



A TEASE VALENTINES DAY SHORT

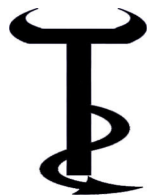
*Dimensions  
of Love*

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## Dimensions of Love

### Chapter One

Mary Grace sat in the garden watching her son grab for the faeries that fluttered around him. Every time she brought him outside they flocked around, apparently as fascinated by him as he was them. Maybe it was the wings. His wing buds had just sprouted his first feathers. According to Al and Nebiros, he would molt then get a new set of feathers several times over the first few years. Once they were able to sustain flight, the feathers would be self-perpetuating. So she had a few more years before she had to worry about her son flying away with the locals.

Smiling, she glanced around. This was so not the life she had envisioned, but she wouldn't change it for anything. Her house looked like photographs she'd seen of Anne Hathaway's cottage in England. Made of stone it sported large lead glass windows and a quaint thatched roof. Watching her hunky husband and his twin brother put on that roof had been a local event. Elves, wood sprites, faeries and even a few trolls had gathered around for the show. Both men swore they'd thatched many roofs in their day, but somehow each one remembered the process differently. They'd cursed and argued and laughed until finally the thing was accomplished. Then everyone had gathered here in the garden to share a meal of soup and fresh bread. Sithicheland might not be what she was used to, but it was home now.

Off in the distance, Mike and the puppy came into view. She watched as her husband ran, mesmerized as always by the perfect symmetry of his form. Fingers of excitement skittered along her back, sending a jolt of awareness through her body to pool low in her stomach. Without thought she rose from her chair and stepped toward him. Her squealing son distracted her and she turned to see that he had snagged a faerie that got too close. The poor thing flailed and jabbered, but the baby held tight to a small foot.

"Warren Kenneth Angelo, you let go this minute." Mary Grace hurried over to her smiling child. Squatting down, she gently pried the baby's chubby fingers open so the faerie could escape. "I'm sorry," she told the tiny creature, though she knew it wouldn't understand her.

"You know they don't speak English." Mike's arms encircled her as he leaned down to whisper in her ear.

Yelping, she jumped, accidentally butting his chin with the back of her head.

"Ouch." He rubbed his chin with one hand but held tight to his wife with the other.

Turning to face him, she craned her neck back so she could see his face. "It serves you right, sneaking up on me like that."

"Sneaking up? You saw me and Jeff heading this way."

"Yeah, but you were way off."

"And you were too busy scolding our son to hear us approach."

The baby began to laugh and both parents looked down. This time he had a handful of dog ear. "No, no." Mary Grace leaned down to free Jeff's ear. "Be nice to the puppy."

Jeff apparently held no grudge because he took the opportunity to lick young Warren's face, which set off another bout of giggles.

Mary Grace sighed, standing to lean back against her husband's chest.

"I hope that was a happy sigh."

Wiggling closer she nodded. "It was."

A quick kiss to the top of her head and Mike stepped toward the house. "Do we have anything to eat?"

"There's a loaf of bread and some sliced ham."

"We don't have any peanut butter?"

She rolled her eyes. The man was obsessed with peanut butter lately. "Try the pantry. If you haven't eaten it all, it will be in there. Third shelf from the top."

"Got it," he yelled. "Thanks."

By the time she had gathered Warren and his toys, she entered the house just in time to see Mike offer half of his sandwich to Jeff. "Mike! That's not good for him."

"Why not?"

She thought about that. "I don't know. It's just not. Why do you think they make dog food?"

"I have no idea. Dogs got along quite well before they made the stuff."

Being thousands of years old, he ought to know. "Fine, then. Feed him junk food. But when he's too fat to move, let alone run, don't blame me."

"He's not going to get fat. We get too much exercise for that, don't we boy?" Leaning down, he scratched the gangly pup behind the ear. "Today he followed troll tracks. That's a good boy, Jeff." Mike grinned, displaying the same dimples his son boasted. "Mutt would be proud."

The poignant reminder of Jeff's sire made her misty-eyed. "Yes. I believe he would."

Rooting at her breasts, Warren whimpered. "Oh, no you don't mister. You are officially off the boob, remember? I'll get you some cereal." Taking down a box of baby oatmeal, she mixed it with goat's milk and placed him in the high chair. He stuck out his lip for a minute, but finally took a bite, liked it, and took on the project with relish. Mary Grace laughed. "If he keeps eating like that, he may be even bigger than you are some day."

"I'll still be able to take him. So don't go getting attitude with me." He leaned down to kiss the baby's cheek and came away with a streak of cereal clinging to the stubble on his face. Laughing, he swiped at the mess. "He's fast, isn't he?"

