hurt.

Lily remembered his story about the Roman slave; she did not want him to feel that he had the right to use her like that. She wanted him, but on her own terms, not as a slave, but as a lover. He reached for her and she pulled back farther. He was starting to look mad; she was losing control of the situation.

"Master, I am sorry if I gave you the wrong impression. I cannot allow myself to become sexually involved with you until we are both free from this curse."

His expression darkened. "I do not know how to free you, Lily, I am sorry. I will never allow myself to be trapped in the lamp again. I want you, but I will not force you."

He waved his hand dismissively and she found her body crammed back into the confines of the wretched lamp. Growling a loud feminine growl she pounded on the lamp, hoping he could hear her. She called his name angrily,

sighing became it came out as “master.” She gave up and tried to get as comfortable as the small space would allow. Desire still coursed through her blood and she regretted not letting him quench her needs.

Huffing in frustration she leaned back and closed her eyes.

Tears leaked out from behind her eyelids and she had no choice but to let herself have a very long and cleansing crying spell. She felt a little better when she was done. Lily had given herself a headache, but she still knew that her heart needed the release that her tears had provided. It was not going to be easy to get her life back, but she would not let him curse her for her kindness. When she got out, she still had one wish and she was mad enough to speculate on what terrible thing she could wish on him. Sighing, she knew that she would never be able to do it but it was fun to speculate on wishing him naked to Antarctica or wishing him to the bottom of the ocean. Lily had not slept a normal and healing sleep since she had been confined, but somehow she managed to find that sleep now. She realized as the sandman took over that she had been fighting what she had become and after her emotional breakdown she had accepted her situation. Sleep claimed her and mercifully she was given the freedom of dreams.

Lily did not wake again until she was called out of

the lamp. She was disoriented. When she noticed a nearby newspaper on the coffee table she was alarmed to realize that she had not slept in the lamp for a night or a day, she had slept in the lamp for a week. Xavier had actually kept her a prisoner for an entire week! She was furious but she did not let it show. In a way, the unnaturally deep sleep of the lamp was a blessing. She did not relish the idea of being trapped in the lamp awake for a week.

She could see that he looked uncomfortable, nervous even. He had not used a wish yet and suddenly she felt panic. What if he used all his wishes up before she had the chance to figure out how he could free her! He must have assumed her pained look was from anger at her long incarceration because he suddenly spoke.

“I am sorry, Lily. I had a lot to think on and you hurt my manly pride. It is hard for me to remember that you are a woman of this time. I am sorry that I left you in the lamp.”

She had no idea how to respond. Worrying that not accepting his apology would hinder her chance to be free. She was also concerned that if by accepting his apology she would be giving him permission to store her away whenever he pleased for however long he pleased. Her confused jumble of speculation left her unable to speak. Lily chose to say nothing and an awkward silence stretched out uncomfortably between them. She felt ill and each moment

was excruciating torment. Fate had not been good to her so far and she worried that it was not going to be getting any better any time soon. Her months of imprisonment were taking a toll and she was getting very frustrated. Xavier showed no sign that he felt guilt over what he was doing to her and her anger with him grew a little more each day.

Lily said nothing. Tension stretched out awkwardly between them. She had to do something, but what could she do as a slave? Her modern sensibilities felt bruised but she had to admit, if she had to be someone's slave she could not have picked a better looking man. No matter how angry she was with him, she still wanted him. If they were both free she wondered if he would still want her in his life. Lily knew that she would want him, but a man like Xavier could have anyone he wanted. He didn't need a magic lamp to make all his boudoir dreams come true. Lily knew he wanted to have sex with her and she desperately wanted him too; however she could not, and would not willingly let him use her body without having her freedom. War raged in her loins, the primitive desire of her womanhood railed at the modern woman in her brain, demanding that she use him for her pleasure

The new strange earthiness that had overtaken her since she had become the lamp's current resident made her even more carnal and left her tortured each night. Laying in

the darkness feeling the longing in her body she knew that he had what would ease the ache between her legs. She had not dreamed since her incarceration in the lamp, but she would envision herself kissing him or touching him or even tasting him. She thought his skin looked like it would feel like satin over steel and she longed to run her fingers over every single inch of him. All night she would toss and turn trying to dispel the erotic images her wanton mind created to torture her. She was his slave but she tortured herself.

