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# Seduction of the Fae



RAQUEL TAYLOR

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*By*

*Raquel Taylor*



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## Chapter One

The room was amber lit by the yellow-orange glow of the waning sun. Its stone walls decorated with empty sconces for what looked to be a thousand candles. The expanse of the room was as large as a hotel's lobby, but the stone floor, combined with the walls, denoted castle more than hotel. There were no furnishings for the building had stood abandoned so long that time had sealed spider webs to the corners, the spiders that had made the webs long gone, and their children, and their children's children. It was an ancient place, as old as the town itself, and crafted purposefully to look older still. Standing within it gave the viewer an illusion of place without time. It made the world unsteady, as if a single step would fling them from the universe of cappuccinos and SUV's back to the medieval and beyond.

Large windows, intricately decorated with smoked glass, filtered sunlight and cast myriad shadows on the floor. As the light turned, waned, the shadows did a slow dance as the wind made love to the trees and the reflections of branches and leaves marked the stone. Long ago, cavorting, humping faeries had been painted upon the ceiling. The artist had been a genius and even though his work had faded

and peeled over time, the glint of wickedness in the eyes of the inhuman creatures fornicating above was still strong enough to make a cock hard and a pussy wet.

Saphira Morgan knew that personally. She could never get enough of looking at the faeries. The faeries were what had kept her coming back to the manor in the woods. How the manor had come to be was not exactly a mystery to her. She knew the rumors that circulated in town about the dread, unholy place. She knew about the Black Mask Chamber, but in all her endless searching she had never found it. A part of her was afraid to find it, because then she would have to admit to herself that she was drawn to this darkness for darkness's sake. That it was not all about paintings and easels and brushes and money, and more her own curiosity about what had taken place within the walls of the manor. Since her first visit, her nights had been filled with hot dreams she could scarcely recall beyond the inferno heat of them. She was awakened from her slumber night after night by her own savage moans.

The manor had only been abandoned for ten years, a brutal attempted murder within it causing all potential owners to flee its dark marble halls. The rumors of debauchery that had taken place within the last year of its occupancy, before the attempted murder, didn't help.

Despite its obvious beauty, no one wanted to buy the manor house. The last in the line of the family that had owned it for generations had gone insane within

its walls. One day he had disappeared completely along with several other prominent members of Blue Paradise. Eleven years of horror had made the manor an ugly place in the eyes of the community. In those eleven years, hundreds of ghost stories had grown and flourished about the magnificent house and the land around it.

Saphira looked up at the faeries again. She had chosen two in the far back corner to paint this time, a male and a female. He was golden and his hair was a shimmering length of platinum blond, with eyes like emeralds. The painter had graced him with the ethereal beauty of an angel, the golden kind that fought demons on battlefields between heaven and hell. He was aesthetic perfection, his every muscle tantalizingly carved to create the illusion of sensual flawlessness.

Massive butterfly wings stood at his back, large, midnight blue and gifted with several pale azure markings that reminded her, in shape, of tears. His lover was dark, the nipples on her full and rounded breast an unnatural golden color to the deep sepia of her complexion. Three sensuous coils of raven hair fell about her shoulders and down to her waist. Embedded with blue sapphires, the twists of thick hair were tied off at the ends with bands of gold. Her eyes were a captivating shade of blue that reminded Saphira of the darkness of the sea in a storm. A chain was wrapped around the dark faerie's wrist like a thick bracelet. It went on to drape, serpentine, around her tiny waist and then traveled sensuously up one

tawny tipped breast to encircle her throat. She laughed in the face of her partner, her eyes wanton and daring. Her legs were wrapped around his waist, their bodies meeting frantic mid-thrust. Her chains twined around him until they were both equally bound in lengths of sun-faded silver. Her wings were like the spider webs, sheer and gossamer, fragile.

Saphira applied another brush stroke to her own painting. Holding her breath with the sheer power of her concentration, she traced the line of the dark woman's shapely hips; the lock of her legs around his muscled ass. She spared one glance to the full-length mirror she had brought along for this painting. She took in her dark and tousled hair. The messy overalls complete with paint stains. Her own large, gray eyes filled with a certain measure of lust that she didn't even try to deny anymore. These two figures had made her the most money. These two were the ones she painted the most, favoring the intensity of their preternatural beauty and passion above all others. They had earned her a small name in the artistic community, a name that grew daily.

She had intended to paint herself into the picture. Yet, each time she drew the lines of her own figure she found herself painting over it, covering the empty space with lengths of chain going into nowhere or bound into studs on the painted lattice in the background. Her scenery was always different from that offered by the original artist. She did not steal his work, but paid homage to it and in every



painting she placed the words *Rousseau Manor*, so that those that viewed her work would know her inspiration. Saphira was not a thief. She was in love. She painted for that love even though a part of her felt as if she did not deserve love.

The cell phone in the pocket of her overalls rang. She hesitated only a moment before answering.

“Honey?” Ransom Morgan breathed into the phone.

“Yes?” she answered.

“You spend too much time in that rundown shit-hole. It can’t be healthy, Saphira.”

“I know Ransom,” she replied, her voice lacking in tone or inflection. She sounded dead even to her own ears. She knew he wouldn’t notice. “But the gallery opening is in three days. I need to have something new to show.”

“Something new?” Ransom chuckled, his voice only slightly irritated. “Is it another one of that black bitch and her blond stud?”

“Yes.”

“Then that is not something *new*, Saphira,” he said tiredly, as if he were talking to a slow-witted child. “When I let you buy that piece of shit house, I had no idea you were going to *move in*. People are starting to *talk*, Saphira, and the last thing I need is talk. There were rumors about that house already, and now you’ve become lost in it. There are as many rumors about *you* now. I used to hang out

there, before all the tragedies, when I was too young and stupid to know that Vincent's little orgies had a dangerous side. I want people to forget that. And for the most part, they have. You are my wife and I am running for mayor. Do you think people are going to vote for a mayor with a crazy wife?"

"No, Ransom," Saphira said woodenly, wishing fervently she had the nerve to simply hang up the phone.

"This is about Kara, isn't it?" he asked abruptly, his voice dark.

"No," Saphira said quickly, the sudden pain in her heart almost caused her to drop the phone.

"You said you had forgiven me, Saphira. You said we could go on."

"I did forgive you, Ransom," she said. *But you haven't stopped fucking her*, she wanted to point out, but didn't dare.

"Good," he said, some of the darkness and irritation ebbed out of his voice. "It's been a long time since I touched you, Saphira. My dick is hard just thinking about it. I've been daydreaming about being inside you all day long."

*Must be Kara's day off*, Saphira thought coldly. Kara Lacey, Ransom's secretary and his mistress. In her mind was the latest manila envelope, received only two weeks ago. There was never a postmark, never any writing on the envelope to prove that it had gone through the postal system. The envelope was delivered by hand, placed in the box at odd intervals, but always when Ransom was at work. In

it, there were pictures, each more inspired and pornographic than the last—her husband in a thousand or so carnal poses with his secretary. Little shutter-click images that brought an agony to her heart so great it felt like her very soul was crying. She had to blink to get the images out of her mind, and shudder to shake off the immediate pain thinking of them brought. She tried very hard to keep that pain out of her voice.

“I need to get back to work,” she whispered.

He sighed. “I know. So do I. But I was hoping that I could see you later. Not just feel your presence around the house and know that you are there. Not just pass you in the hall. Not just lie down next to you with the inches between us seeming like miles. I want to see *all* of you. Saphira, it’s been over a year since you let me touch you.”

Was she imagining the need she heard in his voice or her own body’s reaction to that need? Her nipples hardened at the desire she heard in his tone, the boldness of his inquiry. It had been so long since he’d talked to her like this. She could scarcely remember the last time. But her body remembered. She felt the tingle low in the pit of her stomach as flames sprouted from within her and flowered to her cunt. Was he being serious or was this more of cruel infidelity’s game?

He needed her, didn’t he? The people wouldn’t elect a divorcee to mayor. It

just wouldn't look right to their vision of the man who would lead their city. Their king had to be happy, the illusion of family intact.

He couldn't be serious, she surmised. A picture was worth a thousand words and she had so many pictures to disprove his interest in her. It occurred to her to wonder why she simply didn't leave him. She had enough evidence for any decent divorce attorney. She could leave Ransom and take everything from him, including his dream of mayor. But Saphira didn't want to do that. She didn't want to hurt her husband. As agonizing as it was to admit to herself, she still loved him. The fact that he so obviously no longer loved her hadn't changed that. And no matter how many times she told herself that she should abandon Ransom, her body told her otherwise on those endless nights when she laid next to him pretending to be asleep.

*How can I not hate you*, she wanted to scream, even as her cunt throbbed as she listened to his deep, interested breaths on the other end of the phone. *This is the cruelest game of all, Ransom.*

"I need to get back to work," she said again, flatly.

He growled—the sound animalistic—a wolf denied. Her body flooded with heat at the primal nature of the sound. She suppressed a low moan of answering desire. Her fingers clutched, knuckles white, around the phone. *Be strong, Saphira*, she told herself. *He's a liar.*

“Tonight,” he said, his voice a command. “Promise me we will talk about it, Saphira. And if talking goes well, we’ll *do* something about it.”

She stopped breathing for a moment, so surprised by his last words, by the entire tone of the conversation that it actually stole her breath away and left her speechless. She was even more shocked by her reaction to him. She had placed Ransom on a shelf in her mind, a high place where the pain that he’d caused her could not reach her easily. Since the betrayal, they walked the halls of the house they shared like ghosts. He worked, she worked, and they barely saw one another. He never seemed like he had minded before. What was this? And why did she long to surrender to it? Was she *that* lonely?

She didn’t think so. She could have returned the favor of his infidelity a thousand times, appeased her ego with a dozen screaming fans of her dark art. Some of them stood out in her mind, beautiful creatures so very impressed with her talent, drawn to her like moths to flame. At each gallery opening another one wanted to be painted, wanted to lie with the naughty faeries in her imagination. She had never even considered it.

“Ransom...” A part of her wanted to beg him to stop this cruelty, to remind him that she was not a game to be played when his current toy was indisposed. Oh, but there was another part of her that wanted so desperately to listen, and to believe.

“Don’t say no,” he said. It was not a request, nor was it a command. It was something in between and there was an undeniable amount of longing in it.

She closed her eyes. “Yes.”

The phone made an interruptive sound she was very familiar with. “Hold on,” he said as he clicked over to the other line. She waited only a heartbeat before hanging up. If he wanted to continue the conversation, he would call back. Otherwise she would see him, and deal with him, when she got home.

Her gaze traveled to her reflection in the mirror again, and her hand rose to comb her hair with her fingers in an absent gesture. Save for the gallery showings, she rarely cared what she looked like anymore. She cared now, despite herself. Her painted on overalls and spattered sneakers wouldn’t do. She wanted to beat Ransom home and at least make herself decent before this ‘meeting,’ whatever it would entail. She pictured herself crying in his lying face and throwing a dozen or so manila envelopes at him, the pictures scattering, falling like autumn leaves. There would be no pretending afterward, whatever happened. Saphira thought that maybe it was time.

She drew her fingers across the shapes of the faeries in her painting, her fingers coming away stained in liquid multi-color. She had painted them in a blood red field of roses, the lofty trellis-walls of an ivory edifice with only three sides around them. To these rose strewn walls were attached their chains and various

lashes. Lengths of chain reached for the sky, going off into nowhere, some twisting, free, in the sky. Other lengths of the silvery metal, reflecting the night's dark light, ran through the blood red flowers, sliding off the picture and into forever.

High above, the full moon illuminated the edifice, as within it, her faeries wrapped together, locked in a passion that she envied with every fiber of her being. On his head was a towering crown of brambles and multi-hued flora the petals encrusted with glittering diamonds. She wore a gossamer gown that was as sheer as a silver moonbeam against her dark flesh. A diamond stud stood out in the golden nipple of one exposed breast. A chain ran from the stud to the head of his cock, capturing the member in a metallic ring.

She knelt before him, her gossamer gown rising above her hips, the glint of the black silken hair between her thighs exposed to the illuminated night. Her hands were on his hips, her nails digging into the flesh there. Her face upturned to him, her full lips, as red as the flowers around them, pulled back into a smile that was as sly and wicked as it was desirous. His swollen flesh, choked and red from the constriction of the ring, was mere inches from her mouth.

"The next time I come here," she said softly to the figures in the painting, "I will probably have lost my husband. I have nowhere...nothing else." She had no family and her memory beyond the moment that she'd met Ransom Morgan one dark night in the forest had eluded her to the point where she no longer

considered it. Amnesia, the doctors had said. She ran her fingers over the blond hair of the male in the painting, leaving a trail of rain in the silvery locks. “What would you do, faerie queen, if you lost him? What if he betrayed you?”

With a sigh, Saphira began to gather up her brushes and return them to the box she used to transport the tools of her talent. The painting she would leave for the night. She did not worry about anything happening to it in the big empty house. Rousseau Manor was believed to be haunted and it was too close to dark fall for even the boldest adventurer. Even those courageous enough to search for the fabled Black Mask Chamber only dared do so during the day.

A sudden noise startled her and the brushes and paints fell, clattering to the floor. Saphira’s gaze flicked from the mess on the floor—paint running, colliding in a kaleidoscope of brilliant multi-color—to the shadowy foyer that led to the massive front door of the manor. This room, with its massive bay windows of smoky glass, provided ample light for her painting, while the rest of the manor was mostly shadows and whispers. She had never been afraid before but a little ghost of fear stirred within her breast as the sound faded into nothingness around her.

“Hello?” she cried into the shadows, her voice was a strangled whisper.

No one replied, and while that should have made her feel better, it did not. The shadows seemed to thicken in the foyer, to condense and breathe. Black inky coils of darkness twisted in on themselves in an effort to avoid the waning light



being cast from the small latticed windows that stood on both sides of the arched front door.

What Saphira wanted to do was bend down and hastily gather her paints. She wanted to rush through the suddenly ominous darkness and out into the light of the darkening day. But she couldn't move. Her feet seemed rooted to the floor, her sneakers taking a bath in a dozen colors.

"He built this house for magick's sake," a voice said coldly from the shadows. "He was as lustful as a satyr and when the fornications of humanity no longer satisfied him, he went looking elsewhere for his pleasures. He went looking in the *dark* places."

A man loomed up out of the darkness. He was a big man, dressed all in black. For the first few seconds of his birth from blackness, Saphira couldn't tell where he ended and night began. He had a stocking cap pulled over his head and all she could see of his face was the glitter of his impassioned blue eyes locked on her. His hands were covered in black leather gloves, skin tight and those hands constricted into fists in a pulsing rhythm. Thick black rubber boots tracked mud and fallen leaves into the room.

"Vincent Rousseau was an obscene man, a rapist and a murderer. He disappeared on my fourteenth birthday. He was my hero. I went to your gallery this mornin'. I've seen your paintings. I've compared your work and his work in my

mind, and you do him justice, woman. Such lust in your brushstrokes, such texture to the quality of your painted skin. The figures almost breathe from your hands. But you're missing the key."

"The key?" Saphira squeaked, her mind desperately trying to decide if this was some terrible nightmare or not. He took a lumbering step toward her and she stumbled back. Had she somehow fallen asleep while painting? Was she even now laying on the floor safe and sound while her mind spun out of control in dream darkness? It would certainly explain the oddity of Ransom's phone call she desperately rationalized. Her husband wanting her after a year of lying and philandering was definitely fantasy material.

The man took another step. There was a fervent, greedy *need* in that footfall. It brought him ever closer to her. She heard the knuckles in his clenching fists crack. The sound was too loud in the empty house. It echoed. Never, even in her worst nightmares, had she met a creature so menacing. Suddenly, Ransom and his wants and needs were very far away from her. Survival rode high in her mind.

The man chuckled as if he could smell her fear and liked the scent very much. The sound was low and dark as the world turned slowly from the orange of sunset to the somber tones of night.

"Yeah...*blood*. Blood is the key," he said. "I was fourteen years old when I tried to open the way to the Black Mask Chamber. My father told me about it, you

see. In the middle of his drunken ravings while he beat my mother and I nearly to death. He told me about the things he saw happening in this house, the things he heard. What the rich folks did when they thought no one was watching, or no one of any consequence anyway. He told me about the blood. It would have worked, but they caught me. Not before I cut the little bitch I dragged here with me.”

He looked up at the ceiling as if in awe, his eyes tracing greedily over the lines and angles of the dark faerie and her lover. “I did it for the faerie queen.”

“Faerie queen?” Saphira whispered, her gaze flicking to her own painting. Full lips brushed the head of the cock protruding there. Just the tiniest of kisses, a tender tease.

*That is not what I painted*, she thought wildly. She had left space between them, a bare inch, but space for the illusion of a kiss...the anticipation of the culminated desire. Those lips were too close now, touching flesh, tasting it. *What the hell?* She thought. The man took two shuffling steps closer to her. His movement drew her attention away from the painting completely.

“You’ve met her,” he said darkly, “don’t say that you ain’t. You know where the Black Mask Chamber is too. The Lady told me so. She also told me that they rejected you from their faerie court for being a frigid prude. But you don’t look like no prude to me.”

“The faeries...aren’t...*real*,” Saphira said, backing further away in the

enormous room. She was leaving multi-toned footprints in her desperate wake. She remembered him, just the ghost of a memory on her consciousness. She saw his face as it had been in the ten-year-old newspaper mug shot and remembered the clipping she had read in the library when she had first become enamored of the manor and sought to discover its secrets. Charlie Newcastle, fourteen years old. Blond hair, brown eyes that raged from the page with the same fanaticism with which they stared at her now. He had cut a girl, injured her badly. She had barely survived the many knife wounds that he had inflicted. Her face had never been the same, ravaged by the cruelty of his blade. *Further Madness Strikes Rousseau Manor*, the newspaper clipping had read. *Girl Found Nearly Dead. Caretaker's Son, Fourteen-Year-Old Charlie Newcastle, Charged With Attempted Murder*. He had bled her like a pig.

With the dawning of recognition, Saphira's horror increased a thousand-fold. Gone completely was the startled deer in headlights sensation that had previously overtaken her. They had locked Newcastle up in Sunnyvale Sanitarium and thrown away the key. Even the fact that he had been a minor at the time the crime was committed had not swayed the jury in their heavy sentence of life behind the sanitarium walls.

"You know who I am," he said, cocking his head to one side like a wolf scenting blood.

She shook her head in denial, her mind seeking a way out, her thoughts

running through the halls of the house, searching for a place to hide should she be lucky enough to make a break for it and manage to get out of the room. There was nowhere to go but up, she thought. She couldn't get past him to the front door and she wasn't brave or stupid enough to try. Behind her, around one corner laid the magnificent mahogany staircase that was one of the most beautiful features of the house. The stairs were made of marble and veined in gold. The wood had faces carved in it, the faces of the cavorting creatures on the ceiling above. She had found her faeries there; the faerie king was the face at the head of the first banister, his queen held the space by the wall, the other faeries fanned out behind them, spiraling upwards in mahogany into the heart of the house.

He reached up and tugged at the stocking cap and Saphira wanted to scream at him to stop. As long as she hadn't seen his face, as long as she couldn't positively identify him, she knew that she had a good chance for surviving whatever horror this was. As the cap came off and his face was exposed to the few rays of sunlight that hadn't been completely gobbled up by the darkness, her chances of survival plummeted in her mind. She stared into the face of Charles Newcastle. Neither time nor the sanitarium had been kind. He was only twenty-four years old but he looked twice that. His blue eyes bulged wildly in his head. His face had a thick, unnatural Neanderthal look to it. His features were pockmarked with the ravage of some disease.

She screamed as he bared blunt teeth in a yellow snarl that was supposed to be a grin. “The Lady was pretty. Prettiest woman I’ve seen in a long time. But she ain’t as pretty as you, Mrs. Morgan.”

*What lady?* Saphira thought. *Why are you here? What do you want?* But she didn’t ask any of those things. Instead, she turned and ran. The rest of the room was a blur as she heard the lumbering beast of a man snarl and come after her. Her heart was pounding so hard in her chest she thought it would break through the fragile cage of her ribs. She could hear the sound of her paint-wet sneakers slapping against the floor, each frantic footfall louder and louder as it echoed in the empty room.

“I’m gonna fuck you, Mrs. Morgan,” he promised. “The Lady said I could and she is Ambassador for them all. She said she came to me because I had the right idea all along. I was just too young then to carry it out. All the ambition in the world, but as wet behind the ears as a newborn pup, you see. Kinda funny if you think about it. But I ain’t no pup now. The Lady gave me the keys to my prison, and here I am free...full grown and ready to reap my rewards.”

Saphira’s blood turned to white ice in her veins at his words. She exploded into the adjoining chamber that led to the stairs. Her wet sneakers slid dangerously on the smooth polished stone that was the floor of this new room. She knew she couldn’t afford to fall, that all would be lost if she fell. She managed to

keep her footing and propelled herself toward the glittering marble that would lead to sanctuary. She could hide in a room up there if she was fast enough; maybe climb out of a window onto the roof. She knew the house well. If she was fast enough she could get away. If she was fast enough she could hide until someone came to find her...someone who was not insane.

But she wasn't fast enough, and she knew that the moment she felt his fingers slipping across the material of her overalls. She was so close, so close to the stairs. She went crashing to the floor beneath the heavy weight of him. Her head hit the hard marble of the first stair and the world winked whitely with shades of gray even darker than the night that threatened the house.

She couldn't breathe beneath the crush of his weight on her chest. She couldn't even muster up enough air to scream. Her attempts were met with quiet, sickening gasps, which she heard echoed mocking back throughout the house. He leered down at her, his face too close. The reek of his breath was pungent and horrible.

"Do you believe in magick, Mrs. Morgan?" he asked. "Not that fake magician's hat trick shit. The *real* thing. M...a...g...i...c...k."

Did he want her to believe in magick, Saphira wondered. Would he let her live if she said that she did? She knew that he would not. The only reason that his last victim had lived was because he had grown tired of cutting her and had simply

waited for her to bleed to death.

The knife loomed up out of nowhere, huge, thick and serrated. The kind of knife Saphira imagined that hunters used for butchering the meat that they hunted. It glittered in the darkness, caught in the white light of the new risen moon. She whimpered at the sight of it.

“I asked you a question, bitch,” he said.

Saphira shook her head, as if in that motion she could make the knife and the man go away. “I don’t...I don’t believe in magick,” she whispered.

He thought about that, his eyes winking silver from the reflection of the weapon in his hand. “I spent one night here and I knew that magick was real. Nothing else mattered after that. Not my daddy’s drinkin’. Not my mama’s whorin’. Nothing. Because there were things in this world so beautiful they were worth dying for and killing for just to touch. Vincent Rousseau knew that too. That’s why he built this house. That’s why he painted the pictures. He was in love. I watched you paint just now, woman. I saw the love-light in your eyes.”

Saphira’s head throbbed agonizingly. She felt the dampness at the heart of her pain as it slid down her face and then felt the sting of it in her eyes. A sob escaped her. The blood leaked across her cheeks and she heard the wetness of the first drop hitting the floor.

He twisted the straps of her overalls into one meaty fist and used the knife



to sever the cloth. She fought him on instinct, her hands hooking into claws and going for his eyes, her legs kicking beneath his awesome weight as she struggled to breathe enough to scream her horror into the night.

He grinned, a mad dog's grin. With his free hand he grabbed her by the throat and squeezed painfully. Panic increased Saphira's struggles. She raked her nails across his face, digging furrows into his skin. Her legs beat a dull and painful tattoo on unyielding stone. His grin never faltered.

"The Lady said that you would be reluctant to give up the information," he said as her world turned sickeningly, near completely gray. Her thrashing limbs slowed and the sound of her own heartbeat reverberated distant in her ears. "She said that you wouldn't share the chamber with me as your guest, not like Rousseau at all. He shared. He held great parties in this house and he shared his magick with his guests. The Lady said that you hadn't even shared it with your own husband, preferring to keep the pleasure all to yourself. She said it wouldn't matter. All I had to do was kill you, exact location be damned. My mistake with Sarah was that the little bitch wouldn't die fast enough, and someone had watched me drag her off. I won't make any mistakes with you. I never said you'd be alive when I fucked you, Mrs. Morgan. Die quietly now."

Saphira stared straight up, unable to move, unable to breathe, her life falling away from her. Distantly, she heard the madman cutting away her clothes, felt the

stagnant air of the house on her newly exposed skin. She caught the barest movement out of the corner of her darkening vision. A thing so subtle, approaching death almost caused her to miss it. The mahogany head on the banister, the head of the faerie king, positioned to gaze off at the far wall on the other end of the room...was looking at her, the head turned at an impossible angle, the eyes meeting her own. And those eyes...*blinked*.

The floor moved beneath her. The madman shrieked. And Saphira and her attacker plummeted into darkness.

## Chapter Two

Ransom Morgan had not wanted to purchase the manor house. Saphira had insisted upon having it. He would have done anything, *anything* to make things right between them again...

He stood outside of Rousseau Manor in the light of a crescent moon and a million stars set on a velvet backdrop of smooth obsidian black. He raked a hand through his hair and stared at the manor house. Saphira had not come home. The mixture of misery, disappointment and slow burning rage clenched his hands into fists at his sides.

Ransom grabbed his cell phone from his shirt pocket and dialed her number again. The sound of the vain ringing echoed in his ear. He heard no answering ring from within the manor; yet, her car was sitting right beside his in the driveway. He tossed the phone away, heard it tumbling through branches and brush to fall to the surrounding forest floor.

He stared at Rousseau Manor like it was a living, breathing enemy, a sentient being that had stolen his wife from him. The square window eyes, with inlaid crystalline glass, looked intently back with certain malevolence. The last

time Ransom had even considered entering the lavish marble halls, he'd been twenty years old. That had been ten years ago. Even when he'd purchased the manor for Saphira, he had not gone inside. It was not ghosts he feared, but *memories*. His reminiscences of what had occurred in the opulence within. Liquor soaked images of bare flesh cavorted along the fringes of his mind. A soft, sultry ring of laughter accompanied the recollections.

His flesh tingled like many hands, far more skilled than his own had been then, were touching him. His body reacted to those touches like they were real and right now. Perspiration stood out on his brow. His cock hardened—so fast it was almost painful—to the consistency of smooth stone. His heartbeat quickened.

Ransom steeled himself against the onslaught of the past, resisted the urge to bury his hands in his pants and massage his aching dick. He moved up the stone cobbled walk toward the magnificent mahogany front door to the manor. The grisly head of the goblin at its center watched him come, its hollow eyes darkly contemplative.

The heavy door slid open for him without the need to trawl in his pocket for the extra set of keys. The silence within the immense foyer was ominous and engulfing. “Saphira?” he called. She did not answer. The silence seemed to thicken around that ominous lack of reply.

The giggle was soft, throaty and faintly reminiscent of the one that had

floated through his mind moments before. His first thought was that he had imagined it like the other, but faintly, deliberately, it repeated from the inky shadows. “Saphira?” he called again and this time there was annoyance in his voice. Rousseau Manor made him uncomfortable. He did not appreciate her playing with him here. Still, it was the first hint of laughter he had heard from her in a long time and a part of him rejoiced at her willingness to play the game. Perhaps, after all, there was a chance for forgiveness for a crime he could scarcely remember.

He moved through the foyer toward the immense chamber beyond it. Moonlight shone through the arched windows casting the room in silver shadow. Ransom barely glanced at the marvel of the gorgeously immoral faeries etched on the great walls. They were his wife’s addiction, Vincent Rousseau’s insanity, and he did not share their passion. He refused to acknowledge the faeries in any way. He had seen enough of them in his own home, being curious enough to remove the stained canvass from each of her latest masterpieces when she brought them home before her showings. There were some that she was more passionate about than others and unconsciously his mind sought out those faeries amongst the chaotic sprawl, flicker-quick, the blue one, and the two she labeled the king and the queen of them all.

His gaze locked on the spilled paints, the small set of footprints and the larger more ominous set that followed. A chill touched his heart, the certain

knowledge that something was horribly wrong.

He walked toward the mess of scattered paints and brushes. He saw the evidence of sliding in the heavy liquid—the unmistakable signs of a frantic chase, the multi-toned prints leading to the room beyond. “Saphira!” he called again and again; he was assaulted by the sound of a low, sensuous giggle, the casually wicked quality of which totally belied the frantic evidence of chase before his eyes.

His flesh tinged with the sudden sensation of being watched, *inspected*. The feeling was so strong that it turned him in a slow circle in the room, his eyes studying the many shades of the darkness of the shadows. The room stretched out before him, undeniably empty. *What the hell?* he thought.

*I simply do not like this house*, he told himself in the several breathless seconds where the strange sensual giggling did not repeat. His mind flooded with images of cuffs and collars of strange black-masked figures in satin robes, the hot flesh denied until the moment of their choosing. The recollections of pleasure, pain, and his own willing surrender hit him like a titan wave. Want came with those images, undeniable, near savage want. He fought down again the urge for his hand to stray to his aching, engorged cock and wondered what the hell was wrong with him. Rousseau Manor was only a house, Vincent Rousseau and his orgies were long gone, a thing of legend and times past.

The feeling of disquiet about the house and Saphira’s refusal to appear

before him safe and sound made Ransom move. He took the all too familiar room in long strides following the trail of smeared footprints into the room beyond. The incredibly lavish staircase led upwards into darkness. There was paint on the stairs, little tiny drops of scattered red paint. He stared at it, even as his heart grew cold at the sight; he refused to think that it was blood. The faerie busts on the dark gloss banister stared in his general direction, the pupil-less eyes in their unearthly beautiful faces blank and uninterested. He recognized them with a purposeful disinterest, Saphira's king and queen of faeries.

The voices were phantom whispers, soft like the tinkling of very small bells from far away, but irrefutable. The whispers came from behind him and the quiet rush of them spun Ransom around. He moved back into the room behind him. Silence met him there. There was nothing in the room but faeries created by a madman who was rumored to have gone completely insane shortly after painting them—a man who was supposed to be a corpse in a fabled black chamber somewhere within the house, his body laying with the corpses of several of his victims.

"There *is* no Black Mask Chamber," Ransom said without realizing that he was speaking aloud. "I spent a year in this fucking house. I've seen all its mysteries. The chamber doesn't exist."

He was being watched again. Watched by many, many pairs of eyes. The

sensation caused his skin to crawl.

“He’s sooo beautiful, General Dragonsreign. *Must* we kill him?”

The words were soft, but crystal clear. There was a definitive shifting in the walls around him, a subtle liquidity of motion that drew his attention to the pictures of the beautiful faeries etched there. *They* were staring at him, a plethora of eyes, in every shade imaginable from pitch black to violent violet. All turned toward him.

Ransom’s entire mind stuttered in cold disbelief. The faeries before him had abandoned the passionate revelry of their varied erotic poses. Eyes luminous with shades of something that definitely looked like sentience were locked on him with considerable interest.

Saphira’s latest painting lay on its easel and even the faerie king and queen had abandoned their ardent positioning. Their gazes were trained on him, a slight tinge of malevolence to the combined weight of their regal stares. *Impossible*, Ransom thought, *my mind, the darkness and the shadows, are playing tricks on me...* “Saphira!”

The faeries were the one thing about Rousseau Manor with which Ransom was unfamiliar. He had abandoned Vincent’s company before the creatures had been painted. Ransom was aware of the faeries due to the scandal and legend that was attached to the house. His only association with them was within the finely



crafted worlds captured in Saphira's paintings—and he *hated* them...each and every winged beauty to which she applied her brush, male and female, he was indiscriminate. He despised her passion and love for the Rousseau faeries, the obvious carnal desires in her every brushstroke— desire that she denied him.

A chaotic wind-whisper talk moved all around him, the sounds of trees in a terrible storm. He glanced back to the window behind him to make sure that a storm had not begun suddenly after he'd entered the house. The night was still and silent, the moon bright, the sky a perfect, cloudless black. And yet the whisper wind stirred within the manor house, many voices, quiet and indistinct, all around him.

“Who is here?” he asked the vast and empty house.

The wind roared, and Ransom took an unconscious step toward the wall of faeries. He had mastered the art of lying to other people in order to gain his carefully garnered political position. He was, however, not very good at lying to himself. From the moment he had stepped onto the cobbled driveway Rousseau Manor had felt wrong to him somehow—thoroughly unlike his previous visit when he'd purchased the house.

His first thought, as the wind picked up and the voices hidden within became unmistakable again, was to abandon the house. But he couldn't do that. Saphira's car was here—that meant that she was here—somewhere. He wasn't

leaving without her.

“Oh yes, he definitely *must* die,” a voice came. It was a dark tone, deep, decidedly masculine, and filled with nothing short of loathing. The disembodied words rippled through the air laden with power and authority; he’d not imagined how easy it would be to turn his blood cold.

He took several more steps toward the still picture chaos of interconnected bodies that was the wall nearest him. Now that he was looking at them, riveted by them in fact, he could see the source of his wife’s addiction. The faerie tale creatures were truly stunning. Saphira’s beautiful paintings had captured the ethereal beauty of her subjects perfectly, but etched on the walls before him, they seemed so much more real than they had been while trapped upon her canvass. In the shadows of the moonlight the faeries before him seemed to be caught in the instant between one word and the next, one *breath* and the next.

The creature that he thought of as the ‘blue’ faerie captured the whole of Ransom’s attention. Male, with a languid mane of baby blue hair, he stood before Ransom and glared at him with eyes that same soft blue color poised beneath wickedly arched brows. The brows were also that same compelling shade. Deep amber butterfly wings graced his back. Pale and muscular, a sardonic smile graced the perfection of the faerie’s face. Ransom reached out testing his reality—trying to dispel the ridiculous idea that this *thing* was looking at him, glowering at him, in

fact, with some malevolent consciousness.