"Um-hum. You have no idea. Just before you got home, he caught a faerie by the foot."

"I caught the tale end of that little adventure. Serves them right for swooping down in his face. I can't wait till he can fly. We'll see who pesters whom then."

Hands on hips she turned to face her men. "That's all I need, a war with the faeries."

Jeff barked his agreement and earned himself the job of licking out the baby's bowl and another scratch behind his ears. "That's right, Jeffy-boy. At least you see things my way."

Mike snorted. "He agrees with anyone who has food in their hands."

Tongue lolling out, the dog looked from one adult to the other, ever hopeful. Folding, Mary Grace snagged a pinch off the pound cake she had cooling on the counter and tossed it to him. "But he's so damn cute, who can resist?"

## Chapter Two

“Mary Grace, where are you?”

Practically falling down the stairs in her haste, Mary Grace rushed toward the sound of her mother’s voice. “Mom? What are you doing here?” She hugged her mother and looked around. “Is dad here, too?”

“Not this time. He’s watching your nephew tonight.”

“Without you? He is getting brave.”

“Now that the potty-training thing has been accomplished he feels more confident.” Alice Chapman laughed. “He’s such a wimp about changing diapers. Besides, I promised Mike I’d watch Warren.”

“What? When did you promise that? Why did he want you to baby sit?”

Throwing up her hands, Alice rushed to assuage her daughter. “I believe it’s a surprise, so don’t get your dander up.”

Affronted, Mary Grace rushed to defend herself. “I don’t get my dander up. I’m a trained law enforcement officer. I always have a cool head.”

Alice laughed and looped an arm through her child’s. “Tell that to someone who’ll believe it. I raised you, remember?” She patted Mary Grace’s hand. “Now, where’s my grandson?”

“I just put him down for a nap.”

“Well, we’ll have all night together so I suppose I can wait. How long does he usually sleep?”

“An hour if I’m lucky. Did Mike come in with you?”

“No. He said he had something to take care of and I should tell you to get ready.”

“Ready for what?”

“I don’t exactly know. He just said it was a surprise.”

“So, how do I get ready for the unknown? Do I wear jeans, a dress, a bathing suit, what?”

“Well, why don’t you start with a nice long bath? You can do your hair and by that time maybe he’ll be home to tell you.”

Blue eyes sparkling, Mary Grace agreed. “I’ll never say no to a long hot bath.” She headed back up the stairs. “You know where I’ll be if you need me.”

Reaching into her purse, Alice withdrew a paperback novel. “I’ll be fine.” She settled into an overstuffed chair by the window.

Forty-five minutes later, Mike sauntered into the house. “Where is she?” he asked his mother-in-law.

“Upstairs bathing. She wanted to know what to wear and I honestly didn’t know what to tell her.”

Glancing toward the ceiling, Mike confided. “We’re going out to eat first, so she might want to wear a dress.” Grinning wolfishly he added, “She might want to wear something sexy underneath, too. I have a bit more planned for after dinner, the details of which I won’t share with you.”

“Please don’t.” Alice laughed. “She is my child, after all. There are some things a mother just doesn’t need to know.”

“Is that Mike?” Mary Grace called from upstairs.

“It is.” His voice, always mesmerizing, had a special quality when he talked to his wife.

“Could you come up here?”

Wiggling his brows at Alice he started for the stairs. “I’ll be right there.” Three at a time, the stairs were quickly traversed.

Wrapped in a towel, Mary Grace held a pale blue cocktail dress in one hand and her favorite pair of Lucky jeans in the other. “What should I wear?” she asked him.

Blood pooling in his loins, Mike took a step toward her. “I like what you have on, but the patrons at Ruth’s Chris Steak House might not appreciate it the way I do.”

Jumping the three feet toward her spouse, Mary Grace wrapped her arms and legs around him, jabbing a clothes hanger in his back in the process. He didn’t even notice, cupping her butt in both hands to align her hot wet core with his bulging need. “Or we could just stay up here all night.” His whispered seduction had the opposite effect.

Mary Grace sprang away from him as if he'd stuck her with a hot poker. "Not on your life, mister. I've always wanted to eat at Ruth's Chris and you're not getting out of it that easily." She hoisted the sagging towel as she turned to offer over her shoulder, "But I might be willing to meet you back here for dessert."

Groaning, Mike adjusted himself and warned, "I'm holding you to that offer."

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Dabbing her napkin at the corner of her mouth, Mary Grace sat back in her chair, smiling. "That was without a doubt the most delicious meal I've ever eaten. Thank you, Michael."