Zavier seemed to have none of her longing as he always awoke looking fresh and rested. It was hard not to totally hate him each morning. They got along and she could tolerate the nuisances of his annoying habits as he seemed to tolerate hers, too. Sighing wistfully, Lily knew he would never have looked at her twice if he had been a regular guy born in her century. The tension still stretched on between them and with a finality that she did not expect, Lily made her decision. One night as she lay in her bed she made a decision. She would take what pleasure she could get in the crazy situation that she had been dealt.

He was getting ready for work and stood in the kitchen looking for his watch. Lily entered the room, naked and without shame. Carelessly she grabbed him around the neck and kissed him. Her slim arms wrapped around his neck and her long fingers tangled in his hair as she wrapped

herself around him. His lips were firm, and unmoving. She had little experience with sex but the Earthiness that the lamp had caused her to feel gave her the desire and courage to try her first seduction.

He did not move. Was she doing it wrong? Lily did not think so, however with her lack of experience she could not be one hundred percent sure and it made her suddenly feel a bit nervous and foolish. Her small, soft lips teased his with a reverent hope that he would want her, too. Sighing against his lips, she felt his hard masculine body as he stood only wearing his Dockers and a pair of socks. He felt wonderful under her fingers as she ran her hands over his shoulders and back. He was so much taller than she was, so she had pulled him down to her.

Zavier did not respond to her and he did not kiss her back. Lily felt his stoic response and she deepened the kiss becoming more desperate in her attempt to make him want her. She knew that he had wanted her before, when she was not ready to be with him, but had he changed his mind about wanting her now?

She pulled back a moment and looked into his stormy eyes. He looked angry and she wondered what she had done wrong. Didn't men like to be kissed? Maybe she should have asked him to kiss her instead of just tackling him with her need. She searched his eyes and his handsome

face for any sign of why he was angry with her. Deciding that she had already done as much damage as possible, she put her lips back to his again, gave one last attempt to make him want her.



## Chapter Four

At first he did not respond and then she felt him grab on to her and hoist her up. Without breaking the kiss, he swiped across the nearby counter and cleared a space to set her down. Mindlessly, she let him kiss her more deeply than she had ever been kissed before. Sighing with the pleasure of knowing that he wanted her as much as she wanted him she felt his teeth nip at her lip and then his mouth was on her neck.

Lily threw back her head and moaned, but she could not moan his name. “Master” came out instead, as she responded to the light tickling sensation of his morning stubble against her pale and sensitive skin. It only heightened her desire for him and made her gasp in little pants as she felt herself growing wet and hot. He gruffly told her what she had desperately wanted to hear for months.

“Say my name, my real name, no more of that ‘Master’ crap!”

She had never felt so wanton in her life!

His name tripped over her lips like a prayer, “Zavier, oh. yes please keep doing that!”

A clawing, demanding desire raged within her as she realized she wanted more. Her naked breasts were pressed

against his skin and she felt his coarse chest hair rubbing against her sensitive nipples. His teeth nipped at her neck and shoulder as he alternated between kisses and the sensual little love bites. Finding his belt, she tugged desperately at it, trying to free him of his pants; they made his butt look fantastic, but she wanted to see more of him than what the garment allowed.

Zavier's masculine laugh echoed in the small space as he helped her and soon he was standing before her in all his glory. His huge erection pressed against her and she could not resist taking it in her hand and rubbing up and down its impressive thick length. She wondered if all ancient men had been so well endowed, or just this one? She had never been with a man that was so large and she wondered what it would be like. He watched her looking at his body and when she looked up, she could see the heat in his eyes as he was obviously enjoying her reaction.

Blushing delicately, she tilted her head down modestly upon being caught enjoying the sight of him. He tilted her head back up to face him and she saw the raw emotion on his face. Something deep inside of him had come to the surface and for a moment, time held them entranced in each other. She felt his sexual need, but something else was there too.

He knelt down in front of where she was sitting on

the counter and the spell of the moment was broken. He spread her thighs wide and she felt both vulnerable and shy, yet it only served to fuel her innocent desire. She had never been in such a bold sexual encounter and she felt awkward, even as she craved more.s

She felt him reach around and hold her soft, small buttocks firmly, kneading it with his fingers as his tongue began to lap at her clit. Sucking in a quick breath, she marveled at the delicious feelings he was giving her. She felt herself growing heavy and wet and ready and she wanted more. Her fingers twisted in his thick soft hair and she found herself throwing back her head and moaning his name. He stood up just before she shattered with release and she felt him stick his long strong fingers into her pussy as he kissed her again on the mouth. She could taste her musk but she was so turned on she did not care.