His questing hand fell on the painted creature's chest grazing one flat, blue male nipple. The shock of warm, heated contact caused him to jerk his fingers away like his hand was on fire. It wasn't just the heat, but the undeniable *hardening* of the nipple beneath his fingers, that sent him stumbling back in disbelief. The faerie caught him before he fell, one pale arm reaching impossibly from the wall and grasping his flailing wrist. The grip was vice-like. Horrified, Ransom watched those cold blue eyes narrow and the sardonic smile on the creature's face lengthen into an outright sneer.

The walls behind the faeries turned fathomless black and from within that swirling, spiraling blackness shapes writhed and came steadily to the fore. A creature slid from within the darkness. It's thick, long, meat rending claws catching onto the edge of the faerie's flesh as it pulled itself out of permanent night. Small and hunched, it grinned at Ransom with sharp yellow teeth. No more than three feet tall, its beady black eyes, devoid of white and perfectly round, skewered him. Its body was squat and round, twisted and wrapped in emerald green leaves in lieu of clothing. It had no discernable legs as it slid out of the darkness to plop, almost wetly on the floor and slid toward him, using its bulky arms to drag itself in his direction.

More of the twisted little nightmares, dozens of them, poured forth as

Ransom struggled with his captor. He might have screamed, may have considered the sublime release of the option, but his throat locked and the ability was lost to him so great was his horror. The faerie held him effortlessly as they came.

\*

General Marcalic Dragonsreign of the Mandrake Clan stared down at the human that struggled in vain against his grasp. Straight chestnut hair fell into satin curls to the nape of the man's neck. His wide amber eyes were the color of dandelion wine. Perfectly sculpted, sensuous lips fought the urge to turn into a twisted 'o' of horror. Marcalic's assessment of the creature wandered along purely carnal lines, much to his chagrin. His Trow Lieutenants hit the smooth floor and moved steadily to surround their human prey. Behind them came the Peg-Leg-Jacks. The Jack Soldiers appearance—each with a single eye, arm, leg, toe, and finger, all perfectly centered and set upon a body covered with pitch black hair and royal blue feathers—seemed to cause much terror in captured human. Marcalic, despite his great and justified anger at the man, could not suppress his grin.

Marcalic studied the struggling human as he had been studying him from the moment that he'd been foolish enough to enter Rousseau Manor. He looked into wide tawny eyes. His gaze swept over the mane of chestnut hair, the golden highlights reflected by the moon. Skin tanned by the sun, tall and finely built. It was his face that captured Marcalic. His visage was a fine and sculpted thing that

bespoke of the physical perfection of the fae.

“What is your name?” he asked the human. His flesh still burned from where the man had touched him. It was an annoyance. The human was supposed to be dead already.

The man stopped looking at the trows and the jacks long enough to clap startled eyes upon him. His mouth moved, but no words came out. Amused, Marcalic drew him closer.

“Are you *afraid*, human?” Marcalic asked, when the man was close enough to smell. The scent of him was slightly unnatural, biological things mixed with chemicals that Marcalic could not recognize, but tantalized him anyway. There was sandalwood in the scent, the freshness reminding him of nature and the wild things that he had cavorted with and made his toys. “You were not afraid when you *stole* from us.”

“*Saphira*,” the human said when he could finally manage to speak.

Rage suffused Marcalic at the mention of that name. The comeliness of the man’s features, the seductiveness of his scent, gave that rage pause. He found did not want to kill the human...yet. Instead, he drew the man closer. His struggling body bumped along the weakening magickal boundary. The heat of his skin reached Marcalic through the barrier and through the man’s clothing. “This is just between *you* and I,” he said, coldly. “Your *name*?”

“He has eyes like sweet honey,” a pretty blonde sylph from another, lesser, nest breathed appreciatively. He glared at her and she was quiet. Marcalic shook the creature in his grasp until the man’s teeth clicked repeatedly and rhythmically with the power of it. The trows and the jacks tittered. Beneath their wicked-edged laughter, he could sense the radiating waves of their confusion—understood the silent question that was currently plaguing all of them. *General Dragonsreign never hesitates. Why was the human thief still alive?* Marcalic could not answer the silent question of the man’s continued existence—why he had not let the trows and jacks have him.

“R-Ransom,” the man replied. “What have you *monsters* done...done with my wife?” His amber gaze, though suitably horrified, was bold with the power of the question, his *need* to know the answer.

*Fascinating*, Marcalic thought. Beside him, two faeries lay in an intimate pose interrupted by what was supposed to have been the murder of the man called Ransom. With his free hand, Marcalic removed the collar from the golden throat of the female. It was made of metal, interlaid with a fine working of leather and diamond stud. A weighty lock hung from it. The lock gave when he touched it rattling the heavy length of chain.

He drew the collar around the man’s throat, amused by his vain thrashings enough to laugh out loud as the lock clicked into place. He let him go then.

Ransom stumbled back and part of the length of chain hit the floor in the small sea of trows and jacks.

Marcalic watched as Ransom touched the heavy collar around his throat and took several steps back from the sea of fae creatures that surrounded him.

“*I want my wife!*” he shouted. He looked only at Marcalic and the challenge in that frantic and enraged golden stare rocked the faerie, heated him, and he couldn’t tell if it was lust or rage that held him.

“*Kill him,*” he told his warriors.

Tittering still, the small army converged on the human. Marcalic watched to see what he would do. He expected him to run.

Ransom did not run. As the trows and the jacks swept over him, barreled into him, claws raking at his flesh, teeth seeking to rend and tear and disembowel, the human fought the encroaching wave. The fae soldiers plowed into him, tried to drive him to the floor where he would make better prey for their smaller inhuman forms. They leapt at him, tried to use their combined weight to bear him to the ground. Ransom battered them with his fists as they came. His voice was a mad roar filled with the determination to survive. His hands flew wildly, and yet, surely, connecting with body after body, sending black forms sailing back into the savage throng. In the floor of the cursed manor he sought to kill the attacking fae weaponless and alone.

Suitably impressed, Marcalic called his warriors off their prey. He grabbed the length of chain and pulled it taut. Ransom fought back, gripping the heavy metal collar and seeking to tear it off. His clothes were in shreds on his golden frame, ripped by claws and teeth. He had managed, during the short scuffle, to suffer no serious wounds.

Moving back completely behind the magickal barrier, Marcalic pulled and Ransom came. He hit the barrier hard—face first. Marcalic held him there, nose pressed against the paint, struggling for freedom. The tittering trows and jacks danced around his feet, stripping away his remaining clothing for the sheer humiliating sport of it.

When he was naked as the day he had been born from his human mother's loins, Marcalic pulled the chain tighter and the human slid slowly through the magickal barrier and *into* the wall. He did manage to scream then and the Fae General found great delight in the sound. Yes, the thief's death could wait perhaps for a small bit.



## Chapter Three

“Saphira Morgan,” a soft, female voice whispered almost teasingly. “Open your eyes.” Beneath that teasing tone laid a command, and Saphira knew she’d better obey it. Even through the soft and merciful veil of sleep, her mind registered that this was a voice used to being obeyed. Her eyes snapped open.

There were people in the room, so many people, and her heart was so filled with joy at the sight of them that, at first, she missed their many oddities. Rousseau Manor flooded back to her in waves, the stink of the madman’s breath, the glint of the knife in the moonlight. Where was he? How had she escaped and come to this wonderful place of golden light and people? She reached up to touch her head, feeling only the faintest memory of the painful throbbing there. She touched the tiny black mask on her face, traced its outline with shaking fingers, felt the jewels around its satin-soft edges.

“Where am I?” she whispered to herself as her mind tried to make sense of what she was seeing. A low pipe played in the background, the musician obscured from her by the surrounding throng. The high walls around her were gold; the floor beneath her feet was comprised of gold ingots and between them lay

encrusted glittering rubies. Velvet crimson drapes fell from a high ceiling that seemed to go on up into forever, the tassels made of woven silver. She tried to look at everything at once. Her mind couldn't capture the entirety and instead made stills of different vignettes; the baby blue satin waterfall that fell at the opposite end of the chamber; ornate pillars in the walls, open spaces to the world beyond them, between the pillars the night was an impossible shade of amethyst, devoid of moon and stars, but complete with puffy, translucent, amber clouds.

A perfumed wind stirred within the chamber—lilac and some scent she could not name—stroked the drapes into satin ripples and made her overtly conscious that she stood before the crowd completely naked. A startled gasp escaped her. Her hands moved to cover herself. They froze. The gentle movement of the butterfly wings of one of the...creatures...before her stilled her breath in her throat.

"I have painted you," she whispered in disbelief. He towered over her and his hair was as blue as the waterfall that fell in the background. His wings were stunning amber, etched at the edges in tangerine. He was all muscle, hard flesh, wide shoulders and tapered waist. The tiny tattoo of some nameless animal on his stomach just above his navel moved with his breathing as though alive. She had tried countless times to capture it and could never get it quite right when she'd painted him.

She reached out and touched it, her hands grazing over the warmth of his flesh; firm muscles jumped beneath her fingertips. He did not move, but stood boldly beneath her scrutiny as he had done many, many times before. His flesh was as pale as milk, without freckle or vein. Only his cock reacted, it rose in answer to her touch, the head blossoming a royal blue. Four stud ornaments, delicate, silver, with little rings intertwined and looped through each, pierced the head of his cock. The metal studs made a ring around the hood of his dick and twinkled in the light of the chamber. Harsh silver contrasted beautifully with the royal blue of the engorged flesh in which it was embedded. Tiny rings were gifted to each of the silver studs. They hung against the swollen blue flesh and jangled lightly as his cock swelled. To Saphira the combination of hot flesh and metal looked like a strange and compelling flower. She resisted the urge to draw her hand down the hard muscles of his stomach to touch them.

She ended up biting her lip. Hard. The pain forced her to remember herself. She jerked her hand away from the fleshy impossibility that stood before her. She looked up into his eyes beneath a black cat mask complete with tangerine feathers. “I died, didn’t I?” she asked. “That son-of-a-bitch killed me!”

*And this is the most perverse version of Heaven imaginable...*

“You are not dead,” the faerie said. He smiled. It was perfect, teeth like pearls, as white as his alabaster skin. “This is not some twisted version of whatever

afterlife you believe in. You are very much alive, Saphira.”

She liked the way he said her name. There was a heat in it, an intimacy in the way that it rolled off his tongue. It was as if he were tasting her with that single word, and savoring what he tasted. Her body shuddered in wild reaction. Her nipples hardened, grew the slightest ache.

In his hand he held a thin circle of silver. Its only marking was a rose design, complete with emerald stems and onyx thorns. He raised this before her and it opened. He stepped toward her and all the space between them was gone. Her aching nipples brushed against the hard flesh of his ribcage, the jolt electric enough to tear a longing moan from her. His hands were in her hair, shifting the dark mass, and then his gift was set about her throat almost too tight. She swallowed against the tight metal, her head reeling as his fingers stroked the delicate hairs on the back of her neck. She closed her eyes, his familiar caress moved across her jaw and cheek. His touch ceased. She opened her eyes searching for him but he wasn't there.

Instead, tiny living things of throbbing gold danced amongst the throng of creatures standing around her. Roughly the size of quarters, they flittered frantically in the empty spaces within the crowd, their tiny bodies providing a low throbbing illumination. Each minuscule movement left a luminous trail in the empty air that slowly dissipated behind the little light creatures, creating

multifarious standing patterns in the chamber, beautiful random designs that faded slowly before her startled eyes to be replaced with others.

A soft sound caught her attention and she turned toward the walls of the chamber. Lining those walls, cuffed to them by way of arm restraints tied to bars in the wall and resembling black opera gloves were several faeries. She concentrated on one, a raven-haired creature with tawny skin. Written above her head in carefully placed diamonds was the word: *Submit*. The buckles from the odd gloves scraped the floor in sterling silver as she struggled and writhed, her violet wings fluttered dancing behind her. She tugged and fought against the gloves, thrashed and pulled as a small black machine positioned behind her, complete with flat round paddle, waged war against the rosy cheeks of her ass.

Her struggles were in vain, for no matter how much she twisted and turned her aching flesh in seeking escape, the machine compensated, adjusted itself, and never missed a step in its rhythmic beat. Her body spasmed with each blow, her legs spread wide with as much anticipation as rejection of the pain. The sound, and her cries seemed muted somehow as the hard paddle met her flesh. It was like watching television with the sound turned down. Though the faerie was not far away, Saphira could not hear her.

There were several faeries, at odd intervals along the wall, being punished thusly. Along with them were statues, sitting on ivory pillars, caught in various

states of movement, frozen in time. It took Saphira a moment to recognize that these statues were breathing and that their state of immobility was something of their own doing. Along with the acknowledgement that the things standing so still and graceful before her were alive, she took in their stunning and unnatural tails. Magnificent multi-hued peacock feathers and foxtails jutted from several upturned asses. She glimpsed the impaling stalks of phallic intrusion embedded between their ass cheeks, holding the marvelous tails in place.

A creature bumped into her and she looked down into its bizarre, smiling face. It was carrying a tray filled with dandelions and this it offered to her. It was female, but it was distinctly not a faerie, its face was too round, its body small and squat where the other forms around her were lithe and graceful. Still, there was an odd beauty to its broad face, the slant of incredible moss green eyes—pupil-less beneath the frame of the delicate black mask—and the silken length of its braided red hair, below a small dark cap. It wore drab brown clothing that bespoke of servitude in a chamber filled with others wearing far more lavish regalia, where they wore clothing at all.

Saphira reached for the tray, her fingers brushing along the smooth stems and petals of the offered dandelions. She selected one, her fingers curling around the stem and drew it away from the others. The little creature tilted its head in pleased acknowledgement of her acceptance of its gift and darted off into the

crowd.

Saphira wandered through the crowd and it became obvious she was being funneled to one end of the chamber. She would catch small glimpses of the blue faerie in the crowd ahead of her.

Then his voice was in her ear. “We had cause to wonder when you would call upon us, Mistress. It has been so long, and our captivity...so very dull these last few years. Even Rousseau’s vile tortures were of some interest.”

Yet by the time she turned her head only the scent of him remained.

“You’ve been willful and it will be satisfying to see you punished.” He peek-a-booped away from her again, drawing her even deeper into the milling throng. A long gong sounded from not too far away. The noise stilled the chamber, even the rushing waterfall seemed to mute itself in tone behind it.

“Stop playing and bring her forward, Marcalic,” came the siren call of the same voice that had wakened her into this strange place.

A tiny length of chain snaked from the collar he had placed around her throat, the metal like that of a necklace, less a bond than a decoration. He slid from the crowd, grasped that length, and pulled her forward. Ogling faeries parted for them like the Red Sea then closed behind. Their skin tones came in a rainbow of colors from dark to very fair. All wore intricate cat-like masks, each more gaudy than the last, but overwhelmingly, no matter what bangle or dangle, no matter

how many silver and gold and varying jewels, the masks were smooth black satin.

Their gazes beneath the masks raked over her body. Here and there as she moved amongst them, she felt the slightest brush against her skin and the heat of their touches consumed her, continuing the low stirring in her belly that the marvel that was Marcalic had begun. They found the trail of a crimson carpet and her feet sunk in the softness of the material as she walked.

Saphira glanced again at the purple sky beyond the golden pillars as thunder rolled and a streak of jade lightning cast across the firmament. Her gasp of amazement was audible in the quiet of the chamber, just beneath the low playing pipe.

“It is a mystical illusion,” Marcalic said without turning around. “We shared the same sky once upon a time. That sky is the culmination of human fantasy.”

Saphira peered around the wide expanse of his back to see the gold and red velvet thrones awaiting her. In those thrones sat the King and Queen of the faeries, as she had painted them countless times, in stunning life. The faerie queen lounged in her marvelous seat, her head thrown over one golden arm and her legs thrown over the other. Dark hair, twisted into three braids, glittering with diamonds, draped the floor. Beside her, her king chose a more regal demeanor. He sat ramrod straight, naked as the day he’d been born. A scepter of dark wood, complete with thorns and flowers was grasped tightly in one hand. Saphira’s gaze was drawn to



the harsh clamps on his nipples and the strip of metal running through them. Claw-like, the clamps bit into the hardened flesh of his nipples, demanding their complete rosy attention. The bar between them seemed heavy, pulling just enough.

Saphira could do nothing but stare at the two regal creatures. They were so beautiful. The tiny black masks etched across their faces did little to hamper that beauty. She felt Marcalic's hand in her hair as he pressed her to the floor and she went to her knees willingly enough beneath the gentle pressure.

"It took you ten long years to come to us, Saphira Morgan. *The Way* demands that you can not master us until you learn mastery yourself," the king said. His voice was the height of sensuality, low and dark and compelling. A string of rolling sparks traveled down her spine. Her nipples peaked as if commanded by the regal utterance. The low tingle that Marcalic and the faerie touches inspired budded into something feral and needy. A low moan escaped her and she pressed her hands deep into the carpet to keep from touching herself.

*Nothing so beautiful could truly exist*, Saphira thought brashly. Long, straight, platinum hair, eyes so green they reminded her of Caribbean seas, wicked arched golden eyebrows against golden skin.

"I don't understand," she whispered. Her reality fragmented. Her disbelief in the reality of the situation did battle with the heady waves of desire running through her. Her heart beat faster, sending a pounding of blood through her ears.

Disdain lay on the gorgeous creature's features as clearly etched as the rose on her collar. Sorrow and dread settled each in a lung and made breathing nearly impossible. She didn't want that. Real or unreal, she wanted him to like her.

She was willing to do *anything*...

The fervency of that admission astonished her. Shamed her.

"My Lord," that seemed the only proper address, "I assume that this is the Black Mask Chamber," she continued in a desperate attempt to explain herself. "So I am still in Rousseau Manor. But there was a man. And he tried to kill me..."

Even the memory of Charles Newcastle brought a shudder to her flesh.

"Silence!" he barked. "*Human!*" He spat the word like it was a curse.

Saphira flinched, dropping her gaze to the floor.

The dark beauty in the adjoining throne unwound herself from her lounged position. "So cruel, Aramis," the queen of the faeries whispered.

The sound of the other woman's voice went straight to Saphira's cunt, releasing waves of liquid heat to soak her thighs. Desire pounded through her blood, through her skin, through her core.

The queen stood, her gossamer wings coming to close over the front of her naked form, creating a gossamer gown that molded to the rounded, sensual curves of her dark flesh. The queen moved to stand in front of her and laid her hand on Saphira's bent head. "You saw what she went through. You know that she can't be

expected to understand everything so readily. Her humanity is a hamper. It clouds her mind to all that was.”

“What is there to understand about paths chosen, Demi?” Aramis growled, his green eyes blazing, the perfect marble stone slabs of his teeth clenched so hard together that Saphira feared they would crack beneath the pressure. “She is our slave before we are hers. Surely there is no great difficulty in her perceiving that. Of course, it is easier to *show* her than *tell* her. As we showed Rousseau when he thought to conquer and debauch we pretty, *innocent*, fairy tale creatures.”

His smile was cruel and mocking, inhumanly cold. As much as he looked like a perfect human male, Saphira sensed that which was not human in him in that frozen moment, and her heart chilled.

“Innocent, indeed,” the queen said softly, running her fingers through Saphira’s hair. Her laughter was like diamonds falling on glass. The dark beauty knelt before her. She smelled of summer roses and a dark musky perfume. “If he betrayed me,” the queen whispered conspiratorially, “I would cut off his balls and wear them for earrings. If I lost him,” she nodded to the king behind her, “I’d be lost myself. Forever. As you were lost, Saphira, but I have found you.”

Saphira recalled questioning the painting vainly, and all the longing and hope that had gone into the pointless question from which she never expected an answer. The queen smiled, her painted ruby lips reflected genuine amusement.

“Did you think that I was not listening, little painter?” she whispered. Saphira caught the glimmer of the silver ball piercing the queen’s pink tongue.

“I thought you unreal,” Saphira answered. “I *still* think you unreal. I believe that fear has driven me mad. And that somewhere back in gruesome reality, that horrible man is having his way with what is soon to be my corpse.”

“Is this not real?” the queen asked, one ruby-tipped nail flicking cat-quick across the swollen tip of Saphira’s left breast.

“Do you honestly not recall my touch, Saphira?” Sadness flashed in her eyes, so brief if Saphira had blinked she’d have missed it. “Has the decade been so long for you as well? Ah, little water sprite, she who used to put her brush to lending the colors of her heart to the flower in the forest glen, have you forgotten us so completely?”

The sensation across her nipple was both pleasure and pain and Saphira could not help but cry out. Her whole body arched so hard into the cruel flick that she thought her spine might crack. She wanted more and the past year that she had spent untouched demanded redress. She panted and pushed forward as the nail continued to taunt and tease her aching flesh. Her toes curled, her fingers cut into her palms. She bit her bottom lip. Everything in the room ceased to exist but the beautiful woman before her.

Full, soft lips met hers and the flavor of the kiss was like wine. There was

nothing gentle about the way the queen stole her breath and played with her tongue. The silver ball embedded in the flesh of the queen's tongue sought out pleasure sensations in the flesh that it ravished as if that was what it was created to do. There was savagery in the kiss and possession, an undeniable demanding. Saphira bent into the kiss, trying to gain more of it. Wetness slicked her inner thighs. Her cunt swelled with dark heat. Suddenly, the queen snatched away from her, and Saphira moaned with need, pulling herself after the woman, despite the short length of the chain that sought to deny her the pleasure she had found in the other woman's mouth, in the cruelty of her fingers.

"Aramis," the queen said softly, sliding back to sit on the first marble stair. Saphira could see clearly the dark hairs of her sex between brown thighs. "Marcalic. Remind her."

The room groaned with a mixture of disappointment and anticipation. She heard the chain fall and she was free. She also saw Aramis rise, took note of the heavy metal ring embedded in his flesh just above the shaft of his cock. His erection pointed at her as golden as the rest of him.

"Unlike your precious humanity, Saphira Morgan," he spat, "our brand of justice is swift and complete. Look down and gaze upon the fate of those who dare to wrong us."

The floor beneath her slid away as the music of the pipe grew louder in her

ears. Beneath the gold was glass and down on the ground, illuminated by the gold of the room, Saphira saw Charles Newcastle. He was lying in a pile of amber straw, his head cradled in his hands. He looked up into the light, looked up at her. He was wearing what looked to be a harness, hard and inky black it was in the shape of a 'Y', running from his shoulders to meet at his chest in a metallic circle. From the circle another strip of blackness ran down his stomach, across his navel to a ring that was secured around the base of his cock. It looked decidedly uncomfortable to her, his limp dick held upwards, pulled by his shoulders and the tautness of the leather.

Something shifted in the darkness below within the tiny prison of a chamber. The first thing that Saphira saw was the gargantuan erection. It pierced the light first, capturing all of her attention. The smallish creature came forward after its monstrous tool. It seemed barely capable of supporting the thing. It stood on furry brown goat legs, its feet nothing more than cloven hooves. It too looked up at her, its slightly animalistic face bestowing upon her a lecherous grin. Tiny horns decorated its head. Fleecy woolen hair stood out around them. Its chest was bare, its dark nipples hard and aroused. It scuttled forward, driven by need.

Newcastle howled when he looked away from her and saw the thing. The pipe music increased and Saphira realized that she was looking down into the source of the sound, that it had not been coming from within the golden chamber

at all but from below it. The shadows moved down there and she realized that there were more creatures within.

The piper came into the light, his body swaying with the power of his own music. Newcastle stopped screaming, as the music grew louder, spiraled, turned into something sweet and compelling and yet dangerous at the same time. His mouth was moving, she imagined he was warning the approaching creature to stay away from him. The creature only grinned savagely and kept up its approach. More of them came out of the darkness, equally aroused, their massive cocks like swords. They descended on Newcastle. Saphira saw his mouth open in a scream without sound as he fell beneath the wave of them.

They ripped him free of his leather trappings, leaving him white and naked. Two of them held both arms down; three little monstrosities held and spread his legs. His ass bucked as one of the creatures positioned itself between his legs. It caressed his ass cheeks, almost lovingly, and then smacked them hard, leaving the red outline of its diminutive hands on his flesh. It grabbed his hips, lifting them upward, the massive cock sliding between the cheeks of his ass. Those that held Newcastle adjusted themselves to accommodate the new position and still hold him relatively immobile.

Saphira thought she heard the phantom ghost of his scream as that gigantic cock pierced him, diving itself home without the barest thought of mercy. His

whole body arched with the power of the invasion. His fingers scrabbled in the hay, dug furrows in the earth.

She swayed, mesmerized by the cruelty with which the little creature took his victim, nails digging into Newcastle's hips it pounded away savagely, letting go once or twice to render a brutal smack to the ass that struggled to get away from it in vain. Its whole body went into its release. It collapsed against Newcastle's shuddering bucking form, spent. Another of the creatures reached for it, pulled it away and took its place.

"Do you see?" Aramis asked. He was very close to her. The heat of him prickled against her skin. "Do you understand why you must please us now?"

His hand cupped her chin, drawing her head upwards until she was looking into the golden, intensely beautiful face of the king of the faeries. He knelt in front of her, occupying the space that the queen had moments before. He leaned forward and kissed her lightly—his mouth hot against hers, searing.

"Where am I?" she asked, her voice trembling.

"You know where you are, Saphira. You said it yourself but moments ago. The house of Vincent Rousseau, dark sorcerer and darker artist."

She looked down again at Charles Newcastle's struggling form. One of the creatures had decided to stuff its massive cock into his mouth. He was choking on it, the spasms giving a thrill to the fiend riding him from behind.



“W-What is going to happen to me?”

“*Everything*,” he answered and kissed her again. *Savagely*. As if he *owned* her. Saphira rose to her feet, her hands against the hard muscled flatness of his chest. It occurred to her to pull away. It also occurred to her that she *wanted* him to take her. She wanted to be his.

## Chapter Four

*In his dream two beautiful women became one in a drunken haze filled with shame and regret...both women had large crystalline gray eyes, but one pair of eyes reflected the full moon in their soft depths. It was a dream that was familiar to him and one that he did not particularly like because he watched the moon fade in those gray eyes as the women blended, melded...for some inexplicable reason, he found the dimming of the pale silvery light reflected in those glimmering orbs so very sad...*

A rhythmic whimpering, that would turn for moments into a low moaning screaming that so intermingled pleasure and pain the sound negated the difference, drove him toward consciousness. Ransom swam out of the darkness of terror to the musty smell of unkempt animals. The collar around his throat was choking tight. He could scarcely breathe around the thick metal. He clawed at it but there was no give. His head was inclined at an uncomfortable angle and he was shackled to the wall, the chain pulled tight through a dark ring and secured to heavy metal stud. He reached for the chain, pulled it and found that, like the collar, it had no mercy and no give.

He was in a tiny gray stone chamber composed of dirty limestone. High above his miserable, half crouched position, a small torch lit each wall, the candle

flame flickering in a thin and chill wind. Straw and dirt on the floor and the intense animal stench caused him to gag breath after breath.

“They are cruel, these creatures. Do not be fooled by their uncommon beauty, they are far more monstrous than I. Hello, Ransom. Morgan, wasn’t it? Yes, it most certainly was. I remember every *part* of you. For a while there I fancied myself in deep, passionate love with you. Fancy meeting you here.”

The voice, strangely familiar despite its inhuman gruffness, startled him and Ransom looked across the dark, tiny chamber to find a hunched mass curled against the wall. It noted his attention and scuttled out of the darkness and into the light. The creature was an odd mixture of goat and human. Tiny horns adorned its forehead. A massive cock, limp, hung between its fur-covered, bowed legs, dragging the ground. It had cloven hooves where its feet should have been.

Ransom scrambled back against the wall as much as the harsh constriction of his bonds would allow. The creature came closer to him, its dark eyes piercing him. How this monster knew his name he didn’t know or care, he simply wanted to be away from it, from the grotesque member dragging the ground, from the vague familiarity of the mutant face beneath the coat of dark shaggy fur. The thing grinned with blunted yellow teeth at the horror of his reaction. It reached out one short arm and stroked at his legs with a fat little black-clawed hand.

Ransom bit down hard on the repulsion that came to his lips at the threat of

that contact. “Don’t touch me!” His words were a strangled gasp of desperation. He moved back trying to meld into the wall. He didn’t care if he choked himself to death doing it.

The creature’s grin widened. “Why not? It isn’t like I haven’t touched you before.”

That voice, he knew it. He stared into the mutant face, tried to look past what was animal and his mind locked on the familiar amongst the monstrous. He *recognized*. “*Vincent?*” he whispered in disbelief.

“Welcome to the Black Mask Chamber, Ransom,” Vincent said, backed away and sat in the dirt a reasonable distance away.

“This is impossible,” Ransom said, more to himself than the hideous *thing* sitting before him. “You’re *dead*.”

“Worse than dead, actually,” Vincent replied. “I always want to fuck, Ransom. Can you imagine what that is like? Had I not just screwed that poor bastard in the other room, you’d be taking it up the ass right now. As it is, you have mere minutes...maybe five, maybe ten if you’re *extremely* fortunate.”

The words chilled him as the creature’s black eyes swept over him with casual, appreciative appraisal. Ransom’s skin crawled wherever that dark regard touched him. He turned away from the lecherous glare and noted a small opening on the other side of the chamber. The moaning cries that had brought him to

hideous awakening were coming from the darkness beyond that opening.

“In the little time we have before I savage you like a pirate captain on his brand new cabin boy,” Vincent said. “I’d like to talk.”

The thing winked at him—a slow, lecherous batting of its left eye that was filled with carnal promise. The very human gesture was unnatural in the hideous mutation of the creature’s face. Ransom’s skin flinched away from his bones in repulsion. He didn’t want to talk. He wanted to escape. *Desperately*.

Ransom did not have to touch Vincent for reality as he had the faerie on the wall. There was absolutely no need to prove that the squat monster sitting before him was real. He *knew* Vincent, and Vincent did not make idle threats. No matter how much he’d changed, no matter what monster he had become physically, the man inside was the same. It was in those black and beady animalistic eyes. Those eyes had been deep, gulfing brown before, but the *animal* had still been there, that thing in Vincent that had been as attractive as it had been repulsive. Vincent hadn’t changed that much actually. He simply wore the animal on the outside now.

In the time that he had been a frequent visitor to Rousseau Manor it had never occurred to him not to return to the lavish halls. Vincent possessed everything he’d ever wanted, wealth, power, and the ears of the most influential citizens. There was a part of him that took pleasure in the pain and humiliation

that Vincent and his wealthy cronies heaped upon him. They found him attractive and gave him lavish gifts. Their friendship and special treatment meant a denial of the poverty in which he had been raised and brought hope for a bright future beyond his scholarship paid for term at University.

But that was then and this was now and he wanted out. Ransom grasped the heavy metal chain and pulled hard against the ring that it was attached to. Metal squealed against metal.

“They are masters of the twin arts of pleasure and pain,” Vincent said with thoughtful appreciation. “They have more ways to mingle those sensations than I ever imagined, and I was *good*, Ransom. You can testify. They, however, have had millennia to practice.”

Ransom’s triceps throbbed painfully with the power of his concentration on the impossible task before him, the metal was too heavy to break, the ring interred deep in the wall and hanging heavily downward, he knew these things, but panic had hold of him. The sounds from the other room were his shrill driving compulsion.

“How do you think you got into my special prison?” Vincent asked, his voice suddenly dark and sly. “I know the faeries brought you here, but this house has been silent for ten years, their powers muted by my magick. Nothing, no one, could get in or out. What do you think changed, Ransom?”

*How the hell am I supposed to know*, Ransom thought. The chain rattled, the metal shrieked. He was getting nowhere, but he couldn't stop. It was a combination of finding himself in the presence of Vincent again, and the change in the man. Vincent Rousseau was a hideous example of the power of Ransom's captors, and he wanted nothing to do with anything that could do what had been done to Vincent.

"First, let me clarify something for you. They brought you here to *use*, much the same way as I did oh so long ago," Vincent said. "They really have no other use for us. They are arrogant, aristocratic creatures with important hierarchies amongst themselves. Humans are their least favorite things. We rate somewhere, oh, say, beneath pond scum. For centuries we hunted them when our world and the world of *Tir-na-nOg* were closer together. They remember and they *hate*."

*Use*. He didn't like that word at all, didn't like the connotation and the promise in it. It distracted him from his fruitless struggle. "If they hate us so much then why didn't they just kill me?" Ransom asked.

The thing that was Vincent scuttled closer in the dirt and straw. Its beady black eyes glittered in the torchlight.

"You're as pretty as any faerie, Ransom," he said. "A creature of your magnificence would interest them. They covet pretty things, from gold and diamonds to something as simple as flowers—an interesting shade of purple in a

field. They *take* pretty things too. Unfortunately for you, it wasn't your sublime gorgeousness that interested them. It was something *else* entirely."

"He called me a *thief*," Ransom said. His mind filled with thoughts of the tall blue faerie. Hatred swelled in his breast, a mirror image of the way the faerie had looked at him in those minutes before capture.

Vincent's blunt teeth clicked with the savagery of his sudden grin. "*They* take things. They even take people who are beautiful enough to interest them, though that is rare. What they don't take too well is having something *taken* from *them*."

"But I didn't take anything from anybody," Ransom said. "Unless you mean the manor. I bought it. And they can fucking *have* it."

"They don't want this house," Vincent said. "This house has been their prison, *my* prison, for ten long years. You took from the royal family, my friend, from the King and Queen of this exiled clan. You told me about it the last day you deigned to visit my manor. We spoke of the thing you took...and a little pond in the back of my woods, and I came and took things too. That is why we are here. Don't you remember?"

"I took *nothing*!" Ransom practically screamed. He'd had enough. He could actually feel his mind threatening to snap. It did not help when Vincent skittered even closer and he could feel the tough hairs on the thing's legs brushing against



his naked flesh. Clawed hands went to the gargantuan cock that stirred to life before Ransom's eyes, stiffening moment to moment. Those terrible claws stroked the intimate flesh with desperation.

"Do not worry," Vincent said. "I've been waiting for this kind of opportunity. Do you think I want to stay a twisted little freak forever? Do you think I would not plan for the moment that the barrier was breeched?"

