



LOVING
A *Fairy*
GODMOTHER

DANIELLE MONSCH

Loving a Fairy Godmother

Danielle Monsch

Published 2011

ISBN 978-1-59578-808-5

Published by Liquid Silver Books, imprint of Atlantic Bridge Publishing, 10509 Sedgegrass Dr, Indianapolis, Indiana 46235. Copyright © 2011, Danielle Monsch. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the author.

Manufactured in the United States of America

Liquid Silver Books
<http://LSbooks.com>

Email:
raven@LSbooks.com

Editor
Devin Govaere

Cover Artist
Tuesday Dubé

This is a work of fiction. The characters, incidents and dialogues in this book are of the author's imagination and are not to be construed as real. Any resemblance to actual events or persons, living or dead, is completely coincidental.

Blurb

Tiernan is one of a kind. Beyond the divine dimples, killer blue eyes, and hard muscled body, Tiernan is also the only Fairy Godfather. Most of the Fairy Godmothers have no problem with keeping Tiernan around, but Reina isn't like most Fairy Godmothers.

Amongst Fairy Godmothers, Reina is the best. Organized, efficient, logical. So why is it when Tiernan is around, all those qualities fly out the window? Reina doesn't like that one infuriating male makes her lose control, and just wants him gone. Circumstances arise that just might let her get her wish, though not in a way she ever wanted.

Tiernan is given an assignment and told either get a Happily Ever After or he will no longer be a Fairy Godfather. Reina is going with him to supervise, but if Tiernan gets his way, he'll not only be supervising that luscious stubborn fairy in bed, but also get her to admit Happily Ever Afters also apply to Fairy Godmothers.

Dedication

To my fellow writer, Anna Alexander, who went above and beyond in her critique partner duties with this story, and to Crista and Gwen, who round out the most awesome critique group in history.

To my husband, without whom my dream to be a writer would have remained just that—a dream. To Mom and Dad, who believed in me when I didn't believe in myself.

And, as always, to Mr. Jim Garner.

Chapter 1

“Oh no, this can’t be. I’ll never hear the end of it from the Fairy Godmother Council!”

Tiernan’s fingers curled over the bloody mess that was once his stomach, viscera and blubber sliding through the multiple lacerations crisscrossing his body.

How in the nine hells did he get saddled with the most incompetent Fairy Godmother to ever exist? Leading the knight to the dragon, helping him overpower the beast, rescuing the princess and having them live Happily Ever After... wasn’t that what Fairy Godmothers did every day? Instead, he got one who couldn’t find her butt with both hands.

“Glad your priorities are straight, Fairy,” he growled, with not enough strength to lift his head, not enough strength to even raise his voice and yell like he wanted. His legs were numb, and blackness settled around the edges of his vision. “ ‘Go this way,’ you said. ‘Trust me.’ I knew I should never have listened. Since when can a female give directions?”

The blond Fairy’s head jerked around nervously. “What do I do?” she wailed, and Tiernan really wished he had the strength to hit her, gallantry be damned. That the female above him was crying, but not due to the fact he was about to die, really set his teeth on edge.

“I know!” she cried, her eyes wide as she bore down on him. “I can grant you a wish! You haven’t asked for one yet! Make a wish! You can wish for healing!”

What an adventure it would be to become a Fairy Godmother.

In his darkening mind, the words ping-ponged back and forth, brighter and more impressive with each volley. Tiernan tried to shake his head and dislodge the traitorous thought that seemed to come from somewhere outside of his own being. Blasphemy, insanity, such a thought. He was a knight.

With no king.

With no land.

With no family.

A knight who had nothing and no one to protect.

His lungs seized up. He was powerless to do anything but wait to see if they would work again. They did, but not without bringing up a quantity of blood through his throat and into his mouth as the price. Spitting out the blood, he knew there would not be another chance.

Before he could reflect, before he could decide if it was truly wise, he simply stated what the voice told him. “I wish I was like you, a Fairy Godmother.”

“What?” said Blondie Bimbette, not expecting this. “I didn’t say you could wish that!”

“You didn’t say I couldn’t,” Tiernan snapped back. “You just said make a wish. I did, now fulfill it before I die.” With that, he passed out.

A cacophony of voices, loud and argumentative, greeted him when awareness came upon him again. His eyes opened, and he saw her...

Tiernan’s lungs seized up again, and he wondered if this was the last time, if she was

an angel sent down to bring him to Heaven. Maybe a devil to drag him down to hell, but no matter, he'd follow her willingly.

Her face was every secret desire he'd ever had come alive, every wish he never made for fear of being prideful. Those wide-set brown eyes, the color of rich earth, fringed with the thickest black lashes and set in the perfect oval of her face caused his heart to ache in his chest in a way even his recent encounter with the dragon hadn't managed to do.

A thick fall of hair, darker than her eyes, fell forward in long waves, caressing high cheekbones and the most luscious mouth he had every come across. That plump bottom lip begged for a man's teeth. With more willpower than he thought he possessed, he forced his gaze back to her eyes.

For a moment, just a moment, he saw feminine awareness in them, but then she blinked, and that awareness took flight, replaced by propriety and duty.

"He is awake, Godmother Sara," she said, and upon hearing that deep, husky tone, stunned desire turned into raw want. He'd started to reach for her when another woman came to his side, bending slightly to have a closer look at him.

"Aren't you a handsome one," said the older woman, a chuckle escaping her as she ran a finger down his face. As her finger came to rest at the side of his mouth, she gave a delighted exclamation. "And dimples as well!"

"Godmother Sara, that is quite inappropriate, and completely beside the point," said the woman who had just eluded him. "He should not be here."

"Hmmm," Godmother Sara said, currently pinching his cheeks and not so surreptitiously looking down the expanse of his chest. Tiernan looked down, not sure what to expect since the last he knew he had a bloody pulp in place of a chest, but also not shocked to see himself now healed, a diaphanous shirt and thin breeches replacing his armor. He was as good as naked because with what he was wearing, anyone in the room could clearly see what he had to offer.

A quick glance around showed he was surrounded by women circling around the sumptuous couch he found himself now on, and yes, they were all in various stages of checking out his body – all except his angel, who was very studiously not looking at him and instead kept her focus on the woman who wouldn't leave his face alone.

So, the one woman he was interested in couldn't care less. Yeah, that ranked right up there with death by dragon. With tensed jaw and a sure grip, he grabbed the older woman's hands, and being gentle with her frail limbs, placed those hands away from his face as he sat up. "What's going on here?"

Sara smiled. "Don't you remember, knight? You made the wish."

So the blonde granted it. "Where is the ditz?" he asked, looking around. He didn't see the ditz, but he saw his angel quickly cast her face down to hide her amusement.

She had taken the sight of her smile from him, the final insult in this insane day, and now he felt blood rush to his face. "What do you mean I shouldn't be here?" he challenged her. "Why do you have any say in my life?"

That wiped all amusement from her face. "I am saying the truth. That wish should never have been honored, and you should not be here."

"I guess that means you aren't in charge then, since here I am. Are you all Fairy Godmothers?"

Godmother Sara smiled. "Cute but not that bright, eh, knight?"

He jumped up, suddenly restless. "Could you cut me some slack considering the

almost dying thing?”

“Of course,” she said, waving her hand to get him to sit back down, a signal he ignored. “Naomi is no longer a Fairy Godmother. Her screw-up was too monumental to ignore. However, she offered you a wish while still a full Fairy Godmother, you made a wish while she was a full Fairy Godmother, and she granted it as a full Fairy Godmother.”

“A wish that no other Fairy Godmother would have granted in her place,” his angel interjected. “That wish was granted in panic. It should be made void.”

“While you are correct, Reina, what is done is done. We, as Fairy Godmothers, are responsible for her words.”

So his angel’s name was Reina. Still, the satisfaction of knowing her name didn’t quite drown out the fact she was actively trying to get rid of him. “Why shouldn’t I be a Fairy Godfather?”

Reina answered, her tone affronted. “There is no such thing as a Fairy Godfather, and never has a mortal been allowed to become one of us!”

“So I’ll be the first, no big deal.”

Her eyes narrowed. “The decision to never allow males was made over a millennium ago, for very good reasons. You shouldn’t be allowed to upset that.”

He gave her a lazy grin. “I don’t know. I don’t think I could do any worse than getting the knight I’m trying to help eaten by a dragon.”

Her look turned murderous. “I don’t want to replace one mistake with another.”

“Sweetheart, no woman who has met me ever called it a mistake.”

Before Reina was able to get past her outrage to form a response, Sara asked, “Knight, what is your name?”

He pulled his gaze away from Reina, though he did admit she was just as cute when she was livid as when she was calm. Maybe even cuter. With those eyes blazing, it was exactly how he thought she must look when she was engaged in strenuous activities of another nature. He had to turn his mind from those thoughts though. These trousers were not forgiving in that area. “Tiernan.”

“Tiernan, you better prepare yourself, because you are going to cause quite a commotion as the first ever Fairy Godfather.”

“Godmother,” Reina started, but Sara shook her head to cut her off.

“His wish was granted, Reina, and his wish shall remain granted. This is the final decision of the Council.”

“Thank you, Godmother Sara,” Tiernan said, the title feeling foreign on his tongue.

“Don’t thank me yet, Tiernan. You have the right to become a Fairy Godfather, but that doesn’t mean you will. You must pass all the training and tests that are required, and even if you do that, Fairy Godmothers are constantly monitored. You can be expelled from the program. Ask Naomi.”

“And if I’m expelled?” Tiernan asked.

“Then you’ll be moved to some other part of the fairy realm,” Sara replied. “Trust me, nothing near as much fun as being one of us. Plus I will openly mock you every time we run into each other.”

Tiernan laughed, the first time today he was relaxed enough to make the sound. “I understand. I promise I will live up to your expectations.”

“Alright then,” Sara said, and the gravitas she displayed only a moment before was

replaced by amusement. “Reina will see to your training then.”

“Godmother!” Reina nearly yelled in protest.

“Reina, you will abide by the Council’s decision. You will train him fairly, and you will see that he becomes a first rate Fairy Godfather. Now, do you understand my words?”

“Of course, Godmother Sara,” Reina replied, but Tiernan could see the fire in her eyes sparking.

The voice had been right, it seemed, whether it had come from his mind or not. This was indeed shaping up to be quite an adventure.

Chapter 2

Oh, the incessant giggling.

Reina was stopped by the noise as yet again she was reminded of why it was such a bad idea to have a man around. For thousands of years, they were a venerated and respected institution, held in the highest esteem and to the highest standards. As soon as a guy stepped foot on the compound, not five minutes could pass without that high-pitched, juvenile sound.

Why mess with tradition? Why? Just because thirty years ago a few sexually frustrated elder Godmothers got a look at dimples for the first time in centuries, she now had to deal with that irresponsible, annoying instigator.

Some days it didn't pay to be a Fairy Godmother.

Squaring her shoulders, Reina was off again, back to business and steadfast in marching towards those giggles.

Maybe she should speak to Godmother Sara about moving Tiernan to another department. After all, it didn't look like the Council would ever move him to another division, so it made sense to try to find some way to live with him that didn't have her constantly grinding her teeth. Maybe if he wasn't amongst the FGs she was responsible for, she might be able to relax slightly. She admitted the man was funny—on occasion—and capable of intelligent and interesting conversation—sometimes—and she did have to admire how he would allow no insult to any of the FGs.

That didn't happen often, but all factions had their undercurrents of rivalry. The others of the Faerie Realm discovered very quickly it was not to their benefit to engage the FGs. Tiernan had been a warrior as a mortal, and that prowess had not left him simply because he was now a Fairy Godfather.

The problem was all of those good points were easy to ignore when having to deal with yet another female mooning after him.

Yes, she would talk to Godmother Sara.

Happy with her decision, Reina wasn't overcome with the usual urge to throw something at the scene that greeted her in the huge shaded courtyard of the FG compound. Under the trees and surrounded by his harem, Tiernan lounged in the grass, his relaxed demeanor proclaiming he didn't have a care in the world.

The other Godmothers were gazing at him in dreamy adoration, as if every word that came from his mouth was a miracle. Though, to be fair, they might consider the miracle more what his shirt and breeches covered and less what came from his mind, considering how many glances Reina counted checking out those two areas.

He was a beautiful man. Even at her most annoyed, Reina could never deny that. Sandy blond hair, eyes the color of a summer sky, and dimples that made every woman who saw them start fanning herself.

Beautiful, but not perfect, with the nose that had been broken at least once and scars slashed into his skin, testifying about his life as a soldier as much as the broad shoulders and heavily muscled body did.