Her arms wrapped around his neck and she felt her body tighten around his fingers as she moaned her release into his mouth. Feeling languid and delightfully surprised by his actions, she felt him pull her towards him as the head of his long cock found the entrance to her vagina. She felt him pinch her clitoris lightly and roll it between his fingers; all the while his mouth had found one of her nipples and was sucking on it in a mind-numbing rhythm. Then as she felt her desire building, close to climax, he straightened a bit,

taking his mouth from her breast as he pulled her onto himself and she was filled with him.

It was wonderful and Lily cried out as her orgasm began. He had her almost off the counter as his cock slid in and out of her body in a rhythm that stole her capacity to think. She clung to him, able to do nothing but helplessly ride the tidal wave of the orgasm he was giving her. She ignored the Formica that pressed into her back and she cried out his name, blinded by the intensity of what she was feeling. He groaned out her name and buried his face into her neck and hair as he released himself inside of her. She felt him coming as the aftershocks of her orgasm rippled against his cock.

Shivering with delight, she did not stop him as he swept her into his arms and carried her into the nearby bathroom. He quickly turned on the shower and she was hastily deposited under the warm running water., He climbed in behind her. He put his chin on the top of her head and ground out his words.

“This is a helluva good reason to be late to work today! I do not know what got into you this morning, but I hope you wake up like this every morning from now on.”

Unable to hide her smile at his words, she was glad that she was facing away from him so that he could not see how much she like what he had said. She felt his hands come

around in front of her and his hands were filled with soap lather. He ran his hands over her body, washing away the remnants of their morning delight, but his actions caused her to want him again.

She turned around and began to duplicate his actions. She ran her lathered hands down his hard chest and over his shoulders. Then she added more lather and found his cock and balls. He hissed and she felt his jerk with the sudden pleasure of her small soft hands on his body. His cock began to grow again and Lily knew he had seen her smile this time. Gruffly, he whispered, “Do you want me again, Lily?”

She put her forehead against his shoulder and replied honestly, “More than I have ever wanted any man before.”

She heard his groan and felt his large hands, almost roughly, position her facing away from him. He placed her palms against the wall. Reaching around, his fingers pinched and teased her clit until she was wiggling with her anticipation. Her eyes were closed because of the shower spray that was coming down over her shoulders and back. She felt his cock pressing against her, and then he took his hands from her body and she felt upset over the separation for a moment.

Then he was placing his hands on her hips, tilting her body forward just enough for his cock to slide into her body. His hand slid up her wet sides and stomach until he had a

breast in each hand and a nipple between his thumb and finger on each side. She moaned at the sensations that assaulted her, making her knees weak. Somehow, she managed to keep her knees from buckling as she began to lean back, matching the rhythm of his thrusts. For several years she had been sexually active, but she had never experienced multiple orgasms, or such intense orgasms before.

His centuries of experience were really paying off for her and she writhed against him as she screamed out with her fulfillment. He soon followed and she felt him hold her tightly to him as he stiffened a moment before he cried out her name as he came inside of her again.

Water beat down against them as they stood in the spray, gasping out little pants and unmoving for a long moment. Xavier turned her around and he tilted her face up while pulling her wet hair away from her face tenderly. He leaned down and kissed her sweetly, but there was a hard, almost desperate edge to it. Without a word, he stepped out of the shower and quickly dried off, threw on some clothing, and left the condo. He was gone so abruptly that she was left feeling deflated and out of sorts.

Lily loved him, she realized with a moment of defined clarity. It was the stupidest thing that she had ever allowed herself to do. Berating herself for her feeling she

could not believe that she had done it. *Isn't there some kind of a syndrome where a hostage falls in love with her captor?* Lily wondered in silent annoyance.

Even if her feelings were just brought on by the stress of her current situation and not real, she could not stop her heart from beating wildly in her chest. She wanted to know how he felt about her, and she knew deep in her heart that her feelings were real and no matter how she tried to disregard or rationalize them away, she was stuck with them.