Vincent chuckled and the sound turned Ransom's blood cold. "We are going to have visitors Ransom, my boy. This is *my* house, the sorcery within like a Japanese Puzzle Box that I, and only I, solved with its creation! The breech in the magickal barrier allowed me to extend certain... *invitations*. These fae are old compared to us, and with that kind of age comes wisdom. But I am a genius and when I had them...owned them...*possessed* them, I made them talk. Sometimes, it was merely for the joy of hearing their wicked confessions, and sometimes it was because I knew that to gather their stories was to know them, to truly *know* them. Demi has a story and Demi did not crack, but the lesser fae knew and they told. They sung her song like canaries. She took a lover once long ago, a thousand years, a powerful lover as forbidden to her as the creature she beds now. He waged war to possess her. A war in *Tir-na-nOg* and all the more reason for her banishment."

His words trailed off into a long, gasping whistle as the cock in his hands sprung to complete life. Huge veins bulged in that flesh and the head flowered a

deep shade of engorged crimson. “They think they’ve rendered me useless in this body, stripped me of all my magick, but an incantation doesn’t *require* magick, it just requires knowledge of the words. *I* have that knowledge. I have forced myself to remember the words despite the animal that eats at my brain and forces me to be less than human. Do you understand, Ransom? I can *free* us. And I can make that bitch queen do what she was supposed to do in the first place—submit to the reason the Mandrake clan was cast out of *Tir-na-nOg*. I can take her precious Aramis from her. The moment the barrier was breeched, I contacted the *goblins*, Ransom! I called upon their dark and mighty king, and I offered him what he long ago deemed his! Bitch wants to screw with me! I’ll teach her that mankind is the master of the earth and her kind is little more than pleasure toys!”

A thick white froth was issuing from Vincent’s mouth and he looked to Ransom, for all the world, like a rabid animal. Those clawed hands abandoned the aroused cock and reached for him, the eyes of their bearer, narrowed with a lust that was vicious, helpless. Those vile claws fell on Ransom’s thighs and his whole body reacted to the touch. He drew in on himself as Vincent bore down on him and kicked with all his might, his soul in the action, his every muscle trained on the thought of driving the thing away from him.

His feet caught Vincent in the chest and the smaller body took to the air, little legs and arms kicking, massive cock bobbing. Vincent crashed against the

wall. His body slid to the ground. He lay there only a moment before scrambling back to his feet.

“We can do this easy or we can do this hard,” he snarled, white spittle dancing on his lips. “As I recall you didn’t much mind either way before.”

Growling, body hunched into smooth motion, Vincent came at him again. Ransom prepared to kill him. He wasn’t quite sure how he was going to do it, but he prepared for murder. Spurred by the height of his desperation, the muscles in his body clenched tight, ready to spring and defend. His hands balled into claws. He reached for the thing as it came at him across the filthy ground.

The door simply appeared in the wall. There was no noise in its appearance, no warning of its coming, it was just there where it had not been there before. It swung open to expose a shimmering blue light beyond. A sleek, black clad figure stepped into that light. She wore high-heeled black thigh boots on a cat suit of inky material so tight on her magnificently sensual form that Ransom wondered how she breathed within the constriction of it. An all-over black mask adorned her head, covering mouth, eyes, nose... *everything* so that there was no way that she could breathe from underneath it. A tiny, cat-like mask stood on the blackness of the all-over mask, the hollow eyes exposing nothing but the material beneath.

In hands covered in the same inky black material she carried a harsh fiberglass cane. She stepped into the chamber and swung the cane at Vincent. It

slashed across his bare back and Vincent howled and dropped to his knees.

“You *gave* him to *me*!” he howled.

She cocked her blank face in Ransom’s direction. There was no way she could see him and yet, he felt the intense burn of her stare travel over him in heady waves.

“I changed my mind, sorcerer,” she said, dismissively. Her voice was a low, sumptuous whisper. Ransom’s body reacted to it with nothing short of sheer unadulterated desire.



Demi, Queen of the Mandrake Clan, glared down at the human balled up against the wall. Her rage at him burned in her mind like the sun, a nova ten years in the making.

She left the quavering sorcerer on the floor, crossed the small chamber and pointed tip of the cane in at the human. She moved the cane very fast in this action so that it whistled in the air before stopping in front of him. His golden eyes locked on the obvious threat of the clear glass head of the thing for a moment before returning to her. She prodded him in the hard muscles of his stomach with the fiberglass tip.

She meant to scare him with her dark clad facelessness, terrify him actually, and then, more than likely, depending on her mood, beat him within an inch of his

life. These things would be mechanical for her and nothing more than the human thief deserved. However, as the fiberglass touched the muscles of his stomach and they jumped in reaction, his cock swelled with the desperate anticipation of something more. Demi's eyes narrowed beneath the duel masks—her interest peaked.

The sorcerer's claws dug into the flesh of her thighs through the black material that covered them. Vincent Rousseau humped her leg like a dog, his massive, engorged cock sliding uselessly along her calf. She kicked him off her sending him scurrying back in the dirt and straw.

*A satyr is truly your perfect state of being, sorcerer*, she thought as the frustrated creature gained its feet and scuttled through the opening available on the other side of the chamber. She watched him go, her mind registering the low, muttered curses he flung back at her with great satisfaction. *Another thief, kidnapper of an entire kingdom...simply killing Vincent would have been too good for him*, she thought. *His current state was far more just.*

She turned her attention back to the human. He watched her intently—his eyes trained on the tight, black-clad space between her thighs—*burned*. She frowned beneath the masks. *How insolent*, she thought. Insolence was far less of an infraction than Vincent actually daring to hump her leg, but where she could dismiss the satyr's desperate action, she found she could not, did not *want* to,

dismiss this. Her nipples hardened beneath the slick black material she wore, her cunt throbbed, the muscles spasmed and sent a molten wave through her frame.

She tapped his thigh, *hard*, with the cane to break his concentration. A pained hiss issued from his perfectly sculpted lips. Golden eyes locked on the place where her eyes should have been but for the masks. Rage and fear vied in those amber orbs.

“Stand up,” she demanded. He started at the sound of her voice. He actually tried to obey her, which was good. He could not obey, however, the bonds that held him smooth and ungiven in their place on the wall. And that was bad...for *him*.

“I can’t,” he said.

She brought the cane down hard on his thigh again. She made sure to hit the exact same spot. He flinched away from her, his whole body going into the motion.

“Did I *tell* you that you could speak?” she asked.

*He really is beautiful*, she thought and understood in that moment why Saphira had wanted him. His beauty had stunned even Marcalic, and Marcalic was a skilled military *assassin*, heartless in the slaying of his chosen prey.

The human glowered at her, those liquid gold eyes enraged. His cock was like stone. *Oh, this is ought to be interesting*, she thought and completely abandoned her former desire to beat him within an inch of his life. She had other things in mind

for Ransom the Thief—he who dared to take what she considered hers.

“Stand up,” she said again.

He did not move, did not speak, and only glowered.

He was a fast learner. It both amused and excited her.

She flicked the cane, swiftly, a certain threat.

He did not flinch. *What manner of human was this?* she wondered, intrigued

Demi moved forward, positioning her legs on either side of him. She walked the length of him until she could feel his low, panting breaths stir the material over the mound of her sex. After all, it was what he was interested in, was it not? What he had stared at with such unabashed boldness.

She heard the moment when he smelled her. It was a deep intake of breath, purposeful and desirous. Her legs threatened to turn to the consistency of hot candle wax.

Demi’s association with humankind was severely limited. All her life she had been diligently taught to avoid humanity. In *Tir-na-nOg*, humans had not been much of a reality for her, though there was human blood amongst the world of the Fae. She knew of beautiful human children stolen by the Fae. There were also human spouses for a scattered few Fae creatures.

As the daughter of the King of the Wood, she had been taught to frown upon such unions with humanity. *Mankind does not love the world*, her father had told

her over and over again. *Mankind destroys everything it touches.* And yet, the rumor of humankind running through Aramis's blood had not been enough to stop her from loving him. It had, however, been enough to stop her father from loving *her*.

Her thoughts scattered as the man between her legs scented her again—like an animal.

“You want to fuck me, human thief?” she asked as she undid the heavy chain that bound him to the wall. When he did not respond, she brought the cane down on the muscled flesh of his arm.

“That depends entirely on what you look like beneath that mask,” he said belligerently.

She stepped back away from him as the chain fell solidly to the floor.

“Does it?” she asked, unable to keep raising physical excitement from her voice. He had no idea what he was in for. No clue. He still thought he had choices—that his body was still his own. She laughed and the pleasure of it mixed finely with the sensual titillation he gave her.

She retracted her wings, feeling them slide away from her face and body with the smooth feel of warm liquor against her naked flesh. Transformed, her gossamer butterfly wings fanned out behind her. Naked, save for Vincent's cursed cat mask, which was losing power moment by moment, she stood before him and brought the cane down against the flesh of her upturned palm.



“Close your mouth, fool, and stand up,” she ordered the wide-eyed human as his gaze ravished her.

“My wife,” he breathed.

She brought the cane tip down lightly across the head of his dick. His eyes widened in agony.

Demi reached down and grasped the chain that held him to the collar. She pulled the metal taunt. He rose to his feet, his hands cupping his agonized member.

“You don’t want to think about your *wife* now,” she told him, her voice cold as ice. “She can’t help you.”

She turned her back to the tiny chambers where they kept Vincent Rousseau and the other altered humans who had dared imprison them and strode from the room, the chained human thief in tow.

## Chapter Five

Saphira was running on adrenaline and fear. Her horror at what was going on in the tiny prison of a room below her was offset by the intense satisfaction that Charles Newcastle was suffering something similar to the fate that he had planned for her. He had achieved his precious Black Mask Chamber, but it was *nothing* like he had thought it would be.

The pipe music compelled her away from the horrible scene below her. She trembled in the hot circle of Aramis' arms. It was like she was being carried away by the low, lilting song, drifting on its sweet melody. *It's a dream*, she told herself, *it is nothing but a dream. The dream had begun with the phone call from her lackadaisical husband. It had twisted into a nightmare with Newcastle's appearance and now that Newcastle had been taken care of, it had cycled into the sweetness of a dream again. That faerie queen was simply wrong in assuming that this was some kind of reality. But that was fitting. It would be more wrong for such a beautiful dream-thing to know that she, in all her magnificence, all her infinite splendor, was merely a fabrication of the mind.*

*It is all right to surrender in dreams*, Saphira thought. And it was all right to master them, as she never mastered the inner workings of her real life. Her

husband cheated. She said nothing. The mysterious envelopes that turned up in her mailbox—she didn't speak of them, confronted no one. She merely suffered in silence day after day, watching the man she loved moved farther and farther away from her and deeper into the arms of another woman.

At night, when she had finally managed to fall asleep so near, but so very far away, from Ransom's still form—the dreams gave her wicked respite. They gave her passion. Though never had her nightly interludes with the dark faeries of Rousseau Manor been quite as vivid as this. She could smell Aramis, the deeply masculine scent of him so strong, so delicious in her nostrils that her hands curved into claws on his chest as he savaged her mouth. His heartbeat pulsed beneath her hands, strong and demanding, so quick with his own excitement.

Her faint recollections of the other dreams had nothing on this. Need suffused her, drove her until she balanced along a razor blade's width from madness. She wanted an end to loneliness, an end to *want*. Spurred by the horror that had been Charles Newcastle, Saphira abandoned herself. It was a gentle snapping. She barely felt it.

"Are you going to fuck me in front of the whole of your faerie court, my lord?" she asked.

"Yes." It was a promise.

"And your queen will watch?"

“She *likes* to watch. Unfortunately, Demi had something *else* to attend to.”

There were so many pairs of eyes burning into her flesh. She felt the delicate stroke of each gaze like a hungry caress. She reached out and touched his cheek beneath the mask he wore, the smoothness of his skin beneath hers. “Too bad,” she breathed, and was only a little surprised to hear a murmur of approval come up from the surrounding throng.

His smile was radiant, but she did not fail to note the danger in it. It gave her pause in the instant that the collar, the taut chain giving her little room for the pleasure of struggle, jerked her backward. She found herself against yet another hard chest, the flesh hot fire against her. She turned, only a little, and watched Marcalic wrap the chain around his wrist as if binding her to him forever. His dick burned against the flesh of her ass.

Marcalic turned her in his arms—his cock teasing the flesh of her belly, causing an eruption in her that spiraled to her cunt in throbbing wave after wave. His eyes devoured her beneath the mask—so hungry. Her own ravenous need met his boldly. He leaned forward, pressed his lips to hers in a kiss that was almost gentle. Fire. Her whole body shook with need. His mouth tasted sweet, her lips teased that soft flesh, so close to biting him. His free hand moved over her hips, rested against the flat of her belly for a moment before plunging into the silken hairs of her sex.

Saphira cried out. Her knees threatened to buckle and she couldn't stand on them any longer. She went to her knees willingly to keep from falling, her head held high by the tautness of the chain and collar. He pulled the chain tighter, forcing her head up, making her look at him.

Marcalic's cock was a bare inch away from her and she was reminded of the sensuality of her painting. She longed to do as the faerie queen had done; to defy him and his chain as the queen had defied the very laws of reality to kiss the swollen cock of her king. *What would he do?* She wondered, and a certain delicious tremor came with the wondering. *Would he punish her?* His passion darkened eyes held such promise.

Her tongue snaked to caress her bottom lip in anticipation. Her gaze never left his as she fought his chain, demanding some slack. His blue eyes narrowed as she managed to gain an inch or two. Free enough, she ran her tongue across the tip of his cock and got the satisfaction of watching his eyes close in smooth reaction.

"Come now, Marcalic," someone called from the crowd, the voice rising over the chamber, sounding both amused and disapproving at once. "Surely, you can do better than *that*."

Saphira grasped the head of his cock with her teeth, the threat hanging between them, her tongue roving over the slit in the flesh. His whole body shook. She went about it relentlessly, using her tongue like a lash, clamping down just

hard enough to cause a furrow in his brow above the dark mask that he wore.

*This is a game*, Saphira thought with growing recognition, and though it had only just begun, Marcalic was losing...to *her*. She grew bolder, heady on the power of his impending surrender, relishing the feel of his silken flesh in her mouth, the many rings warming against the flick of her tongue, the way his body shook as he fought to maintain control of his precious chain. She sucked hard on his cock, pulling him forward, using her teeth like weapons to make him come nearer, to dissolve the space between them completely. He groaned and the sound was surrender.

Her pussy was hot, wet and throbbing. She felt hands tap the flesh of her cunt, demanding fingers slid through her pussy hair with purpose. Her legs were spread wide from behind, and forcefully. A rush of ardent electricity coursed through her body. She grasped Marcalic's thighs to keep from falling down. His cock slid deeper into her throat, eliciting another groan from him. She thrilled at the sound. She clamped her teeth around the flesh in her mouth, Saphira barely breathed. She refused to let Marcalic go and yet, she worried for herself.

Fingers caressed her wet sex and her body bucked as a wave of pleasure assaulted her. The moan came from deep within her. Her eyes closed. Her heartbeat quickened. *Fuck me. Fuck me. Fuck me. Fuck me*, her mind screamed, and she was grateful that the cock in her mouth prevented her from screaming her desire

to the room.

Her head slid forward on the silken flesh she'd captured, just as the fingers found her clit. Her mind grayed, as they flicked across her tender flesh. There was no kindness in the flicking. It was methodical, rhythmic and so close to painful she wanted to scream. Her mouth matched the rhythm helplessly. Her nails digging into the flesh at Marcalic's hips as she tried to swallow all of him whole.

She felt hands in her hair, a none-to-gentle pulling. Fingers slid deep inside of her and began a frantic pounding that her body couldn't help but answer. Her cunt locked around the digits, demanding more. Her hips pounded down on them as her body went into the rapturous waves of delight that courted her orgasm.

The hands in her hair drove her mouth down hard on the cock within and Marcalic's moans grew to match her own. Saphira felt suspended in time, as if the uncanny pleasure had blended with eternity and pinned her in that aching moment before release. And then with a terrible groan that spoke volumes for the power of his will Marcalic pushed her away from him.

Saphira found herself in the arms of the faerie king. She could smell herself on him. He released his grip on her hair, but his fingers stayed firmly rooted in her sex. "I want to cum," she demanded.

Marcalic knelt between her legs; she watched his wings move behind him, the beautiful amber flutter dancing on the wind in the room. His eyes black with

lust as he used the chain to jerk her to him. Saphira hated to feel Aramis' fingers slide out of her cunt, leaving her empty. Following the demands of the chain and its master she found herself on her knees before Marcalic, her breasts on his chest. He was panting.

“Almost had him,” Aramis whispered from behind her into her ear, the heat of his breath on her earlobe maddening.

“We’re not done yet.”

Marcalic grinned. He was so very beautiful that Saphira found herself wrapping her arms about his neck. She was lost now. Gone. Her only thoughts of her own long denied satisfaction—the wild need running through her body like hot lava fire. She felt his hands on her hips, the graze of the chain wrapped around her wrists as he lifted her to meet him. His cock teased the opening of her sex then plunged inside, drawing a breathless, feral cry from her.

The velvet silk of his wings grazed beneath her fingers as she held onto him. She marveled at how fragile they were, so soft to the touch, so unlike the hard body they were attached to. Her legs sought to lock around his waist, to pull herself closer, but she faltered as he stood. Aramis slid in behind her, his hands grasped her breasts, and his fingers teased the nipples.

Saphira squirmed on the cock impaling her, but Marcalic held her still as Aramis's hands worked her nipples, teasing them to agonized points. Golden



hands traced a path from her breasts down the slick flesh space between her and Marcalic, and then to her ankles. Aramis shoved upward and out. It opened her body wider, almost painfully so and the cock within sought deeper spaces. She felt the first pressure of Aramis' cock at her asshole and she panicked, thrashing on her fleshy perch.

"You said you wanted to cum, Saphira," Aramis whispered in her ear, as Marcalic's mouth came down hard on hers. He sucked her breath away, and her panicked bucking only strove to drive Marcalic farther into her. She felt a heated rush of warm liquid slide down the crack of her ass. She didn't have a lot of time to wonder what that was. Aramis' dick pressed against the ring of her asshole and the pain was a strange and compelling thing as he pushed himself inside of her. Marcalic swallowed her cry as her fingernails dug into the flesh at the back of his neck.

Aramis moved slowly, feeding his cock to her ass by inches. With each thrust her body heaved as pleasure and pain battled inside of her. Slowly, the dual rhythms of both males matched that of Saphira's heaving yearning flesh. She unwound her arms from Marcalic and twined them behind her head, her fingers locking in Aramis' blond mane.

The sheer power of the gushing orgasm startled her. She tore her mouth away from Marcalic's as it opened in a soundless cry that ended in a breathless

squeal. She found herself floating. It wasn't the mere sensation of flight borne from the ferocious desire erupting inside her; she was floating, flying above the watching throng below, the golden world spinning before her lust-shadowed gaze.

Faerie wings beat in the front and behind her as they rose higher and higher in the air. Marcalic's body grew rigid and she felt the heat of him flood into her in waves, and still they climbed higher, until Saphira could see hundreds of chambers above the sky and pillars—little rooms lit with golden light behind velvet curtains. She spied lavish feather beds, gold and velvet chairs and mahogany tables within.

Aramis' shoulder cradled her head, his teeth on her earlobe, biting down with the power of his own release. "Did you cum?" he asked, the mockery in his tone thick. He licked her ear then, a lion's hot, wet caress and fell away from her.

Saphira lay in Marcalic's arms, her eyes closing. She wondered how it was that she could fall asleep in a dream.

"Do you honestly think that it is going to be so easy for you, Saphira?" Marcalic whispered into the shell cup of her ear, his voice cold, even as his mouth nuzzled her earlobe sending shocks of white lightning through her.

"*What?*" she whispered, the gentle haze of sleep combined with sexual contentment falling away from her.

"I think that it is about time that you saw the prison that your selfishness made for us," his voice was a dark growl, utterly inhuman save for the words. His

speech had taken on a strange and exotic lilt—the ghost of another language lying just beyond.

His wings grew suddenly still, mid-beat. They fell like stones from the lofty height toward the cold gold floor below. *It's only a dream*, she reminded herself as horror assailed her and a scream rose in her throat. The ground rose up to meet her. *A bizarre, twisted little dream that won't stop*. But why did her body ache so from the lovemaking of the faeries? Why was her skin still flushed rose-red from their touches? She's had dreams before of a sensual nature, dreams that had involved the beautiful Rousseau faeries, and *never* had they been like this, so vivid, so filled with emotions. She screamed. Marcalic laughed. The sounds blended in the rush of wind in her ears.



Aramis, King of the Mandrake Clan, moved down the darkened hallway as the fiery salamanders, in brilliant tones from white-fire blue to scalding crimson, lit the cobweb-covered torches that marked his way through the dungeon of Vincent Rousseau's pretty golden prison. The fire fae sung while they flittered down the smooth stone hall. The song was of nature and the moon, the green of the trees and their fierce longing for a return to those things.

His thoughts mirrored the emotions in their song as he moved through a large arched doorway framed in solid gold and into the first of three gulping

chambers filled with the devices of torture that Vincent had used on them before they had mastered the sorcerer and his minions. Each chamber laid out a different level of sensual torture that had bordered from moderately pleasant to intensely painful.

The salamanders lit high torches in silver sconces along the walls of the first chamber. The room was made, floor to ceiling, of solid ivory stone. The lack of color gave the appearance of cold, white winter within. Inlaid on that winter vista were inky canes, crops, floggers, paddles, slappers, straps and whips that hung from metal and leather pegs in the smooth stone walls. Thick stands of rawhide lace dangled from the high domed ceiling at various intervals, ever ready to bind and hold, creating a dark lace rainfall of potential binding. Intermittently scattered amongst the black rain of leather and lace, were yokes that fastened to the neck and wrist. The white floor was landmined with spreader bars that fastened to the ankles and forced the legs apart. The smooth walls had dark spaces carved within them, enclaves for varying gags and muzzles, from ball gags with bright red centers to inky leather contraptions dotted with silver metal and designed to stretch the mouth and keep it open.

One crimson salamander stopped its flighty dance torch lighting. Its tiny red body expanded, growing in size until the fiery creature was full sized and distinctly humanoid. Flames danced along its dark brown flesh and in the short,

electrified length of its coarse red spiky hair. Dark eyes blazed fathomless black beneath the cover of its black mask.

“Our Lady Queen and the human thief are in the *third* chamber, my Lord,” the creature said. There was obvious excitement in his voice, the overwhelming *need* to be at their destination already and see the human punished. Aramis could also appreciate that emotion. He wanted to see the human punished as well. More than anything, he was amazed by the fact that the thief had survived both Marcalic and Demi’s attention and managed to stay alive this long. Let alone the fact that the man hadn’t been reformed into something far more interesting and acceptable than a mere human.

“You will wait here for Marcalic, Amanitine. Tell him where to bring her. Bring back to me word of the expression on his face when he understands.”

With a chuckle, the fire fae nodded obediently, and Aramis pushed on into the second of Vincent’s torture chambers. Dark, mahogany-carved pillories stood central to the chamber’s pale gray stone walls, the holes in the smooth wood ever ready to receive ankles, feet, arms, and heads. Upon those devices of torture lay dark iron bilboes—archaic contraptions meant to bind ankles and wrists and squeeze them tighter and tighter within the metal.

Aramis moved deeper into the gray chamber as the salamanders brought it to stunning, fiery life all around him. A fire blazed suddenly in the large stone

fireplace at the opposite end of the room. He passed through the forest of standing dark wood whipping posts that rose from floor to ceiling, complete with rings, studs, and inky leather belts intertwined within the metal.

His mind skipped over many of Vincent's devices, only locking on a few. In the corners small cages littered the walls. Barely big enough to sit within, the cages were equipped with a metal hole in the roof for the head to pass through and the neck to be securely bucked within, forcing the unfortunate creature within the cage into an uncomfortable balanced position within the small confines. Aramis stepped over several contraptions of flat black metal laid in the floor in capital "I" design. Dark rings stood out at each end of the "I" to bind down the wrists and ankles at all four ends to hold a captive on their hand and knees. A heavy steel collar was attached with a short length of chain embedded in a peg in the stone floor. A thin shaft rose from the stone at the back of the thing and rearing upon it a multicolored phallus, raised high, in an arch, and ready to plug and penetrate.

Aramis recalled, vividly, every moment of the enslavement of his clan by the madman, Vincent Rousseau—and he understood why Demi had chosen to bring Saphira's human to the third chamber. He passed into the smooth blackness of the third chamber. The obsidian chamber stretched out before him and as the salamanders crowded their fiery bodies around his head, their natural light useless in this darkest of places, he spied his faerie queen and her human captive.

Demi stood and the human thief knelt on a floor that was not a floor, but an intermingling of dark sorcerous magick that could solidify or desolidify depending on the will of the being in charge. In this case, that being was Demi and Aramis was in awe of her. She was still the most beautiful creature he had ever seen and she had won his heart in the moment that he'd met her a thousand years ago. She looked down upon her human prey with all the disdain of purebred faerie nobility. Something about that look never failed to excite him. Perhaps because that was the way she had looked at him upon their first meeting—those dark blue eyes cold and like ice against the dark earthiness of her skin. He had never wanted to fuck anyone in his life as much as he'd wanted to fuck her in the wake of that look.

He felt the same desire now, even in the swirling black mist of Vincent's sinister chamber. His hands clenched into fists with need to have her. The stygian darkness all around him did nothing to stop it. She pulled the human's collar tight, cruelly, and Aramis got a look at him before she slipped the dark leather hood over his head and pulled the buckles tight around his throat above the collar. He had eyes like the sun...a near impossible to find eye color amongst the fae. He was valuable for that alone. His gaze slipped to travel the rest of him. The twin rings in the man's flat male nipples impressed him. The human was not afraid of pain—that was a good thing, considering. It was also *intensely* promising.

The chill in the dark chamber did not particularly disturb him beyond his

awareness of it. It was ice cold all around him and the hooded, collared human shuddered miserably. The walls were not walls, but deep, swirling, near sentient, darkness that could be called to and commanded. What light lit the chamber was singular and shone from the ceiling in a widening white beam that spotlighted Demi and the human thief.

Marcalic's flesh touched his. The fae General's breath brushed his hair. "*This* is going to be fun."

Before Aramis could reply, Marcalic shoved Saphira forward into the swirling shadows in the floor that was not a floor—and those shadows rose to meet her. Twisting around her thrashing limbs pure liquid darkness bound her, wrapping around her thighs and wrists, holding her tight. Her cries fell on deaf ears, for Aramis did not pity her. The strong, protective emotion he experienced while watching the terror of her struggle, he denied. Triumphant in capture, the shadows wrapped around her in incestuous bands, bound her arms to her sides, trussed her legs together and slid over her mouth in inky ropes, forcing her into silence. The prize secured, the darkness *propelled* her, in a black silk wave, toward the light and a punishment that was, in Aramis's opinion, *far* too long overdue.



## Chapter Six

Deep within the dungeon prison of his own dark conjuring, Vincent Rousseau cleared a space amongst the filth that surrounded him and drew a circle around himself in the dirt. The whole of his existence, all of his hatred and madness, was focused on the darkness of the incantation that swirled through his mind. He grasped the words desperately, feeding on each one and using it to fuel his detestation. The Mandrake faeries had stripped him of his magick, but in their sublime sadism, they had left him his mind, knowing that to exist as a satyr, a thing more animal than man, would be the worst torture imaginable for one such as he. One who had thought previously that he had tapped into magicks beyond human scope, who had used those magicks to further his own selfish ends, who had wielded natural magick like a practiced knight on a great battlefield littered with the corpses of the enemies that had fallen to his blade. His reasoning in seeking this audience was simple. The Mandrake faeries had weakened his barrier. Beyond his hatred of the queen and any and everything the dark bitch held dear, there was the question of his self-preservation at stake. Should the Mandrake faeries escape the Black Mask Chamber, they would not leave him alive, not even in his altered state. The blue one, their General, hated him. He had seen his death,

a thousand times and in a thousand different ways, reflected in that faerie's eyes.

"I call upon the Ancient Ones! I summon the power of dark gods that dwell in the Otherworlds. Here me now!" Vincent whispered.

He let the words, the dark purpose of the incantation take hold and flow from him in a steady mantra of vehemence. He had to reach the dark places, the stygian crevasses that lay *under* the world. His mind became the words until they flowed from him in a raging gush of hatred and desperation as furiously natural as the chaos of a tornado. It was a phone call and nothing more, and yet, it held the promise of devastation for those that he despised. They did not understand his mansion. They did not understand the intricate magicks involved in its creation or the containment spell that held them trapped within his Black Mask Chamber. They had been fools to leave him the bitter cruelty of his mind, for it was his mind that had conceived of the chamber in the first place, his mind that had knitted together the magickal netting that held them. *Stupid fucking faeries*, he thought. *Ignorant little wisps of air and moonlight*. He would show them why mankind ruled the earth and had taken it from their kind millennia ago. And he would *use* them; use one fae against another to further his own ends. "Terra, Squall, Oceanic, Inferno...I evoke you! Do my bidding!"

The wind picked up within the small chamber and the stench of brimstone assaulted his nostrils. His former minions sat in a loose, obedient ring around him;

their black eyes blank and animal save for one darkening pair. Vincent stared into the darkening pair of eyes, the blue swirling to black, the whites being swallowed by the expansion of the inky darkness of the irises, and waited for the incantation to work...his phone call to be answered.

His own eyes had looked like that once. He knew that even though he had no way of witnessing the brutality of the change the faerie bitch had inspired in him. He had seen it in the fearful gazes of the people—his carefully garnered circle of the city's debauched elite—who had been trapped down here with him. He had watched the horror and disgust on their terrified faces as the transformation took him.

He had *felt* it though, every agonizing moment of the animal coming to the fore, tearing at what was man in him and subverting his humanity. His bones had cracked, shrank, and painfully reformed. His feet had withered, turned to something like stone, and then broken off in shards leaving only the hard cloven hooves of the beast he'd become.

Chained down, his associates could only watch and scream as he came for them one by one, using the newly formed weapon that was his cock to inspire the modification within each of them. And then he had seen it up close and personal, each one of them becoming a creature similar to what he was—similar in *look*, but not the *same*. The elite of the city, those creatures in a rough circle around him

now, held no memory of ever being anything but satyrs. They were free, free of fear, free of rage, free of everything but the need for sexual gratification and the desire to play the low pipe music that inspired the faeries to dance. Still, they obeyed him—his will dominant amongst them as it had always been. They chanted the words of the incantation mechanically without any real knowledge, understanding or caring of what they were saying. Their voices added to the strength of the incantation. The power of their compliance and concentration would keep the link strong so that he could strike the bargain.

*Who Dares Summon Kobalos...*

The voice was like the whisper of dead leaves on yellow, dying grass. It was a nasty, dead sound and it struck Vincent's heart cold in his chest. He knew better than to show fear though. Fear would not be respected. Fear would be punished should things go wrong in the bargain he hoped to strike with the thing.

"I do," Vincent said, his own voice littered with hatred. "King of the Goblins...my dark Lord and Master. I called to thee again. From this dark in-between place, I beseech thy aid."

Beneath him the circle he had so carefully, methodically drawn, swelled with throbbing liquid darkness. An icy chill touched Vincent's thighs and pulsed against the furry rounds of his backside; it ran through his skin, clogged his veins with ice.

*You Again. Sorcerer. Ridiculous Human Sorcerer Wearing Fae Skin. You Should Use Your Magick To Contact Those You Can Of Your Own Dark Creatures And Leave The Fae Alone. Your Fae Disguise Does Not Fool Me. A True Satyr Would Not Dare Contact Me. There Are Those Among The Earth Fae That Eat Satyrs When They Can. Your Audacity Could Prove To Be Quite Deadly...*

“My audacity could be quite beneficial to you, Dark Lord Kobalos,” Vincent reminded him. “You lost something a thousand years ago. As I told you before, I have come into possession of it.”

*Where Is She Then Sorcerer...You Talk And Talk But Have Yet To Produce Her...*

A face swam out of the darkness beneath Vincent and slammed hard against the magical barrier there. In their first conversation arrogant Kobalos had not bothered to show himself. Vincent stared at that face in shock, for the extraordinary beauty of it was unexpected and defied everything he had previously known about goblins. White hair whipped in a dark wind about the pale visage. Amethyst eyes, narrowed with both disdain and annoyance, studied him like he was a particularly repulsive species of insect. A fine, aristocratic nose wrinkled with that same disdain, and sculpted lips turned up in a sneer that exposed a set of sharp, pointed canines.

*It Was Reported That The Children Of The So-Called ‘Mandrake Clan’ Returned To Tir-na-nOg Over A Decade Ago...*

Stunned by the vision of male beauty, it took Vincent's mind a moment to register that the words held a level of desperation that he recognized, had *counted* on. He smiled. This was power and it had been a long time since he'd wielded any. He reveled in it—the drug-like, blatantly carnal, associations that his mind made with it. *Power.*

“I had no use for children,” Vincent said, more to himself than the being addressing him. “And I thought it would be an effective method of breaking them...forcing them to leave their squalling brats behind.”

In truth, he probably should have taken the children. Their presence in the Black Mask Chamber would have made the Mandrake Faeries less likely to buck his authority, less likely to use what little magick his masks could not tame within them against him.

He had failed to realize that it was impossible to control the magick within a creature that was composed, almost entirely, of the stuff. The fae were magick, their hearts, their very breaths, were magickal. Even his masks, as carefully crafted and binding as they were, could not contain all the power within the creatures.