"Godfather Tiernan, here you are," she greeted.

"Godmother Reina, what a pleasure to see you! What can I do for you this fine day?"

Tiernan answered, as though lying on his back surrounded by women who would all gladly jump him at the same time was a perfectly reasonable way to greet a superior.

You are going to have him transferred. You've done too much for Sara to have her deny you. "I am sure your busy schedule caused you to forget that you were to see me in my office last hour."

"Really, that was today? My deepest apologies, Godmother Reina. Katarina here was informing us of some problems with her last assignment, and since Godmother Sara always wants us to keep our minds sharp, we were brainstorming some ways to improve her performance next time."

Reina's gaze went to the head that was closest to Tiernan's crotch, and Bingo! It was Katarina.

Katarina had a habit of sleeping with her male clients, to "educate them sexually so that they will be able to take care of their woman," as she liked to explain it. Reina also heard that she'd offered a blowjob to Tiernan within the first thirty seconds of their meeting. No surprise she was positioned to be first in line should Tiernan require any servicing.

"Godmother Katarina, I heard of no problems from your last assignment. Is there anything you wish to tell me?" Reina asked in her best, but patently false, sweet voice.

"No, Godmother Reina," Katarina responded, and Reina felt a flash of inappropriate pleasure seeing nervousness replace absolute adoration on Katarina's face. Since Katarina's paperwork indicated no problems, she was in a difficult position should Reina wish to pursue that line of questioning.

"This is just an informal session, a learning exercise if you will," Tiernan cut in smoothly. "Not anything that needed to be reported, just some talk so we can keep our skill set sharp."

The women sighed in unison over Tiernan's defense. Reina restrained the urge to roll her eyes. She was used to restraining that particular feeling since she got it about every two minutes in Tiernan's presence.

"While I always appreciate taking the time to keep skills sharp, Godfather Tiernan, this sounds like something that can easily wait until after our meeting."

"You are of course correct, Godmother Reina. Ladies, if you will excuse me..." Tiernan rose from his place on the grass, his imminent departure causing grumbles and pouts.

He stopped next to her, and she was reminded once again he was one of the few beings that lived in the compound taller than she. Reina loathed the authority she ceded when forced to tilt her head back to look at him. "Please follow me," she responded, crispness in both her tone and her gait as she turned and headed for her office, not bothering to look back to see if he followed.

She didn't need to. She felt him whether she wanted to or not, his presence creating a current on her skin that never quieted.

He came up beside her, and as they walked the compound, other Fairy Godmothers called out greetings to him. Tiernan responded with smiles and pleasantries, and somehow made it seem that each woman he answered was the only woman he had any interest in talking to.

Reina held back her snort. She had learned well enough. No man had interest in only one woman.

Before they reached her office, one of the junior FGs came running towards them. She stopped shortly before them, taking a moment to compose herself before finally delivering her message. “Godmother Reina, Godfather Tiernan, the Council requests your presence in Chambers immediately.”

“For what reason?” asked Reina, thoroughly confused. As a senior FG, any Council activities should have been on her calendar. There was nothing scheduled until next month.

“I wasn’t given that information. I was just told to bring you the message.”

Reina glared at him from the corner of her eyes. Tiernan caught her look and brought his hands up. “I know nothing of this.”

“Yet somehow, I feel like the reason for this mystery session is you.”

He cocked his head and tsked her as if talking to a recalcitrant child. “You’ve been trying to get rid of me again, haven’t you?” His eyes caressed down her body until they came to rest on her hands, and before she could protest, he caught one of her hands in his and brought it to his mouth, kissing the back. “Such beautiful hands. You would have so much more fun if you used your charms to have me eating out of them instead of using them to push me away.”

Her teeth immediately set on edge, and she jerked her hand back, clenching it into a fist. “I am always trying to get you kicked out of the program. I can only hope that this meeting has something to do with that fervently desired wish.”

Irrepressible as always, Tiernan gave her a full-on dimpled grin. “That, or maybe they sense how perfect we are for each other and want to set us up on a date.”

“I think that we need to get to the Council Chambers now, Godfather Tiernan.” With that, Reina marched forward.

For having such a fearsome effect on any Fairy summoned to it, the Council Chamber was nothing special, a room that contained a long table housing five chairs behind it. Still, entering the room, and seeing the Top Tier—the five women who were the leaders of all Fairy Godmothers—was a nerve-wracking experience.

“Sara, my love, you are looking radiant as always. Immortality obviously agrees with you.”

Correction, it was a nerve-wracking experience for any Fairy with sense, a description that had never included Tiernan.

“Godmother Reina, Godfather Tiernan, good of both of you to come,” Sara replied, as if there were any choice in the matter of a Council Summons. “Tiernan, your eyesight is obviously as perfect as always.”

Tiernan had once told Reina that Godmother Sara, the Supreme Leader of the Fairy Godmothers, looked exactly how mortals thought FGs were supposed to look and showed her a print to prove it. Reina had to agree that the older, portly woman with curly gray hair and the cherubic air seemed to be an exact match for the picture.

Of course, mortals were shortsighted as always. FGs could take on any appearance they desired in the Mortal realm, any Faerie could. Still, Reina wondered if Godmother Sara had appeared to the exact right mortal in her true form, resulting in being forever known in their books and pictures.

Tiernan placed his hands on the table and leaned down, bringing his face on the same level as Sara. “When are you going to give up being overlord of all the FGs and run away with me?”

“Tiernan, I cannot abandon my post,” replied Sara even as Reina could not stop herself from palming her face in her hands. “And as much as I hate it, it is my post that demands I bring you before us today.”

Though Sara’s voice held a hint of warning, Tiernan showed no hesitation in responding. He pushed himself away from the table and said, “I live to serve you always, ladies of the Council. Please let me know what is troubling you.”

Irene, the second in command, thin and pale where Sara was round and rosy, spoke. “Tiernan, you are aware that as the only male ever to be given a place amongst the Fairy Godmothers, you are under more intense scrutiny than any other in our ranks.”

“Yes, Madam, I am aware and very proud of my unique position here.”

“We do not wish to be perceived as being harder on you than any other. Though you have gone through some adjustments, you have done an admirable job thus far,” Irene continued.

“I only wish to be a credit to you always,” Tiernan responded, and Reina could see the old fairies eating him up, the gallant words paired with his very commanding presence. Reina had to give him credit—the man was a master in the art of BS.

It took Irene a moment before she was able to continue, but Reina could see the distress coming into her eyes, her already thin face becoming alarmingly drawn.

“Tiernan, though we may not like it, we are answerable to others outside this organization, and we have been told...”

Irene’s breath contracted as if she was getting near tears. Sara leaned over and patted her hand, then took over the conversation. “Irene is trying to be diplomatic in her wording, Tiernan. Here is the straight scoop. Everyone watches you, trying to see if you will mess up. We on the Council have never wanted to be perceived as being harder on you than the others, so we have let a few things slide. We don’t regret that because you are very entertaining and have never done any major damage. However, a situation has come up that demands our immediate attention, as those outside this organization are starting to question us.”

At her pause, Tiernan nodded, letting her know he was truly listening. “What is the situation?”

“Tiernan, why have you never had a Happily Ever After?”

Ah, the elusive Happily Ever After. That’s what brought this on.

“Is that all?” Tiernan’s body relaxed, and it wasn’t until then that Reina realized beneath the smiles and charm, he had been tense. “Godmothers, HEAs are notoriously difficult. Even for the advanced and highly experienced Godmothers, such as Godmother Reina, there is a very low HEA rate.”

“This is true, Tiernan, but in over three decades, you have never even come close to having one.”

“Godmother Irene, that is because I do not waste precious time hoping for a near impossible HEA. I go for a solid happy ending, and make sure my clients are well and in love, instead of possibly destroying any chance of them ending up together by going for the impossible.”

“Tiernan, we are Fairy Godmothers. Going for the impossible is our job,” Irene said, and Reina could hardly believe her ears, because for the first time it sounded like she was scolding Tiernan.

Even in the face of this highly unusual development, Tiernan kept his cool. “I must

humbly disagree. Being the only one here who was once human, I can assure you that a human will take what they can get happiness-wise. HEAs are unnecessary.”

Sara shook her head at him. “Tiernan, it is precisely because you were once human that I don’t think you see the whole picture. More than anything, humans need hope. They need to believe the impossible just may happen. The happiness you procure is indeed a wonderful thing, but as a Fairy Godfather, it is not a good sign that you dismiss the possibilities so easily.”

Tiernan nodded, but Reina could tell it was more as appeasement and less that they’d actually convinced him. “I will indeed take your wise advice to heart, Council. Thank you for bringing this to my attention.”

Sara sighed. “It’s not that easy, Tiernan. Unfortunately, that laxness of attitude we have been displaying towards you has come back to bite you in the butt.”

As usual, Tiernan’s reaction was the opposite of what Reina would expect. He gave the council members an indulgent smile, letting them know whatever came next, he in no way blamed them. “What has happened, Sara?” he asked, his voice low.

For the first time Reina could remember, Godmother Sara looked visibly upset. “Your lack of HEAs has been brought to the Elf King’s attention.”

“No.” The word was reflex; Reina had no idea she was going to say it until she heard it in the air. This was not good. The Elf King hated him, had wanted to get rid of Tiernan for a long time, and he was not a being you wanted to be on the wrong side of.

It was said that he despised Tiernan because Tiernan slept with his daughter yet refused to marry her, but Reina did not believe that for a moment. While she didn’t doubt that the King sincerely believed this, she in no way could believe Tiernan had slept with the princess. Tiernan simply had to snap his fingers to get the pick of the FGs, let alone the greater female populace, so he had no reason to sleep with a princess who was not only unfortunate looking, but had a nasty, spoiled personality to boot.

“Oh just great! I knew I should have slept with that princess, ugliness be damned.”

Reina’s shocked gasp filled the chamber. “Godfather Tiernan!”

“What? She was an oinker. Don’t ever make the mistake of swearing not to do something unless pigs fly, because she has wings and you’ll see her overhead.”

Reina’s eyes rolled so far into the back of her head, she was sure she wouldn’t see anyone in front of her until they smacked her to announce their presence. When she turned her attention back to the council, though, she saw the Godmothers covering their mouths, trying not to laugh, their spirits obviously lifted.

It would be giving him too much credit to assume his outburst was because he wanted to alleviate the tense atmosphere that was affecting the Godmothers, so she refused to even contemplate such a motive.

Tiernan spoke again. “I assume the Elf King acted in some way on this information?”

“He went straight to the Green Man. Told him you were sullyng the honor of the Fairy Godmother system.”

Tiernan sighed, a great expanse of breath. “What does the Green Man think?”

“You may not believe this to hear it, but The Green Man is a great romantic. The Green Man doesn’t care about you personally one way or the other, but he is a huge supporter of the HEA system.”

A resigned smile curved Tiernan’s lips. He turned to look at Reina then, his sky blue

eyes direct on hers, holding her captive. "I guess this means your wish came true, Reina. They are going to move me."

Reina had a hard time swallowing as she met that intense gaze. Where was the ecstasy, the jubilation? Finally, she was vindicated, and Tiernan was to be removed. Why weren't her lips twisting in glee at the thought of finally being rid of him?

Sara's voice cut through Reina's confused thoughts. "The Elf King has called for complete revocation of the wish, not reassignment."

Tiernan's laugh was low, the gallows evident in the sound. For some reason, Reina could not comprehend the sentence that had just been uttered. Yes, she knew the words, but she must have somehow switched meanings in her mind. That sentence could not possibly mean what she thought it did. "Godmother Sara," Reina began, then stopped as no sound passed her tight throat. Why was her body not under her control?

Tiernan's hand curled around her wrist, pulling her into the curve of his body. "Godmother Sara, I want Reina to leave. I'll do whatever is required, but I refuse to allow her to see my death sentence carried out."

Reina's face burrowed into his neck, Tiernan's words unlocking her body as their truth cut through her denials. Tiernan had wished to become a Fairy Godfather as he lay dying. Revocation of the wish meant he would be returned to the instant before he made the wish, scant moments before his mortal body would have expired.

She wanted to be free of him, hadn't she? And how pathetic her reasons sounded now when she was faced with her wish being granted. Please no, I don't want a world without him in it. I don't want him forever gone from me. I want...

"Don't give up the ghost quite yet, Tiernan," said Sara, and both Tiernan and Reina startled, turning their gaze to her. Reina, aware of how entwined their bodies had become, wrenched herself from his grasp.

Tiernan made no move to stop her, absorbed in the Fairy in front of him. "What do you mean?" he asked, his voice cautious.