She knew that she could not just come right out and ask if he had feelings for her that were deeper than horniness. It would seem forced and she would never be able to trust his reply. However, he had lifted the title of 'Master,' finally, and she supposed that it was at least a step in the right direction. It showed her that he saw her as a person, a woman, and not an object or just an extension of the lamp and her office as his genie.

She knew that she wanted to know what he was thinking and feeling but his abrupt exit made her wonder if he regretted having had sex with her. Lily was inexperienced with sex and the few encounters that she had indulged in the past were nothing like what she had experienced with Xavier. Her day seemed to drag by slowly, torturing her and mocking her. Each time she looked at the clock it was only a few minutes since her last peek. Groaning, she flopped back

on the sofa and threw her arm dejectedly over her face. She had found herself unable to use the telephone since she had become the lamp's current genie and as she desperately wanted to call him or communicate with him somehow. Her imprisonment felt intense at that moment. It seemed that anything that would take her body or voice away from the lamp was lost to her.

When the clock showed Lily that Xavier should be coming home soon, she quickly did what she could to make herself look as good as possible. It was a hard task as she only had the one outfit that was always magically fresh and no makeup. Sighing she pinched her cheeks in an old fashioned attempt to add some color and closed her eyes thinking *What am I going to say when I see him?* She sat down ready to pounce on him when he came home. Minutes ticked away.

He was late. Xavier was never late. Minutes became hours and then Lily became angry. Love 'em and leave 'em did not work so well when you lived with 'em! Had she been that bad in the sack that the poor man did not even want to come home? Was he that afraid she might want seconds? Yipes, she had better get some reference books on the subject of sex just to make sure she didn't make some kind of massive faux pas. Maybe she had done something that had been taboo in the ancient world? She taught history, she



should know about some kind of sexual taboo that had not made it into modern times.

Lily was angry. She felt rejected and hurt, but mostly embarrassed. Her whole life she had been shy and never once had she ever initiated a relationship or sex, and the first time she did it, she scared her chosen man away. Did she smell? Was she hideously deformed after her transformation into the genie of the lamp? Worries and uncertainty nibbled at her brain until she thought she would go crazy. If she had been a free woman, Xavier would have been in serious hot water with her, but as his enslaved genie, she had no choice but to accept his bad behavior and poor treatment. Her modern woman felt stung and her primal woman felt pissed, and she was just unhappy all the way around. Hours passed and at some point she fell asleep on the couch.

A loud sound woke her and she heard something slam against the couch where she slept. Almost falling in her panic to see what was happening, Lily sat up and realized that it was a tall person. Shrieking with her sleepy terror, it took her a moment to realize the early morning visitor was Xavier. She rubbed her blurry eyes and could not stop her question.

“What in the hell happened to you, Xavier?”

“I decided to get drunk, very completely drunk! You are not my woman, so quit nagging me. Shrew!”

Lily didn't like his harsh words. She knew that she had no claim to him, but a nagging shrew she was not! In the entire time that he had been living her life he had never gotten drunk or stayed out late. After what they had shared, his uncharacteristic actions made her feel hurt; also, frightening her awake was not the way to get a welcoming reaction from her. Lily gritted her teeth, but did her best not to turn into said shrew.

“Zavier, you scared ten years off my life. I'm sorry if I reacted poorly. Why did you decide to get drunk tonight? Celebrating something or just avoiding me?”

He stumbled away from her and sat down in a chair, putting his head in his hands. His turmoil was obvious from his posture. Doing a funny little flip in her chest, Lily's heart responded to his pain. Reaching out, she put her hand on the back of his head and gently stroked his hair.

“What is wrong Zavier?” Her genuine concern seemed to make him even more upset.

“Lily, I will not allow myself to be trapped in that hell again, but I know that leaving you there in my place makes me a real bastard! This morning I realized how much I wanted to make it right, I just don't know how to do it. I thought, at first, that I could just convince myself to accept what had happened to you as fate, but you just had to be so sweet and beautiful and graceful in your acceptance of what

I had let happen to you. In all my long years of existence, I have never felt like I did with you this morning. I have never wanted more than sex, but after I left I realized that for the first time I want more. I just cannot let myself be imprisoned again, I am sorry. I am a coward.”