*So You Are Truly In Possession Of The Princess Of Tir-na-nOg, Noble Daughter Of The King Of The Wood...She Is An Extremely Dangerous Creature To Be In Possession Of, Sorcerer...Though Banished By Her Father, He Has Not Stopped Looking For Her Since The Children's Return...Should He Find You, The Agony Of Your Death Will Be The Stuff Of Legend*

*And Nightmare Amongst The Fae...*

“That *could* happen,” Vincent said darkly, “but we would *both* lose then, wouldn’t we, my Dark Lord? In order to have her, you must possess her as I have possessed her these past ten years. You must lock her away in your underground world of darkness and throw away the key. Even her father could not take her away from you then. You do not *fear* him, do you? The King of the Wood did banish you and yours as well.”

Vincent’s words were carefully calculated to produce a certain reaction. He got that reaction. He saw barely checked rage on the face swimming in the black pool underneath him.

*I Fear No One...*

Vincent nodded. “Of course you don’t. I did not doubt you. I only thought that perhaps you had changed your mind about wanting her after a thousand years. That perhaps I’d be better off taking my bargain to some other dark fae creature who would be happy to have the princess of the realm with which to barter with the king, or keep for themselves, or use however they see fit—”

*Demi Is MINE...*

The words were like an explosion, and for Vincent they meant certain triumph. “Good,” he said. “Then we will deal, yes?”

Curtly, the gorgeous image in the pool of swirling darkness tilted his head in

the smallest gesture of acquiescence.

Yes! Vincent thought. *Power*. Having the means to complete his vengeance so near sent shudder sparks of electric want through him. The sensation was so close to sexual lust that his body became confused, he throbbed with it, hot pulse after pulse riding through him with furious carnal need, and the will of the animal battled the will of the man.

The will of the animal won. It *always* won. The cursed animal demanded that he leave his circle, his negotiations, and seek the flesh in the other chamber. Vincent rubbed his throbbing cock frantically, seeking climax and a quick end to the sudden, damning desire that assaulted him. His fingers worked his familiar flesh furiously, forcing his dick to stony rigidity in an effort to get the humiliation of the fact that he had to masturbate while in conference for his life over with as quickly as possible. The resulting orgasm satisfied his treacherous body and drove his mind into a frenzy of desire for freedom from the curse.

“Did you bring what I told you?” He tried desperately to keep the eagerness, the lust, and the culmination of his hatred out of his voice.

*The Spell Of The Pretty Faerie That Is Like A Vampire...*

“Yes, the spell,” Vincent said as the incantation rose and fell in crescendos from the mouths of the animals all around him. His heartbeat was pumping fast, his cock throbbing again, pleasure coursed through him in hot, radiating waves.



This is what it had been like when he was a man. This was what it had been like when he had commanded the most elite to commit the most befouled and humiliating acts deep down in the bowels of the Rousseau Manor. This was what it had been like before the idea of taking the pretty faeries had come upon him and driven him to kidnap their kingdom and they had brought about his ruination.

In all his lifetime, in all his dabbling with the darkest of sorceries and all the power he had gained from those dark gifts, he had never come close to acquiring a spell so great and all encompassing. With a penchant for artist, the Faerie Mistress was a deadly fae, a dazzling creature that brought sadness and the dark cloak of self-destructive insanity to her human lovers by draining them of their emotions—devouring their love, their hatred, their pain...*everything*. She fed off those emotions in much the manner of a vampire until he became a dried husk of want for her and he grew insane, often suicidal, for the lack of her attention. But the true power of the Leanan Sidhe, the power that Vincent was interested in, had nothing to do with her vampiric desires and more to do with how she went about carrying out the act.

*I Have Done Better, Sorcerer. I Have Brought A Faerie Mistress ...I Have Brought A Leanan Sidhe...*

The face within the liquid swirl changed—too quickly. He could not react, could not save himself. Sea green eyes locked on his, sinuous sea foam curls danced

within the black liquid tangle about a face that was that same lovely shade. There was a collar around her neck; it was carved from dark wood and the lock that held it carved from wood of a lighter shade. The chain was a thick length of vine, and dark purple. Her breasts, large pale green globes of pure promise and delight, rose and fell with the power and intensity of her rage. The nipples, peaked from chill, were the same color as the rest of her.

Those green eyes locked on him and Vincent's engorged cock thudded against the cold barrier between them. Something treacherous flickered in the cold, deep sea of those orbs. A slow, sensual smile turned her pretty lips up in a sardonic bow.

*You Paint*, she said damningly, the barrier distorting the words making them sound hollow and hideous against the dark wash of pornographic images that assaulted his mind upon hearing them. *You Are Good But I Can Make You Better. I Can Make Everything Better, Sweet Mortal.*

Kobalos chuckled and the sound was terrible as Vincent realized the gravity of his horrible mistake. How had the Goblin King known? Or was it a desperate act? A chance? A gamble? No, he'd been played. His painting of the Rousseau faeries had been a frantic thing, an amusement and nothing more. He had done it in a frenzy of drunken debauchery inspired entirely by his triumph over them. He thought little of art and less of artists and certainly had never claimed to be one.

He longed to tell her these things, to dissuade her from her low, sensual stare and replace it again with the rage with which she had first gazed upon him.

He could not turn away. He was locked on that incredible gaze, his dick twitching and needy in the face of it. Want coursing through him in waves so violent that his body ached with the demanding spasms. His fingers drew invisible spider pattern pictures on the cold surface within the circle and he could not stop. She wanted him to paint. She wanted him to create. She wanted to lie with him in paint at the height of that creation. Vincent moaned as a shot of pre-cum slid across the dark cold surface underneath him.

*You Must Learn Not To Fuck With Us, Sorcerer...Demi Is Famous For Changing Things...I See Her Handiwork In You...I Saw It The Moment You First Dared To Contact Me...Give Me Your Location And You Can Have Your Spell. Keep Them For Me And I Won't Let The Leanan Sidhe Kill you...This Is The Bargain...*

Vincent's mind exploded with dark vistas, black worlds with amber-tangerine plant life and cerulean suns. He saw oceans of blood lapping beaches littered with obscene, unnatural and distinctly inhuman, bones. She wanted him to paint these things, these shutter-click gifts of the imagination, to make them real upon any canvass available. In return he could do anything he wanted to her and she would do anything he wanted to him. In a single, gasping breath he told Kobalos where to come.

His mouth began to move as the Leanan Sidhe fed the words of the spell directly into his mind. He repeated them in rote, mechanically, his syllables rising and falling at her direction. The words filled him; the images exploded in his brain. His mind stuffed with both her words and her bizarre pictures. He became a vessel and he spewed what he was commanded to spew. His fingers hovered in the canvass of the air, drawing vistas in the nothingness at her command.

Distantly, he noticed that the animals around him grew bored with his new ‘game’ and wandered off to find more interesting things to do within the confines of the dank little dungeon. All but one, the new one, he was still changing.

“Master, I will not leave you,” he panted, the words clipped with the agony of the distortion of his body.

*Break the circle*, Vincent thought desperately at the creature. Yet, no words would come out of his mouth but the one’s she wanted him to say. There was poetry in her mantra—a savage genius to her sweet litany. They were connected, he and the green-eyed fae, and she lent him her power and in return she gobbled little nibbles of his soul. Time and space meant nothing; she was with him in the dank dungeon. He could feel her hands run over his tortured, distorted flesh, felt the insane heat as she grasped his dick and jerked in quick demand.

Kobalos laughed cruelly, triumphantly, the words of the spell poured from Vincent’s mouth liquidly and the part of him that had been preparing for this for

ten years locked on them and twisted them to suit his needs. His needs were the same as those of the Goblin King...to keep the Mandrake Faeries within the Rousseau Mansion until the goblins could arrive from whatever dark underground hole they lived in. How long it would take them, Vincent didn't know. All he knew was that his soul was no longer his own. It belonged to her. He was her puppet.

He had become a tool in his own vengeance, but he might be spared as long as Kobalos got what he wanted. As Vincent stared into cold, hungry eyes, his fingers etching invisible vistas at her command, he realized he might be alright with that, as long as he could step over the shattered corpses of the Mandrake faeries as he left Rousseau Manor for the last time—as long as he could see their Faerie Queen brought to heel by a good, cruel master. Still, he struggled to take his fate out of the hands of the fickle, faithless fae. As the Leanan Sidhe's dark magick coursed through him, as it coursed through the dark chambers and inky black basements of his terribly magnificent house, it struck something, something that Vincent had collected and then forgotten about long before he'd met his first faerie, and something that might save him.



It was a strange place, the dark obsidian room where she brought him and ordered him to kneel before her. His mind worked to make sense of the onyx floor and the shifting black walls composed of darkness so thick it was more like liquid

than shadow. The white light in which they stood central made viewing the strange shifting darkness almost impossible as his eyes tried to adjust from one medium to the other. She ordered him to kneel and he did so with a strange compliance that bespoke of the terrifying quality of the unnatural chamber around him. He was not so afraid of her as he was shocked by the incredible oddity of the room around him, the way it writhed and pulsed with life.

The heavy length of chain that connected them wrapped several times around her wrist; she lifted his face toward her, her dark fingers hot and demanding against the flesh of his jaw. Utterly mystified by how beautiful she was, he was completely enchanted with studying the impossible perfection of her face and features, the high cheek bones, the soft full lips curled into something so close to a sneer that it had to be a kissing cousin to that dark expression. Those incredible blue eyes, so unusual against skin so dark, studied him with concentration equal to his own. They were voracious and compelling, interested despite themselves.

He did not know where she got the hood—she was stark naked, her impossible, gossamer butterfly wings flowing behind her like a crystalline cape—after her incredible magic feat with the inky black cat suit. She slipped the hood over his head and blotted out the light, casting him into darkness.

Terror rushed Ransom, unlike anything he'd ever experienced before. It

went beyond living faeries, his missing wife and monster creatures that lurked in dark dungeons. It was a sexual fear and it took complete hold of him from the moment she'd forced the hood over his head. His body trembled with fear he couldn't suppress.

His flesh tingled with both the chill of the chamber and the chill of her presence. He was excited—he was *beyond* excited. The collar around his neck constricted when he swallowed.

She moved about him, the heat of her examination teasing his chilled skin. He felt his life depended on whether he passed or failed this critical examination. She scraped her nails against his shoulder and the sensation went through him like a jolt of lightning. He gasped. Quivering expectation swept each nerve and though he tried to anticipate where and when the next touch was coming, he was wrong, every time.

“You will be whipped,” she said finally, breaking the agony, giving him something to go on in the darkness into which she had mercilessly cast him. “*First.*”

The words were both merciful and damning.

“Then you will be *further* bound, *further* punished and then used. Nod if you understand.”

He didn't move. It was like she was asking for his agreement in this, asking

for his consent and *demanding* his consent at the same time. Why would he do that? Agree to the terrible things she planned for him? He *wouldn't*. And the thought of blatantly disobeying her sent a terrible delight through him that he tried very hard to deny. But his panting breath betrayed his excitement. She saw, he knew; those piercing eyes would miss nothing.

He heard the warning whistle of the weapon as it cut through the air, and he immediately regretted the brashness of his defiance in the instant before it fell mercilessly against the naked flesh of his ass. His body arched away from the power of the cruel blow. His thoughts scattered with the onset of the pain, it radiated through him, and skittered across his nerve endings, igniting them with fire. He bit down on the scream—understood that she was not playing with him.

“I do not like having to repeat myself,” she told him. “Nod. If. You. Understand.”

She jerked the collar hard and he almost toppled over face first on the floor. Arms pin-wheeling in the open air, he caught himself. A burst of aggressive tension welled up in him. Half a dozen vile curses poured from his lips before he could stop them. Her answering laughter was cold, crystalline. It shattered all around him. He hated her and he was leaving.

Ransom got to his feet, one hand snatching at the hood and the other searching for the chain that linked to the collar. She stopped laughing. That was



good, because there wasn't a damn thing funny. She had been so incredibly beautiful, her stunning aesthetic perfection brought to life from his wife's canvasses and the walls of the Rousseau Manor, that he'd followed her more than half willing to the dark little dungeon where she thought to further punish him. He admitted that he wanted her, to taste of the cruelty he sensed in her, as compelling as any siren's song. His body had overruled his mind, his cock had made a fool of his senses, but the truth of the matter was that he wasn't bound now, save for the collar. She had freed him and that had been a mistake...because he was *leaving*.

His hands never connected with hood or the metal of the chain attached to the collar. Each wrist was enveloped in a soft liquid chill, so fast he barely had time to react to the utter repulsion of the grotesque gelatin-like contact, and then jerked apart and above his head. He was lifted up of the floor and he reacted in panic, kicking his legs. His actions elicited a soft male laughter that rang through the room. The laughter was a humiliation and he stopped kicking in the face of it, allowed himself to relax as a hot flush ran through him. *Someone was watching this*. It was a terrible thought. And yet, he could not deny the strange excitement that came along with the knowledge. The self-admission increased the heat of the flush, until his body burned with it.

"A question lingers between us, thief," she said. The cane crossed the flesh of

his ass again, it was gentle, a love tap compared to the blow before it. Lifted off the floor so that he was standing on the balls of his feet, his body stretched upwards and utterly helpless, Ransom nodded. It was not the first time he had been whipped. Vincent and his cronies had taken great delight in that sort of thing, and Ransom had been receptive to it, finding pleasure in the helplessness involved in it as well as the sting of the pain. It had been ten years since he had experienced the like though, and his body did not quite seem to know how to handle the anticipation of it. Perspiration broke out on his brow despite the chill and yet the chill set his body to convulsing and he couldn't honestly tell if it was from the cold or simple want. The fact that he now had no choice in the matter helped some, but rebellion wouldn't allow him to get back in the frame of mind that it took to get through this. There were rules, he recalled. He couldn't scream, no matter how great the pain. There was humiliation in screaming, and an intensified desire to hurt him.

He had come back to the Rousseau Manor night after night compelled by reasons beyond himself to suffer their tortures, to take pleasure in their cruel administration of pleasure and pain. He had only stopped when he'd met Saphira in the dark woods behind the manor, the wild thing within him that craved the pain sated and content within her arms. But Saphira was gone from him and he was back in the Rousseau Manor, enslaved to a cruel dark creature that had

brought him easily back to the servitude and the tormented ecstasy that had drawn him to the manor's halls in the first place.

Hands, almost gentle, swept his hair, teased his right shoulder. They then moved to his hips possessively, and slid over the flat muscles of his stomach. Combined with the anticipation of the pain promised and the blackness of his world, the sensation was soft, seductive, *deceptively* pleasant. Those hands bumped over the bones in his ribs, creating enjoyable vibrating sensation and then moved over his nipples, sliding over the hard rings embedded in the flesh. He gasped as they lingered on that flesh and he felt the undeniable response of his body as it spiraled from simple pleasure to something wilder and more demanding. Each none-too-gentle flick went straight to his cock, blazing a path of hot lava all the way down.

Her mouth was at the small of his back, her lips pressed into the indentation there. Her warm breath sent hot pleasure in a band around his waist. "Everyday, human," she whispered, "until we grow bored with you and kill you." It was a promise. Despite the dire message in her words, there was breathlessness to her tone that arrested him, something that suggested a desire akin to his own. Ransom didn't know what to make of it since she'd just promised to kill him. He didn't have time to contemplate it overmuch. Her hand slid down to the hot shaft of his dick. She grasped it with fingers that said that she owned it.

She touched him like a possession. Her fingers slid over the hardening flesh of his cock to the tip and then down again to graze across his balls. She went about this with a near maddening slowness, drawing it out. When she moved away from him, he felt bereft of her.

Ransom waited. Long moments passed and nothing. The lack of touch was its own warped torment. His body tensed and waited for caress or blow but still neither came.

“Hello?” Cold viscous nothing seeped into his mouth through the hood, weighted his tongue, and silenced him.

Had he done something wrong already? Was she displeased by his arousal at her touch, the way that his cock had hardened helplessly in her hands? The tension was nearly unbearable. His body was alive and throbbing with anticipation.

Howling pain seared his shoulders, the blow taking him by surprise. His cry died in his throat, stifled by the shadow gag. The remnants of air escaped out his nose and sounded like something between a gasp and a moan. Either way it sounded erotic, like a plea for more. Humiliation clenched his teeth hard even as blood engorged his cock.

There had been no telltale whistle of warning this time. This was a different weapon, the heads slapped flat against his skin were not intended to cut the flesh, merely punish it. Every cell beneath the blow sprang to life. The heat of it spread

through him. The second blow fell just beneath the first. His body arched against the power of it, and he bit his lip to keep from crying out as white-hot heat surged across the aching flesh of his back. He needn't have bothered; the gag diminished his cries to moans. He panted heavily through his nose.

An agonizing period passed before the third blow fell. It slid across the center of his back. The pain elicited a long, low moan from him, despite the knowledge that sound, hell, any reaction to the pain, was his worst enemy. His breaths were coming in hard, uncontrollable pants. His body tried desperately to absorb the pain of the strokes as the fourth blow landed, sliced across the flesh of his ass, and drove him to his toes.

He sensed a rhythm in the pain, a plan in its dispensing, a method to her madness. She struck him again, slightly gentler this time, across the flesh of his ass, hitting exactly the same spot as before. His whole body arched away from it. His arms throbbed in his bonds. The next blow fell across the small of his back, roughly where her lips had touched him. Again, he surrendered to the need to cry out, the confused growl-moan echoing back at him through the chamber. He was panting, his whole body on fire—his cock threatening, mutinously, *insanely*, to explode at any moment.

The lash fell again across the center of his back as if it was carefully retracing its steps on his flesh. His mouth opened, but no cry came from it. He

fought his bonds. He wanted his hands free so that he could grab the throbbing fiery thing between his legs and jerk it into release before it burst. Teeth clenched, he expected the blow that fell across his shoulders where all this had begun. His body surged forward, his toes dancing on the smooth ground, his arms aching with the power of hanging so suspended. His pant-growls sounded loud and animal to his ears beneath the hood.

The next blow fell across the flesh of his thigh, and shock of the change-up broke him completely. The power of the helpless orgasm swept through him like an inferno and he exploded. His whole body went into sensual climax, tugging on his bonds until he thought his shoulders would dislocate. The blows fell and fell, lighter than before, but consistent, refusing to allow him complete release, forcing the orgasm to go on for what seemed like an eternity. He jerked like a puppet on her cruel strings until he couldn't take it anymore and collapsed, his body limp, his chest rising and falling.

Distantly, from what seemed like forever away, he heard the low, humiliation-inspiring, sound of a single set of hands clapping. The sound was slow, each meeting of the hands hard and delayed—a purposeful acknowledgement of his surrender of will. His face reddened beneath the hood. He wondered what was going to happen to him next. He wondered if he could take whatever that was.

## Chapter Seven

Saphira was ashamed of herself, was ashamed of her wet cunt and ashamed that watching the man—for he was a man, he didn't possess the incredible, multicolored butterfly wings she had been accustomed to seeing since she'd been here—whipped had turned her on so completely. Even the grasp of the liquid black nightmare that held her did nothing to lessen the waves of desire that coursed through her as the lash fell again and again against his flesh. Suspended from the high shadowed ceiling by bands of the same dark stuff that held her, the hardness of his cock had been mesmerizing, watching it weave and bob in the air as he sought sanctuary from the pain, fascinating, in a dark and sensual way that had hardened her nipples to stone and sent hot flutters racing in the pit of her stomach. She had enjoyed it, enjoyed every moment of his punishment and now that it was over and he had been forced to climax in violent reaction, she wanted *more*.

She stared at the man's limp form, watched his chest rise and fall hitching with the power of his previous exertion. She wondered what he was being punished for in this dream that was so much more than any dream. She wanted to see his face; her gaze roved the small, familiar rings in his flat male nipples. Many

of the dream faeries had rings like those—and so did her faithless husband. The rings were Ransom’s little secret fetish, the clandestine thing that he hid from everyone else but her. He would have died if any of his high society or political associates were to ever see them. They were Saphira’s favorite toys. She knew the taste and texture of those rings and the flesh that held them better than she knew the intricate lines on her own palms. To touch them, taste them, and pull them was to invite his complete surrender to her every wicked desire.

“Did you like that?” Aramis asked from too near, drawing her contemplation from the compelling metal. He stood beside her. His smile was warm enough, but his eyes were cold, predatory...*hungry*.

The hooded man’s head jerked up at the sound of the new voice. Saphira thought to deny her wicked desire, knowing that the man would hear her acknowledgement of her enjoyment of his punishment. “I asked you a question,” Aramis said, his eyes colder. Those cold eyes dared her to lie to him, dared her to deny the fact that her sex was wet and throbbing or that her nipples could cut glass with the strength of her arousal.

“Yes,” she said finally.

His smile widened. His eyes narrowed. “Good,” he said. “Then there is some hope that you will truly remember who you were. I must say I half expected you to whimper and cry and beg for his release. I am pleased with you. And from this



moment on, you will seek my pleasure with every fiber of your being. Pleasing me will become your world. We will begin now.”

The liquid darkness moved away from her so fast and so completely that there was a moment where Saphira found herself suspended an inch or two above the obsidian floor. She fell and stumbled forward, going to her knees. The length of chain Marcalic had attached to the collar about her throat trailed behind her and Aramis bent and grabbed it.

“Don’t move,” he said. It was undeniably a command, uttered in an icy off-hand fashion meant to be obeyed...or else. She didn’t want to find out what ‘or else’ was, she froze.

“I don’t understand—” She had seen kindness from him, concern for the culmination of her desire. He had returned to the cold creature she had first viewed upon the throne, the one that had labeled her ‘human’ like the word was a curse. *Why?* She opened her mouth to ask him what she had done wrong, how she had displeased him.

He jerked the collar hard. “Do not speak unless I tell you to,” he commanded in that same off-hand tone, like he was talking to a creature that he definitely considered less than himself. It went beyond his royal pedigree and into something deeper—that thing scared her. She stared up into his glittering green gaze—fought against being affected by the inhuman beauty of the face that surrounded

it—and closed her mouth against the arrogant, commanding weight of his stare. “It took you ten long years to come to us, Saphira Morgan. *The Way* demands that you can not master us until you know mastery yourself.” His repetition of the cold words stunned her.

The bound man seemed to go insane suddenly. He thrashed at his bonds. He kicked his legs. He was like a bound savage animal seeking to fight his way free of captivity. She watched as Demi walked away from him, moving with slow deliberate purpose toward her.

“There is great tragedy in forgetting *The Way*, beloved,” Demi said. “You helped write it after all, the thing that holds our clan together, that makes it strong. You chose to come with me when I was banished from *Tir-na-nOg*, you chose to carve a way of life with me outside of all that we knew and all that we held dear...and then you chose to betray me.” Demi stroked her cheek.

Saphira shook her head in negation of the horrible words. She would never betray anything so beautiful. She didn’t know *The Way* and she didn’t know what Demi was talking about. “I didn’t,” she cried. “I painted you because I loved you--”

Aramis jerked the chain in the same fashion that someone would jerk the leash on a bad, barking dog. “Shhh,” he said.

“You painted us because you *missed* us, silly water sprite,” Marcalic said, his voice as dark as the room around them. “You painted us because you *are* what you

*are* and you need us like we need you. We are incomplete without you. You are incomplete without us...such is *The fucking Way*.”

A single dark coil dropped from the ceiling like black rope. It hung above her head. Marcalic reached for her. He grasped her arms and though she struggled against him, he was much, much stronger. Saphira wanted to deny the tiny stirring of joy that went through her as she was bound. She did not want to own the way her hard nipples ached deliciously as the cool, gelatinous liquid darkness ran over her wrists, securing them in a vice-like grip. She tugged against her bond but it pulled taut, stretching her, so that her back arched slightly and her knees rose just the tiniest bit off the floor. In that instant her vulnerability scared her, but the rush of desire from being bound scared her more.

Marcalic knelt behind her, spread her legs and reached between her thighs. He touched her hot cunt, his fingers grazing over her clit. “Wet,” he said, satisfied. “Good girl.”

“How would you punish a traitor, Saphira?” Demi asked. “In the same fashion that you would punish a thief, perhaps?”

She didn’t know how to answer their questions. She didn’t know what they wanted from her. What they were telling her was impossible, wholly inconceivable as any kind of reality...but then again, so were *they*...these flitter-dream-things painted by a madman, and then brushed into life so lovingly by her

own hand. *I am ready to wake up now*, Saphira thought desperately, trying to force herself from the bizarre dream and the confusing kaleidoscope of emotions that ran through her at being bound, naked and so very wanting before them. What did she want? She couldn't possibly want what had been done to the bound man to happen to her? *Could* she? Did she want to be abused and forced to climax in violent streams before her cold, cold audience? Her mind fought the thoughts, even as her clit pulsed with the evocative heat of Marcalic's touch.

Demi knelt to the obsidian floor and ran her fingers across the smooth surface. It rippled beneath her palm, sucking at her hand, molding itself to her like it was alive. She buried her hand within that darkness and pulled a tangled crimson-black mass from it. The two floggers were very small as she separated them and handed one to Marcalic. Their centers were a hard band of black leather, grooved so that the fingers fit smoothly and held tight. A fall of long crimson suede dangled from both ends of each individual flogger. Demi held hers firmly and twisted it in the open air so that the fall of the red suede hit her dark arm with a delicate, yet *dangerous*, slapping sound.

Saphira's thoughts ran in a frantic maze of pleading and lusting as she watched the crimson hit the dark flesh before her, the slaps became progressively harder and more rhythmic as the moments passed. She understood that punishment was imminent, even though she did not truly understand the crime

beyond what they told her of it. Her body and her mind warred. Her body quivered with anticipation, it twitched and squirmed and wondered at the feel and weight of the promising red suede fall. Her mind wanted to beg, to plead, to agree to whatever servitude she thought would please them and spare her the punishment.

When she had been watching Demi with the bound man, she had not imagined herself in his position, but the queen's. She had mixed his pleasure and pain until his confused body became compliant to the furious will of her lash. Demi had gone about inflicting the punishment with a mastery that she couldn't help but admire, each blow carefully dealt and moderated in order to gain the most helpless reaction from the man—to bring him to the brinks of something that shut down his mind completely and made him a slave to the wants and needs of his flesh, *forcing* the orgasm from him, *demanding* it against the will of his mind.

The powerlessness of what she thought of as the 'slave's' position frightened her, and yet, as Demi and Marcalic moved to stand behind her, wild shudders of anticipation surged through her and she knew that could she have willed the fear and the desire away she wouldn't have. She wanted to submit. The heat of their combined gazes upon the flesh of her exposed back prickled her skin. Saphira closed her eyes, panting, in a duality of lust and fear so great she thought her heart would seize with it, and waited for the blows to fall.

“What is her pretty human pet called? I have not cared enough to ask before,

but it is important now.”

Her eyes snapped open. A little breathless hiss of denied anticipation issued from her. Aramis stood in front of her, his legs spread, his arms crossed. His gaze devoured her. His half erect cock directly in front of her face, poised a bare inch from touching her lips.

“Ransom,” Marcalic answered, his voice a hiss.

“You do not love Ransom, Saphira. You will repeat that. You will repeat it *loudly*.”

She stared up past the promise of his dick to the commanding and wholly intoxicating sight of him. What he asked of her was a terrible disloyalty and yet, did Ransom truly deserve any better? He had betrayed her in the most hurtful way imaginable, and within the confines of the bizarre dream would the words truly make any difference other than to save her punishment?

Her gaze roved Aramis with a wanton abandon that she knew she should not feel, considering. She *wanted* him, even in this cruel fashion. The heat of him, the sweet musky scent of his flesh pushed away her ability to think rationally. Her tongue rolled in her mouth, behind the carefully closed gate of her teeth, with the fervent desire to surge forward and lick the tip of the swelling flesh before her. There was shame in it, but the shame inspired her desire rather than negating it. She moaned softly, frustrated, trying to understand the slave thoughts that had

sprung rabid in her heart and soul.

The floggers slapped behind her against skin that was not her own and she coveted the sting of the soft suede. The threat was clear; her legs shuddered in response to the low, rhythmic noise. She was bound and helpless and the lie would hurt no one. “I do not love Ransom,” she said. Aramis’s smile was shark-long and triumphant in acknowledgement of her surrender.

His hand fell on her head and he pet her like an animal, his fingers parting her dark curls, his nails grazing the scalp beneath and sending little ripples of his approval through her. Her mind rebelled in finding pleasure in this, but her body was more interested in moving closer to him and the delicate slap of suede against flesh behind her. *Whatever you’re going to do to me, she thought shamelessly, do it. Do it now.*

Aramis sat down in front of her. “Tell me why you do not love Ransom, Saphira.”

She stared at the extraordinary perfection of him, the glitter of the metal in his flesh, hypnotic as it sparkled in the white light. This was beyond cruelty, this question.

Aramis lay back on the obsidian floor, and then slid his legs underneath her bent knees. He positioned himself under her in the fashion of a mechanic sliding under a car in desperate need of repair. His hands gripped her knees, slid them

apart and she could feel the blunt head of his cock at the mound of her cunt. “Ride me while you tell me,” he demanded and gave her a white smile so dazzling the light of it confused her for a moment. Only the coldness of his gaze kept her from returning that smile. He was serious. *Very*.

That glittering gaze was mesmerizing. It was a clash of wills and her will was already corrupted by lust. His wants dominated hers with the unwavering precision of a cobra hypnotizing a particularly fat rabbit that it was determined to devour. It swept through her inhibitions like a potent drug. She wanted nothing more than to feel him inside her and that want overshadowed her fear, the cruel oddity of his demand, *everything*. With only the slightest hesitation, she used the bonds that held her to pull herself up until her hot cunt hovered over his engorged cock.

His grip on her knees increased, his fingers digging into her flesh. The demand in the little action brought her breaths in hot pants as she lowered herself down onto the silken heat of his erection. His hands slid up her thighs and he jerked her down abruptly, filling her completely. Her moan was involuntary—a soft, animal sound that echoed through the chamber and back at her.

He let her hips go, his hands sliding behind his head, determined that she do this herself, that her surrender be complete and her own. Excited beyond all hope of salvation, Saphira used the inky black bonds for pull and balance. She set a slow



rhythm on his cock. Her every stroke, from tip to base and back again, sending riotous waves of pleasure through her body.

His gaze never left hers and it was a strange sensation. She used him like a fleshy machine, seeking her pleasure with no regard for his own. Her rhythm even, if somewhat frenetic, as she pursued the culmination of her selfish desire. She wondered what manner of punishment this was, where he lay back and demanded nothing but the hot friction of her sex against him—and then she ceased to wonder or care. Perspiration broke out on her brow with the strength of her exertions and her fingers slipped in the inky gelatinous darkness that held her with the need to finish this—to explode in brilliant satisfaction.

“Tell me why,” he demanded, his words only a little breathless. Distantly, beneath the pleasure, she felt a flicker of obstinate annoyance. He had brought her to this frantic, sensual place. How could he remain so cool and uninvolved? How could he remember his silly question and pose it to her with her body rising and falling against him in demand?

His gaze flickered behind her and the first lash fell and stole her breath so that her scream was a breathless, silent, pathetic thing. She paused momentarily, shocked by the combination of pleasure and pain, frozen by the implication of where this was going. She had forgotten the threat of punishment, but she understood now that he did intend to punish her.

His gaze slid to the right and a lash licked her ass from that direction. Molten excitement and fear in combination swept through her and tore her mind's connection from her body, disassociating them. It was not more than she could bear. It had not yet threatened to cut her flesh. The gratification of it damned her more than anything. Pleasure and desire for the pain warred with shame and her sense of self. She didn't want this to be who she was but...

Her cunt throbbed with want, *need*. She supposed she had gone crazy, because a part of her liked this, really liked this. She was *soooo* wet now and her nipples throbbed to aching. The heat in her belly had grown inferno hot and that heat swept through her and ignited every one of her cells, concentrating particularly on the places where the lashes assaulted her. Those places more needy than others, cried out for more.

Having been bidden by their king to wield the floggers, Demi and Marcalic fell into a rhythm with one another about dispensing the pain that drove her from sane sensible woman to trembling, untamed animal. They were merciless in that dispensation, left falling first then right then left again, the floggers licking her flesh with marked precision. Like a wild thing, Saphira pounded down on the rock hard flesh inside her. Each blow made her wetter, greedier, and more demanding. Whether it demanded the pleasure or the pain she did not know, for the two blended into a mad combination that craved satisfaction with a frantic

desperation that forced her toward orgasm with the detached cruelty of a jockey whipping a champion race horse toward the finish line.

She was being worked like an animal, each blow inspiring her to ride faster and harder, stealing her breath and tightening her muscles. There was a sublime joy in such complete release, in being carried beyond the realm of her humanity into something completely animal. She clung desperately to her humanity in the only way that she knew how; she began to talk within the realm of her little squeals and wavering moans. She told Aramis what he wanted to know. She told him how Ransom had betrayed her, how much his betrayal had pained her. She told him about her nights alone in a big comfortable bed with him lying right beside her. She told him about the pictures and what they meant, how they'd made her feel. She *confessed* as she had confessed to the Rousseau faeries many times before. And Aramis *listened* as he had listened when he had only been a beautiful image on the walls of a lonely abandoned manor house.

The floggers dominated her, each stroke a cruel kiss that drove her further and further away from the sadness of the tumble of words, the deep inner pain, of her confession. And then there was no more to tell, only desire as the orgasm claimed her. She felt Aramis's balls tighten in time with the powerful sweep of her own climax. He abandoned his casual pose and surged up at her, his arms locked around her and some of the dispensed blows fell against the flesh he offered. The

flesh of his hard chest was slick against hers, the coolness of the metal embedded within that chest, cool where she was hot all over. “Do you see why he is not worthy?” he asked, and the words were soft as his mouth fell on hers.

Yes, Saphira thought, the waves of passion sweeping through her, her body bucking violently against his. “Yes!” she cried when his own orgasm tore his mouth away from hers.

The earth moved. She swore it did. The only problem was, when she collapsed into him, spent and so weak her body could hardly move but for the steady falls of her panting breaths...the earth didn't *stop* moving.