"I mean that your boss was able to do some nifty neat negotiating on your behalf."

An open mouthed smile came over his face. "You sly fox. Marry me."

"Don't tempt me, boy. I just might force you to waste yourself on me. It boils down to this, Tiernan. You have one last chance to prove yourself. Your next assignment ends in a Happily Ever After, or the Elf King wins."

"Not a problem. You want it in one day, or two?"

Sara's laughter rang out, welcome after the uncomfortable past minutes. "Well, I am glad to see you in full spirits, Tiernan. It bodes well for your success. Don't take this too lightly though. This is beyond the Council. You must produce a HEA, because if you don't, I can do nothing else for you."

"You've done so much for me already. Don't think I'm not appreciative." He closed his mouth, his brows coming together, his fingers tapping his leg in a quick staccato movement. "The Elf King will not be happy about this last chance, and I'm sure he'll know all the details of your bargaining. He'll do anything to stop me from getting a Happily Ever After."

Sara's hands clapped together, and she rubbed them furiously together. "Now that, we can help with, and that is why Reina is here."

Tiernan's eyes once again turned to Reina, gleeful calculation replacing the relief that had been in them. Now on her guard, Reina asked the council, "How am I to help?"

Sara was practically vibrating in her seat, and Reina knew she wasn't going to like what was said next. "Reina, you are going to be sent with Tiernan to prevent any attempts by the Elf King—or any other outside party—to stop Tiernan from getting his HEA."

Almost as an automatic response, Reina began shaking her head. "Godmother Sara, there must be others besides me who are more suited for this job."

"No, Reina, there is no one else." Sara gave her a hard look. "Let me continue my frank speech because I'm enjoying it so much and I don't get to do it often enough. It is a well-known fact that you are against Tiernan being in the program. If I send anyone else with him, should Tiernan get a HEA," she turned her gaze to Tiernan, "and I am fully expecting you to get one, boy. Nevertheless, with anyone else, the Elf King will bring charges of collusion. If he tried that against you, people would hurt themselves falling down laughing. Beyond that, you are strong enough to take on any challenge that the Elf King would send to prevent Tiernan's HEA."

Oh yes, Sara was very serious about this. Short of holing up in an enchanted castle, there was no way Reina was getting out of this one. "What would be my duties?"

"You are to assist Tiernan. You are not in any way to interfere or take lead; you are there to follow his directions. The HEA must be his alone. If you discover someone from our realm trying to disrupt the HEA process, you are to immediately neutralize any threat. Is this understood?"

Follow his directions? Put herself in the hands of that arrogant, cocksure male? Screw the castle; she was going to get her very own pet fire-breathing dragon. "Perfectly, Godmother Sara."

Reina could feel her face taking on a pinched look, and this was confirmed a moment later when Tiernan burst out laughing. He leaned over and whispered, "You look like you've just eaten a basket of lemons, Godmother Reina."

Once this was over and the Elf King dealt with, she was going to make it her life's mission to get him reassigned and away from the Fairy Godmothers. Once that was accomplished she would dance a jig, she would cavort naked in a meadow, she would never, ever, ever offend the heavens again by having a second of hesitation with her feelings of him leaving. On all that was sacred, this she promised.

Chapter 3

Reina was walking at a good clip ahead of him as they exited the Council Chambers and went to her offices. Tiernan's eyes wandered down her body, past those squared shoulders, continuing down the long column of her back, until they settled on that delicious backside he so adored. Even when stomping mad, Reina's body had an instinctive seductive sway, all the more enticing because Tiernan knew there was not one shred of artifice in it.

In fact, she would probably start walking under a tent if she ever realized how the movements of her body were so well known to him.

He followed, keeping slightly behind her to enjoy the view. Since it also allowed her the illusion of control, it was a win-win situation as far as he was concerned.

As the cool early evening breeze swirled around him, he let himself recall the feeling of Reina's body pressed against his. She fit him, every curve aligned to a hollow of his body. He'd discovered that in those scant moments where she forgot to be unyielding and clung to him. Now, if only he could find a way to get her to do that without his death as a motivator.

He also wondered about Sara. Not that he minded, but there were others besides Reina who should have been chosen for this job. Instead, once again she had put him and Reina together. Sara always had, right from the beginning. When she had Reina train him, he assumed that it was a backdoor way to get out of the wish, putting him under the power of a person she knew didn't like him. He was wrong about that, though. Sara knew if he passed under Reina's instruction no one could say he did not deserve his place amongst the Fairy Godmothers.

Sara also knew what Reina was. Reina was tough, but she never did anything underhanded to try to get him kicked out of the program. He would succeed or fail on his own merits.

That was Reina, honor and inherent fairness underneath sternness, using propriety to try to hide an innate sensuality that could never be quashed, no matter how she tried.

That a woman so sensual would try so hard to deny that part of herself had him very curious as to why. It didn't take much to find out what drove some of her animosity. Some light flirting, some seemingly random questions about her to different fairies, and he heard of the scum who broke her heart, very nasty, very public.

His favorite fantasy involved throwing the bleeding carcass of that sorry excuse at her feet in tribute, then letting her go to her knees to reward him.

"I received the file earlier," Reina said as they entered her office and took their respective seats around her desk.

"What file?" he asked, partly to annoy her. No, make that completely to annoy her.

She gave him a disbelieving look. "Your HEA file? Your last chance file? The file that will determine whether you live? That file?"

"Oh, my next assignment, you mean. You talk as if you think it's a possibility I'm going to fail."

He nearly smiled as he watched her control her tongue. She was just too much fun to tease. He wondered what she would do if he told her seeing her in a temper caused him to

get harder than seeing any other woman naked.

Hmmm, if he decided to do that, he should probably get used to the idea of eating flies and hope green was a good shade on him.

“Godfather Tiernan—”

“You can just call me Tiernan,” he interrupted.

She tried again. “Godfather Tiernan—”

“”Didn’t Sara just tell you that you had to follow my directions?”

That pushed her over the edge. “Do you truly think you are going to secure a HEA when you haven’t been able to do it yet?”

He let out a derisive snort, but immediately realized that was a huge mistake. Her face lost her usual look of annoyance crossed with bemused tolerance, leaving pure ice in its place. “This is why men should not be allowed into the Godmother program. None of you have any respect for Happily Ever Afters.”

“I never said I didn’t believe in HEAs” he began, but she cut him off.

“Every case you’ve been on tells me you don’t believe, or else you would have tried once, just once, to get one!”

His hands slammed on the table as he leaned across it, his face coming inches from hers. “I’ve never tried because I believe in love! Humans need love so much, who the hell was I to screw up two people in love to get them to HEA status? I could never forgive myself if two people in love missed out on each other because of my actions!”

All anger fled her face, and a hesitant, unsure look came over features. “What do you think a HEA is?”

He drew in a deep breath, sitting down once again. “I think happily ever after is a nice way to end a story, but in the world I remember, it’s a waste.”

Her hand was halfway towards him before she seemed to remember their roles, and she pulled it back to her side. “Love is wonderful, but only love alone is incomplete. You can love someone, but they can ultimately not be right for you. Even in love, people can still be led to believe the worst of each other, still hurt each other, still decide they are better without the other,” she began, her words hesitant, as if she was trying to define to herself what it all meant as much as to him. “But the Happily Ever After is so much more. It’s finding your perfect match, love purified, refined, to such an extent that it can never be sundered. With a Happily Ever After, men can achieve greatness, as can all the generations who follow growing up in its shadow.”

“And you think jeopardizing the surety of a love match now is worth it for only the possibility of a Happily Ever After?” he asked, his voice gentle, reverent, wanting nothing to break this intimacy their words were creating.

“I do. In your view, maybe that seems cruel, but in my view, there is no greater tragedy than two people who almost make this connection but fall short in the end.”

Such a hard exterior to cover such a tender heart. “I’m not sure if I can believe as you do,” he said after considering her words. “But I never want Sara... you... to feel as if I let you down. After we get this situation behind us, I want you proud of the job I do.”

And as his breath caught at the rare smile she bestowed upon him just then, he knew all she had to do was keep smiling at him like that, and anything she wanted, whether it be his beliefs or his blood, he would give her.

Her smile faded, and the moment ended. Reina cloaked herself in her position of authority as she handed him the file that had been sitting on her desk. It was already open

to show a picture of a blond girl, pretty and vibrant with a mouth full of straight white teeth, all of which was evident even underneath the dirt. “I looked over this case earlier, before I realized what was going on,” she said. “It is a good, solid HEA case. There are several challenges to overcome, but also several sources of help for the client. It is about as perfect as a case can be for this purpose, as evenly balanced as I’ve ever seen. No one can accuse the council of favoring either side. The girl’s name is Cinderella. She lives with an abusive Stepmother and two rotten spoiled stepsisters. She is a very kind, generous girl—though a little too much of a doormat, if you ask me—but outside of that, not really any other character flaws. She is much beloved in her village, children and small animals flock to her daily. In short, we exist to give HEAs to mortals like her.”

Tiernan read the file quickly, then flipped the page and took in the photo of the male who would supply the HEA. “A prince, huh? That’s pretty standard.”

“Indeed, but for the most part, we don’t mess with the classics here.” The pointed look she gave him told him he was one of the exceptions, and she wasn’t necessarily thrilled about it. Ah yes, completely back to normal.

He returned that look with a flirty smile. “I used to serve royalty, Godmother Reina. Believe me when I say, sometimes the large crown is to compensate for something.”

“Oh really? Well, I assume we can say the same thing about your sword, eh, knight?”

Maybe not completely back to normal after all. The second those words passed her lips her eyes went saucer wide, and Tiernan couldn’t say who was more shocked, him or Reina herself. There was no way he was letting this pass. His voice coming out a low growl, he replied, “Why, Reina, I never knew you were interested in the size of my sword. Anytime you want a private viewing, I will be more than happy to oblige.”

Chapter 4

What in heavens above had caused her to make that comment?

Reina and Tiernan were amongst mortals as themselves, no glamours to change their appearances. Everyone who looked upon them saw a tall pretty woman with dark hair and dark eyes, and an even taller gorgeous man with thick blond hair and eyes the same color as the sky overhead.

They were walking through the local village on the way to Cinderella's home, having decided that the best way to complete this assignment was to take positions of employment at the house and monitor everything from there. Of course, it just happened that the one maid and stable boy employed by Cinderella's family ran away with each other only the night before, so they were sure they could get employment there. Funny how coincidences like that happened.

From all around them, appreciative murmurs found their way to Reina's ears, and she knew from past experience it was from the women taking in Tiernan's form, wondering to each other about his prowess and giggling like ninnies over their suggestions, as if they were the only ones who had ever put voice to such thoughts.

Really, no wonder he had such a fat head.

Something must have shown on her face because Tiernan spoke then. "Excellent way to keep up our charade, Godmother Reina. You truly look like a woman who is jealous of the other ladies' attentions towards her husband."

"Please don't let the stress of this assignment cause you to lose what's left of your sense," she replied in a false sweet tone, and wished that Tiernan's laughter didn't cause her stomach to jump.

This was getting ridiculous.

Since their discussion yesterday, all manner of ridiculous thoughts invaded her brain. Thoughts about how it might not be so terrible to have a male as a FG. Thoughts about how he just might be different from what she assumed he was, different from the other males she had known.

The warmth of his hand coming to rest on the small of her back startled her from her musings and stopped her in her tracks. She looked at him, a question on her lips, but she noticed his lip curled into a snarl and his attention was elsewhere. Following his gaze, she noticed two men who were very obvious in looking at anything but her. She had been so absorbed within herself that she did not notice those men do anything, but they must have said something that Tiernan did not like.

He looked down at her, his eyes holding those last remaining vestiges of anger, and Reina wanted to jump back in instinctive protection against a superior predator.

His fingers curled into her skin, branding her where they lay, and all the while his eyes warned against her trying to reject his possession.

She turned her gaze back to the road, suddenly all too aware of his overwhelming maleness, the power in those thick legs, the strength in those corded arms.

It had been like this since they arrived in the mortal realm, as if returning to the place he had been born had affected a change in the man before her. No longer was he her subordinate. No, here he ruled, and demanded she follow him.

His hand traveled up her spine, the calloused fingertips drawing light patterns over the sensitive skin at the nape of her neck. Without thought, her eyes slightly closed, her head giving a small tilt back. An appreciative rumble of sound came from him, causing her eyes to close even more.

“Do you be needing help? Strangers aren’t common in these parts.”

The voice caused Reina to jerk away, her eyes flying open as an older man, burnt-skinned and shoulders hunched, appeared before them.