Lily fell to her knees in front of the torn man. She took his face into her hands and pressed her lips to his, tenderly. He did not respond he was too busy staring into her beautiful eyes. Looking up into his troubled face, Lily spoke with quiet intensity.

“I wish that I could confront that bitch that did this to you!”

Zavier found himself staring into empty space. Lily was gone.

## Chapter Five

Light, bright and pure burned Lily's eyes and made her shield herself from its power. She was lying on a flat smooth plane. It was not warm but it was also not cold. Sitting up, her eyes began to adjust to the brightness and she was able to look around. Everything was white and bare. She had no idea where she was, but she had a feeling she was definitely in trouble. She had chosen her words with rash thoughtlessness and now she wondered if she had not just made her terrible situation worse.

She felt the emptiness of the bright empty space. What was this place? It almost reminded her of the tunnel to the afterlife that she had heard people talk about when they had a near death experience.

Shivering, she closed her eyes and thought about Xavier. She wanted them both to be free, but had she condemned herself to a much lonelier prison with her words? What if she never saw him again? Tears began leak out of her eyes and she felt the slow slide of their path as they tiptoed over her cheeks to land on the bare floor. She cried out. "Is anyone here? Hello, is there anyone who can hear me?" Her voice echoed into the loneliness. Lily shivered.

She heard distant foot falls that seemed to echo into the infinite stillness. Freezing with uncertainty, she listened as the light steps seemed to be getting closer and closer to her. Looking all around, she could not tell what direction the sound was coming from; it seemed to surround her. Lily wished she could *un-wish* her wish. In her new state of being, she did not know if she could die or be harmed and she certainly did not want to find out the hard way. Resisting the urge to close her eyes, she stood and decided to boldly face whatever was coming her way.

An eternity seemed to stretch by as the light footfalls kept coming in an unhurried and natural manner. She knew that whatever was making the noise was in no hurry to arrive; she even had to wonder if the being knew that she was there at all. She could see no place to hide in the vast expanse, so she just waited, unmoving.

Lily turned when she felt something touch her. She had to bite down on her lip to keep from screaming. Whirling around to face whatever was behind her, she stopped sort. It was a woman. She looked small and frail, painfully thin. Her pale skin and dark red hair was a striking contrast but it was her glowing green eyes that caught Lily's attention and made her feel terror. A twisted smile lit upon the woman's lips as she looked at Lily. She spoke quietly, but her words held a lyrical quality that was terrible and

beautiful at the same time.

“I see that you are tangled in my web of magic. Why have you called me from my peace and rest?”

“Are you the woman who cursed a merchant’s son in Rome? His name was Xavier.” Timidly, Lila asked, afraid of the woman’s reaction.

A soft laugh issued from the woman and suddenly her head snapped forward and she pierced Lily with a penetrating gaze that made her stomach fall out from under her.

“I did not curse him. I saved others from him. He was a violent, thoughtless, and crude barbarian. I put him in a place where he could harm no one. Whatever has caught you in his punishment is unfortunate. This magic is like a rolling stone, and it will follow a path and cannot be stopped. I cannot undo this.”

Lila felt her heart stop at the admission. She grabbed the woman’s cold hands and clung to her in desperation.

“Please, I respect what you felt that you had to do. I have only studied life for women of your time, but I cannot imagine what it must have been like to live as you had. It has been centuries, truly centuries that Xavier has been trapped in the lamp. Please, if you cannot undo what has been wished, could you undo his punishment? He has suffered a thousand times for what he did to you and he does regret his

actions. He understands how he wronged you. He has been violated and used again and again he knows the humiliation and helplessness that you have suffered. He has changed; he has become a good man. Please look into my eyes, the eyes of a woman who is experiencing servitude against her will, and see that I speak the truth to you!”

For a moment Lily thought her plea had fallen on deaf ears.

“I do see your passion for this man, but I am sorry, I cannot just take his curse away. He will have to prove your words if he wants to end the power of the lamp. Go now, child, and if he has truly changed then have peace that all will be well for you.”

Leaning forward, the woman placed a caring kiss on Lily’s forehead and spoke again.

“Your grandfather told me to tell you to have faith and to never forget who you are.”