## Chapter Eight

The ground beneath Demi's feet shook and the world tilted, casting her into Marcalic's arms. The darkness of Vincent's private torture chamber pulled away from what little light was available, *recoiled* from it. Her eyes narrowed and she immediately thought of the sorcerer as the quaking of the ground intensified. She heard the crumbling of heavy chunks of stone beyond the swirl of liquid darkness that covered the walls.

She had carefully, oh so very carefully, stripped Vincent Rousseau of any and all connection to the magickal and, therefore, *whatever* was happening; she should in no way attribute to him. But she did. In her mind, Vincent was the source of all evil in the universe and the bastard had finally found a way to kill them. *I should have allowed Marcalic to slay him, as he wanted to do in the first place. I should have let my fae make an interesting game with a good-sized stick and his severed head.*

But she had not done those things. She hoped that she and all the other Mandrake faeries did not have to pay the ultimate price for her little amusement, that her desire to linger within the Black Mask Chamber to show Lady Saphira the intimate intricacies of the fate to which she and her fool human had condemned them, did not cost them their lives. She turned in Marcalic's arms, looked into

power blue eyes filled with complete trust and waited commanding. “Find out what is happening,” she told him.

He nodded and let her go. He took wing and left the obsidian chamber in a tangle of frantic red-fire salamanders.

Aramis helped the Lady Saphira to her feet as the black gelatinous stuff that held her recoiled away from her and snapped up toward the ceiling. At the same time, the bonds that held the human gave. He tumbled to the floor and the darkness there flinched away, showing the gray stone floor beneath. Demi made determinedly to his side. It was his mouth she was worried about. She was not ready for Saphira to know that her wayward human was with them.

She did not know what she was going to do about him. The darkness in the chamber refused to obey her mental commands. It had taken her a full year to master the chamber with her limited power and then to teach the other nobles how to command the liquid darkness within, to bend it to their wills instead of the will of the master that had created it.

She watched the band she had forced around his face melt and slide down his body to the floor to ease off as the rest had done moving with slow, sensuous, serpentine motion, crowding toward the walls. Ransom coughed, trying to gather his breath and reached for the hood with clawed, desperate hands. The mask on Demi’s face shattered like glass. She closed her eyes to protect them as tiny pieces

of ebony rained to the floor.

In the second that it took her to open them again, she was free, wholly free, and she could scarcely believe it. Her hair tried to stand on end beneath the golden weight of her decorations. Her skin felt like it was on fire and the low licking flame of the blaze consumed her. She outstretched her arms in magnificent invitation. Head thrown back in sublime joy, her mouth opened in a soundless cry of longing for all that she had been. Her cells ignited one by one and combined into a hot liquid apogee. The magick caressed her. Her body burned with the pleasure of the return of all that she had been and she slipped to the floor as her knees went as weak as warm butter in the wake of the supernatural climax. She felt whole again and unlimited as the rest of her existence before Vincent captured her and made her his toy. It was a heady sensation, erotic in scope. *Free*, she thought and pointed a dark and shaking finger at Ransom Morgan. *I am free, but not you, troublesome human.*

Pale light erupted from her fingers and the feel of it was as orgasmic as the sudden return to herself had been. It swept through her and she cried out with the delicious feeling. She stole his breath away in that smooth motion and froze him to the floor. Rendered helpless, he made a pretty human statue—aware of everything, capable of doing nothing.

Her task completed, Demi could turn her attention back to the destruction

of the world around her. The light that stood center to the floor, spotlighting that part of the chamber, balled in upon itself. Simultaneously, brilliant color began to run down the walls. In voluminous tones of sheer cerulean to dark amethyst it ran like velvet waterfalls.

“Demi?” Aramis said. His voice held the note of the orgasmic glow of the return of his powers, the return of himself. Wicked emerald ran underneath Demi’s feet and she stepped back away from it as it came. It ran over her feet in a satin wave and with it came the scent of grass and nature, things denied her so long the smell of them so intensified within the chamber caused her senses to reel.

The white light solidified into a ball and rose in the chamber toward a ceiling that was throbbing with black-blue color. What looked like a million white fireflies erupted in that blue-black darkness above. They danced and twinkled enticingly.

The world erupted in a symphony of screams as faeries panicked. The sound was loud, terrified and slightly musical. The sound saddened Demi, their fear touched her heart. Condensed and confined their fright and confusion flowed through her like daggers and they went straight to her heart, piercing her like a thousand needles. She had to *do* something. But *what*?

The ground beneath her feet cracked with a sound like impending death. The rush of cerulean water shocked her as she danced on the precipice of the



black-nothing gulf that opened in the earth. She took to the air to save herself a fall that seemed endless as she stared down into that black abyss.

A tiny, brown wren, born it seemed of the air itself, materialized before her and flittered off. More birds followed and she could hear, beneath the steady rush of water filling the abyss, the sound of crickets chirping and insects buzzing. A fat yellow bumblebee darted past her.

“We must leave this place,” Aramis said over the sound of the world crumbling all around them. The white ball of light solidified and found its place in the blue-black darkness high above, higher than the ceiling, higher than it had any right to be. Demi’s heart throbbed, bathed in the silver rays of that familiar, but so long denied light. The silvery moon throbbed back at her from its place in the newborn sky.

The scent of cedar and pine swamped her nostrils as trees tore through the ground and rose to towering heights silhouetted against the sky, leaves in varying shades of green fluttering in a thin wind. The walls and the darkness that clung to them simply ceased to be, disappearing in the dense foliage that sprung from everywhere and nowhere and dominated their cold little world that previously consisted of chamber after chamber of confinement.

In the distance, through a forest of trees, jagged mountains rose against the horizon, their serrated peaks twisting in an effort to come together and hold up

the full, pregnant moon. *Did Vincent die?* She wondered, staring into the breathless beauty of the untamed nature that was her natural home. *Had he slipped and fallen and broken his neck, casting them from his horrible prison of a reality? Why would such a thing happen when they could have taken leave of his cursed Black Mask Chamber whenever they chose?*

It didn't add up, but she was very aware that the terrified cries of her fae had changed to exclamations of joy and wonderment. Fishes splashed in the babbling brook that had once been a dark and fathomless abyss and a fat dragonfly landed on her arm and stared up at her with rounded, bulging eyes before continuing on its journey. *Where is the house?* Demi wondered. *Where is the nightmare house into which they had been brought in chains?*

It was in that instant that she recognized her surroundings and with that recognition came as much joy as terror. She was home—so close to home. She turned to Aramis. He held Saphira's thrashing form by the wrist over the newborn brook. His emerald gaze swept the world with narrowed suspicion.

"Bring her," she told him.

Demi moved on the thin scented wind that slid around her, promising the natural, promising the return of all that was good and safe and free of the oppression of selfish humanity. She passed through the forest, watching the way the moonlight danced on the leaves and the dew clung to the emerald blades of grass. She wanted to believe. Her heart clung hard to that selfish desire as her

surroundings became more familiar from rock to stone.

The satyrs moved in a rush underneath her, chasing a pretty sprite with inky black hair and big gold eyes. Those eyes reflected the confusion of the sudden change of things, but were also lit with the excitement of such a familiar carnal game. Behind the satyrs, dragging legs that had not quite completed the transformation, the human she had given them, the one who had dared laid hands on the Lady Saphira, struggled to keep up. *The satyrs are free*, Demi thought darkly, *and more importantly, Vincent does not lead them*. She thought to stop and speak to the satyrs, to ask them of their leader, but home called first. She had to see it, the place she had come to after being cast out, so carefully selected and made theirs.

Demi came to the *Cedar-At-The-Center-Of-The-Wood* and gazed upon the magnificent tree. Both apprehension and lust filled her. At the same time, she realized that she'd been flying around the human world full-sized. Under ordinary circumstances, it was an unforgivable error and the punishment for it dire. She would punish herself later, however. She shifted into the diminutive dimension that kept their existence secret from humanity and spiraled down toward the ground until she stood in a towering forest of bright green grass bathed in moonlight.

Aramis lit down beside her, the minuscule Saphira cradled in his arms. Demi knew that reducing Saphira in size had been an easy task for Aramis, no harder

than taking a simple breath because she was one of them. Changing the human would be harder, would require a more communal effort. Human's resisted change of any sort. The difference between the two races of beings likened to the difference between the sun and the moon. It was an undeniable difference, faeries like the liquid elasticity of night, ever changing like the phases of the moon and humans like the garish light of day, constant in that throbbing vibrancy, thriving in it.

But change him she would, to something small and pliable that she could bend and control. Right now, they had bigger problems.

"It is impossible," Aramis said.

"Indeed," Demi replied. "It is Vincent. Somehow he has done this. But why?"

Towering mushrooms, in multiple tones from tan to green to white-speckled crimson rose all around her, Brownie houses abandoned ten years before. Many fae had amassed before the *Cedar-At-The-Center-Of-The-Wood*, varying levels of confusion combined with sheer delight drawing them to this familiar place.

Leprechauns and their dark cousins, Cluricauns, dug at the base of the tree for the precious store of gold and jewels that they had painstakingly collected and placed there, and then turned upon one another when they didn't find it fast enough. The leprechauns in dark green and the Cluricauns in deep blood red began a vicious battle that started with words and ended in flying fists and meticulously

made shoes.

Demi left them to it as the thin and wizened pixies made a loose, protective chain around the precious tree and began a slow and respectful worship of a dance that bespoke of their joy at the sudden and unexpected return home. She pushed past the throng, ignored the many whispered questions that came at her as she moved. She did not have answers for them. Not yet. She pressed her hands against the warm bark of *Cedar-At-The-Center-Of-The-Wood*. It opened for her and she passed through the dark wood and into the great hall of the Palace of the Mandrake Faeries.

Engraved in the polished walls was carved the words of *The Way* in the language of *Tir-na-nOg*. The Lady Saphira herself had carved them when they had found this sanctuary in the harshness of the human world after being cast from *Tir-na-nOg*. Five words marked *The Way* and anything that branched from it had been discovered and incorporated into smaller scrolls that marked their laws and governed their existence. *The Way* was simple. All who dwelled within the Clan of the Mandrake Faeries adhered to *The Way* unfailingly.

*Love One Another. Unconditionally. Forever.*

Demi touched the words to see if they shattered as her black cat mask had. They did not. The words were carved in her heart and as deeply etched as they were on the wall before her. Etched in gold as the years passed, the first scrawl had

been no more than desperate, impassioned scribbles on rough wood.

She could still hear Saphira's words as she carved them. Formerly Lady Saphira of the Isle of Mist in *Tir-na-nOg*, she had abandoned her title, her home, *everything*, to follow a banished princess into a world that was not new, but feared, never to return to the dukedom of her father or the world to which she had been born.

"You love him," Saphira had said, her gray eyes glittering in the golden light of a dozen will-o'-the-wisps. "What is wrong with that? Love is a pure and simple thing. It does not have rules, Demi. Your father is *wrong*. I will always love you...*we* will always love you. We will always love one another, those banished from apathetic *Tir-na-nOg*. We won't live any other way." Her kiss after those words had been like honey, the taste of her tongue a sweet satin dream.

"Demi," Aramis said.

She turned to him. Saphira stood beside him, her all-too-human eyes widened at the magnificent splendor all around her. She took in the white halls stretched out before her like she had never seen them before, the braided vine etching that decorated them marvelous to her for the glittering diamonds intertwined within the dark green leaves. She took three steps toward the high, open, gold and mahogany doors of the throne room, the chain from her collar dragging the floor. Shackles ran from twin thrones, the hard metal permanently

molded in the hardened amber of which the thrones were comprised. There were metal studs in the base of the thrones sporting collars of thin metal and heavy leather. Glittering insects that hadn't been seen by human eyes for thousands of years, stared from within the amber. Captured in the poses that they died in, their gossamer wings and insectile bodies perfectly preserved.

Heavy tangles of thick vine crisscrossed the chamber. Thick green leaves made for the seating scattered about the room, the stems burrowing deep into the earth and the very life of the tree. Magnificent pillars carved to a shine from the wood of the tree, studded with rings for binding, rose to the high ceiling that went up into the branches of the *Cedar-At-The-Center-Of-The-Wood*. The pillars circled a great, rounded pool of veined gold and ivory filled with water gone dark and stagnant by time.

Thick tangles of grape hyacinth flower hung from the walls and down into the chamber on long stems to form magnificent chandeliers. A long table, enormous and circular, was engraved so that it resembled the wilted petals on a budding white rose. It was as much a part of the tree as the pillars that rose around it, and stood embedded in a tangle of lush green grass that made up the carpet of the chamber. Littered upon it were tiny cups hardened by magick. They had once been roses, their leaves frozen and preserved so that they could be used for this purpose. Plates of lemon yellow marigold leaves lay overturned upon the

table. These had also been magically preserved for use. What food had once rested upon and within these utensils had long since rotted and turned to dust.

The sleeping chambers rested in an incestuous tangle above, the curtains to each separate chamber parted in invitation to the rooms within. Unlit torches of lavish silver and gold marked those high, polished ivory walls. Dark tapestries covered the walls, depicting various fornications, much like those that Vincent Rousseau had etched on the walls of his manor. In the background of those tapestries depictions of a different world, so alien to the one in which they existed now. In a topaz sky rested an amethyst moon. High castles, with walls that were made rounded instead of at angles rose to pay homage to that sky. Creatures that bared little resemblance to humanity lay with those that bore a striking similitude to mankind in wicked sensual poses of sublime bondage in clandestine glens with flora of pale lilac and glittering tangerine.

“Marcalic sent back a report that his trows and jacks can find no scent of Vincent within the forest,” Aramis continued. “He says he will keep searching until daybreak drives him back.”

He strode to her, wrapped his arms around her and she was enveloped in the heady masculine scent of him. She pressed her lips to the cold metal on his chest, feeling the comforting heat of the flesh beneath. Her hips met his thighs as she tried to become part of him. Her arms slid around his waist, her nails digging



possessively into the flesh of his back.

“Send him word to bring me a satyr, Aramis. I saw them running down a young sprite in the forest. Vincent was not with them, but perhaps they know something.”

The whisper of moving chain drew her away from the arms of her king. Saphira stood at the base of one pillar. Her back to them, she held a length of that chain in her hand; she stared up at the tapestries that depicted the alien realm. “That idiot fucked with the wrong faeries, didn’t he?”

The smile came unbidden to Demi’s face as the joy to her heart. Somewhere in Saphira rested the memory that the Mandrake faeries were not like other clans, either living in the human world or dwelling in the realm of *Tir-na-nOg*. “Yes. He did,” she replied.

“Moron,” Saphira said softly.

“And now we’re going to kill him,” Demi promised. “If he is not somehow, miraculously, dead already.”

“Good,” Saphira said absently, moving to study another painting and another, trailing the length of chain behind her until it grew taut and she had to let it go.



Vincent worked the spell so that it was not meant to wholly confuse the

more intelligent of fae, it was only meant to *hide* their means of escape, to *hold* them. He was fighting for his life and he knew it. The green bitch could suck his soul completely out of him with a thought. His reprieve was that she had been ordered not to do so, to prolong his existence and aid him with the spell until the Kobalos and his army could arrive at the manor. Though the Leanan Sidhe never executed her lovers herself, she had let him know that without those express orders and the fear of Kobalos' reprisal, she would consume him in spite of being bound and set to serve the Goblin King.

Obediently, helplessly he continued to trace her invisible pictures on the cold, dark canvass beneath them, creating rampant beautiful nothing worlds from stunning images that made no sense to him for all the bizarre potency of their alien exotic allure. While he did this, she enjoyed the cruel devouring. It was intensely sexual for her and the result of that was that she drove him to orgasm again and again, mercilessly. His body shook with the terrible exertion of her will; his every cell ached and burned with gasping, breathless pauses between teeth clenching bouts of cumming.

His body was no longer his own to control and command, but there were dark chambers of his mind where Vincent clung to his ever-blossoming plan. What the vain and foolish fae did not know *could* and *would* kill them. Kobalos had turned the tables by trapping him in the grip of the Leanan Sidhe, but he had made

a fatal error in underestimating Vincent as an opponent. *Through her connection with me she feeds me magick with her every breath*, he thought. *My manor runs on magick and that gives me power...the power to save myself...the power to destroy them all.*

He had effectively pitted them against each other—the goblins and the treacherous Mandrake faeries. They were *all* fae and he did not acknowledge their hierarchies and distinctions. While they fought amongst themselves, the magick they were naively imbuing him with moment to moment would grow stronger. When he was strong enough he would give them an offer they could not refuse—an offer that meant the difference between life and death.

And then he'd kill them anyway.

His heartbeat quickened and there were two echoes in the sound...two distinct and throbbing heart beats.

Vincent smiled and chanted the words to the spell along with the Leanan Sidhe, his voice rising and falling as her voice rose and fell in timber and tone. Most of his concentration was centered on harvesting the depth of her grand power of illusion—the power that had been granted him at the terrible price of the swallowing of chunks his soul. There could be no salvation for the tortured lovers of the Leanan Sidhe because she could bend time and space to her wicked will and make herself utterly invisible in a room full of people. While her lover spoke to her and heard her passionate replies, while he reached for her sultry form and stroked

her delicious curves, no one around him could see, hear nor touch her. It lent to the legend that those enamored of the Leanan Sidhe were demented, and Vincent was twisting her mad illusion, using her power to create a lush green world of his prison.

The walls had melted away, the combination of fae magic combining with the latent power inherent in Rousseau Manor so great that his fellow satyrs had left him long ago, passing into the forest vista that rose up before and around their startled black eyes. Even the new one had abandoned him, moving on crippled legs, the animal within unable to resist the call of wild that had sprung so beautifully before his tortured gaze. They had been helplessly drawn into Vincent's well-crafted newborn reality, and their joyous departure had given him the heady rush of knowing the effect his efforts were having on the Mandrake faeries.

The fool faeries did not understand when they'd managed to overtake him that this house was *his* and his alone, that it had been built stone-by-stone for the express purpose of containing and manipulating the magickal. Kobalos could not have understood that either, for as much as Vincent was suffering in the grips of the soul vampire, her aid of her very strong and very real magick made his spell that much more powerful. The magick lent depth to the illusion and allowed him to manipulate the house, allowed him to set the failsafe that would guarantee his

continued existence. Her magick—running through him with the liquid ease of the feel of the caress of her fingers on his tortured flesh—touched the inner mechanisms of Rousseau Manor and the illusion sprung to life around the fae creatures trapped within, taking their memories and recreating their comfortable green world, their sanctuary and making those memories vibrantly real. Along with that, the Leanan Sidhe's magick allowed him to do things a simple spell would have denied him. Within the great manor he manipulated doors and entrances; he moved his dark dungeon and masked his own animal scent. The blue one would be looking for him. He was as sure of that as he was of his own name.

Vincent listened to the beating of the stolen demon heart. Each beat was like the brutal tick of a neutron bomb. Another triumphant smile crossed his grotesque visage beneath the thick layer of white froth that covered his mouth as he spoke her words. He would kill them all, the Goblin King too, if he did not have his way. He wanted his humanity back and he wanted *out*.

To an extent, Vincent also wanted what Kobalos wanted because it served his end. He needed to hold the Mandrake faeries within Rousseau Manor for a limited time, to keep them from departing through his weakened barrier until the Goblin King arrived. When that happened, he would demand the return of his humanity and carefully garnered magicks, he would demand that the faerie bitch queen kneel when she and her minions gave it back to him. Beautiful again, recast

in the full extent of his power, he would decide their fates like the dark human god he had been when he had discovered and captured them.

*Paint for me*, the Leanan Sidhe whispered into the hollows of his mind.

*Sure bitch*, Vincent thought, and in those same hollows he heard the tick, tick, tick, that would either mean his salvation or the cold, explosive condemnation of all who dared to walk within Rousseau Manor.

## Chapter Nine

Ransom heard Saphira's denial of her love for him over and over in his mind until he could not stand the agonizing emotional pain of it anymore. The rabid culminating desire in her guttural moans intermingled with terrible sadness in her words were a torment far beyond any inflicted upon him since coming to this dreadful place of winged creatures and the dark monstrosities that served them. Someone, some—*thing*, ravished his wife right in front of him, and the thought was about to drive him crazy.

His present solitary immobility was torture, like being encased in cold stone. Past that, he couldn't feel a thing. The only hint of his continued existence in the black world behind the hood was the fact that his chest rose and fell with breath and that he was still thinking. And his thoughts were murderous; fixed mainly on ripping the wings off the pretty humanoid butterfly creatures that had taken over his world, tortured him and his wife. Seeking that bizarre confession from her was part of his torture. They wanted him to hear it and know the pain he had caused her—a pain she had never deigned to share with him before, preferring big-eyed accusing silence. It was a malicious act, the wresting of that dark

confession from her beneath the crack of their lashes—a definite part of the torture they had in store for him. The torture the dark faerie had promised him everyday until she decided to kill him.

Saphira’s moans and cries echoed in his mind, becoming louder than the earthquake that had shaken the world as seconds passed into minutes and minutes passed into what felt like hours of immobility. They had simply left him, frozen and blind. He had been alone for a very long time. He had not even been allowed to apologize and that torture was far worse than the one inflicted upon him by the Dark Lady’s lash.

“Well, well, well,” someone said, jerking him out of his dark thoughts. The voice was cold, arrogant, completely smug and *very* recognizable. “Seems like Demi forgot something out here in these fool’s woods.”

*Fuck you*, Ransom thought in the general direction of the blue faerie. He would have told him if he could speak, but his tongue was as frozen as the rest of him.

“Can’t leave you out here, can I?” the blue faerie said mocking. “It might rain and you’ll catch a cold, which would impede my joy in cutting your throat when Demi allows it. She’s soft hearted, our queen. Not like *me* at all.”

The hood slid abruptly from Ransom’s head and he gazed out upon the smooth blackness of a clear moonlit night. The pale blue faerie stood before him in



a clearing. He held a length of chain attached to a captured satyr. Though indistinguishable from Vincent in form and feature, Ransom could tell that the bound creature was not Vincent Rousseau. There was a lack of something in the creature's eyes, a wicked tinged innocence that had nothing to do with the master of the manor.

The blue faerie's hand fell in his hair and Ransom tumbled to the grass covered ground with the sudden return of his mobility. He almost thanked him for the mercy before he remembered *whom* he would be thanking. He stretched his aching limbs. The blue faerie only watched. Ransom found the faint, sardonic tilt of the creature's lips annoying.

"General Marcalic," the satyr said, reminding Ransom of the blue thing's name. "The sport. I will miss my turn with the pretty pixie. I ran as fast as any other before you called me. It is not fair."

"Few things are," Marcalic replied, never taking his gaze off Ransom. Those blue eyes burned both icy and hot.

Ransom shifted uncomfortably under the weight of that stare. *Stop looking at me like that*, he wanted to say but didn't dare. He chose another tact instead. "Where is my wife?"

"Saphira is where she should be. She is *ours*."

"You're crazy. *All of you fucking things—*" Ransom snarled. Rage spurred him

to attack. He got about halfway up before Marcalic reached out and put a staying hand on his shoulder. He froze again, but it was different this time. The hand on his shoulder burned hot and that heat seared him in place. His brow furrowed with effort to command his own body. His teeth clenched. He could move that much at least. His senses sung. His cells danced beneath his flesh. Slow, burning rage intensified the oddity of sensation.

“Really, thief?” Marcalic said, hunkering down in front of him. “Because *you’re* the one seeing faeries.” The hand on his shoulder slid down to toy with the silver metal embedded in his right nipple. Marcalic did not touch his flesh, only the metal, flipping it up and down in a casual fashion. “I watched you earlier,” he continued. “You take punishment well. I don’t have a lot of time now. I’ve been set an errand. I enjoy my tasks. *But—*”

The hand left the metal and slid down Ransom’s chest. The shock of the intimate touch stole his breath away. Fingers slid over his pecs and down across traced the lines of his stomach muscles, delved down further until they skimmed across the base of his dick.

It was a phantom’s caress. He detested the carnal response of his body. He closed his eyes, shamed. He denied the pleasure that came with Marcalic’s touch, fought it with every fiber of his being. He hated this creature. *Hated* him.

“Aren’t you going to say something?” Marcalic asked. “Make protests? Glare

at me? That wide-eyed stare is almost embarrassing on you. It would lead me to believe that you are in lust with me, Ransom Morgan...that you are kneeling there in anticipation of my doing all kinds of wicked things to you. That you *want* me to.”

Ransom found the ridicule in his voice as maddening as the humiliation of his sudden return to helplessness. He took a slow, unsteady breath, tried to think of way to reason with this creature and failed. “I *want* to rip those ginormous wings off your back and stuff them down your throat, asshole. Did you touch my wife?”

Marcalic smiled. There was darkness in it beyond the unfailing mockery. “Many times, in many, many different ways. If you can imagine it, human, I’ve done it with your wife.”

Ransom thought he might explode with the consuming need to kill this thing.

The stray hand returned to his dick. This was no ghost of a touch, no butterfly flutter of curious fingers. Marcalic’s grip was hard, demanding and possessive. With the first cruel jerk his cock stirred to mutinous, mortifying life. His breath hissed through his teeth in reaction. Those hot-cool blue eyes locked on his. Radiating waves of triumphant arrogance danced in those blue depths.

“You’re keeping me from my task, Ransom.” He sounded impatient. His voice was a soft growl.

“Then go the *fuck* away,” Ransom snarled.

“I thought you wanted to know where your wife is.”

The satyr seemed to take great enjoyment in the way this was going. It sat in the grass to watch, the length of its chain pulled taut in Marcalic's hand. Its grin was wide; stretching nearly from ear to ear exposing blunted yellow teeth. The huge, bulging member between its legs was not erect, but interested and twitching.

Ransom was suddenly free again and he collapsed back in the grass. His dick throbbed, for Marcalic refused to release it from his hard grip, and he cried out. He made up his mind very quickly. Whatever the faerie was about, he wasn't cooperating with this particular creature in *any* way.

He wasn't given that kind of chance, however. Before he could draw breath to breathe out his harsh, curse-filled, *demand* to be released, Marcalic was on him. Though the faerie was taller, Ransom was heavier, more muscular. The struggle was relatively fair and extremely brief. Marcalic had his dick and one rough twist after another left Ransom gasping in pain.

Still, he would not give. He thought it better to have his cock ripped off than submit willingly to whatever the faerie had in mind. His hatred was a wild thing, rabid and intense.

*If you can imagine it, human, I've done it with your wife...*

The rage inspiring words drew his hands into fists, which pounded the pale

body on top of him. The struggle was a tangle of arms and legs, animals scrabbling in the dirt. The giggling satyr made up the whole of the cheerleading squad. A blow to the jaw turned Ransom's head to the sky and he was utterly distracted by the impossible.

Part of the sky turned absolutely, malevolently black above—the stars winking out in a ragged circular patch to be replaced by the same awful, writhing shadows that had filled the black chamber where the dark faerie had taken him to be punished.

Against the near perfect starry perfection of the Heavens above, that awful black patch struck him as horribly wrong. Unnerved, he watched that black patch correct itself. The stars returned as natural blue came again to the darkness, blending with the rest of night's smooth backdrop.

"Did you fucking *see* that?" he asked, neglecting to notice that he had ceased his struggle and the creature he'd been battling had ceased as well.

"See what, human?" Marcalic asked.

"There is...*was* something wrong with the sky."

Marcalic looked up, eyes narrowing. "It is false," he said simply. "No more real than the ridiculous purple nightmare that played the sky before it."

*It is more than false*, Ransom thought. *It was like the sky was alive...and* devious.

The faerie moved away from him. It jerked the length of chain and the satyr's

cloven hooves padded the earth as it followed him.

“Get up, fool. I have duties to attend to,” Marcalic called back. “And you mentioned wanting to see your...wife.”

Ransom sat up. He glared at the faerie’s back and stood on legs still shaking from battle. Saphira was wherever Marcalic was going. He let that be his only thought, and followed.



Saphira could not stop looking at the lavish tapestries. Time passed and she was unaware of it so lost was she in the bizarre world offered by the embroidery. Fae creatures scurried around her, the Rousseau faeries and many others. Some of them touched her as they passed and the contact was cautious, but somehow very intimate and familiar. It was as if they couldn’t help themselves, as if they felt they had every right to touch her. *Anywhere*. After the first few finger brushes and delicate bumps, she stopped shrinking away from the feel of their flesh against hers; she stopped noticing them at all. Only the tapestries existed for her.

The world presented before her was very different from her own. It wasn’t only the look of the daytime sky or the bizarre coloring of the foliage. It wasn’t only the rounded edges to everything when the world she knew was composed of straight lines and angles. This alien world was familiar in a way that wanted to touch her heart if only she could let it. She felt it reaching out to her through the

tapestries, and along with it came the stirrings of great sadness.

Day or night the sky in the tapestries was the same soft amber color of Ransom's eyes. Some small part of her mind noted this as she moved to a tapestry with two moons sitting in that amber sky—one gargantuan moon dwarfing the other, both the translucent multi-hues of reflective opals.

*Ransom...*

Her heart ached. She felt as if she were being pulled apart. She felt lost, so very lost. Her fingers brushed the magnificent embroidery. Her hands strove to push within the tapestries as they glided over the intricate needlepoint. She felt like she could step into the magnificent world if she only pushed hard enough. Something held her back and that something had face, form and name. *Ransom...*

In one tapestry she was gifted with the sight of the inside of one rounded, magnificent ivory castle shrouded in dual moonlit mist. Dozens of chambers stood out before her, level to level, rising to the castle's crimson towers. Within those chambers, naked faeries slept. The images stirred her, pushed her toward recognition. The ache in her heart grew.

The faeries in each chamber rested with one another in large beds of pale lilac petals tinged in gold. Their positioning upon those flowerbeds a tangle of limbs that would, at first, seem uncomfortable. They were a fleshy blanket of warm bodies, twisted arms and legs haphazardly tousled in sleep.

“A faerie nest for that fantasy castle and that fantasy clan,” Demi said from behind her. There on top lies the royal nest. Within the realm of the banished Mandrake Clan, that is the nest to which you belong, Lady Saphira. You are of the Nightshade family. My family.”

Dark arms slid around her, the palms lying flat against her stomach. The scent of roses and jasmine filled her nostrils, the effect intoxicating. “Do you like pain, Saphira?” There was some amusement to the question, but beneath that amusement laid a deadly seriousness. Beautiful fingers curved into delicate claws at Saphira’s belly, crimson nails raked against her flesh. There was no pain in the action, but the promise was there. Saphira’s whole body tingled in anticipation of more.

“Tell me that this is a dream.” It was as close to a demand as Saphira dared. She turned in Demi’s arms. She stared at the vision of stunning beauty before her. The queen of the faeries was dressed sparsely and in black leather intertwined with crimson. She had a cincher around her waist, harsh bone woven into the leather material, pulling it taut and tight allowing little room for movement, less room for breathing. Heavy rings dangled from the cincher. Her full breasts rose to tawny points just above it. She had similar bonds of leather and rings around her wrists and ankles. The most startling thing about the bizarre outfit was the collar. It was not small like Saphira’s own, but crafted to take up all the space between



her head and shoulders, fire red with a humongous glittering sapphire at its center, it allowed little room for the movement of the queen's head, forcing her into a permanent state of submissive grace and posture. She bore no chains, but the leather seemed to beg for them.

Saphira could see the dark hairs of her sex. Her gaze raked over hardened golden nipples and she found herself taking a step back from the queen in order to breathe, in order to think beyond the quiet stirring of lust that looking at her inspired.

Demi smiled wickedly and took a step forward. It was like a dare and Saphira failed it as she took another step backward to avoid being enveloped in the delicious scent of the other female again.

"It depends on what kind of pain it is, doesn't it?" Demi said reflectively. "What Ransom did, *that* kind of pain, it is the kind that is too much to bear."

Her voice was mesmerizing. Saphira found herself swaying gently to the sound. "I want him."

"Why?" Demi asked, her glittering blue eyes genuinely quizzical.

"Because I love him."

"Humans know nothing of love," she scoffed. "Love does not betray."

"Love forgives."

Saphira felt stalked, Demi moved in on her, devouring the space between

them. The back of her legs bumped into the low round walls of a pool, and there was nowhere else to go. The pool walls were warm against her, the smooth stones teasing her flesh.

“Do you love *me*?” Demi inquired, her voice as soft as satin. Her body was against Saphira’s, dark velvet against pale satin, the touch electric, disturbing, intimate. Hardened nipples raked against hers, swollen tip to swollen tip, and a maddening, impossible thrill traveled down her spine then arced towards her toes.

“Y-Yes,” she said, fighting the urge to arch against the smooth body that sought to conquer hers. Her love was real. It was damning and the craving to surrender to it stirred a low desirous moan from deep within her, the sound echoed in the chamber beneath her panting breaths.

Demi smiled. “Then *say* it. Say it like you’ve said it a million times before. Bring the songs back to my heart, Lady Saphira...bring back my joy.”

“I do not know—” Saphira panted. ...*What you want from me...*

“*Demi*. Say I love you, Demi.”

“Why?”

*Why was any of this happening?* Saphira wondered, and her legs trembled as a dark hand slid across the ebony curls there, stealing across the flesh of her mound and inflaming it. *Where did this macabre dream end and reality begin again?*

“Because saying it might make you remember. Because once upon a time you

betrayed me, and if you want me to forgive you in that awful human way you insist upon believing in, you *must* remember the choices you've made, the pain you've caused."

Velvet lips came down on hers. The firm softness of the mouth on hers demanded that she yield. She was pressed back over the waters of the pool, the faint scent of long departed lilacs enveloped her, lending to the passion of the kiss. She lost her footing and fell backward. Demi fell with her, their lips seared together as they sank beneath the cool waters of the pool.

She felt the rocky bottom of the pool beneath her back as the woman in her arms seemed to dissolve away from her, to become transparent and insubstantial as mist on the waters. In Saphira's heart a terrible ache blossomed for the loss.