Tiernan recovered fastest. “Yes sir, my wife and I are looking for employment.”

“What be you looking for?”

“I can do anything outside a house, and my wife can do anything inside it.”

The old man scratched his chin. “I heard the Baroness be needing help, her two run off. Cash poor, that one, so count your wages, but she’s excited over the Prince coming back. Needs the help, so won’t be too choosy about how she gets it. Only has her one little lass who she overworks. Such a good little girl, deserves better than the Baroness. Lives over the hill there.”

“Much thanks,” said Tiernan, inclining his head.

He waved the thanks off, and turned to Reina. “Missus, be warned, she has two daughters, and word is, both are fond of a handsome man.” He patted Tiernan’s broad back. “No one could deny you landed yourself a handsome one. Make sure you keep him happy.”

“Uh, yes,” said Reina, unsure how else to reply, and the old man wandered off.

Continuing up the road, Tiernan gave a happy sigh. “What?” Reina asked.

“Oh, I’m just imagining all the ways you can keep me happy. After all, you were lucky enough to land me.”

“After I landed you, I should have gutted you,” Reina murmured, which earned her nothing but delighted laughter from Tiernan.

They reached Cinderella’s home and approached the back door, as any servant looking for work would do. An older woman came to the door, the smell of baked goods clinging to her skin. “Yes?”

Tiernan spoke. “We were told work could be found here?” He kept his voice light and his manner hopeful, going for non-threatening, not seductive.

The woman took them both in with a long look, then slowly nodded her head. “There may be work. It would be my Mistress’s place to decide. Who are you?”

“We are a newly married couple who are trying to make our life together,” said Tiernan, putting his arm around Reina and hugging her to him. Surely the woman wouldn’t notice if Reina kicked Tiernan in the shin, right?

In contrast to Reina’s thoughts, this news was met by a smile from the old woman. “That’s grand, aye it is. Nothing like young love. Come in, I will call my Mistress. You’ll get your answer directly.”

They were seated in front of the hearth while the old woman went out. As soon as she vanished from sight, Reina started. “Could you be a little less demonstrative?”

“No.”

“No?” she repeated, flabbergasted. “What do you mean no? There is no reason to go on like you are. Just try to control yourself.”

His hand came up to bury itself in her hair, turning her to face him. “Control myself?” he asked softly. “Be aware, Reina, I am very definitely controlling myself. If we

were truly married, I would have ripped the tongues out of the mouths of those two bastards who talked about you like you were a whore.”

He pulled his hand away, letting the dark strands slide over his tanned skin, letting her see the way he played with the heavy fall between his fingers, taking in the texture.

Finally, he seemed to satisfy his fascination enough that he tucked the strands behind her ears. His hold on her hair was gone, but he didn't release her gaze. “I am leader here, Reina, completely in control. Don't forget that.”

She wanted to refute him, but her voice didn't work. All she could do was gaze at him and wonder when exactly that place between her thighs became so wet.

“Oh, now there is a handsome one, don't you think, Serena?”

Two young women were at the doorway. Both short, one round, one thin, wearing identical airs of extreme entitlement.

They were also staring at Tiernan like he was the most decadent dessert they had ever seen in their lives and they wanted to devour him.

Just when Reina decided that the best way to help Cinderella would be to toss these two bitches down the nearest well, the old woman returned, followed by a lady Reina recognized as the Stepmother. Even if she hadn't read the file, she would have loathed this woman on sight. Her daughters had nothing on her in the entitlement department, and her expression said that Reina and Tiernan had as much meaning to her as a pile of dung.

However, she had a handsome face, even in her advancing age, and her air could be misconstrued as regal for someone unaccustomed to reading people. Reina wasn't surprised Cinderella's father, an honest and simple man, had mistakenly married her to provide companionship and family for himself and his daughter.

“Serena, Melanie, what did I tell you about talking to the help?” she said to the girls, who looked chastised but not cowed. Turning to Reina and Tiernan, she said “I understand you are looking for work.”

“Yes, Madam. My wife and I heard you recently lost your help. We're strong and work hard.” Tiernan's voice held subservience, but Reina had known him long enough that she alone could pick up the slight undercurrent of contempt.

She looked at them long moments, obviously debating some point within herself. “Cinderella!” she suddenly yelled, causing Reina to give the slightest jump. Before Reina could even calm herself, the young woman appeared in the doorway.

She was even prettier than the picture showed, though Reina had no idea how that was possible. Cinderella gave her a warm smile, her welcome not dependent on the status of the person receiving it. Cinderella's attention then turned to Tiernan.

Instead of the usual melting scene Reina usually observed when it involved Tiernan and the opposite sex, Cinderella gave him a warm but fleeting smile, her eyes quickly sliding from his.

“I indeed have work for you,” said the Stepmother, looking only at Tiernan as she spoke. “Cinderella will tell you your assignments. Girls, come with me.” With a swish of her skirts, and without any further acknowledgement, she was out of the room, her daughters in tow.

“Please excuse my Stepmother.” Cinderella's quiet voice cut into Reina's internal name calling of the older woman. “There are rumors that the Prince is returning home, and she is very stressed over all that must be done in preparation.”

Cinderella led them around the estate, familiarizing them with the layout, answering

any questions they had. She was warm, quiet, efficient, everything the file told of and more.

Nevertheless, she never tried to converse with Tiernan. In fact, she went out of her way to avoid being around him, always having Reina between them.

Reina and Tiernan were eating dinner at the end of the first day. It was just the two of them. Reina could hear the distant laughter from the front of the house, where the Stepmother and her two daughters were. Cook had already gone to bed, and Cinderella mentioned something about wanting to visit the animals in the barn.

"She's afraid of men," Tiernan said, interrupting Reina's recount of how many ways the stepsisters annoyed her today.

"What?"

"Cinderella. She's afraid of men." He took another bite of the bread, his eyes staring blankly at nothing in the distance. "Maybe afraid is the wrong word. Wary might be a better way to describe it."

"And what would give you that idea?"

"She doesn't come near me."

Reina made a rude sound at that. "Because we have found the one woman in the world who isn't aware of you, then automatically, she doesn't like men?"

His head swung in her direction, and warm, lazy eyes swept over Reina's body. Immediately her skin became sensitized, bringing with it the knowledge that they were sitting too close to one another, that their legs were almost touching. Tiernan leaned closer, his gaze intent on hers. "The one woman, Reina? And you?"

Flustered, she shook her head. "I don't know..."

"She's very aware of me, Reina," he interrupted, his mouth now so close to hers that she felt his hot breath. "But there are two kinds of awareness..."

She swallowed, her throat tight. "Two kinds?" she asked, and was shocked at how husky her voice sounded.

"There is awareness where your body craves someone, no matter what your mind says is safe," and he pulled back, leaving her space. For one moment, before she had the sense to stop herself, her body had wanted to follow his. His voice became brusque, "and then there is the type of awareness when you absolutely want nothing to do with someone and you never want them to be able to surprise you."

Needing to be away from him, she reached for a glass of water. She took a sip of water, using the moment to compose herself. "Why would she feel that way?" she asked, once she was sure her voice would be normal again.

"My guess? At best, she has almost no exposure to men in her day-to-day life, and as gorgeous as she is, the attention she does get the few times she is around men is the kind I guarantee a proper young lady would not want. She doesn't know how to react to men. At worst, she has been the victim of some sort of attack."

Negating that line of thinking with an emphatic shake of her head, Reina said, "No, thank heaven. If something of that magnitude had happened, it would have been in the report."

Small lines of tension eased around his eyes. "I'm glad. I'd hate to think of that happening to her. We need to assume that she hasn't been exposed to the best in male/female relationships then."

Reina nodded. "I agree. Beyond that, she really doesn't have a female to talk about

things with.”

Tiernan arched a brow in interest. “What things exactly?”

“The secret things women talk to each other about,” she answered tartly.

“Secret, huh? What exactly would it take for you to tell me these secrets?”

She looked him up and down, then dismissed him with her glance. “I don’t think you could offer anything.”

Tiernan’s hands gently cradled her face, tilted her head back slightly, and she felt his mouth settle on her throat. “Don’t count on that, Reina,” he said, his tongue swiping across the sensitive skin. “I can be very persuasive when I want something.”

“What are you doing?” she asked, her voice raspy.

“Tasting my wife.”

“Tiernan...” she said, then groaned as his tongue explored the hollow of her throat. His mouth was so hot as it explored her neck, his hands gentle as they held her head in place.

He was not letting her escape, not that she had any desire to.

His mouth moved up, settling on top of hers. There was no hesitancy, no wavering, his tongue finding its way in, his groan of satisfaction at this action reverberating through her body.

He was devouring her, and she loved it.

She grabbed his shoulders, bringing him even closer. He obviously liked that thought, because Reina felt his hands leave her face and wrap around her waist, dragging her body over so that she settled on his lap, her sex firm against his erection. Unthinking, acting on instinct, she rubbed herself against him.

“Fuck, Reina,” he gasped. “You make me crazy.”

A crash sounded to their right. Immediately Tiernan was standing, placing Reina behind him and shielding her with his body as he faced the unknown.

Cinderella was standing here, her hand to her mouth. “I’m so sorry,” she said, her voice high and breathy. After a moment where it was obvious she was unsure what to do, she evidently decided getting away from them was best and ran out of the room.

Reina touched her swollen mouth with the back of her hand, wondering how she had ended up in Tiernan’s arms.

Wondering why she was upset she was no longer in them.

Chapter 5

Tiernan kept his gaze at the spot Cinderella had just vacated, relaxing the muscles in his body, letting his lungs release several deep breaths, before he turned back to look at the woman behind him.

It was too soon. He took in the long line of her throat, wanting to taste again, to touch it with his tongue, to follow the line down to that little hollow where it met her shoulder and suck the skin there in his mouth, bite it to mark her like he should have done earlier.

Reina swallowed audibly and, unthinking, her hand came up to that spot, as if she could shield herself from him. "Tiernan?"

His hands clenched into fists at his sides. "I have to go, Reina," he said, his voice hoarse. "I can't stay around you right now."

He couldn't stay around her, but he couldn't force himself to go far from her, and Tiernan found himself sitting on the roof of the manor.

The stars twinkled behind a light smattering of clouds, a sight that helped remind him he was no longer in the Faerie Realm. There, everything was always perfect. In that realm, no clouds would block the view, and the stars appeared twice as bright as they ever could here in the mortal world.

"Do you miss living in the mortal realm?"

A groan escaped him before he could stop it. "Reina..." he said, but she interrupted.

"We have a job to do," she said. "And being at odds will not help that us accomplish that job."

He drew in a deep breath, smelling animals and dung. "What would you have me say?"

"Nothing."

His mind circled the word, seeking the trap that surely must be hidden. "Nothing?"

"Here, you are acting as my husband, and have played that role with conviction. You merely got carried away."

So that was how she wanted to dismiss their chemistry. Her defenses were already armed against him, and now she was trying to neutralize any threat, convince them both the kiss was meaningless. "I miss it."

"Huh?" came her less than coherent reply.

"Your question, do I miss living in the mortal world? Yes I do. Not always, but often."

She bit her lip and sat down beside him, drawing her knees to her chest. "Why did you make that wish?"

"I have no idea. I was dying, and something inside me told me to wish that. It never crossed my mind that I would want to leave my life before that day. Why do you believe in HEAs so much when you never tried to love again after you and your fiancé broke up?"

Reina jerked back, losing the space she had just a moment ago claimed. "What do you know of that?"

He shrugged. "What does it matter what I know? How does that change the

question?”

The look on her face spoke of flight, so Tiernan caught her wrist in his hand before she could flee. “Tiernan, let go.”

“Answer my question.”

“It’s inappropriate.”

“How is it inappropriate, Fairy Godmother? I am about to die for lack of one. You speak of the greatness of them, yet I’ve never seen you take so much as a step in that direction. Surely you’ve heard about which carry more weight, actions or words.”

The air felt stagnant around him. Her chest rose and fell in an impossible rhythm, such that if she were mortal he would fear her fainting. “Why are you doing this to me?” she asked, her voice small, all authority from age and position gone.

“I find that being near death makes me less inclined to deal with hypocrisy.”

Under his fingers he felt fine tremors along her skin. “I’m here to help you, and you have the nerve to call me names?”

He pulled her closer, unwilling to allow her distance. “I’m tired of being punished for what he did. I’ve been living with it for over thirty years, so forgive me if my complaints about it come at an inopportune time for you.”

“I have never—”

“Don’t even finish that lie,” he interrupted, heat scorching the back of his neck. “I don’t care how much in denial you are, even you can’t believe that.”