Before Lily could respond to the statement, she heard the woman chanting unrecognizable words and she felt herself feeling wobbly and ill. Losing herself to the sensation, Lily felt herself fall onto the cold, bare floor and she closed her eyes in an attempt to get her rebellious stomach under control.

When she opened her eyes, she was laying in the middle of her own living room, or rather Xavier’s living

room, now. She got up with his assistance and rushed to the bathroom where she was ill for a short time. When she had herself under control, she cleaned up and returned to the living room.

He sat looking concerned. Xavier asked “Where did you go? I did not order you away. Were you in the lamp?”

“I met your flame haired north woman. I begged her to take the curse away, but she said that she could not. She said that if you had really become a good man, then I had nothing to worry about. What do you think she meant?”

He looked disturbed and just shook his head “no” in confusion. Lily’s heart sank. She knew that she was no closer to freedom than she had been before her trip to the twilight zone. It did warm her heart to know that Gramps was looking down over her, but she still wanted more of an answer than the cryptic words that the woman had given her.

Sighing, Xavier took her hands into his when she sat down on the arm of his chair and spoke to her quietly. “I do not see any way out of this. I love you, Lily, and I want you to remember that. I am sorry that I was not strong enough to say these words before.”

Lily thought he meant the words “I love you,” it was not until he continued that she understood what he was really apologizing for.

“I love you, Lily, and I just wish for you to be



happy.” She could see that he was bracing himself as if he expected pain or some sort of impact.

Nothing happened. He opened his eyes carefully and when he saw that they were still sitting just as they had been, she felt his tense body began to relax just a bit. He cleared his throat before he spoke clearly and louder.

“I said that I love you and I wish for you to be happy!”

She felt him tense up.

Nothing seemed to happen. He looked annoyed because of the anticlimactic moment. Lily did not know if she should laugh or cry. He was a good man and he had changed. He had risked his freedom for her happiness. He had risked another thousand years of pain just to give her back her life. Lily threw her arms around him and kissed him. At first it was a light kiss but soon the passion between them ignited and the kiss became hot and intense. Closing her eyes and letting the sensation roll over her, she sighed.

Zavier pulled her into his lap and she felt his erection pressing against her thigh. It made her smile to feel the physical evidence of his desire for her. She wrapped her arms around his neck and she felt his hands run over the sheer fabric of her clothing over her back and buttocks, and then she felt them skimming her stomach. She gasped into his mouth when his strong hands began to gently knead her

breasts and fondle her nipples, sending ripples of pleasure through her body. Shivering, she sighed with the delightful sensation. Her fingers found the buttons of his shirt and after a moment of frustrated fumbling, she smiled against his lips, knowing he would be irritated later, and tugged his shirt apart.

With three firm tugs he was out of the garment and she heard the buttons bouncing against the hard floor and furniture. He growled into her mouth and she laughed as he returned the favor and she felt the sheer material give as he gave it one sharp pull. They both had the tattered remnants of their clothing hanging from their shoulders but when he took her nipple into his mouth, drawing it in, sucking firmly she moaned and all thoughts of how they looked ridiculous fled.

She ran her hands over his smooth, defined chest and relished the feeling of his skin against her hands. His lips found hers again and she felt a moment of sorrow that he had stopped what he had been doing to her breast. Groaning, she felt him stand up with her, the kiss never broke apart, and she felt him lay her down onto the carpet. His lips and tongue had never left her mouth and she could feel him shrugging off his tattered garment.

When he finally moved his mouth from hers it was to place it on her neck. Xavier began to kiss down her neck and

shoulder until he found her nipples again and he took the nipple that he had previously ignored into his mouth this time and she shivered as the sensation coiled in her belly, and the wetness between her legs began to grow hotter and wetter. Impatiently she began to undo his fly, mercifully he had no belt on, and he helped her free his cock from its imprisonment. Her hands found the beautiful appendage and she began to stroke and caress his sensitive flesh. Her small hand cupped his sack and he hissed.

She felt him move farther down her body and as he kissed her stomach she felt him opening her legs for him and when the stubble of his jaw brushed her delicate clit she jerked with pleasure. She would have been happy if he had just taken her right at that second, but he had other ideas. His teeth gently nipped the sensitive piece of flesh and she moaned. His tongue started to roll and swirl over her clit and she could not stop her hips from wiggling with anticipation.