*She lay in an ocean of water and floating roses. The moon hung high above her in a jet-black sky, its silvery light glowing luminous over the shimmering pool in which she languished. The roses floated on the water and there were thousands of them. She lay in one such rose, its voluptuous flowering walls rising around her, bleeding blood red. The night sounds were a symphony of the natural, the perfumed air smelled of new fallen rain.*

*A dream within a dream,* Saphira thought. It was a drugged consideration, smoky and unreal.

*He was in the water again that night, this beautiful creature that had so captured her attention, this forbidden fruit that she had been born to shun, and yet, fascinated, she watched him*

*from within the rose petals as he bathed. Long, dark chestnut curls streaked with gold, eyes that were tawny like the sun she had so rarely seen—eyes like the amber wine she drank from the dandelions within the glen in which she lived; long dark lashes that curled slightly in the most tantalizing fashion beneath wickedly arched eyebrows. Sexy lips curved in a smile that implied some private and decidedly funny joke that she wished dearly that he would share with her.*

*Her pussy went wet as she watched him standing in the pool, roses clinging to his slick, wet flesh. Twin silver rings, tiny and glittering in moonlight, pierced the dark nipples on his broad, golden chest. Fat droplets of water slid across his skin. Her gaze roved over him hungrily, common sense warring with the need for the forbidden. What was his name, she wondered. In which house did he live within the village? Why did he bathe here in this forgotten pool in the darkened forest where few humans dared to tread?*

*Her fingers strayed to the hot wet center of her desire, flicking against the bud of her clit, causing tremor after tremor as she watched him. She was fascinated by him. Enraptured. Her gaze roved over the hard muscles of his body and came to light on the trail of silken hair that ran from his navel to his cock. She sighed. What was so wrong with humans that she had to deny herself this? That she had to suffer this miserable frustration, the anxiety of festering want night after night? Or the terrible fear that one night he would not return to bathe in the pool while she slept within the petals of a gilded lily during the day?*

*She sighed again, her body drunk with desire.*

*He turned in reaction to the sound and the waters rolled through the pond, rocking her tiny rose-petal hiding place. His amber eyes narrowed in the moonlight. "Who is there?" he demanded.*

*Her decision was instantaneous and foolish. She abandoned the tiny shape with which the fae hid from humanity with little thought beyond desire. He had acknowledged her presence. He had asked a question, and lust gave her the courage to answer. She stood in the water, naked. Fear, shock and lust entered his amber gaze all at once and she was amused.*

*She took a step toward him and he did not move. She placed a hand on his chest above his right nipple and felt the muscles flinch beneath the hot flesh. "Make love to me," she demanded.*

*"You are impossible," he said. His eyes moved over her, as if he wanted to take in every part of her at once. "I couldn't be this drunk. There is not this much drunk in the world."*

*She could smell the hint of human libations on his breath. It was a pleasant scent, strong and forceful. She drew closer. She could do this once, she reasoned. Taste him, take her fill and be free on the wicked desire that had hounded her since she first spied him bathing in the pool weeks ago. No one would be the wiser, and she could stop the cruel ache within her that drew her to this place night after night hoping that he would be there, not knowing what she would do if he were not.*

*He was like a statue against her, as she tasted his lips, an incredibly hot effigy of the most beautiful thing in the world. "Make love to me," she said again, as her tongue flicked across the fullness of his bottom lip and she tasted the sweetness of the liquor that still lingered there. Her*

*hand slid down his chest, over the muscles of his stomach and across his waist and back until she felt the smooth skin of his ass underneath her fingertips. “And I will make love to you.”*

*He groaned and it was a deep animal sound. His cock hardened against her stomach. The fingers of her free hand strayed to the wet length of his hair and became entangled within. She drew him closer, eliminating any space between them, tasting him, breathing him. He was disarmingly hesitant in her arms. His mouth opened to hers. His tongue was intoxicating, luscious, and she had to resist the urge to bite it as it surged into her mouth.*

*She pulled at his hair, squeezed the taut ass beneath her fingers. She wanted to devour him. She reached within hoping to find the control she needed to enjoy the dalliance, but found only more passion until she was flooded with it and could not take a breath that was not carnal and obsessed. Possession surged within her and in a moment of foresight she knew this was a mistake of epic proportions but the moment faded, swamped by ardor’s passions. There was no way she was going to be able to give this up. Her wings made to draw around him, to seal them together. He felt the feathery touch and flinched away from her...but not too far. The tip of his swollen cock brushed against her navel.*

*“You’re not real,” he whispered.*

*She contemplated that thought. It was sweet to her, and safe. “No,” she said. “I am only a dream. Tell me your name.”*

*“Ransom,” he said.*

*It was a beautiful name...almost as beautiful as he was. She could hardly stand the little distance between them, and where his cock touched her, her flesh burned and that tiny inferno flowered and spread throughout her body. "I am a dream, Ransom," she breathed. "And there is safety in dreams."*

*He grinned hesitantly, a good measure of the shock and fear evaporated from his golden gaze.*

*She took a step toward him, re-closing the space between them. Her breasts pressed against his chest, feeling the night chilled metal of the rings against her own nipples.*

*"This is the craziest dream I ever had," he said and then his mouth came down on hers, savage, demanding, and wondrous.*

*She sighed. He was hers. Finally, he was hers.*

*Long denied desire murdered patience. She changed the water to fit her immediate needs with merely a thought. Hardened it and yet made it pliable at the same time. When he pushed her backward she lay atop the surface and it held her. He hardly noticed this miracle. He was intent on her ravishment. His mouth teased her nipples into agonized points, leaving a hot trail across her ribs and down the flat of her stomach to the dark thatch between her legs.*

*His tongue flicked across her mound, drawing hair and flesh into his mouth at once, parting the lips with his tongue and teeth. Her mind screamed. Her back arched and then her clit was in his mouth and he was sucking at it greedily, and she almost forgot the magic she held on the*

waters beneath her.

*She dug her fingers into the thin skin she had place on the water, felt the stirring of the fishes beneath as they flittered under her. She could hear their song, and the songs of all the other creatures of the forest. They matched the rhythm of her breathless pants and moans.*

*When he kissed her again, she tasted herself along with the liquor on his mouth. She felt the insistent press of his cock against her cunt. Her body begged for it. Her fingers strayed to his ass, felt the smoothness of the crack and the heated warmth inside. Her legs opened for him as he thrust inside her, filling her. Her fingers stroked his asshole and he trembled, his whole body going with the wild rhythm created by her hand.*

*Her body arched to meet his each and every thrust, as she grew bolder. The wild animal sounds he made became her inspiration. She looped one leg around his waist in an effort to control his wild bucking as he plowed into her. Her finger slid into the inferno heat of his asshole. He cried out at the invasion. His beautiful eyes widened and she watched the gorgeous contortions of his face—pleasure and pain dancing across his visage in a mad mating ritual that made her so hot she felt she might ignite and spontaneously combust.*

*His mouth came down hard and bruising on hers, his kiss practically sucking the life out of her and then his head was by her shoulder and the sting of his bite caused her to cry out and orgasm in a flood. Still, she gave no quarter, using her hand like a weapon, thrusting hard and fast. She watched him the whole time and when their eyes locked, he blushed beneath her scrutiny and*



*came as savagely as she had.*

## Chapter Ten

Ransom followed Marcalic to a towering tree that stood alone in the center of a vast clearing. Mushrooms in various shades stood sprinkled around its great knotty base. In the near distance, beyond the great boughs of the impressive plant, he could see the soft blue waters of a small pond. He realized that he had been to this place before. The tree meant little to him. But he had bathed in that pond. He had met Saphira in its stunning blue waters.

He took a step toward it, drawn to it. Marcalic glowered at him, ceasing the movement.

“Aramis,” the blue faerie called.

The blond appeared out of nowhere. One second he wasn’t there and the next he simply *was*. Emerald eyes gazed at Ransom with an arrogance that made Marcalic’s inherent haughtiness seem like simpering servitude by comparison. He bristled against the cool, calculating assessment in that stare, and when it snapped away, on to more important things, he felt as if he had been weighted, measured and found severely wanting.

“What have you uncovered?” Aramis asked.

“Certainly not Vincent or I’d be coated in his blood-spray,” Marcalic replied.

“I have brought a satyr as Demi requested. I questioned him. Vincent played a game with them. He taught them the words to say, but the words were dull and he has forgotten them, as a satyr will. Vincent raved to the dirt in the dungeon. The satyr knows not what he raved about. The world changed for him as it changed for us.”

Aramis nodded, his golden brow furrowed. “A spell of some sort,” he said, and motioned his arms to indicate the forest around them. “But it doesn’t explain all this. No matter, Vincent’s not the patient sort. Whatever he’s going to do, he’ll do it soon.”

Ransom wondered if he should tell him about the sky, how it had shifted and the way the alteration had left a gaping hole that had covered itself up before his eyes. Nothing so unnatural could bode well for any of them. He opened his mouth to speak when the little black thing moved beside the pool. It stood no more than three-feet tall, obsidian, but for the glittering yellow of its eyes. It appeared to be covered in or composed of thick mud. Its body was almost completely round where it crouched upon a jagged rock. It had no neck that he could discern between its round body and the roundness of its head. Its arms and legs were long and spindly and Ransom wondered how those thin legs supported the weight of its lumpish body. Its mouth moved in the darkness and reflected in moonlight, he caught sight of shark like rows of needle-sharp teeth within the

cavern of its maw. The creature carried a small sword, which it raised in his direction, then scurried down the rock and off into the foliage with an animal's quickness.

"What are you gawking at, stupid human?" Marcalic asked.

Ransom ignored the insult. Looking at the little monstrosity had left him cold in the same way of the shifting, sneaking sky. "I don't know what the fuck it was," he answered. "I've seen a lot of ugly-ass things since coming here. Haven't seen anything like that though. It carried a weapon. A sword. The little bastard looked hostile. *Very.*"

"I don't see anything." Marcalic growled. He sounded both edgy and annoyed.

"It's gone now."

"Are you sure it wasn't one of my jacks or trows? The creatures you saw before I brought you here?"

"Uglier than those. And that's damn hard," Ransom replied.

"It's the weapon I'm worried about," Aramis said. "Did you stop by the *Cedar-At-The-Center-Of-The-Wood* to outfit your soldiers before pursuing Vincent, Marcalic?"

"No." With those words, Marcalic stalked off into the forest in the direction of the pond. In his first step he was taller than Ransom, but each step after shrunk

him, until he was no taller than the little black creature he hunted. Amber butterfly wings moving with a hummingbird's swiftness, he lighted on the rock and then took off in the direction of his prey.

"I saw something else," Ransom told Aramis, and then explained to him about the oddity of the sky. He tried to do it without quaking as he spoke, that was how repulsive watching the sky change like that had made him feel, almost as repulsive was the little monster carrying a sword. Something was very, very wrong in the dark world of the faeries and if he couldn't get out then he thought he'd better offer what help he could. He couldn't imagine that his fate would be any better than theirs. He was, after all, in their world. At least he thought he was. Patches of the sky didn't just disappear and then *sneak* back in his world, that was for damn sure.

Aramis watched him as he spoke and some of the indifference melted from the coolness of his gaze. "Did you tell Marcalic of this?" he asked when Ransom was done speaking.

Ransom couldn't stop the color from running to his face at the question. A blazing trail of heat spread through his whole body. "Marcalic wasn't interested in listening at the time," he said.

Aramis smiled, and it wasn't cold. In fact, Ransom thought that he might have preferred a return to the frigidity of his stare instead of the heat that spread in

the blond's dark regard.

"Really?" Aramis asked. "What was he doing?"

Ransom fumbled with the answer. The sounding of a horn in the distance saved him the displeasure of having to reply. Those heated green eyes slid away from him in the direction of the sound. It was a call, a summoning.

Marcalic returned, no more than three feet tall, wings beating frantically in the night. He was carrying something that looked like it weighed considerably more than he did. He dropped it on the ground at Aramis's feet. The inky black body lolled lifelessly in the grass.

"Goblin," he said with some distaste. His voice was small on the wind. He was carrying the creature's sword. He dropped it alongside the dead thing.

Aramis's eyes narrowed. Ransom swore he saw hate in those emerald depths. Aramis kicked at the corpse as Marcalic regained size beside him. "*Kobalos*," he said.

Ransom started as creatures took form all around him, short ones and tall ones, all humanoid, their bizarre distinctions ran the gamut. To simplify matters for himself, he came to the conclusion that some were faeries and some were not and left it there. The dark faerie stood amongst them, her blue eyes narrowed to the inky night. "Who makes the fae war cry?" she demanded.

"*Kobalos*," Aramis repeated, and the reaction of the crowd was one of great

horror, they seemed to recoil from the word en mass.

“Impossible,” the dark faerie said. “What would Kobalos be doing in Vincent Rousseau’s house of pain?”

Marcalic reached down and scooped up the tiny black body. He held it before her face. Her eyes widened. “He is *here*, Demi.”

The horn sounded again, its heavy trill long, low, and undeniable. Aramis looked like he was about to go into a frothy mouthed rage that bespoke of nothing short of murder. The potency of his emotion flowed through the group, igniting a strange and engulfing fear in them. Ransom felt that fear crawl all over him, digging into his flesh like the dead goblin’s thick little claws might.

“What will we do?” some creature with a face entirely too round and features too broad for humanity whispered. Its pointed ears twitched nervously beneath a dark brown cap.

“We will meet him of course,” Aramis hissed.

Marcalic’s grin at those words was lupine, fully animal. He put two fingers to his lips and whistled. The night responded to the sound. Dark shapes slid in the trees, shadowy lumps moved liquidly from the ground and began to take shape, making up the nightmare creatures that had assaulted Ransom when he’d entered Rousseau Manor. He saw hundreds of them, and there were more waiting in the shadows, turning the forest inky black with their presence. Lantern eyes, in

luminous tones gleamed eagerly as they awaited their general's command.

Marcalic pointed toward the great tree, and toothy grins split the grotesque faces of the little creatures. Spiraling downward until they were very tiny, the creatures flowed *into* the tree, past the bark and within in a black satin wave, and then, only seconds later, they poured out again. They carried weapons upon their return, swords, maces, javelins and heavy staffs. The staff heads glittered with amber light, making the night around them a soft sherry color. Some carried heavy shields that glittered in that pale amber light. The little black bodies were newly armored, the scanty stuff dangling ridiculously on misshapen frames that grew to monstrous proportions before him, until they stood head-to-head with their tall faerie masters.

*I have completely lost my mind*, Ransom thought, staring into the horror-mask faces of the nightmares gibbering and snarling before him. He fought not to cringe as one of them leaned in close and smelled him, its enormous nostrils widening with his scent. Its tongue lolled as if it had just found something particularly delicious and danced across the jagged yellow edges of its teeth. *That is the only explanation. I don't want to believe it, but its true, because this can't be happening—none of it. From the moment I walked into that fucking house...*

He watched, mesmerized, as any snake before a good charmer, as butterfly wings convulsed sinuously all around him, stirring like soft satin they encircled



the bodies they were attached to lovingly. The faerie wings hardened before his startled eyes, forming garments, twisting into hard metal, becoming more armor for the burgeoning fae army. He watched as a length of Aramis's cerulean blue wings wound down his arm to meet his outstretched hand. It lengthened, impossibly, snaking in upon itself, growing broader and forming hard edges of that same magnificent color. It took on weight and razor-edged substance until it was a formidable sword.

"I want to know how Vincent did this," the dark faerie said reflectively. A dark Valkyrie, she too was outfitted for war. "And I want his head."

"*Done*," Marcalic snarled.

"But Kobalos' head first," Aramis said softly. His voice was deadly.

The small army surged forward and Ransom felt so forgotten about that he was bereft of them—even their cruelty—as they moved toward the pond and the high wailing sound that dared echo again across the night demanding their attention. A drop of rain fell upon him, followed by another and another as he took a step forward, unsure as to whether to follow them or not, but very curious about the sounder of the horn and what would happen on the chosen battlefield. He was not alone, however, for only the faeries and the Jacks and the trows had gone off to their impromptu war.

Lumpish creatures in brown caps stared at him with moss green eyes

glittering with moonlight. Dark haired things that looked like very thin little old men danced nervously before him as the army moved on in the night. “What will we do with *him*?” one of the little old men asked.

Marcalic waved a bow and sheath of black arrows, his voice carried over the snarling war-driven beasts that followed him. “Bind him. He is *still* a thief.”

“Like Dark Lord Kobalos, you dared try and keep what is rightfully ours,” one of the strange creatures said from a loose circle that was tightening around Ransom. They were grinning but there was no mirth in their frozen smiles. The nervousness in their eyes, their helpless fear and rage they turned on him. The first one fell upon him and then another and another until they bore him, thrashing, to the ground.



*“You must remember!”*

It was Demi. Saphira’s lips were still swollen from the faerie queen’s kiss. Her mind slid from the cerulean pond and Ransom’s arms to stumble toward wakefulness. She heard so many voices, soft and insistent, but the faerie queen wasn’t anywhere. Her skin tingled from phantom caresses. Her body was pressed in a throng of flesh and warm as fingers slid delicately, intimately over her.

“Saphira!” The voice was insistent, demanding and familiar. “Saphira!” the voice called again, petulant this time. Her eyes snapped open. Ringed around her

leafy bed, dozens of fae creatures stared at her adoringly. One fat, gentle hand stroked her rose colored nipple with absent intent, bringing the puckered flesh to an attentive peak. *Brownie*, her mind identified hazily. *They cook and they clean and they serve.*

“Lady of the Isle of Mist,” he whispered, “Such danger has befallen us...such suffering...first the dark sorcerer and now this...”

The other voices joined his. They rose in her mind like a song, echoed through the chamber with near hypnotic fierceness. They demanded that she understand. They insisted that she remember. Their voices were like the riotous waves in a storm, and they carried her away with them.

*“Our dark queen made love to the Goblin King for sport underneath the full moons of Tir-na-nOg. You were with her. You must remember...”*

She saw him, the Dark Lord Kobalos, hunched over a writhing goblin maiden in a field. He had her skirt jacked up and from her place in the brush; Saphira could see the dark place that was her sex. Kobalos, laughing, worked his pants to unleash his throbbing cock, his hips straining to reach that sweet flesh. The goblin girl’s scream echoed in the darkness of the night, reflecting her terror. Beside Saphira, Demi laughed softly and strode out into the clearing with eyes darkened by some wild and nameless emotion.

*“His love for her changed him. He is not a goblin by look, but he is goblin in his heart...”*

Demi, ever cruel in her lovemaking had chained the dark lord within a writhing tangle of vines. She was wrapped around him at the hips, his cock deep inside her. The tangerine trees, obeying her commands whipped at his dark flesh mercilessly, and every orange-tinged lash drove him deeper inside her. The Goblin King, unused to such domination, howled in rage...but there was something in his dark howling, a desperation in which he moved his hips that bespoke of great passion and desire. When the light of the moons struck him as they gasped for breath, hunching against one another, striving for climax, the goblin began to change.

*“Demi fell in love with golden Aramis, a fae prince whose blood was, eons ago, tainted with a tinge of humanity...”*

Fair Aramis who gathered his army and rode against the Goblin King...His was such a small army against the goblin horde. His General, Marcalic, riding at the head and cutting a swath through the dark oppressors as Aramis and Kobalos waged personal war in the center of it all.

*“Oh how, the Great King of the Wood disapproved of their great love...”*

The great sentient tree that was the King of the Wood, his jade hair writhing like snakes from the branches in his head, his dark brown eyes—the color of earth— was enraged as he stared down at his wayward disappointment of a daughter and condemned her.

*“Kobalos waged war...bloody war in Tir-na-nOg. The change in his appearance drove him to take note of the strange seed of love in his heart...Goblins do not love. He did not know what to do with such passion of emotion...”*

Villages burned, fields darkened by blight, blood in the streets and corpses swinging in the wind. The stench of death was heavy as the reek of oppression, as the goblins moved from town to town destroying everything in their path and coming closer and closer to the great castle at the center of *Tir-na-nOg*.

*“The King of the Wood offered no aid to his people, so great was his despair of his daughter’s feelings of affection for one tainted by humanity. He preferred dark Kobalos to golden Aramis. At least Kobalos was truly fae...but, after much time and much suffering, even he could not ignore the great anguish that Kobalos inflicted on the villages that stood between the Goblin King and his love. In the end The King of the Wood banished them all, the lovers, those that stood with them, and the goblins...and we, the inhabitants of those tortured, forsaken villages, lost faith in our King and chose to come with you...”*

The smell of blood was strong as they rode their horses through the villages in a farewell to all they knew, and the villagers followed them to the edge of *Tir-na-nOg* and into the world beyond.

*“You forsook us...”*

*“We forgive you...”*

*“He is back...”*

*“You must remember...”*

The hand on her nipple turned cruel, a wave of pain shot through her. It was a conflicting sensation, both hot and cold. She jerked up on the leafy bed in reaction to it, heat flowing to her sex. The fae creatures scattered. And she could still smell the heavy smoke from the fires that had driven them from *Tir-na-nOg*.

*This is not a dream*, and the acknowledgement of that simple fact changed something within her. She did not know what that something was, but she felt it give with a simple snap. *This is real*.

“Saphira!” The adamant voice called again. It was so familiar she could not mistake it even as the memories of a time long past flooded her. Her husband was calling. She had better answer.

“Ransom?” she whispered, turning in his direction. She was so glad to see him that at first she failed to note the oddity of the circumstances in which she found him.

Ransom was on the throne room’s great circular table. But the table had been altered while she had been sleeping. On either side of it, sprouting from the floor were thin metal bars that curved inward over the mattress. Roughly two feet separated the tip of one bar from the other. From each blunt end, descended a chain only a short distance before coming to a leather strap that looked very much

like a seat or a swing for some small creature.

*All in all, Saphira thought, that is what it looks like...a swing.*

Ransom was a captive of that red swing. His back was to her and he was on his knees on the circular table, trussed up like the most bizarre offering to invisible dinner guests. Tight chains bound his arms to the bars.

“Saphira! What are you looking at me like that for? Hurry! Undo these chains!”

“What are you doing here, Ransom?” she asked.

“You didn’t come home,” he said as when he saw that he had her complete attention.

Saphira was assaulted by a certain surge of anger while looking at him in this way. Her head was filled with images from the past. A past she had forsaken...for him. His face was red on one side, the outline of a handprint clearly visible there. She stared at that, wondering who had dared to do it and why looking at it increased her anger. Ransom was hers to punish and no one else’s.

“You said you would,” he continued. “You said we could talk about it. Try again. But you didn’t come home, so I came looking for you. All your work was turned over, watercolors spilled everywhere, your canvas smeared and on the floor. Paint covered footsteps...two sets, and one of them was so big...a pit in the floor. And blood on the stairs.”

He turned his head and looked at her. Hard. It was like he was trying to see *into* her.

Anger rooted her to the spot. She would hold herself aloof, survey him with the cold gaze of an impartial observer. The heartstrings that his intense gaze tugged on, she ignored. She concentrated on the sexual instead; the width of his shoulders, the taper at his waist, the smooth curves of his muscled ass. She didn't want to think on their attachment. Her gaze flickered for a moment to the tapestries that hung around the chamber. They were not so bizarre after all—the world within them less alien to her.

“I have never been so scared in my life as when I saw that blood, Saphira,” he finished and turned away from her.

“Liar. How dare you say that,” she whispered, “when you spent all your time with that whore? Do you love her, Ransom?”

She wouldn't admit, even to her own secret heart, how much the question hurt to utter. Silence hung heavy between them.

“No.”

Saphira processed that single word. Hope rushed to fill the fissures of her heart. She could see, make him see. Very well, they would share the experience. Then her course would be clear. She moved off the leaf bed, her feet touching the cold floor, and moved to sit on the edge of the stagnant pool, the cool stone



warmed to her flesh. She could get a better look at him from here. The fae creatures in the room were very quiet, as if they hoped they could be forgotten about during this encounter.

She gazed into the waters and saw her reflection. She looked so different to herself than the last time she'd looked in a mirror. Her hair hung in loose curls about her head. Her gray eyes glittered unnatural silver. *What is happening to me?* She wondered. *I am...changing.*

*And I am angry...so very angry...*

“Do you know how old I am, Ransom?” she asked. “No, you couldn’t. You know how old I *look*, but a thousand years are crowding in upon me with the promise of the thousand before that dancing like will-o’-the-wisps and playing along the edges of my memory.”

She slid her palm across the warm water, causing her image to scatter. A new reflection took its place. “I can...I can manipulate the water. Bend it to my will. Make it a mirror that sees through time. I have so much power, Ransom. You wouldn’t believe it.”

*“What do you mean, ‘what am I going to do’? She won’t even talk to you. That’s why you’re here talking to me,” Kara Lacey said to Ransom. “You told me yourself that she’s been cold and distant lately. But I’m here and warm and I want you, Ransom. Shall I pour you another drink?”*

She heard his startled gasp behind her, but she was focused on the picture in the water. They were in his office...mahogany furniture, crisp white walls, gorgeous full-length windows opening on a scenic night-view of the city and his Law degree in a golden frame.

*“She stares at the moon with more adoration than she gives to me. I am beginning to hate the moon and the stars and the trees...and that damnable, hulking nightmare of a house...and those fucking faeries. She used to look at me like that, touch me like she touches her fucking precious brushes.”*

“Saphira, don’t,” he said from behind her.

“Quiet,” she said softly, leaning closer to the water, her gaze following Kara Lacey across Ransom’s luxurious penthouse office. Her eyes narrowed when Kara kicked off her six-inch heels, her toes digging into the ebony and gold flecked carpet. The woman stopped before the tiny bar on the opposite side of the room and stretched seductively before the gathering of crystalline decanters. Her fingers trailed across the glass bulbs on the decanters until she found one filled with the amber of brandy. Next to it was a small, delicate potted plant with amethyst flowers. A tiny dot winked red from amongst the leaves, a steady rhythmic flickering. Kara took a moment and adjusted the camera lens.

Smiling, she grabbed the bottle and poured the contents into a small glass.

*“She’s so beautiful,” Ransom murmured. “And distracted. It gets worse every year, as if I*

*get that much smaller and unimportant in her eyes. Can you imagine what that's like, Kara? Becoming smaller and smaller in the eyes of the thing you desire most in the world?"*

Ransom sounded sleepy, which was strange. Saphira watched Kara's back tense. Her ruby red nails digging into the glass with irritation. Then the woman reached into her pocket and took out a tiny vial, pouring a small amount of white powder into the brandy glass and swirling it around.

*"No, Ransom," she said, turning around, her eyes narrowed. "I don't know what that's like at all. I can't imagine the pain you're going through. I am just glad that you came to me. It is never good to suffer alone."*

*"Ah," Ransom said, laughing, "but I did ask you to leave me alone. I don't like putting this kind of emotional baggage on you. I need to talk to my wife. She listens while I'm talking, but five minutes afterwards, she's drifting away from me again. I need to go home, Kara, but thank you for listening."*

A sliver of guilt ran through Saphira listening to her husband's voice and the pain in it, knowing that she had been the cause of that pain. He was sitting at his desk. When he tried to stand, he almost fell. He seemed confused by that as he steadied himself against the dark wood.

*"One more drink," Kara Lacey said, her voice low and seductive.*

*He shook his head. "You drink it," he said. "I think I've had more than enough."*

*Kara studied him, with darkened blue eyes. “Yeah”, she said, “maybe you have.” She slid around the desk, in the few steps that it took her to get to him, she moved like a predator after a wounded deer.*

Saphira tried to rationalize the hurt running through her. She had lain with Aramis and Marcalic, how could she be mad at Ransom for lying with Kara Lacey? But she knew the answer to that. Aramis, Marcalic and Demi were her nest mates. She had been laying in their arms for thousands of years. Her heart had cried out to them in the time that she had pretended to be human. She had found it hard to exist without their love. As much as she loved Ransom, the moon was her mother and the night sky was her father and her nest mates were her lovers, eternally. She had missed them living in the garish light of day.

*Ransom watched Kara come, his pupils dilated in the blazing gold of his eyes.*

*“She’s stupid,” Kara said softly, “so damn stupid to ignore such a gorgeous, powerful man like you. I hate her. You can do anything to me, Ransom. Anytime. Anyplace. Anything.”*

*She touched his face, her hand caressing his jaw line as the muscles there jumped beneath her touch. Her other hand slid down his chest to rest at his crotch.*

Saphira flinched, her mind sorting through the rash of damning emotions that came with having been human for so long. She couldn’t watch anymore. She drew her hand over the water dismissively, obliterating the moment.

*“This was the first time,” she said, thinking of the tiny vial and the white*

powder that Kara had poured into Ransom's drink, his odd behavior, the fact that he'd almost fallen on his ass trying to stand up.

"The *first* time?" he said, dejectedly. "It was the *only* time. I never touched her after that. I don't even remember most of it, Saphira. I just wanted to go home to you, to be with you. And she was...there."

The photographs ran through her mind, hundreds of them, so obviously delivered by the hands of a jealous woman, the same kind of horrible creature that would drug a man in order to take him from his wife. A picture was worth a thousand words, but Saphira knew that it was possible to take a picture and make it into a lie.

There was something ferocious rising in her and someone would have to suffer it. Ransom would do. He liked that sort of thing anyway.

She slid onto the mattress on her knees. Her palms moved over the hot flesh of his back, feeling the smooth muscles jump pleasantly beneath her touch. He was so tense, and yet, as her fingers slid over his shoulder blades, she felt him quiver, as if he had waited forever for her to touch him again.

He was as fine as any faerie, and the more she touched him the more she wanted to. Her hands moved over him greedily, roughly. She took her time playing with his muscles, pressing them in order to elicit his deep, jittering response. She listened to the harsh intake of his breath as her hands trailed over the small of his

back. When her lips started to follow her hands, his body took to trembling uncontrollably. Her teeth nipped his flesh, biting hard enough to draw ragged, desirous gasps from him.

The sounds were music to her, a tune she loved but hadn't played in a long time. Her cunt went hot as fire just listening to it. She felt like a bee that had been starving and someone had laid before her a comb of nectar. Her bites increased in strength, not hard enough to break the skin but hard enough to command his absolute, undivided, attention. She slid against his back, her hot sex against his ass, her stomach to his back, her teeth in the flesh of his throat at the jugular, feeling his heartbeat pulse there, one hand in his hair, pulling back.

He was hers and she didn't know what she was going to do about it. She could not live as a human; the calling of her true nature would tear them apart. Her free hand slid between his parted thighs from behind, ran across the hot flesh of his balls, seeking his cock. Her fingers closed around the thick shaft possessively. *Hers.*

She listened to his harsh intake of breath as her fingers slid along the smooth flesh she had captured, from the collar wrapped tight around the base to the swollen tip. Her thumb tapped the tip rhythmically until his body surged with that rhythm. She increased the pace striking harder, nearly cruel, until the word she wanted to hear issued from his lips.

“Please.”

She wanted to see his face. She slid along the side of him, never allowing a moment where her flesh wasn't in contact with his, never relinquishing her hold on his cock. His gaze devoured her; his amber eyes so filled with desire that she was spellbound. On her knees she met him, the leather of the swing separating them at the stomach, her breasts flattened against his chest, the skin-warmed metal of his piercings teasing her aching nipples to diamond peaks.

“You forgive me?” he asked. The longing in the question was undeniable.

“Do you *deserve* forgiving?” she asked.

She did not give him a chance to answer her question; her greed for him was just too great. Her mouth met his, closing over the swell of his bottom lip, sucking on that captured flesh. The hand on his dick ceased its cruelty in favor of the kindness of gentle stroking. He surged forward against the bonds of the chains and bars as she increased both the pressure and command in her kiss and the demand inherent in the way she was stroking his cock.

She brought him rough and thrusting to the brink of orgasm—his hips thrusting into the tight circle of her palm. His whole body involved in the manipulation of his dick...and then she stopped.

He whimpered and said it again, his breath a desperate rush into the cavern of her mouth, “Please. I want to be inside of you.”

Her tongue slid over the metal piercings, the hardened nipples that held them in place, and trailed up to his throat where his skin pulsed with the rush of his blood. She encircled his waist with her legs and wrapped her arms around his neck, threading her fingers through his dark hair, tugging only a little. She linked her legs over the chains that held his arms in place, felt the bite of the metal into her flesh as she spread them wide below him.

He shifted his hips to meet her. He entered her mercilessly, filling her all at once.

A wave of wild pleasure slid down her back, moving electric down the bones of her spine. She watched the birth of her wings reflected in the hot amber of his eyes. Joy rolled through her; the return of her wings sent her into spasms of pleasure. It made her greedy and determined, the slightly horrified shock in his molten gaze made her even more so. She kissed him to inspire his passion, to rekindle desire beyond the shock of the odd birth that occurred before him. He hesitated only a moment and then returned her kiss.

Triumphant, her wings surged forward on the command of her mind, liquidly, moving over the both of them, sliding between the chains and bars, touching as much of his flesh as possible while hampered by the contraption they played on. He was already pounding her savagely, when her wings met the flesh of his ass. She found it hard to concentrate while his tongue melded with hers. Her



impassioned cries, he swallowed greedily, as she commanded her wings to do her bidding—the tips coalesced and hardened into something, smooth, pliable and phallic. With this new thing that was her, she probed the pounding flesh of his ass and pulled away from the savagery of his kiss long enough to watch the shock in his eyes as she entered him this way.

His body twisted with the pain of invasion, but she refused to give him time to think about it. She pushed herself deeper into him; feeling with her wings the hot, tight space. A thousand sensations spiraled backwards from the sensitive wings and slid to the fire already raging in her cunt. Slow and light, she set a rhythmic undulation that sent him surging into her. She could only hold on for dear life.

When the first moan escaped him, she kissed him again, tasting the pleasure-pain coursing through his body in violent waves. He matched her rhythm for a while, until, caught up in her own passion, she dug her nails into the back of his neck and bit his tongue. He lost it totally and the fire in her blossomed into something insane and exploded. She stopped breathing in the time that the orgasm coursed through her, her whole body tense as Ransom savaged her relentlessly and with a cry joined her in that misty pleasure place.