He saw her throat moving, working to ease the tightness this discussion had caused within her, but it was her eyes, wider than he had ever seen them, begging to be free, that broke the spell around him. He let her go and rose to his feet. “You’re right, it was inappropriate. I fear the stress of this assignment has gotten the better of me. Please forgive me, and excuse me.”

With that, he was gone.

* * * *

They had been cordial all morning, Tiernan nothing but polite, keeping as much distance as possible while still maintaining their cover.

A total gentleman, instead of his usual teasing, inappropriate self.

“Reina, I appreciate you volunteering to air out the rugs, but you don’t need to beat them quite that hard.”

Stopping herself in mid-swing, Reina looked over to see Cinderella behind her, the furrow of her brow and slight compression of the young woman’s lips as she smiled negating what was supposed to be a cheery attitude.

With thoughts of Tiernan abruptly banished, Reina was now aware of the ache across her back, the trickle of sweat down her spine. A break was assuredly in order.

Cinderella held out a glass, and with a nod of thanks, Reina grabbed it, the cool water a blessing on a parched throat.

After giving the glass back to Cinderella, wanting both not to delve into her confused thoughts and to see if Tiernan’s words from yesterday were correct, Reina asked, “Do you leave this house much?”

If the question seemed strange to Cinderella, she gave no indication. “I go to town, of course. I can carry more than Cook.”

“Do you have a beau?”

Now that question did bring Cinderella up short, if the glass falling on the ground was any indication. "Why would you ask?"

Reina shrugged. "You are young and pretty. It seems a rather ordinary question to me."

Cinderella shook her head. "I have too many responsibilities here."

"Granted, men can be demanding, but being in love helps make the day go faster, no matter the chores in front of you."

"I was told..." Cinderella bit her lip, her eyebrows coming together. She didn't finish the sentence.

"You were told what by whom?" Reina prompted.

When she answered, Cinderella's voice was noticeably lower. "Men can be rough."

"Rough? Were you ever hurt by someone?"

Cinderella shook her head. "No, please, don't think that about anyone from the village. Simply I was told that it would be best for me to never engage with a man."

Reina nodded. "And who told you this?"

"My stepsisters."

"Forgive me for being blunt, but I think you stepsisters feared the attention you would receive, and were not concerned for your well-being."

Cinderella brought her hand up to cover her mouth, but she was not quick enough to silence the snort of laughter Reina's comment brought. "Perhaps," Cinderella allowed. "But I have heard stories from others. I never had anyone to ask what was truth and what was lie."

Reina couldn't imagine being as alone in the world as this woman was. How someone who loved and was as beloved as this woman was could be so isolated that she couldn't even talk to someone about love was almost unfathomable. Her stepfamily truly was a piece of work.

"Well, I would never tell a young woman to abandon all sense when dealing with any stranger, let alone a man. Still, I believe your family exaggerated the caution you need to take."

Cinderella brushed a hand over her hair, putting a few stray pieces back into the ponytail she wore. "They always said that if I showed interest, then anything... bad... that happened would be my fault. I always try to be polite but removed, but sometimes after knowing someone for a long time, I forget myself and am more open than they would approve of."

Reina's arms tensed against the urge to pull Cinderella into her side, not wanting to insult the young woman's pride. "Cinderella, while I pray nothing bad ever happens to you, I can tell you with certainty if it did, you in no way would have been the cause of it. You are one of those people who radiate goodness, and it is a crime that your stepfamily tries to stop you from sharing that with the world."

Cinderella's eyes met hers, searching for whatever truth she could find. Whatever she found put her at ease, because her body relaxed, her lips curling up in equal parts joy and relief. "Thank you."

Reina shrugged, turning away so that Cinderella would not make a fuss and just absorb her words, when movement at the corner of her eye caught her attention.

It was only a second, but the chill that wound its way through her chest told her she was not wrong. She needed to get to Tiernan now.

“Cinderella, the rugs are done. Would you take them in for me? I forgot to tell Tiernan something and need to see him.” Not really waiting for the answer, Reina sped to the barn.

Tiernan was chopping wood when she found him. “I saw a servant of the Elf King,” she said without preamble.

His stance changed from wary to on edge. “Where?”

She shook her head. “He’s gone now, but I saw him near the gardens. I’ve seen him only one time before and I never heard his name, but he scared me enough that I never forgot him.”

“Let me guess, the one with the pure black eyes and the hiss when he speaks?”

That a warrior such as Tiernan took notice of the man meant Reina was not exaggerating in her mind over how dangerous he was, and her anxiety increased. “Yeah, that was him.”

Tiernan nodded. “You’re right, he’s gone now. He wanted you to see him or you never would have. He wants to send a message. Oh, well, at least the Elf King hates me enough he’s sending his best after me.”

“Don’t joke,” Reina snapped.

“What would you have me do? This is what we were told to expect. That’s why you are here, isn’t it? Otherwise, you would have nothing to do with me.”

This news may have given Tiernan something else to think on, but the heat in his words told Reina he was still upset over the night before. “That’s not true. Maybe we aren’t the closest of friends, but I would never want to see you hurt.”

Tiernan’s laughter was closer to a bark of warning than any sound of merriment. “You don’t want to see me hurt, but you’ve been active in trying to get rid of me from moment one.”

“I have to protect the Fairy Godmothers.”

“And yet, Godmother Reina, the only FG who doesn’t like me and wants to see me gone is you. So who exactly are you protecting again?” With that, he turned his back and started chopping wood again.

Reina wanted to reach out and stroke that broad expanse, take away this coldness that he had never shown her before, but instead she moved inside the house and started polishing the silver.

The problem with labor is that while it exhausted a body, it left the mind too much free time to think.

He was right. From Godmother Sara down to the recruit who joined only last month, Reina could not think of a single Godmother who did not like Tiernan. All had only good things to say about him. His presence was something of a disruption, but that was caused by those around him. He never participated or encouraged it.

Outside of the lack of HEAs, in every other way he had some of the highest success rates amongst the Godmothers as well. If the Elf King had not made it his mission to destroy Tiernan, this would never have come up.

Reina sighed. Why did she suddenly feel like the bad guy? Why was protecting the institution that she devoted heart and soul to somehow a black mark against her?

Looking out the window, Reina discovered she had a good view of Tiernan, now fixing the side of the barn.

His shirt and pants were plastered against his skin because of sweat, putting the

muscles of his body in stark relief. His movements were fluid, a living sculpture any woman would pay to see.

Reina tried to swallow but found her throat too dry. How could beauty keep catching you unaware after living with it for thirty years? Yet somehow through the years, Reina kept being transported back to that first day she saw him.

Lying on the couch, his face relaxed, that fringe of lash resting against his cheeks. She didn't believe him mortal at first. Only the Fae were said to possess such looks. Yet this mortal man put every other male she had ever seen to shame.

And then when he opened his eyes...

Reina rubbed the back of her neck, the gut punch that had overtaken her as strong in memory as it had been in reality.

Desire was dangerous. It blinded you to everything about the other person. It left you defenseless. She knew all this, and yet when it came to this man, she always found herself raw and ragged.

But maybe she could exercise those demons.

There was now too much moisture in her mouth, and she swallowed several times, hoping to banish the thoughts coming to her, but no, a crack had formed and nothing would stop the rush of illicit thoughts.

She was far from the Compound, far from the other women. No one would know what transpired here between her and Tiernan, no one could judge or find fault with her conduct, no one could gossip about her.

What if she took this opportunity to get him out of her system? Ignoring him hadn't worked. Pretending the attraction didn't exist was ludicrous. What if she took the other path? What if she enjoyed the time they had together instead?

She scoffed. Ridiculous, of course. Ridiculous. Once they got back, how would he treat her? As some sort of trophy, probably.

But he never treated any of the other women badly, and the crack opened wider. She never heard of any women hurt because of his actions, never heard any of that mock sympathetic cooing in regards to any woman because of a liaison with him.

She'd feel a fool. Hadn't she already been made a fool too often at the hands of a man?

Reina nodded, certain she had made a wise decision and put such thoughts out of her head.

The crack remained.

Chapter 6

Once again, Tiernan was on the roof, lying on his back with his hands behind his head, looking at a sky where the stars were covered by a thick mass of clouds.

"I owe you an apology."

He felt Reina appear beside him, but chose not to say anything. Now that she had spoken, however, it would be churlish not to answer. "For what?"

"A lot of things." She sat down beside him, following his gaze up to the sky. "Will it rain, do you think?"

"Talking about the weather?"

"Well, I'm not from the mortal realm. I have no talent to know what the weather will do, so it fascinates me."

He chuckled, the sound no less honest for being small and slight. "That is true."

"I was wrong to try to get you kicked out of the FGs because it wasn't you I had a problem with. I judged you against someone else, not on your own merits. For that, I am sorry."

"Do I look like him?"

Reina laughed at that. "Why would you think that?"

"You seem to have an especial problem with me versus just any male. I always thought maybe I looked a little like him."

Reina took in a great expanse of breath through her nose. "No, you don't, but you have a similar way about you. He was also the type of man who had woman dropping everything to follow him."

"Would it help if I told you I've always tried to use my power for good and not evil?"

"I always knew that they were never able to fix your mental capacity completely after that dragon was done with you."

Tiernan smiled at her, glad that they were back to their usual truce. Maybe even better. Before they came here, he could never have envisioned an apology, much less her talking about her ex, even if only in passing.

He heard the rustle of cloth, but it was slight, not enough to suggest she had left. "Cinderella's dreaming."

This time the quick change of subject left him confused. He looked at her again. "Reina?"

She shook her head, her tone all business. "Remember your assignment, Fairy Godfather. Look into her dreams."

Tiernan closed his eyes and entered Cinderella's dream. He saw what Reina must have seen, saw himself and Reina entwined with each other, kissing. Reina's naked body was vivid, while his was hazy, the lower portion completely misted over. The dream Reina's expressions were not as he would wish, continually sliding into pain.

His eyes opened onto Reina's face, and he said, "Not only is she wary of men, she knows nothing of what happens between men and women. If anything she thinks it's a torture women have to endure."

Reina nodded. "She truly is an innocent. I talked to her some today. I didn't want to

pry too much, but I needed to understand where she was. She has never been accosted, but at best her family told her nothing, and at worst, they made sure she knew only the details that would scare her.” Her fist clenched, and Tiernan wondered if she was imagining using it on certain members of the household. “That Stepmother of hers needs to meet the sharp end of your sword.”

“As a knight, that whole chivalry code would have prevented me from doing anything like that.”

“No exceptions?”

“None.”

“A shame.” She got up and started pacing the roof. “You were right. As wary as she is now, she’s not ready to be courted. We need to figure out how to get her over that fear.”

“Have faith. We’ll figure something out.”

She cocked her head, her hair falling along the side of her jaw as she looked down at him. “What do you suggest?”

He shook his head as he rose to a sitting position. “I’m not sure yet. Being here posing as a married couple helps, but we do have a time limit. That alone won’t be enough.”

She sat back down next to him and drew her knees to her chest. After a moment, her brows drew together, and she began fidgeting, small movements at first, slow, but in short moments grew in speed and intensity.

“Reina?” he asked, and she jumped. Whatever she had been contemplating was enough to make her shut out the outside world. She looked at him and then away at once.

She shook her head. “It’s crazy,” she whispered.

“OK,” he agreed cautiously, not pushing the issue when he saw the fidgeting increase. Some sort of internal battle was waging, and he was happy to stay far away from it.

“We don’t have much time,” she said, not looking at him, her face still flushed.

He nodded, not sure where she was going with this.

He saw the battle end as the fidgeting stopped and her back straightened. She turned to him, her face still flushed but her gaze steady. Reina brought her lower lip between her teeth, biting it for a moment before taking in a breath and saying, “We could show her what physical love between a man and a woman is like.”

The blood stopped moving in Tiernan’s veins as he stared at that lovely face. “Reina, what are you proposing?” But he knew, every sense focused on her.

She licked that lower lip, and Tiernan’s every thought urged him to follow her lead. “We are husband and wife here.”

With the elemental part of his being screaming at him for being a fool, he shook his head. “I will never use you like that. You’ll come to my bed for your own pleasure only, not as some sacrifice or an apology.”

Reina reached out, laying the flat of her palm against his chest, sliding it upward until it cupped his cheek. “I want that pleasure for its own sake. Does it matter if it somehow also helps us as well?”

Her proposal took his breath as surely as any blow to his body ever had. Thoughts of everything he wanted to do to her filling his head, he stood, never taking his gaze from her.