"My pleasure." He signaled the waiter for their check.

Once outside he pulled her into a nearby alleyway and opened a portal, drawing her with him as he entered.

"Open your eyes, sweetheart."

Chagrined, Mary Grace blushed. "I don't think I'll ever get used to the strangeness of sliding between dimensions." Glancing around, she realized she was not in her bedroom as she expected. Instead she was in a grotto, the tinkling sound of cascading water catching her attention. A small waterfall ended in a shallow pool, the aquamarine water inviting her to bend down and run her fingers through the silken liquid. "It's beautiful. Where are we?"

"Does it matter? It's just a little place I discovered in one of my travels." Pulling her into his arms, Mike kissed her, sliding his hands along her back to pull her closer. "We're alone together." Lifting her into his arms he kissed her again, tasting the inside of her mouth and nipping playfully at her swollen lips. "It's time for dessert."

Lost in the magic of his touch, she was oblivious to the bed until he eased her back against the soft, cool sheets. "What the...where'd this come fr—" she began, but never finished when his rough calloused hand slid up her leg, dragging the hem of her dress along to reveal the thigh-highs and the tip of her French-cut teddy.

"Shhh. Just let me have my wicked way with you."

Her only reply was a groan when he slipped a finger in the crotch of her undergarment to tease the golden curls it concealed. She arched toward him and he took the hint, plunging a finger inside her warm, moist opening.

"God, you're beautiful." He worked his thumb against the sensitive apex of her sex, sending tremors through her body and causing her to clinch against his invading finger. Nudging the plunging neckline aside, he sucked against her lace-covered nipple.

"Mike, please," she panted.

"Easy, sweetheart. Let me love you." He grazed the distended nipple with his teeth. "It's been so long."

Closing her eyes, she chuckled. "Yes, this morning was an eternity ago." Her mirth was cut short when he found the convenience snaps on the teddy and with a pop revealed the prize he sought.

"Oh, baby, look what I've found." He lowered his head, replacing his finger with his probing tongue, his thumb never ceasing its quest. Sliding the skirt of her dress higher still, he urged her legs to his shoulders. Lapping and sucking he took her over the edge reveling in the sweet taste of her release.

She lay there, limp as a noodle, unable to lift so much as a finger. At least until he flicked her nipple with his very talented tongue. That revived strategic parts of her immediately. "Are you going to undress me, or are we going to spend the rest of the night groping each other under our clothes like a couple of teenagers?"

Bracing himself on an elbow, Mike looked down at her. "As I recall, I've been doing all the groping."

"In the interest of fairness, I think I should have my turn." Resting her palm against the impressive bulge in his trousers, she rubbed. "Hhm, this seems promising." She walked her fingers to the belt and unbuckled it with one hand. The zipper was a bit trickier, considering the pressure behind it, so she employed both hands to accomplish the task. Taking into account his penchant for



going without undies, she didn't want to damage anything. But going commando had its positive side, too. As soon as the zipper was down he sprang out of the opening, eager for her touch and the tender attentions of her mouth. She didn't disappoint. Wedging a hand down his pants to massage his tight balls, Mary Grace drew her favorite treat deep into her mouth, curling her tongue along the sensitive underside of his penis, sucking hard.

Mike's hoarse shout was her only warning as he spilled into her, jetting down her throat as he held on to her hair.

She continued to lick and suck until he was completely spent. "Now that the edge is off, do you think we could get naked?" Her husky voice promised delights he didn't intend to forgo.

Arms slipping to his sides, Mike admitted, "I'm not sure I can find the strength right this minute."

Without answering, Mary Grace sat back on her heels and pulled her dress over her head. Teddy unsnapped at the crotch, thigh-highs still in place, and strappy little heels still in place, she stood beside the bed. Humming some inane song, she began to dance.

As she turned, squatted, bent at the waist and ran her palms over her body, Mike didn't remain immobile for long. When he reached for her, she shook her head and continued to move, letting the straps of the teddy slide down her arms. With a shimmy, the thing fell completely off and she kicked it out of the way giving him a glimpse of what lay beneath the concealing thatch of blonde curls. Ripping his shirt off, he lunged for her again, tripping on his pants and stumbling to his knees.

Not missing a beat, Mary Grace swayed close enough for him to smell her arousal then darted back again. "Oh, you're gonna pay for that, Mrs. Angelo." Rising to his feet he divested himself of the rest of his clothes and began to stalk her.

Conveniently he caught her just as she passed the foot of the bed. Urging her face down against the comforter, he ran his hands and eyes over the tempting sight of her rear. Still in her heels and hose, she looked like sex personified and he was an admitted sinner. Without preamble, he slid into her welcoming body and her slick, wet channel pulled him deep.