## Chapter Eleven

Demi stood at the edge of a battlefield already littered with the corpses of goblins, trows and jacks. Lightning streaked zigzag on black, scattered drops of rain turned into a steady torrent, and thunder crashed across the night sky. She stared at the black vista of dead bodies. *So many lives lost*, she thought, *and all because of a minor, meaningless dalliance*. It was enraging. Vincent was up to something. He was the true problem. Kobalos was here but Vincent had somehow given the goblin the key and shown him the door. Somewhere in this dark hell of his own creation, she imagined that the sorcerer was laughing as fae slaughtered fae. For that was truly Vincent's end, to kill them, in the manner that humans had killed so many fae so many millennia ago. She had understood this about him innately, despite his insistence that his cock had been the thing that had inspired him to capture and enslave them.

She had reformed him one big walking cock...and he was *still* trying to kill them.

Vincent Rousseau hated the fae, resented them for the natural magick that he had to steal, for their love of the earth instead of their need to selfishly possess

and rape it. Though the King of the Wood simply couldn't understand that not everything human was like that, Vincent was the epitome of everything he had always warned her about. She appreciated her father for the wisdom. It inspired her to storm out onto the battlefield toward the opposing line of combatants.

"Kobalos!" Aramis called from within the grips of a mighty mountain troll. The troll was desperately trying to eat her love, but he seemed to barely notice, his thoughts on the Goblin King instead. Instinct saved his life as he brought the sword down to the hilt in one of the troll's great eyes and the massive body toppled to the ground and drug him with it.

Thick, black arrows tore into the creatures that sought to attack her along the way and she made a mental note to reward General Dragonsreign should any of them survive this. She heard Aramis call her name, far more desperately than he had called that of his nemesis. He would chase her, she knew, and if he caught her before she spoke to Kobalos, the war would go on until one of them was dead. She ran. She sprinted frantically, leaping over the corpses in her way. She must not stumble, must not fall. The mountain fae that Kobalos commanded dropped in her wake.

A spriggan, towering to gigantic proportions, swelled before her, his head nearly eclipsing the silvery moon. His footsteps shook the earth, his slathering jaws gibbered. Composed of stone and mortar, its long beard dragged the ground

and moved with serpentine sentience, writhing across the rain slick grass. Thunderous hoof beats echoed in the night as that monstrous beard made for her, touched her legs and wrapped itself sinuously around her.

The red-eyed, frothy mouthed, steed bore down on her and the spriggan, which seeing its rider, drew back its attentions from her, leaving her to his better. Kobalos leaned down and reached for her, and swung her upon the horse's back. "Demi, at last, my love. Where is your sweet Lady of the Mist, who liked so much to watch us fuck?" he asked insolently, his breath warm in her ear. "It was a mighty turn on. I'd hate to leave without her."

"Get your filthy hands off me, earwig," Demi replied. "Brainless Troll, what are you doing here? We are all pawns in a mad human's nasty little power game. Do you want to be *used* by a human, Kobalos?"

His lips were on her throat as he pinned her in the black leather saddle. Demi had to admit the sensation was pleasant amidst the chill of the rain. She could feel the thick heat of his engorged cock riding the cleft of her ass. The sensation was white-hot. Demi groaned with the distraction. He wasn't listening to her. Kobalos *never* listened. He was singular of mind and only wanted what he wanted, what he'd told himself he'd wanted for a thousand years. She had to make him understand though, for all their sakes.

"You must *hear* me," she tried again, as he spurred the big steed deeper into

the woods and farther away from the fray. “The sorcerer is evil. Whatever he promised you, he won’t give it. Vincent destroys everything he touches, rips it apart piece by piece...and he has touched you, Kobalos. You are in this with us now. He won’t let you go.”

“I have rendered your *terrible* human sorcerer useless,” Kobalos chuckled. His fangs dug into the flesh of her throat, sending a dark and violently sensual response all the way through her. *Who taught him how to do that?* She wondered absently, her thoughts scattering for the barest instant. “He is currently in the thrall of a Leanan Sidhe. I believe you know her, my love. She is distantly related to your Lady Saphira. She was easy prey; lured with no more than the distant rustlings of word of her cousin.”

Demi frowned and sat up in the saddle, putting some distance between her and the goblin. “A Leanan Sidhe? Is she here?”

“No,” he said.

“But the magick of the Leanan Sidhe flows through her victim to create their dark and terrible art. She lends her power to gain the strength of emotion she wants. She grants incredible talent. She gives them the magick to create worlds in return for their souls.”

His hands fell hard on her shoulders and he turned her in the saddle until she faced him. “What does it matter as long as she devours him?” he asked. “If that

is what you want then that is what you shall have. How did he hurt you? How many ways do you want me to slay him? I will give you anything. Do anything for you—”

The sincerity of his words did not escape her, and somewhere deep within her she felt an abiding sadness for the creature she had created on a carnal whim. Her fingers strayed to the pale hair at his temple and stroked the soft white satin. It was not his fault that he was a goblin and she had chosen to play with him. It was not his fault that he couldn't handle the change in himself and had burned villages when she'd spurned him. Kobalos, no matter how attractive he looked, was what he was—a goblin, terror of the fae. For him, love was a curse. “You are an idiot,” she said. “I stripped Vincent of his magick and you have given him magick back. You are as trapped as we are.”

He ignored her. His lips came down on hers ardently as he dragged her close. Her hardened nipples flattened and burned against the hard battle-leather that covered his chest. She drowned in the wicked amethyst pools of his eyes. His tongue invaded her mouth, intent on a full-on assault on her senses. The taste of him she remembered well, for it was the flavor of a truly wicked thing; something dark and forbidden, heady decadent nectar.

The steed, going full speed, had free reign and the forest sped by in a blur all around her. Her heartbeat matched the frantic fury of the mount's rolling hoof

beats. Kobalos wasn't paying any attention to where his animal was taking them. Demi thought that the Goblin King would have been content if the beast ran off the edge of the world as long as he could continue to paw her.

She struggled in the ever-shrinking circle of his grasp. He inspired lust in her, which was a truth she could not deny. It was apparent in the heat blossoming like a wildfire between her thighs. But he was outside the circle of her heart, his love too possessive, too confining for her taste.

She bit his tongue hard enough to cause him to cry out against the onrush of pain. Had he forgotten her in his ardor? What kind of fae she truly was? Did he think she could be overwhelmed by his ridiculous attempt at ravishment? He snatched away from her. She watched as the physical pain along with the pain of her rejection flooded into the purple of his eyes, tried to become rage, and simply couldn't. Another unbidden wave of sympathy washed over her in the wake of that hurt stare. She fought the pointlessness of it.

Where she may have been content to have Kobalos follow her around like a lost puppy—he was certainly handsome enough, sensually appealing enough—his personality would demand that he be her king. It was not in him to play second or third, which would bring him, had *always* brought him, into direct conflict with Aramis. There would be bloodshed. *More* bloodshed. It was that simple.

The low snarl was so enraged, so animal, that at first, she didn't recognize it

as anything more than that. She turned toward it. Aramis streaked through the forest trees at breakneck, berserker speed. The expression stretched across the ethereal beauty of his face terrible with hatred and murderous intent. Hands outstretched into grasping claws, he seized Kobalos and jerked him out of the saddle.

Demi abandoned the steed, taking to the stormy air as the two males hit the ground with bone-jarring violence. The pain inherent in the fall seemed to be beyond them, however. They were far too busy trying to cripple and maim one another. Weapons were meaningless in this personal war. They wanted to tear each other apart with their bare hands. Swords hung forgotten in sheathes as they surrendered to the sheer physical brutality battle. This *mêlée* was the culmination of jealousy and hatred that had brewed a thousand years.

Exasperated, Demi was almost content to let them kill each other. “Enough,” she said. They did not hear and if they did hear, they ignored. Kobalos got his hands around Aramis’ throat. His teeth clenched with the exertion of trying to squeeze the life from him. His eyes were narrowed shut against the invasion of the white-knuckled thumbs pressed into them.

“*Enough!*” Demi snarled. Her voice was whipped away by the wind and the storm. She’d had enough. Her body reacted to her frustrated rage. *There are more important things to think about than personal vendettas*, she wanted to scream at them.



*Their very lives and the lives of everyone they held dear hung in the balance.* She didn't bother. They wouldn't hear her over the storm.

Her wings shifted, blackening, sliding away from her skin and leaving her naked in the night to reform in her hand as one single black length of leather. The harsh heads on the end were meant to flay. The whip cracked in the night, the heat of the weapon heavy in her hand. *She'd beat them to death herself if...*

The ground beneath the two opponents turned a swift fathomless black, the liquid darkness spreading around them in a growing inky pool. It crawled, it snuck, it *slunk*. Her mouth opened in dire warning and the wind ate that too, making it a small, indiscernible squeak amidst the riotous violent flow of the storm.

Aramis and Kobalos began to thrash in the thick black goop, to flail and go under. Horrified, Demi ran, crossing the grass to the edge of the inky pool. She could feel the heavy suction of the pool as it swirled around her with vacuum-like power and threatened to pull her in. She reached for Aramis as the blackness quit pretending to be a pool of stuff with weight and substance and became the terrible sucking void that it truly was. She felt his fingers graze her palm and then he jerked back away from her. She screamed and leaned forward, her knees teetering on the brink of that dark nothingness, the suction threatening to pull her in with him.

She didn't care. Her mind was a whirlwind of horror that centered completely on the blond head of her love as it was sucked into that gulping darkness, and the straining of his muscles as he fought his way out of it again and reached for her. This time he managed to grab her wrist, and she grabbed his; the harsh leather whip curved at her command and bound them together.

*All or nothing*, Demi rationalized. She was either going into that mysterious sucking darkness with him or she was going to pull him out. There was nothing in between. She braced her legs as they slid in the thick mud created by the torrential rain...and she *pulled*.

Aramis slid toward her with agonizing slowness. She looked into the emerald green of his eyes and the rest of the world stopped existing for her. There was nothing beyond that beautiful shade of green so very like the grass and the trees that she adored. Those things made up her universe and he was an unfailing part of that universe. She could not lose him. Her heart would break into shards and the pain would be too much to bear.

He slid onto the wet grass free of the mire and she collapsed with him. The rain obliterated her tears and blended them into a general wetness that did not betray the terror in her heart. She revealed that terror herself, her body a mass of wracking sobs slid against his and refused to let him go.

She watched in horror as Kobalos was sucked down into the darkness and

the ground refilled itself with a devious, purposeful velocity. In an instant, the grassy earth was restored, and the Goblin King was gone.



Ransom stretched his aching body gratefully after Saphira undid the torture of his bonds. Only the collar about his throat proved defiant to removal, the tiny lock in the thick metal clinging tight to the mechanisms within. Accustomed to its constriction, he chose to ignore both it and the chain that hung from it. There were locksmiths in the sane world that could undo such things. His goal was to get back to that world with his faerie wife, wings and all.

He watched as Saphira knelt amongst the throng of creatures that inhabited the chamber. Ransom could not quite understand why the sight of her there saddened him. The smile on her face was beauteous, enraptured. They had the whole of her attentions, and she listened to them intently as they fawned over her, touching her with possessive hands in intimate places. Fingers stroked her breasts as if the familiarity of such a touch was the most natural thing in the world and hands played in the inky garden of her hair. There was some insistence in whatever they were telling her, but he wasn't listening, more intent on how beautiful she was when she was with them, how much a part of them she looked even though she was a thing wholly different from all that surrounded her. Her gossamer wings caressed her pale, naked flesh gently, sliding over lithe limbs in

cherished caress and then fanned out like a sheer cape, the wind-sound of that movement soft and delicate and compelling.

Jealousy stirred up in him. He wanted to touch his own wife, but he would have to move through the throng to get to her. They seemed to think that she was theirs, these creatures, and their bodies stood in his way like the waves of a fleshy sea. They guarded her with the same jealousy that he felt swelling up in him and the emotion nearly sent him barreling into them, scattering them, so that he could catch that look in her eyes, find it centered again upon him, be the focus attention. It was the same way that she stared at the moon—with such passion of longing, such beatific hunger.

She loved them. He understood that in that moment, and the aching sadness in his heart grew. *Does she love them more than she loves me?* he wondered. She was a part of this strange world, and the evidence of the gossamer butterfly wings set upon her back made that fact undeniable. He recognized that this was his world too—that they were, in fact, behind Rousseau Manor at the pond where he had regularly bathed away the filth of Vincent and his associates lecherous, pain-soaked pawing ten years ago. But these creatures were set apart from him as surely as the stars were set apart from him. From the moment that he had met the blue faerie, he had received nothing but disdain from them as if he was some lesser creature and, therefore, wholly unworthy of their consideration. And when they

had deigned to turn their attentions upon them there was something disrespectful in that too—like he was some minor amusement created to please them in whatever manner they chose, and nothing more. A toy.

*I am not a toy*, Ransom thought. But he recognized the feeling. Vincent had made a toy of him. And when Saphira would stand in their back yard, her toes digging into the dirt and grass, her head up thrust to the sky in the light of the silvery moon, he had felt a similar feeling while waiting for her to come and play with him again.

And he was waiting still. There was an escape to be made, but she didn't seem inclined to go. Conflicting emotions suffused him, the fear of losing her battled the pleasure of seeing her happy. It had been such a long time since he'd seen her smile.

Slowly, the smile on her face flickered and died, replaced by slow dawning horror. "Kobalos," she said. "*Where?*"

The world behind Saphira, the world inhabited by amber thrones complete with insects in grotesque suspended animation, flickered before Ransom's eyes. The whole back wall of the throne room turned fathomless black. That blackness stretched like an inky rubber band.

He recognized it as the same thing that had happened to the sky and sheer curiosity drove him across the room to get a better look at it. The closer he got to

the terrible yawning hole; he felt a slight, but growing, suction. The edges of the wall crept in on each other, filling with shards of the white polished wood, trying to fill up the black gap and replace the wall.

The pale, grasping hand and arm shot out of the black space, clutching recklessly for any purchase before being sucked back in and then plunging frantically out again. The impossibility and desperation of those clutching fingers inspired horror in him and froze him in his tracks for a moment. The hand disappeared again as the wall tried to close in on itself, the gap growing smaller and smaller by the second. The fingers reappeared, and something in the valiance of the struggle of their bearer drove Ransom forward.

“No,” he heard Saphira say, and the horror in the word made it a command. But the warning came a second too late. Ransom touched those desperate fingers and the greedy hand grasped him. He pulled. The arm came out of the wall, all black fluttering silk. That arm was attached to a shoulder and that shoulder was attached to a pale head that swum half in and half out of darkness. Amethyst eyes lanced his with desperation. A vampiric smile curved into a toothy grin with no mirth and the utter demand to be free of the black sucking prison in which it was mired.

“Kobalos,” Saphira hissed, “you bastard—!”

The creature that held him disappeared, jerked back into the wall, and

Ransom went with him. The darkness was icy cold and he was instantly blinded by the eternal night that spread all around him like frigid death. The suction was so hard that it jerked him off his feet.

Distantly, he felt dozens of hands on his legs, desperately grasping, trying to free him of the stuff. But it had him, as did the pale creature he'd been driven to help.

All warmth left him as he was pulled completely into the wall. He could not breathe, gagging on darkness that had weight and substance. Panic assailed him as his lungs screamed for want of air. He plunged forward, the grip on him vice-like, and tumbled in black nothingness.

He hit the floor hard in a tangle with the creature that had dragged him into the wall. He gagged out thick clots of blackness that hit the straw covered floor and scurried away from him with horrific *life*. The stench of unwashed animals assaulted him as he lay there coughing and trying to remember how to breathe. A noise swelled around him. It beat in the slow rhythmic time of a heartbeat. *Thump-thump...thump-thump*. That constant sound dwelled beneath the steady noise of crazed mumbling spewing from a voice that was altogether too familiar.

Ransom skittered back from the living clouts of darkness as they rippled back toward the walls around him. Vincent Rousseau sat in the center of the same dank chamber where Ransom had first been reacquainted with him. The only

difference in the chamber was that all the walls were made of swirling black living darkness. Those walls flickered, the darkness replaced by scenes of violent thunderous natures untamed for seconds at a time. He was both inside and outside the dungeon depending on the moment, and in those times when he was outside rain lashed at him and the wind whipped at his hair with the hostility of an uninhibited storm that aspired to be a hurricane.

Hunched within a carefully drawn circle of dirt, seemingly oblivious to the flicker-changing world, Vincent chattered and jabbered to himself like the true madman he'd always been. The very picture of pure mutated insanity, a sick white froth spewed from his lips with the intense concentration with which he spewed his maniacal words.

"I seek audience with the king of the goblins," Vincent whispered. It was his voice and the sound echoed through the room, but Vincent never stopped whispering the words of his madman's mantra, his gaze locked on the floor, the whole of his concentration in the dirt beneath him as his hands drew arthritic and senseless patterns in the mess there. The voice came through the walls, echoing at them through the darkness. "She was going to let you die, Dark Lord Kobalos," Vincent tittered. "She does not love you. Call off your soul stealer. Lend me your power. Seek a thousand years of vengeance. Step into the circle, and I'll kill Demi for you. I'll kill them all."



The creature beneath Ransom pushed him off. It gagged up a rope of the dark stuff. It's amethyst eyes locked on the hunched body of the satyr with hatred.

"Kill him!" the creature demanded of Ransom knew not who.

Vincent's laughter reverberated from the walls, vicious and cruel. "The Leanan Sidhe cannot hear you," the walls spoke in his voice. "This is *my* house, filthy fae creature. What *I* say goes here. Perhaps if she could see you that would help...read your lips maybe. You are certainly welcome to try. Come closer. Step into the circle. Hello, Ransom, my boy. How are you?"

*Terrified*, Ransom thought. He forced the fear from his voice. "Hello, Vincent. I am well enough. What are you doing?"

"Freeing us," Vincent replied. "And ridding the world of these...these pretty aberrations, these bizarre figments of the imagination, these mad dreams. They would have killed me, you know...you too probably. You should thank me for saving you from that cold fae bitch wife of yours. She was bound to return to these inhuman animals. I knew I could count on that. It took ten long years, but I knew that she would be back, that she would forsake you. Don't you remember telling me about your little dream, about the incredible sex with a winged thing by a pool in woods? I told you that you should go back. You laughed, but I knew he would go back. What you described to me was well worth going back for. I followed you and found the faerie kingdom and used my dark magic to capture them all."

Vincent drew one hand from his mad scribbling on the floor and stroked his cock as he spoke. It swelled with his every word, the tip glittering wetly.

“But they were so wicked these faeries, as wicked as I and then some...so creative...so seductive, with or without their magic. Look what they turned me into. Just look at me. The Master became the slave and didn’t even notice until he had horns and a tail. It would be almost funny if the little bastards weren’t cruel and murderous as any assassins. They think *nothing* of us. She could not love you. You cherished a dream, Ransom. You abandoned me for a dream...and now the dream is over. I am going to *make* it over.”

The dream was vague in Ransom’s mind, as vague as it had always been in the time when he had been with Saphira. He had spent that entire year out-of-his-mind drunk. Meeting Saphira by the pond in the woods had changed all that. She became the focus of his world; the simple acts involved in pleasing her and giving her all the things she wanted and needed had brought him all the success that he had thought Vincent and his influential friends would bring him.

The world flickered again and the surrounding forest danced for the storm, tree limbs ripping from their bases and flying about, enslaved to the fury of the storm. Lightening crashed and thunder rolled across the jet-black sky. Rain fell in a torrent and black clouds drifted over the moon, obscuring its pale light.

Inky ropes of blackness extended from the walls in whip-like fashion and

fastened around the clothed leg of the Goblin King. Another such rope of darkness lashed out at Ransom. It did not want him to possess him though, only to touch him. Its embrace was a cold caress, sliding over his face, caressing his chin with intimate delight.

“Ahhh, *memories*.” Vincent’s voice echoed as the Goblin King was dragged away from Ransom in a thrashing, writhing ball. Pale fingers dug into the dirt and the straw for purchase. Amethyst eyes were slit with hatred.

The dark coil slid down Ransom’s chest, across his stomach to his cock and there it lingered, pulsing and throbbing icily, drifting over his cringing flesh.

“When I am human again, we will get...*reacquainted*,” Vincent promised. His voice was filled with so much lechery that the sound make Ransom’s flesh crawl. Slowly, ever so slowly, the darkness moved away from his dick. It left a gift behind in its passing. He sported a harsh looking leather strip around the base of his cock, complete with silver ring. Looped through the ring was a long, thin leash much like the chain attached to the collar at his throat.

“This is Hell’s darkness, my boy, and I bend it to my will at a whim. This is *human* magick, the carefully controlled black magick spawned of the demons determined to corrupt human souls. It has been so long since I’ve controlled it, but the feeling is, as it always was, *delicious*. We are sons of Adam, Ransom. This world is ours. These petty little fae things are merely the castoff from the war between

Heaven and Hell. When the Angels fell, *these* did not fall far enough. They did not become our demons, but something *else*. They sought to battle us for our world, and we beat them, forced them from it into a realm of their own. And I will beat them again. I will put them in their place and teach them that men are the superior species!”

Froth erupted from Vincent’s slathering jaws as his body erupted in the violent spasms of riotous orgasm. Helpless against the pull of the inky darkness that had him, the Goblin King slid ever closer to Vincent’s circle. The sound of the heartbeat in the room grew to wild, uncontrolled levels.

“Ransom!” Saphira said from behind him, relief rang in her voice. She balanced half in and half out and gagged on the darkness. Ransom scrambled to his feet and caught her as the wall spat her forth into the chamber. Her arms wrapped around his neck, her fingers in his hair. Her gaze was frantic as it slid over him, as she assured herself that he was all there. “The hole was so small,” she whispered. “I-I had to force myself inside. I was so scared. But I had to—I c-couldn’t lose you.” Her wings slid around him in a flutter-touch ecstasy of possession.

The Goblin King’s agonized, enraged howl drew them apart. His booted foot touched the circle. The boot evaporated on contact. Thick, dark smoke drifted from what was left of his foot. His body arched in agony. The dark coils that held him forced him closer to the incised circle.

Saphira drew away from him, her luminous gray gaze locking on Vincent with something akin to hatred, but less than that emotion. In her swirling eyes was the same disdain Ransom had come to expect from the faeries.

“*You* were not invited, *bitch*,” Vincent’s voice boomed from the surrounding liquid darkness. A thick lash of the stuff, curved and whip-like arched outward from the walls. There was nothing but harm in the weapon-like intent of the motion. Ransom moved without thinking, putting himself before the coming coil of darkness and his wife. Agony was his reward. The whip-like stuff fell on his back and shoulders, the punishment was swift and immediate. He bit down on his tongue to keep from crying out as the incredible pain threatened to send him to his knees. His world grayed, but he would not fall. Saphira needed him.

She moved away from him, swift and silent. She stepped over the twitching body of the Goblin King and moved close to the terrible circle in which Vincent squatted. “You’ve already lost, sorcerer,” she said.

Vincent’s voice was a terrible boom of maniacal laughter. “What will you do?” his darkness asked contemptuously. “My house, *my* rules. I’ve held your kindred in my sway for ten years. I have your Goblin King. I’ll take his magick and rekindle my own. Your king and your queen are helpless in my illusion and you have been pretending to be human far too long to stop me. What is one pathetic, confused faerie against the likes of me?!”

“Too true,” Saphira said softly, stepping ever closer to the trap of Vincent’s circle. Ransom cried out to her in warning, his voice throbbing beneath the terrible rising beat of the heart sound. His words were lost in a crack of thunder as the walls flickered again. “But the fae are never ‘one’. We exist in *clans*, Mr. Rousseau.”

Standing in the exposed forest around them were *hundreds* of fae creatures. Winged faeries, hideous goblins, and towering trolls stared with loathing at the hunched form of Vincent Rousseau beneath a sheet of wind and stinging rain.

“You masked your scent, hid yourself within your illusion,” she continued. “But you didn’t mask Ransom’s or Kobalos’ scents. Before I stepped into your nightmare wall, I sent word to *my clan*. They have come, tracking Ransom and the Goblin King. They have come for *you*.”

Vincent, while his body spewed the constant words of his spell, roared. The sound made the earth shake. There was only the slightest tinge of fear in the irrational sound, but Saphira heard it. Ransom could see that she had in the cold smile that turned up the corners of her lips.

“This is all my fault,” Saphira said. She looked at Ransom and her smile faltered just a little. “*Our* fault.”

The Goblin King howled again as his leg was drawn into the circle. His pant leg evaporated and his skin turned black with the contact. The heartbeat sounding

through the world quickened as the walls faded back into place and the swirling darkness returned, obliterating the faeries standing in the storm of false nature.

They simply walked through the gray stone walls en mass. The dark faerie separated herself from the rest. Her gaze was on Saphira. Her gaze was frantic. “Saphira, don’t!” she cried.

Ransom’s agonized cry joined hers as Saphira stepped against the circle and it blazed with yellow light from the ground to the ceiling. Her hands burned against that light, thick smoke rising in dark tendrils from her darkening flesh. Still, she pressed on. “I did this,” she said, looking into the blazing light. “Hello, Lady Rowena of the Isle of Mist...cousin of my cousin. It is I, Saphira. Stop your song, I beg. You are killing us.”

“Lady Saphira?” a soft, feminine voice whispered from within the circle in response.

The world trembled as Vincent’s enraged roar intensified. The chamber became a writhing coil of dark lashes. Shadow whips sought her pale flesh and attempted to tear it from her bones. Ransom dove forward intent on being his wife’s bulwark. She wavered toward the circle of light, agony threatening to spill her completely into it. Her hands caught fire before his horrified eyes.

He grabbed her and bore her to the ground, using his own body to put out the terrible flames. Around him, the light born of the circle flickered and went out

like a candle flame. The darkness receded into the walls and was replaced by thick, heavy stone. Bodies swarmed over him, calling Saphira's name. They sought to tear him away from her, but he wouldn't let her go.

"Cousin, I didn't know," that same soft, feminine voice whispered from within the circle. "Captive or no, my allegiance is to the daughters of the mist. I will help you. I will bring the goblins and their king back to their dark castle."

The suction was so hard and so strong that Ransom felt it immediately, but it moved with purpose and it did not want him. He turned to watch Vincent scramble away from his circle as darkness swirled within it. Kobalos clawed at the ground as he was jerked into the sucking hole that the circle had become.

"Demi!" he cried one time before he disappeared within, his body clogging it for a single instant before he disappeared completely. Other goblins followed in a satin wave of eyes, snapping teeth and twisting limbs. Towering trolls and the other nightmare monstrosities that Ransom couldn't even begin to name, screeched as they were forcibly shrunk and compelled to follow their ruler. When the last of the Goblin King's henchmen slid into the black abyss, the hole closed completely and became a circle in the dirt again.

Not another creature was disturbed. Many of the remaining fae crowded around the fallen forms of Saphira. Ransom found himself crushed within the rush of bodies. Distantly, he felt a contentment to be compressed within the forms of so



many of them and wondered why that was so as he clutched his unconscious wife to him.

“You can’t kill me,” Ransom heard Vincent cry. His terror was a beautiful thing to hear. Ransom reveled in the sound. “In my chest rests a demon’s heart. It beats in time with my own. Magick started it to beating and magick or no magick, should my own heart stop for any reason, the demon’s heart will explode, killing you all. That was my last trick, you *motherfuckers*! And one that can not fail.”

“Hold, Marcalic,” Rage and pain made her voice a mad dog’s snap. “My original punishment still stands. Vincent will be my pet, my *dog*, until the day he dies! Carve that heart out of him though. Make sure that his precious human heart does not stop beating for a second while you do it!”

Ransom’s world became a symphony of Vincent’s screams. He found he liked that music very much.

## Chapter Twelve

She shifted on the gray feather blanket. There were warm bodies on all sides of her, arms and legs strewn chaotically across her naked flesh. She languished in the warmth created by the intimate twisting of so many bodies, reluctant to draw herself away from them to the realm of wakefulness. *Pain*, her mind warned, and she shied away from remembering what she was being warned about.

Still, the thought came in a tumble. Her hands, which were her joy, which gave her the ability to paint marvelous worlds of wicked seduction, throbbed with the memory of the pain. All her work forever more would be marked by the experience. She pushed the thought away, unwilling to surrender to the encroaching recollection and stretched amongst the silken flesh and velvet flutter of wings. A silk covered head rested against her stomach. Her eyes opened reluctantly. The room was all white, with shades of cream. The only true disruption to that purity of pale color was the soft gray in the goose feather blanket. The bed was enormous and circular, the head and footboards carved so that they resembled the petals on a budding white rose. Demi's dark braids lay against her in velvet coils. One brown arm thrown about her both protectively and possessively, the ruby tipped nails digging slightly into the flesh of her side.

Marcalic, pressed against her back, his body molded to her, the warmth of his cock set against the crack of her ass. There were many more faeries on the bed with her, all naked, all asleep. *Her faerie nest.*

In the center of the chamber was a circular pool filled with bubbling waters. A pale steam rose from it. White roses floated on its surface and the perfume from them lent the room a marvelous fragrance.

Pale curtains were drawn back from the opening to the chamber. There was no door, the whole wall before her was nothing but empty space. Across the way, along the opposite wall, she could see other chambers, similarly laid. The only way to reach the room was to fly to it and the only way to get down for one who did not fly was to be carried by one who did.

Saphira sat up, taking great care not to awaken those around her, which was *The Way*. The fact that she remembered *The Way* both shocked and delighted her. She stared at the pale chamber around her. She was where she was supposed to be but...*Where is the sky?* she wondered longingly, *and the moon and the birds with their night songs and the forest and the trees?* A terrible yearning stirred in her breast, and her hands ran across the flesh of the faeries around her, moving over peaked breasts and hard chests, sweeping through hair that was as green as grass or as blue as the firmament. She stared at the white walls of their gilded cage and her heart wept.

Along the far side of the chamber, Ransom slept against the whiteness of the wall. There were heavy cuffs around his wrists and ankles, fashioned in such a way that it made it impractical for him to stand. He had to kneel instead. Seeing his bonds made Saphira aware of the cuff around her own ankle. She touched it lightly, felt the slight sting of the metal chaffing. The chain was threaded through the bodies lying slumbering around her, through thighs and wings and between breasts as if she were joined with them in her captivity. Bonded. And that too was *The Way*.

She threaded her way delicately through the crush of bodies, her gaze fixed on her sleeping husband.

She knelt before him, her hand straying to the warmth of his muscled stomach. He stirred; his amber eyes opened. His eyes narrowed warily, his gaze moving to her hand as it slid lower and lower on his flesh. Desire bloomed in those golden depths. She liked that. *A lot*.

“Vincent?” she asked.

“Is bound and unconscious. Marcalic cut out the demon thing within him.”

“Good,” Saphira whispered. “I hope it hurt.”

“They said that you would be well,” Ransom said, relief in his voice. His gaze trailed from her face. “They used magick to heal your hands—”

A violent scream drew Saphira's gaze upwards. She saw a woman grasped in the arms of several faeries. The faeries were giggling madly as the woman thrashed. They held her arms as her legs kicked wildly. Her eyes were a soft bulging jade and Saphira recognized her immediately as she neared.

*Kara Lacey...What the hell was she doing here?*

*"Do you love her, Ransom?"* the words echoed in her mind.

*"No."*

She believed him. She had seen the other woman's manipulations for herself. Eyes narrowing, leather in hand, she moved away from him, toward the empty wall that was the only way out of the chamber. She looked down at the ground far below. Kara Lacey was in a tangle of fae creature, beating their questing hands off of her with a black leather bag she carried and wielded like a bola. She would not stop screaming and the sound echoed through the massive golden walls and sought the amethyst sky that lay beyond them.

Suddenly, the faeries pulled away from her, creating a wide circle. Kara stood amongst them, clutching her purse, waving it at them maniacally. A broken shoe heel lay beside her as she hump-walked the center of the circle of bodies. "Monsters!" she screamed and her voice was a dry crackle of horror. "Get away from me!"

"Saphira, what is wrong?" Ransom asked.

“The fae are going to play a game,” she said with interest. “They *like* games.”

Saphira watched the woman dart across the golden floor. She tripped and fell, screamed again as she scrambled to her feet and kept running frantically. Several satyrs stood out from the milling crowd and trailed behind her, hunting her in pack formation. The sound of their hooves clicking on gold sent a chill up Saphira’s spine.

Saphira felt the hand on her ankle. She let go of Ransom’s leash only moments before she was pulled over the side and cast out into nothingness. Ransom’s scream drowned her own disbelieving cry. She plummeted the short length of the chain attached to her ankle, turned upside down in the open air.

“She just wandered into the house calling your husband’s name. She was calling his name quite possessively and so we figured she had something to do with us and we took her. How long do you think she’ll last before they catch her?” Aramis asked. He hovered alongside her, his blue wings flapping rhythmically. He was looking down at the frantic scene below, watching the little chase intently.

Kara fell again near the thrones; her horrified screeches were like discordant music in the echoing emptiness of the grand chamber. In between her breathless squeals were frantic mumblings about ‘monsters’ and ‘winged monstrosities’. Even hanging upside down, the chain on her leg aching painfully, and the only thing

keeping her from certain death, Saphira took some pleasure in the woman's suffering. This woman who had dared to lay lustful hands on what was *hers*.

The tiniest buzz of rage blossomed in her heart as the all photographs delivered to her mailbox flashed through her mind. She had seen this woman naked, her ass bobbing so hard against Ransom's cock that the movement had blurred more than one photograph.

She heard Ransom calling her name and the despair in his voice. The sound of a hard slap accompanied by his soft indignant cry. The faeries in her nest had been awakened. Someone had just slapped the hell out of him to bring about his sudden silence. And then they were with her and Aramis—floating around her in a cluster of soft and hard bodies, their wings brushing against her flesh, stirring both her rage and desire.

More faeries joined them from the many nests in the surrounding chambers. They hovered in the air watching what was happening below with half-interested amusement, as if it was some gladiator sport where the victor was certain.