He refused to reconsider. Nothing in her eyes or body language told him she regretted making the suggestion, and he would not be the cause of her changing her mind. "Wait for me in the barn," he said, his voice guttural. She nodded and used magic to vanish from his sight.

He disappeared from the roof, mere seconds later appearing in Cinderella's room, and he leaned over and whispered into Cinderella's ear, "Five minutes. You will awaken and come to the barn, thinking you heard the animals upset. Once you get there, you will see Tiernan and Reina. Watch them and learn what really happens between a man and woman." Cinderella gave a little nod in her sleep, confirmation she had received the magical suggestion.

He then disappeared from Cinderella's bedroom only to reappear in the corner of the barn, and seeing Reina there waiting for him, Tiernan had never been so grateful for the magic in him as he was at that moment which allowed him to be with her so quickly.

Reina's gasp was loud in the surrounding silence as he lifted her and sat her on a bale of hay, nudging her knees apart so he could stand between her bent legs.

"Do you trust me?" he asked, his hips moving in small circles, his breath in her ear, and the second she moved her head in the affirmative, his lips claimed hers, hungry and hot. He had waited an eternity to taste this woman, feel her. He felt her shock, but that was not going to stop him now, not when she was here, her soft body cushioning him perfectly where he pressed and strained.

He absorbed every sensation, how her mouth opened under his, her tongue tentatively coming to taste him, and he groaned.

He didn't want this rushed. This moment was so long denied he wanted to spend hours dwelling on every single sensation. Her mouth on his was a miracle he could live on for days, and he took his time making sure he had kissed her in every possible way, with both soft caresses and demanding pressure, before moving to other areas of skin to do the same there.

The skin of her throat heated where his fingers touched, the lush scent of aroused woman coming from that delicious body he had always been hard for. His mouth followed his fingers, marking her throat, wanting everyone who saw the satin skin to know she was already owned.

"Tiernan," she gasped.

He travelled back to her mouth, plundering and tasting, before putting his lips to her ear. "You are mine, Reina. Remember that."

His hands traveled firmly down the front of her bodice, pressing into her breasts, the nipples hardening under his ministrations, and a loud rrrriipp as the fabric tore away from her body, leaving her bare to him.

"So beautiful," he murmured, his hands coming to palm the heavy weight of her chest, his thumbs circling her nipples. "And so hard. Would you like me to take one of these hard little buds into my mouth, Reina?"

He didn't wait for her answer. Lowering his head, his tongue flicked out to touch one tip. At her cry, he pushed his lower body harder into hers as his tongue settled more fully onto her nipple, sucking it into his mouth.

"Tiernan... so good," she said on a low moan that stretched out as his teeth came into play.

He explored until he was sure each of his senses was satisfied that they had learned

everything they could about this part of her body, and only then did he move on to her other breast. Beneath him, she was a wild thing, moving and crying out and begging him for more, her hands threading into his hair, trying to force him closer, her lower body grinding into him.

He settled back slightly, bringing his face close to hers while his hands continued their devastating assault on her nipples. "One day, Reina, I'm going to play with your breasts until you come from that alone, but right now I'm a greedy man and there is something I need to do for myself."

He came down to his knees in front of her, taking her thighs into his hands and gently spread them wider, giving him complete access.

She instinctively tried to close her legs, but he was prepared for that, using gentle pressure to keep her legs apart, his thumbs softly rubbing the skin of her thighs.

His tongue came out again, touching her through the fabric covering her hot core. Her body arched, pressing his tongue harder on her, causing her body to buck with the pleasure.

"So damn responsive," he whispered. "I'm barely touching you, and you move like I've dreamed."

Feeling her fingers thread through his hair again, he looked up, meeting her eyes as she stared at him, arousal and disbelief swirling through those shadowed eyes. His gaze never left hers while he gently moved his hand, then used one long finger to move the fabric covering her, baring her dripping pussy to his assault.

Her eyes dropped lower, taking in the sight, his face so close to her most intimate part, naked and vulnerable and wet and open to him. She was near panting, but no words came from her.

He leaned in.

This time, tongue tasted wet female flesh, aching and ready for whatever he would give.

She never looked away, even as the sounds coming from her increased in volume and intensity, even as it became evident she was struggling to breathe.

His eyes closed in ecstasy, his tongue and mouth determined to explore every inch of flesh, bring in every subtle difference so he could savor everything about her. He was making noises as though it was her mouth on him, as if doing this gave him more pleasure than he could stand.

Then he concentrated exclusively on that little bud, his tongue never leaving it no matter how much her hips moved or her cries deafened him. He continued until he felt the spasming of her body, the rush of wetness coat his face, and he heard his name torn from her throat in the most beautiful sound he had ever known in his life.

Still licking her lightly, he opened his eyes to see her head thrown back, her chest frantic with her pants, making him desire to stand up and fulfill the promise he made to her earlier.

Beautiful. Such a fucking beautiful sight was well worth the thirty years it took to get here.

Finally she came back to herself, looking at him once again, her gaze starting to sharpen. Not wanting her to end the moment yet, he stood, kissing her sweetly, tenderly.

She took his kisses, and he couldn't stop the bulge in his pants from pressing into her, the sensation causing her to moan, to tilt her hips towards him.

This was killing him, this was killing him because he had to stop, because she wouldn't stop him if he pressed but she might regret it later. He'd waited for her too long to jeopardize everything now.

He took his mouth from hers, pressing small kisses along her jaw, along her brow, across the tip of her nose. "Let's get back to the house," he said, voice low between kisses.

"Yes," came her hazy voice, agreement without knowing what she was agreeing to, and he settled her clothes so that they covered her again.

He picked her up into his arms, and flashed them into the room they were sharing at the manor. He gave her another kiss, his tongue languidly exploring her mouth, before forcing himself to back away from her. "I have wanted to do that since the first moment I saw you."

A small laugh escaped from Reina's mouth. Her color was high, but as he saw awareness come back, Tiernan was pleased that regret was not following. "If we did that the first moment, Cinderella wouldn't have been able to watch, now would she?"

So she had felt Cinderella's eyes on them as well as he had, the curiosity and first stirrings of hunger their lovemaking had caused in the young woman, all because of her plan. Brilliant his angel was. Brilliant and sharp and so fucking sexual that he was half sure he could start coming just by looking at her.

He started undressing her. Her hands came up, but he was ready for her. "Don't fight me, Reina," he said, gently enclosing her hands in his.

"I was going to help you get undressed."

Shock stole his ability to speak for a moment, but when her hands landed on his chest, he once again stopped her. "No."

"No?"

"If you undress me, no power in this world could stop me from making love to you tonight."

She ducked her head as a flush rose on her cheeks. "What if I said..."

"Don't finish that sentence, Reina," he warned. "My control doesn't exist right now. I swear to you if you want me tomorrow, after you've had a night to sleep and time to think, I will spend the entire night worshiping your body. I swear to you, but right now all I want is to hold you as we sleep, and to do that, I need to be dressed."

That didn't stop him from undressing her, though. His eyes took her in, taking delight in every place on her body they touched. He settled them both in the small bed, her back flush against his front.

She surprised him, turning in his arms so they were face to face. Reina caressed his face, leaning forward to kiss his forehead. "Good night, Tiernan," she said, then closed her eyes. Within moments, her even breathing told him she was asleep.

Fulfillment engulfed him. Drawing her close, sharing her breath, he fell asleep as well.

Chapter 7

Reina was unsettled.

She had no better way to explain the mass of confusion that existed within herself. She wasn't anything specific... she was nothing, she was everything...

Her head fell back, and a long, loud sigh escaped her mouth.

When she'd fallen asleep last night, she half thought in the dreamy, well pleased recess of her mind that she was going to awake angry—at herself, at him, most probably both. Instead, waking up to Tiernan's face, one dimple noticeable in the morning light, her tongue was already out and ready to get a sample of him before she came to her senses and moved away.

She got up, readying herself for the day. As she finished dressing, Tiernan woke, a hesitant smile at the sight of her. "Are you going to hurt me?"

"Not yet, you have the barn to fix today."

Both dimples came out at her light response. "Of course, the secret is to go to bed with chores to do in the morning. That way I can be assured of not being murdered in my sleep."

"Wise Godfather. Up, up, up, we have a HEA to accomplish. You can discuss strategy with me at lunch."

Reina spent the morning scrubbing the floors with Cinderella. The good part was that none of Cinderella's family was around. The bad part was they were not around because they were using every excuse possible to go outside and watch Tiernan, who was working shirtless in the morning sunshine.

The fact that she had yet to see his bare chest while they were ogling him made her want to smash their faces in.

Yeah, that was one feeling she wasn't confused about.

"Reina?"

Cinderella's soft voice broke into her thoughts. Cinderella had a true gift, a spirit gentle and loving, able to calm a person before they were even aware of it. "Yes, Cinderella?"

"How long have you known Tiernan?"

Reina smiled, for a moment the urge to tell Cinderella the truth and see what her response would be strong. "A long time."

"Did you always love him?"

Hmmm, this conversation was going to be dangerous, and considering her own confusion, not one she felt up to having. Still, she had to try. She had a HEA to accomplish. "I was always... aware of him." Aware of him, yes, always aware. Aware of his smile, of his scent. Aware that I didn't want anyone else near him. Aware that he could lay me bare in ways that would destroy me. "I always knew the moment he entered a room, I always felt him when he was behind me. I can't shut down my emotions around him."

"Oh," Cinderella said, and the tone of that small sound sparked Reina's interest.

"Oh," Reina repeated. "Have you ever felt that way?"

A light blush suffused Cinderella's face, and a small, shy smile passed over her lips.

Before she looked away, Reina saw in Cinderella's eyes complete, perfect contentment.

Reina had been a Godmother for a long time, and she knew exactly what that look meant. Whoever caused that reaction was the only one who Cinderella could ever have a HEA with, the f--- be damned. That reaction was one of true love.

Which meant Reina needed to find out the name of the man quick, since she didn't have time to waste trying to put Cinderella with the wrong man. Tiernan's life was on the line.

Cinderella cleared her throat and went back to scrubbing the floor, but within a moment she sat back on her heels. "Reina?"

Nonchalance would be best to draw Cinderella out. Reina kept her head down as she answered in a distracted tone, "Hmm?"

"Were you scared?"

"Scared?"

"Your... first time, as a wife."

Oh yes, complete nonchalance. "Of course," she answered, not even bothering to look up to see Cinderella's reaction. Keep it simple, keep the conversation easy.

It seemed to work. Reina couldn't see Cinderella's face, but she could almost feel the relief come off the young woman.

After a moment, afraid Cinderella wouldn't continue, Reina said, "I guess you don't have any women to discuss such things with."

From the corner of her eye, she saw Cinderella's first reaction, an instinctive response to defend her Stepmother, but almost immediately Cinderella stopped herself. "I am not close to my Stepmother or stepsisters."

"I know many families like yours. It would be nice if when there is a remarriage everyone would love each other, but that is not always the case."

Cinderella smiled in gratitude of her understanding. After a moment of taking Reina's words in, her mind turned back to the original thread of the conversation. "Is it painful, being a wife?"

Reina reached out and grabbed Cinderella's hand, keeping her manner easy and loving. "Will you allow me to speak with you as a sister in this matter?"

"Please do," she said, gratitude infusing her voice.

"As you grew up around animals, I assume you know the basics," Reina said, her voice holding the slightest undercurrent of naughtiness.

Cinderella's face turned beet red. "I, yes, I mean, I have seen horses."

Reina laughed. "If you have only horses to think upon, you will be more scared than you should be," she said, patting Cinderella's hand reassuringly. "Men are not that large, but yes, it is the same with humans as it is with horses."

"So it is painful?"

"It is the greatest pleasure we as humans have been given, but there are moments that can hurt, especially for us women. Your body is made to take your man, but the first time, before you are accustomed to him, it will hurt. For some women, the pain is negligible, for others they may be sore an entire day afterwards. All of them learn to enjoy it."

"And you enjoy it?"

Sharp and distinct, the memory of Tiernan's face buried between her thighs surfaced, and heat blossomed in her body. "Yes, I enjoy it very much."

Cinderella smiled, delighted with the secret she came upon in Reina's expression. "Your husband is very handsome."

"Well, please don't tell him that. Enough women make fools of themselves over him."

Smile still firmly in place, Cinderella started to clean the floor again. "I would not worry myself if I were you. Every time I saw him, he was looking only at you. His eyes never leave you if he can help it."

"Really?" The question left her mouth before Reina could stop it.

"Oh, yes."

Before Reina embarrassed herself by asking probing questions, a male voice that was not Tiernan's came from the door. "Am I interrupting?"