He took two fingers and slid them inside of her, then he began to fuck her to the rhythm that his tongue was using on her clit. Lily choked out a moan of pleasure as she felt herself begin to come. Her orgasm ripped through her and she gasped out his name like a plea for more. When she felt the pleasure subside a bit, only the aftershocks of her orgasm were left, she decided that it was her turn to use her mouth to torment him.

She gently nudged him back and he accommodated her nonverbal request happily. She straddled his hips and she flicked her tongue over his manly chest and nipples and then she let her tongue trail a path down his flat stomach. She felt his muscles contract. She smiled at his reaction.

When she reached his long, very erect cock, her mouth gently began to nibble at it and she let her tongue slide up and down from base to tip and then back again. He moaned and she smiled. Her tongue found his sack and she lapped at it. She felt it tighten and she heard his little gasp of pleasure. Taking it in her mouth she gently suckled it all the while she held his shaft in her hand and firmly stroked up and down on it. He groaned and she felt him quickly flip her back onto the floor and pin her.

His eyes were dark with desire and he rasped out, “One more second of that and our fun would have been over for a while!”

She understood his meaning and chuckled, feeling the thrill of her feminine power over him. He sat up and pulled her to her hands and knees, she felt him place a light kiss at the small of her back and then one of his hands found her very sensitized clit. She gasped and she felt her desire grow; she felt so close to another orgasm. She felt him moving closer to her and then his cock was pressing against her. He slid inside of her slowly, and she moaned as each

inch of him entered and filled her.

He never stopped massaging her needy clit even as his hips found a quick rhythm. Moaning his name, she felt him filling her completely and her orgasm began to build inside of her. Her hips began to slam back and forth against him and she screamed his name as she came. Shortly after she felt the pleasure of her orgasm, he stiffened and Lily heard him groan her name like a prayer.

Panting, she felt the air chilling the sweat on her body and Xavier was backing out of her and pulling her down on top of him. For a long moment they looked into each other's eyes, then Lila smiled and said, "I guess you got your wish after all, because wow, your mad sexual skill made me happy. You are one fierce sex machine!" He laughed at her words and she noticed that he was looking over her shoulder in confusion. She turned to see what had stolen his attention from her and her brow furrowed.

"That wasn't there earlier, was it?" Lily asked, tilting her head in consideration.

Zavier got up naked, his cock glistening with her juices, and he began to study the changes that had somehow come over the room while they were distracted. It was no longer the plain bachelor pad, but Lily noticed many of her things too. Somehow the apartment that she had lived in before she had found the lamp had united with the apartment

that had been Xavier's after he had been wished into her life. Lily sat up and shivered. When had it happened?

Helping her to her feet, Xavier led her into the bathroom and they stepped into the shower together. Lily immediately noticed that her favorite loofa was back; she had missed it. His shampoo sat next to hers and they both laughed; somehow it just did not look right but it felt right. They quickly cleaned up and dried off and dressed. Together they began to investigate. She was delighted to see every article of her clothing back in the closet, with a few very stylish additions.

He noticed that the school I.D. badge was no longer in his wallet. Smiling, Lily ran to where she would have left her purse and to her delight it was there just like she remembered it: The I.D. badge was in her purse and it appeared that she had her job back. She turned to show Xavier her badge. He took it from her hand and looked at it a moment before he handed her a card. She looked at it and whistled. "Nice gig!" She replied, handing the card back to him. He tucked it back into his wallet.

"Archeologist., Perfect profession for someone older than dirt," Lily laughed as she teased him about his current fate. He looked pleased and that made her happy.

She noticed the calendar that hung on the wall and saw that the day's date was encapsulated in a big heart and in

her handwriting she had written inside the heart, *one year wedding anniversary*. They looked at each other, startled. She blushed; had her longing for him trapped him into another unwanted imprisonment, marriage?

He must have read her thoughts by the look on her face and she heard him burst out laughing. Then he grabbed her around the waist and swung her around, exuberantly.

“I guess it looks like I got my wish, after all. You are happy to be my wife, right?”

His uncertain expression melted her heart and she tucked her arms around his neck and pulled him to her lips for a sweet, tender kiss. When she moved her lips away, she whispered her reply quietly but with deep and honest feeling. “I love you, and yes, you make me happy, Xavier, happier than *I* could have ever wished for!”

~ The End ~