Aramis moved closer to her in the growing throng. He also moved down until his head was level with her breasts. He leaned forward, his lips locking on one of her nipples. She hissed in reaction to the jolting contact. Someone grasped her leg at the chain and the metal of the cuff rode her flesh painfully and she cried out at the intense intermingling of pleasure and pain. A hand eased from her ankle

to her knee, teasing the flesh with hard nails, then trailed down the inside of her thigh, easing ever closer to her sex. Her body blazed in hot response.

“Tell me that you were happy being human, Saphira,” Aramis whispered against the hot peak of her nipple, his teeth grazed the aching flesh. “Tell me that you did not miss us.”

Insistent hands eased her legs wide, exposing her cunt completely. She felt the gentle lap of a hot, wet tongue against her aching clit. Her mind reeled.

“Rousseau mistook us for some human children’s cartoon, something pretty to be easily dominated and used for his own pleasure. He locked us in this house, trapped us in the bonds of his masks so we only had limited use of our natural powers, so that we could not harm him or the vile humans he used us to entertain. In the end, it was his own lust that destroyed him. When you first came into possession of the house, I thought that you had become so human you thought to use us in the same fashion. Demi told me differently, but it was hard to believe that the creature that wandered the manor was the same faerie that I had always taken such delight in. You were a broken thing, Saphira, so weak and miserable. So sad. So lost to us.”

His hot breath circled her nipple then his searing tongue blazed the same trail, followed again by his breath, which left her quivering. Every once in a while, his teeth would nip the barest edge of her swollen flesh, sending crashing spirals of



desire funneling upward to her cunt and there it was met by the fiery tongue and stoked into an inferno.

“I am fae,” Aramis said. “I am of the Nightshade family, King of the Mandrake Clan. Saphira, who are you? We want to hear you say it.”

“I-I am--” she began as a tongue dove deep into her pussy, the pleasure sensation cutting off her breath.

*...Saphira Morgan of 13 Hyde Park Drive, wife of Ransom Morgan who is running for mayor of our prosperous city. I lied to my husband on the night after I met him. He came back to the pool looking for a drunken impassioned dream—to assure himself that it was only an inebriated vision. His faerie was not there, but a human woman who resembled her. A human woman whose faerie memories were already falling away from her.*

“I am--” she began again.

*...Saphira Morgan who was so in love with the moon that she would find herself staring at it for hours and whose husband would laugh and say, “It is just the moon, Saphira.” And she would never quite believe him.*

“I am...”

*...She who paints the flowers at night so that they would enchant the bees with color in the pale light of dawn...*

“Fae,” she whispered, as her body stirred with the beginnings of orgasm. “I am of the Nightshade family, noble of the Mandrake Clan.”

Aramis moved a few feet away from her in the air. He studied her face for a moment, before seeming satisfied in what he saw there. Then he looked up just above her, with some effort Saphira managed to follow his gaze. Demi smiled from between her legs, her face shiny with Saphira's juices, her hands grasping her thighs hard, her blue eyes smoldering.

Marcalic was just behind Demi. With a tiny silver hammer he struck the metal of the cuff around her ankle hard enough for her whole body to vibrate with the ringing metal.

"Prove it," Aramis growled.

Saphira screamed as Marcalic struck the cuff again and it gave. The metal sprung open.

"We had already conquered Vincent. There was nothing holding us here when you arrived but the fact that the door was locked." Demi said. "We could have gone the moment you breached the chamber. But we wanted you back, Lady Saphira. More than we wanted the moon and the flowers and the stars."

Saphira plunged toward the hard, gold ground below.

She fell like a stone, the golden floor leapt up to meet her. The air rushed out of her lungs with such ferocity she couldn't even manage to scream her fear and panic. But that was okay, because someone was screaming for her. Hideous

whooping screams filled with revulsion, sick horror and the slightest hint of new dawning pain.

She veered off in the direction of the screams. She flew and it took no conscious thought. It was an impulse as natural to her as breathing. It was a beautiful feeling, the return to her of the power of flight. She wanted to languish in it, to dart between pillars and columns feeling the exhilarating rush of the wind on her face.

The satyrs had finally cornered Kara Lacy at the waterfall. The woman clutched a purse to her breasts like a shield. The satyrs had her surrounded as she stood in the pool just before the rushing blue waters. Their gazes locked in the distance, and Kara seemed to forget all about the satyrs—her attention completely focused on Saphira’s approach. The fear in her blue eyes muted slightly and something else bloomed there instead. Hatred.

Saphira lighted before the woman, so close she could smell the spearmint on her breath.

“You’re supposed to be dead,” Kara Lacey hissed.

“Am I?” Saphira asked.

“Newcastle was supposed to kill you. To think that I went through all the trouble of studying the history of this house and setting Newcastle free to see you still breathing. It’s laughable.” Her hilarity was the high mad whooping of

someone very close to losing his or her mind. Tears streamed down her pale cheeks. “I thought when I sent you the photographs week after week that you would just leave him and it wouldn’t come to...*this*.” She turned in the water, one hand clutching the purse as if it were a life jacket in a storm, the other indicating the chamber around them. “That crazy fucker was right. Fuckin’ faeries. *You’re* a fuckin’ faerie. Big ass wings and everything.”

“Out of the way, faerie, Aramis gave her to us,” one satyr said, taking a bold step forward on little cloven hooves. “She is ours by right.”

“I can smell her pussy,” another satyr tittered. “Human pussy smells so sweet.”

“Move, faerie,” the bold one warned. “Unless you too want to play.”

Saphira turned to see the satyr massaging the incredible length of his humongous cock with small-clawed hands. He gifted her with a lecherous terrible grin.

“I aim to fuck that woman and I aim to fuck her first,” he continued to stroke his cock as he spoke. It swelled with his every word; the massive tip glittering with the proof of its need. Saphira thought about slapping its terrible little face. The action was natural to her and the need to do it curled her hands into fists at her side. Taking her hesitation for fear or compliance, the satyrs surged forward, intent on their human prize.

“Wait!” Aramis called. His voice was calm and authoritative and drew all motion to a halt in its wake. There was also a wickedness to it that turned Saphira on. She could not explain why but there was a promise in his tone that was undeniable. They had brought Kara Lacey here for her. The source of a year’s worth of emotional agony stood trembling alongside her. *What are we going to do to her?* she wondered, and the thought brought a thrill.

“We’ll offer you a chance, woman,” Aramis continued. He pointed at Saphira. “You will bow down between her legs and you will service this royal Lady to whom you have brought so much pain. You will do this or we will serve you to the satyrs.”

Saphira gasped. She did not want Kara Lacey anywhere *near* her legs. She opened her mouth to decline the offer and Demi glared at her. “Who are you?” she asked. “Saphira of the Isle of Mist, water sprite of *Tir-na-nOg* would have thought that this was nothing but justice. She *should* bring you pleasure after visiting so much pain upon you. Spread your legs.” It was a command. She obeyed it tentatively, her legs stiff and wooden as they moved apart.

Demi turned expectant eyes on Kara, who had the look of an animal in a trap etched upon her face. “You’ve got to be kidding me,” Kara said.

Demi smiled. It was cold. Icy. Unforgiving. Her blue gaze flicked to the satyrs. “Never mind then,” she said. The satyrs cheered and surged forward in

response. They snatched her purse away dropping it in the waters. They grabbed her legs, rubbing their massive cocks along her flesh. They reached for her breast, captured them in little clawed hands and squeezed till she cried out.

“No. Wait.” Kara whispered, horrified, and dropped to her knees in the swirling waters.

“Good,” Demi said. “Now stand and remove your clothes.”

Kara looked panic stricken but rose on shaky legs and shed her garments to the hooting of the entire band of satyrs.

“Well?” Demi barked impatiently.

Kara crawled on her knees toward Saphira, her head down, her gaze on the cerulean blue liquid she was mired in until she was directly in front of her. A breathless instant passed—an instant where Saphira felt a dozen or so conflicted emotions about this punishment. Kara moved her mouth toward Saphira’s mound and she could feel the heat of the woman’s hot breath stirring in the hairs of her cunt. Her thoughts scattered.

Kara’s first hesitant touch was a gentle press of her lips against the sensitive flesh, a little hot kiss that sent a tepid wave of heat inquiring through Saphira’s shocked body. The next kiss was harder, more insistent and held a certain amount of desperation that went beyond the carnal, beyond licentious desire, and

conveyed the fear of the gargantuan cocks that waited silently in the wings, wanting her to mess this up, wanting to hear Saphira's tiniest growl of displeasure.

A heady rush of power swelled in her and competed with the low licking flames of desire that were growing within. Kara's tongue teased the lips of her pussy, assaulting the wetness, tasting it first, almost curiously, and then plunging recklessly inside to swirl brazenly against the swollen flesh of her clit. Kara alternated between licking and tugging at Saphira's nub with her hot mouth until she found a rhythm, and having found it, she worked hard to maintain it. Saphira closed her eyes and surrendered to the hot tongue's probing.

Cautiously, Kara moved her head away from her swollen and aching clit to brush her lips against the flesh of Saphira's inner thigh. The woman's helpless compliance was like a drug and combined with the pleasure of her lips, the sensual opiate threatened to consume her.

Suddenly, the human woman drew away from her completely. Saphira looked down into Kara's eyes. Hate burned there still and seeing that lingering, consuming emotion dissolved the niggling doubts she had as to this form of restitution. She entwined her fingers into Kara's hair and guided the kneeling woman's head back to her sex.

Saphira's body trembled deliciously as Kara pressed her face again into her hot sex. The blonde sucked on her clit hard and Saphira found her hand grasping

at the woman's hair, drawing her in tight, and forcing the breath from her. A set of burning eyes was locked on her with near agonizing interest. The little creature struggled with its monstrous tool, seeking to stroke it to climax. Rolling waves of pleasure made her generous. She nodded to the satyr that had dared to defy her. "You may rub against but not enter her."

The satyr moved in tight behind Kara whose breaths were already staccato gasps. When the huge cock moved across her clit she moaned and the sound was deep, guttural and wanting. Saphira's body rocked to the rhythm of Kara's pussy wetting the member that sawed back and forth between her thighs.

"Now, the prize," Aramis announced. "If you force Lady Saphira to climax before you reach your own gratification, we'll fly you out of here. Otherwise you're going to get acquainted with that big cock between your legs. If you take your mouth off her again before she finishes, you'll have satyr cock in your throat before you take your next breath. And while you please her I want you to think about what you've done, how much pain you've caused. It is only fitting that you make this up to her...don't you think?"

Kara nodded never taking her lips from Saphira's pussy.

Saphira closed her eyes and experienced the other woman's remorse. It was glorious. Kara pressed the point of her tongue into Saphira's clit, drawing ever widening rings around her inflamed nub, and then strumming the flesh fast and



hard. It was definitely not a first time for the usurper. Her knees went soft and she found herself leaning back on her wings, her legs spread wider to give better access.

Saphira looked down at the covetous slut. It was almost hard to blame her. After all, she herself had been willing to forsake her entire world for Ransom's love. But Kara had used trickery and deceit to gain him and in playing Ransom false, she'd shown her true colors. She was every bit as uncontrolled and lascivious as the satyr that slid between her legs.

Kara's hands grasped the mounds of her ass, the nails digging into the flesh, the prick of the nails made Saphira frantic. She ground her hips into the face pressed to her cunt. She moved her legs even further apart, pressing Kara to go deeper. She felt the hot wetness of the woman's lapping tongue on her inner pussy lips, a butterfly flutter that sent a wild shudder all the way through her, only seconds before she felt the nip of her teeth on her sensitized flesh. The sensation brought her up on her toes, a stalled, breathless scream ripped from her and then Kara plunged her tongue into her pussy, penetrating her deep.

Kara's relentless tongue speared her again and again, the pleasure turning to something wild and molten that locked her hands in the satin waves of blonde hair and made her toes ache from her need to balance on them as her body rocked with violent shudders. The orgasm swept through her in a wave that was diabolical in

its satisfaction. It wasn't only the pleasure, but the surrender of this cruel enemy that rocked her. She called out Ransom's name over and over again as she forced Kara's face—her desperate licking tongue—deep inside her.

Applause reverberated throughout the hall. Along with the applause came a multitude of pleased words on her being a fine dispenser of justice—the Lady of the Isle of the Mist, reborn.

She barely heard those things, but the satyrs howls of rage and frustration brought her out of the bleary pleasure place where Kara had sent her. The woman collapsed in the water of the fountain. Spent, the satyr that had found pleasure between her thighs fell with her. Its tiny, clawed hands reaching to stroke her flesh with something like love for the release she had given it. Instead of recoiling from its touch as Saphira expected, Kara barely noted the gentle rubbing. Rage cast her countenance with unbecoming splotches of red but held no trace of understanding that Ransom was not hers, would never be hers. Saphira's eyes narrowed. This woman must be made to understand. She would plague them no more.

"Marcalic, would you bring Ransom here?"

"Ransom is *here*?" Kara blurted.

Marcalic raised a questioning brow at her but shot toward the upper rooms; on his return he dropped Ransom at her feet.

“Ransom, look who came for a visit,” Saphira said her tone light as birdsong. Underneath that lightness of tone was another, that one deadly serious. She looked at her husband, examined her hard muscled, gorgeous human addiction, and she *wanted* him. Despite having just reached the pinnacle of sexual satisfaction, she wanted him. She would always want him.

“My God, Ransom! Are you all right?” Kara crawled toward his sprawled form. Her hands splayed in the waters as she scrambled at him. Her purse hung off her wrist like some forgotten bangle.

He looked at his secretary. “What are you doing here?” he asked. Kara touched him; her hands roving as she scrambled up his legs to the thighs, sought solace against the hardness of his chest. Ransom held her at arms length. She struggled trying to reach him. The little battle sought to become a frenzy of want and rejection.

“Stop. These inanities bore me,” Saphira said. “Ransom, I want you to kiss her and tell her what you taste, what you feel.”

His golden gaze shot to her and he shook his head in refusal.

Marcalic yanked the chain attached to the collar at Ransom’s throat. The cruel motion, the upsurge of his body in reaction to it, sent Kara flying back in the cerulean waters. The sound of the slap resounded through the chamber. Saphira watched the red blush that came to Ransom’s face with conflicting emotions. She

did not like to see him so handled, but it was a necessity if he would not obey...and she *needed* to be obeyed. “You will do as commanded by your betters,” Marcalic snarled and let the chain and Ransom go.

Ransom’s whole body tensed as he fell back in the water. He stared at Marcalic with murderous eyes. The violence inherent in his posture left little room in Saphira’s mind that he was ready to spring at the blue faerie. His hands drew into fists at his sides and he gathered himself into position to do just that.

“Kiss her,” she commanded. She left nothing in her voice for disobedience, nothing to question. His pretty words of not wanting his secretary were nice, but this was the true test. There would be no confusion from this moment on about whom Ransom belonged to. He was *hers*. This bitch needed to know that, to understand it deep within her core.

Distracted from Marcalic by the command, his gaze met hers—gray and gold dueled. “Why are you doing this, Saphira?” he asked. The confusion on his face was almost comical, so very close to amusing, but for the pain and fear that lay just beneath it.

She crossed her arms and watched him expectantly. Ignored the surge of sympathy that encompassed him at that pathetic look. She set her face in a cool mask of pure detachment that rivaled Demi’s queen-like faerie disdain.

After a heartbeat, Ransom turned to his secretary. “Come here.”

Kara did not hesitate, but sprang into his arms. He leaned into her stiffly and pressed his lips to hers. For Saphira, it was easy to see the moment when he forgot whom he was kissing, the instant when her own intimate scent hit him. His lips softened and parted and his tongue surged into Kara's mouth. His arms closed around her nakedness, drawing her close. With abandon he sought every trace of her left on Kara's face, his tongue circling her mouth, his teeth nipping her lips.

Impassioned by the ferocity of his kiss, Kara returned it with abandon. Her whole body leaned into the pressure of his mouth. Her nails dug into the flesh of his back, pawing him. Her breasts were mashed against his chest. Her hips ground down on his rising erection.

This time it was Demi who took up the length of chain, and when Saphira nodded, drew Ransom back, separating them. Demi's manipulation of the chain was softer than Marcalic's had been. She wrapped the length of it around her arm, giving him little room to move as she reined him in steadily until the back of his head was cradled in her sex.

Ransom only looked at Saphira. She moved toward him, placing herself between him and the human woman. "You got what you wanted," he said, still panting from the fervor of the kiss. "Are you happy now? Have you humiliated me enough? Do you even still love me, Saphira?"

She didn't answer any of his questions audibly, but her mind answered them and the echoes of those answers swirled in her head in order of their presentation. *No, my love. Yes. More than life itself.* She knelt, reached down and stroked the hard, silken length of him. "You want her," she said softly.

Ransom shook his head in vehement denial. "No. Only you."

"Ransom, your body is shrill in its lust. How can you deny it?" She gave his cock a vicious flick. It was important to all of them to prove where Ransom's loyalties lie—that her betrayal of all she knew, her love for this man, had not been a foolish selfish thing born on a fickle whim. This was *love* and love was the very foundation of *The Way*.

"It's not her," he insisted. "It's you. She tastes like you. Smells like you."

"You can have her, Ransom," she whispered, letting her mouth brush his. "You need relief. You're so hard."

He moaned and bowed his head as her hand slid along his shaft.

Saphira looked over her shoulder, directly into Kara's eyes. "You can have her or ...you can have me. Here and now."

"You!" He looked up at her and the sun in his eyes was a brazen thing filled with molten heat. He grasped her waist, his hands sliding up her ribs, the brush of his nails sending spiraling flickers of heat coursing through her. He pulled her

closer, buried his face between her breasts. His hot pants seared the flesh there. “Always you.”

“Ransom, no! I love you. She doesn’t.” Kara yelled. “She’s incapable...she’s not even human. She’s a fucking faerie.”

Saphira glided his hand to her tongue-slicked cunt. “She made me ready for you, wasn’t that thoughtful?”

“Very.” His hands captured her breasts and tugged her nipples, pulling them into points and his tongue circled the edge of her ear.

The warmth of his breath prickled her skin with gooseflesh. If a picture was worth a thousand words, she’d make sure Kara had lifetime’s worth of images. Her eyes sought out Marcalic. “Make sure she watches this, General Dragonsreign.”

“Oh most certainly, my Lady.” Marcalic moved next to Kara and motioned the group of satyrs to stand just behind her. The creatures almost tripped over themselves getting into position. “Watch the pretty spectacle, human. Don’t blink. Don’t miss a second. You know by now what noncompliance will bring.”

The satyrs reached out for Kara, their clawed fingers raking at her naked flesh covetously. Saphira watched the human woman’s eyes widen, her body quiver. A whimper escaped her as the hands on her body became increasingly emboldened. Kara’s miserable gaze locked on Saphira obediently.

Ransom fought Demi's hold on the chain and collar. Excitement raged through him so strong his body shook with it and the vibration was delicious as it throbbed against Saphira's wet and throbbing sex. His renewed grip on her hard pebble nipples tightened to something near painful. The shock of the sensation garnered all of her attention.

"You wanted to do this," he said. "Quit screwing around. Gimme."

The wickedness in his gaze was mesmerizing. Her mouth sought his, her tongue tasting his lips and then moving into the hot depths of his mouth. One hand left the heated silk of his engorged flesh to tease the ring in his left nipple and then pulled it hard. He panted into her mouth. She felt the stirring of frenzy in him as she pulled the ring again.

He fought Demi's hold on the collar, seeking to surge into Saphira and bear her down in the pool's cerulean waters. Demi held fast, her hot, sensuous giggle floating musically through the air around them.

"Or how about I give it to you, Saphira," he whispered so that only she could hear. His voice rivaled Satan's for sheer temptation. "Make your friends let me go so that I can fuck you."

The words, hot in her ear, set her pussy to pounding. His tongue slid across her throat at the jugular, and suddenly she and Ransom were alone in their heated tangle of flesh on flesh. Though she was distantly aware of the onlookers, nothing



else existed or mattered for her. Her world became very small and centered on him, the tumultuous tone of his beating heart, his deep masculine scent, and his vibrant knowing touch. His teeth clamped down on the flesh of her jugular sending little spirals of pleasure through her that surged and blossomed in her gut and set her pussy to spasming in fiery demand.

His hands left the torture of her breasts and slid between her thighs, parting them abruptly. Her shaking fingers laced in his hair as his mouth slid lower, his teeth clamping on one swollen nipple and then the other. Her body bucked as two fingers slid inside her, and began rubbing her g-spot. His thumb flicked her clit in much the same cruel fashion as she had flicked the head of his dick earlier. The moan slid from her clenched teeth with the power of the jolt that went through her. Her body arched.

He grasped a handful of her hair with his free hand. His grip was not painful, but it was demanding.

“I love you, Saphira Morgan. Only you. Tell me that you love me.”

His fingers plowed fast and hard into her wet cunt and the sensation curled her toes. The muscles within her pussy locked on those skilled digits. Her body shook, moans that threatened to become screams poured from her as the throes of impending orgasm crashed over her. Violent tremors rocked her body and set her

legs to shaking helplessly against him. She pulled away from him, felt his fingers leave her and her body practically screamed from the sudden denial of pleasure.

“Let him go,” she told Demi and the chain fell into the waters as the faerie queen stepped back away from them. Saphira repositioned herself until the head of his cock was poised just beneath the opening of her cunt. She looked into his gorgeous golden eyes, so filled with passion and want and fear of the answer to the question he had just dared pose. His breath was a single hiss as she slid her body downward until her pussy engulfed the hot silken length of him.

His dick filled her, twitched inside of her. His hands slid down her back to cup her ass and force himself even deeper. She moved upward in one smooth stroke, sliding from base to tip and then dove down again. “I love you,” she told him for the first time in over a year.

His smile was almost childish, slightly arrogant, greatly relieved. Pleasure reverberated through her as her muscles gripped his captured member greedily. His hips arched as he sought to match her stoke for stroke.

“No,” she breathed. Her hands went to his throat, slid around the collar until she found the end of the chain and drew it in. She wrapped the length of metal around her wrist and pulled tight until his face was a centimeter from hers. “Don’t move.”

His only answer was a dark, impatient growl.

She set a slow, steady, but demanding rhythm intended to drive him crazy. She felt the bite of his nails in her ass cheeks and the slight pain spurred her to boost the pace...but only a little. His breaths were the ragged gasps of an animal that was *almost* getting what it wanted. Between strokes his hips trembled with the urge to plow into her, but he remained obediently still enough as her body worked his, seeking the point where he would break and disobey. She loved that point, going to that place with him.

Impulsively, she jerked the chain so that their lips met. He breathed raggedly into her mouth as her tongue sought his. His grip on her ass tightened, his fingers kneading the flesh. Her mind stuttered as the additional sensations washed over—his cock, his hands, and the titillation of his mouth.

*Very* disobediently, his hand snaked from her ass, around her hips to the mound of her cunt. His thumb brushed against the swollen flesh of her clit. She lost her mind. Her body undulated wildly as she slid against him with all the energy she had left, riding him like he was a champion race horse about to cross the finish line in the greatest race ever run.

His thumb pressed against her clit, thrummed that aching flesh. It drove her to increase her pace again, inspired her to a chaotic rhythm that jarred her body with each stoke. Hot liquid desire sought to melt her bones in their fleshy encasements when he boldly met one thrust and then another. The chain dangled

limp and forgotten in her hands as he rose to his knees in the water and she fought to get her legs around his hips before they gave on her completely. She gripped him hard, making them one as he pounded into her.

Belly to belly with him, her orgasm was a wild all-encompassing thing that arched her back to the point of near pain and put her head in the water. She heard him cry out in his own release as the pleasure swept through her mercilessly, stopping her breath, strangling her with its sheer power.

“*Impressive...for a human,*” Demi said appreciatively as Kara’s scream echoed through the chamber.

Legs trembling with the power of orgasm, Saphira laid her head on Ransom’s chest, listened to the rapid beating of his human heart. The first icy tendrils of terrible fear assaulted her as she looked up into Demi’s eyes and saw sadness there. Loss. You can’t keep him, Demi’s blue gaze said. She grasped Ransom’s arms possessively.

“What’s wrong?” he asked, the concern in his gasping voice tinged with low, ebbing desire.

“Nothing,” she whispered and turned to watch Marcalic bear down on the blonde woman. Kara scrambled for her purse, managing to snag it right before the fae general lifted her in the air and toward spiraling chambers from whence she’d fallen. One satyr’s voice rose high above the rest. Saphira almost recognized it in

the instant that it spoke. He ran underneath Kara and Marcalic, his twisting legs impeding the quickness of his flight. “Lady, don’t leave me,” the voice wheedled as he reached up for the blonde woman. “Take me with you.”

Saphira gazed at the satyr that had formerly been Charlie Newcastle. Budding horns grew out of his head. His human legs melded haphazardly with those of a fury goat. His body was disproportionate, awful, his transformation almost complete. Kara Lacey didn’t even glance at him as she spiraled with Marcalic toward freedom from the Black Mask Chamber.

“It’s time for us to go too, Saphira,” Demi said, softly, and Saphira drew away from Ransom, standing in a chamber that had grown suddenly cold. The fear within her grew. She stood, and Ransom stood beside her, grasped her hand. She clutched it like it was a lifeline. “I can’t make them wait in this terrible place any longer,” Demi finished.

The fae crowded around their queen. Those that could fly were carrying those that could not. Their gazes trained on the upper spire of Vincent Rousseau’s prison. There was joy and anticipation in those gazes.

Saphira felt none of that joy. The waves of pleasure abated, leaving her cold inside.

“Ransom,” she said.

“Is *human*,” Demi responded. There was sympathy in her tone, but an undeniable firmness. “You can not keep him. If we had the luxury of *Tir-na-nOg*, it would be possible. He would be ever young there. It was always the problem, Saphira. You would watch him grow old and you would watch him die. And you would go on. That is in the *best* circumstance. Set him free now. Let him live his life. He would ache for the sun. He would find a way to return to it as you found a way to return to us.”

A terrible sadness suffused her. She could not be human. She had tried and she had failed. She had to go home, and she didn’t have the power to take him with her...even if he would do as she had done—give up everything he knew—and go.



Aramis and Marcalic carried Ransom between them, each holding an arm. Ransom looked horrified. They had given him back his clothes.

The gold of the chamber below grew smaller and smaller, the sound of the waterfall distant and then nonexistent. The blackness around them became complete and Saphira linked her hand in Demi’s. They traveled in darkness for what seemed to be forever and the only sound was the fluttering of hundreds of pairs of wings seeking freedom, seeking moonlight, seeking nature and the sky and the stars.

They burst free of the magical entrapment that was the Black Mask Chamber into the hall of Rousseau Manor just as the sun set and the soft beginnings of darkness set about the manor house. Giggling faeries danced on those marble floors, enraptured by the pictures of themselves that decorated the manor walls. Aramis and Marcalic dropped Ransom, none-to-gently, to the ground.

“Earwigs!” Saphira growled, moving toward her fallen husband. *He will always be my husband*, she thought, *no matter where he goes in his human sunlit world*. She would always love him, and she wondered if the ache of it, an ache that was growing steadily by the millisecond, was something that she could survive. What good was living for thousands of years if she had to do it without him? It would have been much better to just live his human life, short as it was.

The guilty faerie males glared at her with no remorse, and Demi’s soft, disapproving laughter echoed just underneath the joy of the Mandrake Clan.

Ransom glowered at both faeries as if he were thinking about killing them as she dropped down by his side.

“Are you all right?” she asked.

“I want to go home,” he said, standing. The strength of his glare intensified to something very much like hatred as he watched the mocking faerie nobility.

“Oh, Ransom,” Saphira said softly, “I *am* home.”

Her heart hurt in a way she had not known before she'd experienced being human. She touched Ransom's face and Marcalic rolled his eyes in disgust. Saphira ignored him.

"Bitch!" the word was a vicious hiss. It echoed in the empty house. Kara Lacey came, it seemed, from nowhere. She had a pistol in one hand and the purse she had carefully kept in her possession in the other. "You filthy inhuman cunt! *Fucking* die!"

Thunder split the air and the gunshot came faster than human or faerie could react. In seconds the gun was wrestled from the madwoman, but a bullet was already on the way and aimed at Saphira's heart. She didn't even have time to scream, time to truly acknowledge what had happened. Pain erupted in her head as it hit the hard marble floor and the world went cloudy as Ransom barreled into her, knocking her down. She heard his agonized cry as the bullet hit him and sent him crashing back into her.

"No!" she screamed.

Blood rained down on her from his limp form. Saphira pushed him off of her, scrambling to her knees to take in the damage. A red-flower hole blossomed in his throat and he leaked blood like a fountain. His eyes were closed and his few breaths were raw and strangled.



Saphira screamed and this scream had no words, just pain. She felt hands on her and she struggled against them.

“You were selfish, water sprite,” Demi’s soft voice said, “but selfishness is in our nature. We are wild things and free. We are not like humans. To truly become one of them is impossible. You would long for what you had lost. We knew that when you left.”

“Leave me alone,” Saphira whimpered raggedly. She cradled Ransom’s head in her lap, stroked his hair. “Just go away. You are free.”

“But Dear heart, you aren’t thinking. He can become one of us now. Together we can do it, as we have always done things together, my love. His human life is over now. There is nothing for him to regret. His sun is gone from him forever. Can’t you see, water sprite? That which held him here is severed.”

Saphira looked up into Demi’s glittering blue eyes.

*“Please,”* she whispered.

## Epilogue

*The-Cedar-At-the-Center-of-the-Wood*

*Scotland*

Saphira floated on the soft blue waters of a new pond far away from Rousseau Manor. Ransom lay on top of her in the cup of the rose that floated sinuously through the waves. She heard the low pipe music of the satyrs playing in the background near the place where they had transported their beloved *Cedar-At-The-Center-Of-The-Wood*. The move had been a necessity so that Kobalos, the Goblin King, could not hope to find them for another thousand years.

She heard the distant laughter of fae children retrieved from magnificent *Tir-na-nOg*. The King of the Wood had wept upon returning them. He had missed his daughter, but *Tir-na-nOg* was no longer a place for the Mandrake Clan. They preferred the human world with its single moon and its soft velvet night of blackest blue. They had braved it, survived it, and now it was *theirs*.

Ransom was half asleep, his face against the mound of her cunt, his breath stirring gentle ripples of desire. His wings were the same brilliant color as his eyes.

On the bank of the pond a small cluster of satyrs went by chasing a Brownie female who was laughing off the ferocity of their attention while running for her propriety. One of them had a small black handbag swinging from its gargantuan tool like the world's largest cock ring. Saphira thought of the last time she had seen Kara Lacey in human form. The satyrs had burst from the Black Mask Chamber in a small drove, lifted by fae with the ability to fly. The instant that they were free and touched the marble floor of the manor, blackened eyes had locked on Kara with raging desire.

“She’s *ours*,” they said.

Not one of the Faeries even dreamt of hindering their sport. She’d been given a chance to escape them.

They had come at her in a small herd, the thing that had been Charles Newcastle, almost completely transformed and obviously horny. Kara had tried to run, but two faeries held her as the satyrs descended upon her. They grabbed her legs and she’d dropped to the floor, thrashing and screaming and howling like a creature insane. They dragged her outside into the surrounding woods. And her body had known every satyr in the herd a dozen times before the transformation.

Behind the thing that Kara had become, another satyr ran. The collar about his throat had been fashioned from the stuff of *Tir-na-nOg*—a gift from the Leanan Sidhe who had been released from the dark kingdom of the Goblin King under

threat of war from the whole of *Tir-na-nOg*. It was melded into the flesh of his throat. It could not come off, so deep was it seared to the bone of his satyr's spine. The collar checked magick and the only way to remove it once applied was to cut off his head. Vincent Rousseau would never wield magick of any sort again. A slave to his cock, he helplessly followed the others. The foul curses born of his human mind, echoed in the night around them.

"Ahem," someone whispered from above. There were twenty faeries in the air above them, the whole of Saphira and Ransom's nest. Demi's smile was particularly wicked. She carried a little whip, with a soft leather head. She used it to point at Ransom.

"We think it's time you let us play with your toy, Saphira. You've kept him to yourself long enough. He's had ample time to adjust and by right he is as much ours as yours."

Ransom grew tense. She knew that all thought of sleep had left him upon the queen's words.

"Saphira, what are we going to do?" he asked softly.

Saphira looked up at her grinning nest mates. She had missed the warmth of their bodies during Ransom's given time of adjustment to being fae.

She pushed him off of her. "Baby," she said. "I am going to give chase. And if you're smart...you'll run."

He grinned uncertainly for a moment because he seemed to be clinging to the hope that she might be kidding. She smiled her most wicked, predatory smile.

Ransom fled.

Aramis and Marcalic lighted on either side of her. “How long should we give him?” Aramis asked, the excitement of the hunt apparent in his voice.

“Half an hour at least,” Marcalic answered generously.

Saphira felt Demi’s hands on her shoulders, kneading the flesh gently when the first echo of the song drifted taunting from the surrounding forest. She couldn’t hear the words but there was a challenge in Ransom’s voice and a freedom and so much desire. He was calling them, taunting them.

Demi leaned down to her. “I love him, Saphira,” she whispered.

“Oh yes,” Saphira said, taking wing with the rest of them to answer the challenge in Ransom’s call. “So do I.”

*The End*

<http://raquel-taylor.blogspot.com>

Hot tub... Poppin' Bubb-ly... Rubbin' your spot, love... Got you screamin' "Punish me."—Big Pun \*\*\*\*\* "When I'm good, I'm VERY good, but when I'm bad, I'm better.~Mae West (damn right:)

Raquel Taylor does a fantastic job creating this mystical, magical world. The sex is intense, wild and fantastic. Ms. Taylor has a wonderful ability to create words unlike any other person. Talented and sizzling she holds you and grasps you. Be prepared for the next wave of Raquel Taylor to take you away.

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