Cinderella's head snapped towards the door, then just as suddenly her gaze fell to the floor and she swallowed hard, color coming into her cheeks.

Reina glanced toward the voice, and only long hours of schooling kept her expression neutral.

By Cinderella's reaction, Reina was positive this was the man she loved, and this man just so happened to be the Prince everyone was so excited about.

Looks like the imminent homecoming was a lot more imminent than anyone knew.

"Hello, Cinderella," he said, his voice warm and his attention focused completely on the girl. He was a very good-looking man, thick black hair resting against tan skin, green eyes displaying intelligence, the slight lines around them telling of a good sense of humor. Still, blue eyes were better, and a man without dimples really wasn't worth a second glance.

Not looking at him, Cinderella responded, "Hello, Henry, this is Reina. She and her husband started working here recently."

He gave a quick nod in Reina's direction, but his eyes went right back to Cinderella, who was still not looking directly at him. "I welcome any new friend of Cinderella's."

Reina smiled at that. This man was so wrapped around this little blonde's finger, it was almost an affront to her as a Fairy Godmother. If the consequences weren't so severe, she'd be laughing right now. "She's a very easy girl to be friends with," Reina responded, warmth in her voice to put the man at ease.

"Yes, she is," he agreed, his voice deepening the slightest bit.

"What can I do for you, Henry?" Cinderella asked, standing but still not quite meeting his eyes.

"It seems there is to be a ball," he said, and Reina noticed the flash of annoyance that crossed his face with that announcement.

"Henry is a messenger for the king," Cinderella explained for Reina's benefit, coming closer to Henry to get the thick parchment in his hand.

So that was how the prince could just show up at someone's door without the household having a screaming fit, huh? Why the hell was he running around playing dress down while having everyone believe he was outside the country and just now coming home? He must have been doing this quite a while, considering the build up of feelings between him and Cinderella.

Cinderella took the offered paper from the disguised prince, and Reina noticed the subtle movement Henry used so his fingers could brush Cinderella's.

"I guess this means the Prince is back?" asked Reina, more to give Cinderella a

chance to breathe rather than truly needing the answer.

“Yes. His Majesty declares a ball is needed to welcome His Highness home.”

For yet another reason to not look at Henry, Cinderella was reading the announcement. “Stepmother will be very pleased to learn of this,” she said softly.

“What about you? Aren’t you pleased?”

Her eyes were direct on his for the first time. “Why would I be pleased?”

He shrugged, and Reina could see the veil covering his eyes, telling of long practice shielding his real feelings. “Don’t all women want to meet a prince? Dream of marrying one?”

Hurt covered Cinderella’s features. “Do you truly think so little of me, that I would be swayed by such a thing? That I would want to marry a title, and not a man I love?”

“No, Cinderella, I’m sorry,” Henry said, his hand coming up without forethought to stroke her face. “Never. Never would I think such a thing about you. I’m just feeling a little jaded after seeing all the responses to the announcement.”

Cinderella went stock still at the first touch of his fingers. Henry seemed to realize as well that he was touching, probably for the first time, the face of the woman he loved.

It was such a beautiful moment, so of course Cinderella’s stepsisters came tromping in to ruin it. “Well, well, I see we have a message waiting for us,” the skinny one said, causing Cinderella to jump back from Henry, once again not looking at him.

Both stepsisters’ eyes roamed hungrily over Henry, and Reina thought over what animals she should turn them into. No matter what animal came to her mind, though, it seemed such an insult to the animal she couldn’t bring herself to do it.

“What a day,” murmured one to the other. “First our new handyman, now our favorite messenger.”

“The King is going to have a ball,” said Cinderella, her voice displaying a hint of anger, the first Reina had ever heard from her.

The skinny one grabbed the message from Cinderella’s hand. “It’s true,” she said, after looking over it quickly. She grabbed her sister’s hand and ran out of the room, calling out, “Mother!”

Cinderella turned to the man. “You should leave before Stepmother comes back.”

It was obvious the man did not want to leave, but he held back his instinctive negation. Instead, he said, “The King’s decree says every unmarried female is to come to the ball. That means you should go.”

Cinderella shook her head. “I have no desire to go, Henry.”

Without warning, Henry grabbed her hand, pulling her so that their bodies aligned, nearly touching. “I’ll be there, Cinderella, and I want more than anything to dance with you.” With a last lingering look, Henry left.

Cinderella’s hand absentmindedly wandered up to her throat, her eyes indicating her thoughts were anywhere but the present. “Cinderella,” Reina said gently.

“Huh?”

“We should finish the floors.”

“Of course,” she said, and sank to the floor to finish her job, so caught up in her own thoughts that she didn’t realize Reina was still in the room. Reina watched over her, the occasional indulgent smile stealing over features.

The rest of the morning saw the house in an uproar over news of the impending ball. Visitors arrived at odd times, and the continuous voices of women constantly whipped

around the halls.

When lunch came around, Reina found herself in the kitchen alone, grateful that Cook and Cinderella were at different tasks around the house and she could finally get a few minutes of peace.

“Damn, women are loud. I swear I heard them over the hammering in the barn.”

Tiernan’s grumbling voice alerted Reina to his presence in the kitchen, so she turned to greet him.

The words died in her throat.

Tiernan’s chest was bare, and it was her first time ever seeing him in this state.

He had a lean, muscular build. His upper body was v-shaped, and his wide shoulders went down to a nicely sculpted chest, to a stomach ridged with muscle. His trousers were a little loose, and she noticed he had a v even there along his stomach and hips going down his thighs, the lines trailing delectably to that bulge between his legs. Her eyes lingered there, and she wished desperately that last night she’d had the presence of mind to disrobe him.

Then she remembered where she was, and praying he was too busy to notice where her gaze had been, she finally looked him in the eye.

He noticed, the bastard. Of course he did. Oh yes, there they were, those dimples out full force in all their majestic glory. “Well, Fairy Godmother Reina, what exactly are you thinking about?”

“Our assignment, of course,” she responded, not giving him the satisfaction of seeing her ruffled. “What else is there to think about?”

“What else indeed?” he asked, going to collect his plate of food. “I assume with all the thinking you were doing, you have something to tell me?”

Smug bastard. She noticed he didn’t bother to put anything over his chest. “As a matter of fact, I have many interesting things to tell you.”

Tiernan listened quietly as she related the events of the morning. “The file never mentioned the Prince’s deception.”

“No, it didn’t. That implies a certain laxness on the part of the intel gathering which I will investigate when we get back, but I can only see it working in our favor right now. She is very obviously in love with him and he with her.”

Tiernan reached out, twirling her hair around his fingers. “Do you think Cinderella is over her fear of men?” and despite the fact he tried to sound disinterested, Reina could see his pupils dilate slightly, darkening his eyes in a way that caused her heart to start beating madly.

She leaned closer to him, her voice lowering. “I think she has made a good start.”

His fingers went from her hair to feather over her lips. “Maybe we should be sure her fear is gone.”

Chapter 8

“Maybe we should,” Reina said, looking up at him from beneath lowered lashes, and Tiernan was hard pressed to remember why he couldn’t just pick her up and carry her to their shared room.

All morning he had been dealing with so-called “gentle” women showing less class and dignity than the average whore, and he wondered why the FGs were always complaining about how men were only interested in one thing. Selective memory, obviously.

After a while, it made him want to take a shower to wash the slimy feeling all the staring was starting to cause.

That went out the window when he felt Reina’s gaze on him.

Reina’s gaze caused licks of fire to travel wherever her eyes touched and caused his muscles to bunch as if in preparation for her physical caress. He wanted nothing more than to bare himself to her, beg her to do whatever she wished to do to him, swear to her his body was made for the express purpose of satisfying her.

He leaned down, his lips ghosting over hers, light brushes and small nips to start, to make the want grow.

Reina growled and grabbed him, threading her fingers through his hair and pulling his mouth to hers, making the kiss hard, deep.

He purred in appreciation. Now that was his woman, taking what she wanted.

Keeping the kiss as hard as she wanted, Tiernan grabbed her hands and pulled them down, placing them on his chest, encouraging her to touch him.

She needed no further prodding. She dragged her nails down his chest, the ridges of his stomach, using her palms to massage the firm flesh, taking his sharp exhalations into her mouth.

“Reina,” he moaned into her mouth.

Someone cleared their throat, and he jumped apart from Reina, looking to see Cinderella standing at the side, not looking at them, her face rosy.

He immediately turned away from her, hiding the bulge in his pants. Reina tried for a tone of normalcy. “Yes, Cinderella?”

“Stepmother said I should inform you that we are to clean out all the chimneys today, and Tiernan is to work on the fence.”

“Yes, we were finishing up lunch, right, Tiernan?”

He nodded. “I’ll get right on the fence, Cinderella.”

Tiernan could hear the smile in Cinderella’s voice. “Thank you, Tiernan.”

Footsteps, then Reina’s smug voice. “She left, you can turn around now.”

Oh, she really thought he’d let her get away with that, did she? So quickly she had no time to react, Tiernan turned and grabbed her hand, placing it firmly on his erection, making her feel the strength of his desire. “When you are bent over cleaning that fireplace, think about how I want nothing more than to come up behind you and slide this inside that hot, delicious pussy of yours, the one I ate out yesterday,” he said, taking the lobe of her ear lightly between his teeth. “Think about it, because I swear if I can manage it, that is exactly what I’m going to do to you.”

Her grip on him tightened slightly, a moan coming from her mouth.

"Think about it, Reina," he repeated. "Think about how I'm going to feel when I'm finally inside you."

"Cinderella!" came the cry from a room inside the manor, and though it wasn't directed at either of them, it was enough to break the spell surrounding them, causing them to slowly separate from each other.

He didn't give up without one final kiss to the hand that had been cupping him, and a wink when said kiss caused her to give an annoyed growl.

While the afternoon wasn't any easier in terms of leering woman, he was able to deal with it much better. In fact, his problem was he had to be careful about letting his mind wander, because as soon as he did, his thoughts went to Reina and, well, he didn't want the women surrounding him to think that the resulting physical reaction was caused by any of them.

The day was long, made longer by the fact that he refused to go back into the house while any random women were roaming around. He trusted Reina to finagle all the important information out of the various women and share the results with him.

He worked well into the night, past reasonable hours, past even when the house's residents could be expected to be asleep. He had to. Once he walked back into that house, Reina was his, the rest of the world be damned. Staying away was his only defense.

As he finished cleaning up, Reina's voice whispered across his mind, "Main hall."

Every muscle in his body tensed, reacting in anticipation. He took a deep breath, telling himself to be slow, telling himself to let her lead, and headed exactly where he was told.

Reina stood in front of the huge fireplace, the firelight shining through the thin fabric of her dress, making her amazing curves visible.

She knew he was there. He could tell by the slight tightening of her body, but she did not turn around.

He had wanted this woman forever. He wanted to absorb her within himself, so that he would never be parted from her.

He took off his clothes, letting the fabric fall to the floor as he walked towards her. Once he reached her, his arms came out, bracketing her. He nuzzled her neck, breathing in her scent. "How was your day?"

"I refrained from killing those ladies who thought nothing of discussing my husband's assets while I was in earshot," she replied, letting her head fall to the side so his mouth could go wherever he wished.

"I applaud your restraint. Does this mean we aren't going to be putting on a show for any of them?" he asked, his teeth grazing the soft skin, marking her slightly.

"Cinderella might have an urge to go exploring, but the rest are safely in bed."

Reina's ass pushed back slightly, rubbing against the ramrod straight cock, causing him to groan as it bounced against her. "I wouldn't be able to stop myself from killing them if they tried anything with you."

"That's my angel," he said, and he dropped to his knees.

In surprise she tried to turn, but his hands on her hips kept her stationary. "Oh no, Reina. I have thirty years of fantasies to appease. You will just have to bear with me."

She swallowed heavily as he started to push up the hem of the slip she was wearing so that it bunched up just above her hips. He put the fabric in her hands. "Hold it," he

whispered, his voice rough, pleased when she obeyed.

“Luscious, luscious Reina. I can’t believe I’m finally able to be here with you.” Starting with her calves, he ran his hands up her body, up her thighs, lightly dipping between her legs before placing all his attention on that firm bottom. With hands, tongue, lips and teeth, he paid proper homage to the backside that had tortured him for so long.

Words were spilling from Reina’s lips, curses and promises, threats and pleas. Moisture was glistening from that amazing juncture, causing him more than once to visit it when he had promised himself to strictly worship her backside.