Mary Grace gripped the covers for added traction and arched into him as his tempo increased, the slap of their eager bodies adding to their excitement. Braced on his arms he leaned low over her body to fit his lips to the curve of her shoulder. He nipped sharply, but laved the spot with his tongue to ease the sting. She went off like a rocket, her spasms pulling him along into the vortex.

In post coital haze, they snuggled on the bed, listening to the sound of the water flowing and absently stroking each other.

"This was a fabulous night," Mary Grace told him.

"I wanted it to be special." He nibbled at her finger tips.

Bells went off in her head. She searched frantically for something she'd forgotten. "It's not my birthday."

"Nope."

"It's not our anniversary."

"Nope."

"It's not Christmas."

"Nope."

Sighing, she flopped onto her back. "Okay. I give up. What have I forgotten?"

Wedging himself up on an elbow, he looked over at his wife. "You seriously don't know what today is, do you?"

"Nope."

"It's February 14<sup>th</sup>." She looked frantic, confused. What woman forgot such a holiday? Mike shook his head. "Valentine's Day. Every heard of that?" He reached over to tickle her ribs.

She squirmed and grabbed his hand to still it. "V-valentines? Today is Valentine's Day? How could I not know this?"

"Gee, let me think. You live in an alternate dimension, you tend an infant all day, your husband is an evil-fighting half-angel. Think any of those things might contribute?"

She punched him half-heartedly. "It's no excuse. I should have remembered." Her eyes filled with tears. "I don't have anything for you."

A smile spread over his face, starting as a simple twist of the lips and eventually lighting his eyes and creasing his cheeks with dimples. "I can think of the perfect gift, if you're willing."

She sat up, blonde hair cascading over her shoulders. "What? What could I possibly give you that you want? You've been everywhere, seen everything, had everything."

"Nope." He smoothed her hair behind an ear, revealing the breast it had concealed. "There's one thing I've never had and I want desperately."

Her heart was already racing from his casual touch. "What could that possibly be?"

He leaned closer, brushing her ear with his lips as he whispered, "A daughter."

Chills raced over her body. "Do you think we can make a girl? All the other Brethren children are boys."

Shrugging, Mike let his lips drift down her neck and across her collarbone. "I'm not sure. It's never been done before, but I'm willing to try until we get it right."

Arching her back to bring his lips closer to her breast, Mary Grace laced her fingers through his hair. "A daunting task. It could take years and years."

"One can only hope." He gave in to the temptation and drew upon the strawberry peak.

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Hours later they sat in the shallow water of the pool.

"Are you happy with your life?" Mike asked out of nowhere.

Mary Grace looked at him, sensing the vulnerability beneath his stoic façade. "I couldn't be happier," she answered truthfully.

"But you had to give up your career. You don't have your family near you. You can't just pick up the phone and call them, you can't drop over for afternoon tea, you can't meet your sisters..."

She placed her fingertips against his lips to stop the barrage of words. "I can see my husband every day. I can hold my son. I can live for many, many years. And maybe, one day, I'll be able to work with you again."

"Hold the phone. You are not exposing yourself to danger again."

"I'm a trained police officer. I shouldn't waste that training. I can help. I proved that in Gehenna."

"You damn near killed yourself in the process. I can't live with that kind of fear."

"Well what about me? I have to live with that kind of fear every time you go off chasing evil dudes."

"Women are built for that kind of worry."

"Bullshit."

"Men have a protective gene. We are physiologically predisposed to protecting our women and children."

"That is the biggest line I have ever heard." Having taken all she could, she lunged at him.

Mike caught her, twisting her around to sit in his lap, wrapping his arms around her body and securing her thrashing legs with his own. "Hold still, woman. You're going to hurt yourself."

"I'm going to hurt you!" she threatened.

"Oooh. I'm scared." He licked a drop of water that inched down the side of her neck. "Are you going to get out the cuffs again?"

Sputtering, she went from anger to laughter. "I have never put you in handcuffs."

Once the tension in her body eased away, he began his seduction anew. "No," he whispered. "But I'd be willing to try it if you want."

It's a funny thing about arguments...they always lead to make-ups. Fortunately, Alice Chapman didn't have plans for February 15<sup>th</sup>.

For those of you have read *Michael Angelo*, you'll recognize the characters in this short story. If you haven't and would like to know more about them, please look for *Michael Angelo* by Diane Merlin at All Romance ebooks, Fictionwise, Amazon, and your favorite book store.