He helped her down to her knees, guiding her forward so that her weight was supported by her hands. In this position, open to him, he couldn’t resist the temptation to place his mouth on her again, needing to rediscover the taste of her.

“Need you, Tiernan need you. No more, no more... please.”

He rose above her, primal and strong, and pushed himself into her.

Reina’s head was thrown back, and a cry that almost sounded like pain passed her lips, but Tiernan’s attention was where they were joined, where she enveloped him.

He pulled out slowly, pushed back in slowly, unbelieving how right, how tight she felt around him.

He wanted it to last forever, he wanted to move slowly, to never be parted from her.

And then she pushed her hips back.

Just like that, she broke him, and he could no more slow down than he could quit breathing.

He brought her head around so that he could kiss her, pounding into her body as his tongue swept her mouth. Sweat droplets rolled down his chest as he pushed himself, used every motion of his body to bring her the most pleasure possible.

Her cries became higher, breathier, the same erotic sound she had made yesterday. He guided his hand over her stomach, between her legs, rubbing that amazing little nub. She screamed as she clamped around him, milking him, causing his own roar to follow as he pulsed into her.

*

In the aftershocks, Tiernan gently maneuvered her so that she was on her side and he was draped behind her. His arm wrapped around her chest, and she rubbed her fingers over the skin, loving the texture of the man.

“Thirty years,” Reina said, breaking the silence.

“Huh?”

“You’ve been imagining that for thirty years?”

Tiernan nuzzled her ear, kissing the sensitive skin behind the lobe. Even after their earlier exertions, she could feel his cock starting to harden against her. “That was just the tip of the iceberg. We’d have to lock ourselves in a bedroom for a decade before I’d say we got through the majority of them.”

Reina partially rolled to her back so that she was able to look up at him. “I’m not sure we’d be allowed to take a decade off of work.”

“Darn strict Godmothers.”

Reina started laughing. “Why are you suddenly so amusing?”

He looked affronted. “I’ve always been amusing. You were just determined to hate me.”

She rolled back, looking away from him. “I never hated you.”

“You could have fooled not only me but the entire Fairy nation.”

“Believe me, it would have been so much easier if I had simply hated you.” Not giving Tiernan any time to respond, Reina moved swiftly, rolling over and pushing him back, then sitting herself on top of him.

Tiernan’s face broke out in a wide grin. “Now, this is another fantasy that I’ve been looking forward to having fulfilled.”

“How do you know exactly what I’m going to do, dimples?”

“Oh, a nickname, now that signifies a challenge.”

“Well, I do live to challenge you.” And with that, Reina started fulfilling what was not only his fantasy, but her own.

Touching him had always been a low level hum in her fingers, a desire she ruthlessly suppressed, but since she’d seen him this afternoon, she had been enflamed, every nerve ending itching to get his skin on hers.

He was so perfect, satin over steel. Her tongue languidly traced every ridge, every hollow, savoring the heat and salt she took in from her explorations.

More than that, she reveled in the groans, the expletives that fell from his lips.

And her lips went lower still.

Tiernan’s groans suddenly stopped, harsh breathing becoming the only sound in the room. She licked her lips, and at that, a snarl passed through his clenched teeth.

Holding his gaze, she opened her mouth, and slowly, so slowly, she descended upon the most sensitive part of him.

It was so satisfying to see Tiernan, always so in control, grit his teeth to force himself not to call out, to feel the fine tremors that were coursing through his body.

She sucked him, playing with the head, tonguing it gently before abruptly swallowing him whole. She took him completely down her throat, using long quick strokes to quickly bring him to a breaking point.

His grabbed her, bringing her up his body. “Ride me,” he said, grabbing her hips to place her above him. “Reina, ride me.”

So aroused herself, she couldn’t bring herself to tease him. She sank down immediately, sighing at the feeling of having him inside her.

Tiernan’s hands kept moving, on her hips to encourage faster movement, on her legs to feel the muscles bunching as she rode him, on her breasts when their bouncing couldn’t be ignored anymore.

Reina loved looking at Tiernan’s face. She loved the groans and sighs her movements caused him. She loved the pleasure he gave her, his body pumping into hers.

Most of all, she loved her name torn from him as he came inside her.

Chapter 9

The screaming from the house was becoming intolerable, and Melanie, the thinner of Cinderella's two stepsisters, slammed the door shut behind her with a sigh of relief.

It was a madhouse since news of the ball got out. Right now, Serena was crying over the fact that her dresses had to be let out yet again.

Of course, if she walked her fat ass a little farther than the kitchen, that might not be such a common occurrence.

As she was about the pass through the gate, Melanie noticed her stepsister in the garden, and her lip curled at the sight.

Melanie hated Cinderella.

It was a true, abiding hate, past all reason, perhaps past sanity. She didn't care to examine it too deeply. She'd just known it existed from the moment she first set eyes on her stepsister when they were both six years old and something inside Melanie whispered that she would never be considered as beautiful, as perfect, as deserving as the blonde girl in front of her.

Serena merely played games with Cinderella when boredom set in and she needed a diversion. For Melanie, nothing except ultimately making Cinderella break would be acceptable.

She was about to turn and walk her usual path through the woods when a man blocked her. His hat was in hand and his head was suitably lowered, but something about him caused her to take a half step back. Maybe it was his eyes, so dark there appeared to be no pupil.

"Excuse me, Miss," he said, and she swore a faint hiss threaded his speech.

"Yes?"

"That path you usually choose," he said, pointing to her path. "Wild animals are spotted down that way, it's not safe. The path that way is where it is safe to walk."

The man pointed to the path that paralleled the river. It was slightly overgrown because few used it, but something inside told her not to challenge this man. Laborer or no, beneath her or no, her nerves sizzled with the need to get away from him. She turned and moved toward the path he had pointed out.

After a fair bit of walking, she considered turning back. It was less than half her usual walk, but the terrain was more difficult. Almost turning around, masculine voices speaking slightly off the path caught her attention. Interesting. No one came to this area. There was no hunting here, nothing of value to take from the land, and no true cover if your purpose was to hide.

Next to her purpose of Cinderella's destruction, Melanie was ruled by curiosity, and as such, the decision to creep closer to those voices was made without hesitation.

The first man came into view, and Melanie knew him instantly, a duke and first cousin to the Prince, dressed in common clothes. She knew he came to the area for the ball, but why was he here so far from the castle, and dressed like that? Then the other man appeared, and Melanie's confusion grew.

Henry, the messenger, who was so in love with Cinderella she was surprised he didn't choke on his feelings when around her, and Cinderella, oh yes, Cinderella loved

him as well.

Melanie had done nothing with that information yet while she debated the best course for Cinderella's ruination. Yes, Henry was beautiful in a way few men were, but he was a messenger and the court ladies probably used his skills as a lover as much as they did as a courier. Those same ladies would not let him stop over such a small thing like his marriage, a situation that would batter Cinderella's soul, her love keeping company with others. Lately, Melanie had been leaning towards marriage between Cinderella and the man.

Why was a man such as the duke in the company of a messenger?

"Henry, you are right, she was more beautiful a sight than I could have imagined. All these years, I thought your heart and your dick were making you believe things that weren't possible, but your dick turned out to be absolutely right."

"Be careful with what you say about your future queen," Henry growled, but the menace was put on, the affection between the men evident.

Future queen?

The duke slapped his back. "Who would have thought all those years ago, when you had the thought of going out amongst your people as a mere messenger, that you would find a woman to steal your heart."

"Cinderella isn't just any woman. Cinderella is everything." And even Melanie, as much as she hated Cinderella, felt her heart clench at the pure love and devotion that was evident within Henry's voice, his body, as he thought upon his beloved.

"You truly are going to marry her, aren't you?" the duke asked, wonder in his voice.

"I am going to marry her," Henry agreed.

"It's not the most politically advantageous match, as I'm sure your father will impress upon you."

Steel entered Henry's voice. "I am to be king, and I will choose my queen."

The duke held his hands up. "I am your support always, cousin. Don't run me through."

Humor returned to Henry's face. "I will always do what is best for my country. What could be better for my country than to have a king who is completely at peace in his soul, because he is married to the most wonderful being who ever lived?"

The duke nodded at his words. "Doesn't hurt that she has that amazing figure, does it, cousin? You will occasionally come out of the bedchamber to rule, right?"

At that, Henry started chasing the duke, who ran, the two of them acting no older than eight year olds.

It was the drip of liquid through her satin shoes that brought Melanie back to awareness. Looking down, she saw her pale pink shoes now had splashes of red. After a moment, she realized the red was her blood. Her hands had fisted themselves around a thorny branch so tightly that the skin broke in several places, and as awareness came upon her once again, the thoughts that she had kept at bay with numbness now started to pour forth. Cinderella was about to get everything. Cinderella already had the love of a king!

It was warm, but Melanie felt her body start to shake. No, she would not give in to emotional weakness, she thought, digging her nails into the cuts into her hands, letting the pain give her something to focus on. She had to think, she had to plan, to calculate. Cinderella would not win. She would not become a queen. She would not marry her love.

She would not have happiness, or contentment, or joy. How dare she think she deserved these things that Melanie would never know?

Now was not the time for emotions. Melanie took a deep breath, letting the rage leech out, cool calculation replacing it. Yes, she knew what to do.

It was time to destroy Cinderella.

* * * *

Cinderella was humming, the sound warm and happy. Henry had just appeared, wanting to introduce her to his cousin and making her promise she would attend the ball.

Henry... Heat coursed through Cinderella, because suddenly an image formed in her mind, Henry on his back, and she, looking down at his beautiful face, riding him, making him cry out as she took him inside her body, giving him such pleasure that he screamed her name.

What would he feel like inside of her? What would his mouth feel like on her breast, his tongue teasing her nipple?

Cinderella shook her head, but the images would not leave. These new feelings inside herself were attributable to the introduction of Reina and Tiernan into her life.

Both times she had come across Reina and Tiernan had been accidental, but she had not been able to stop watching them. Her curiosity about what happened between men and women took over.

Beyond watching the physical act, she didn't want to stop looking at their faces, watching the love that was always evident, not just during their intimate moments, but whenever they were in each other's presence. Tiernan's eyes took on a special light only when Reina was around, and Reina's body seemed to come alive when Tiernan entered a room.

Cinderella barely remembered her parents together, but she knew, somehow, that they had that awareness of each other.

A door opened, and Cinderella looked up to see Melanie walking in.

"Hello, Melanie," she greeted.

"Cinderella," Melanie answered back. "Where is my mother?"

"Stepmother went to the seamstress with Serena."

"Ah yes, I forgot that she mentioned that. What will you wear to the ball?"

The question was meant as a subtle putdown. Cinderella only had one dress, older and out of style, but serviceable. Cinderella didn't mind though. Henry wouldn't care what she was wearing and would not be embarrassed to be with her.

"I have a dress, stepsister. I will be fine."

Melanie didn't leave, though, as Cinderella was expecting. She stood there, looking at her, causing Cinderella's nerves to stretch taut. Finally, Melanie said, "I don't like you."

That was unusual. Melanie tended towards subtlety. It was Serena who boldly declared all emotions.

Before Cinderella could respond to that, Melanie continued, "I don't like you, but I don't hate you. I have enough feeling for you that I wish you to have some pleasure from this life, though I admit, I hope it is far from me."

Wary, Cinderella asked, "Why this sudden concern now?"

"Because you are getting older, and as soon as is acceptable, Mother will cast you

from the house. Pretty you might be, but unless you take advantage of that, you will find yourself old and alone with no money and no prospects. You should use this ball to find your place in this world.”

“Find my place?”

“There will be many men of power at the ball. You have no family, no connections, so marriage to any of them will be out of the question. However, you can become a mistress and secure your future. Any man only has to look at you to want you in his bed. You are comely enough for the Prince himself to have interest.”

Cinderella paled, her hand coming up to her throat. “I only want love.”

“Are you a fool?” Melanie gave a laugh shaded with disgust. “Do you live in a Fairy Tale? Love is what poor people talk about when they don’t have enough money to feed their children or buy firewood to heat their homes!”

“I would rather be married to one who loves me than be decked out in jewels and furs and homes and be a mistress!”

Melanie gave her a pitying look. She turned on her heel and walked out of the room, throwing over her shoulder, “Well, then, stepsister, I would advise you to not go to the ball, because the men there are only interested in making you the latter.”

Chapter 10

The ball was tonight.

Reina was on edge, finding it impossible to sit still. She and Tiernan were in agreement, at the ball the Prince would sweep Cinderella in his arms and declare his love for her, proposing to her that very instant. It would be such a moving scene, have such an effect on the populace that even with concerns over her lack of connections the king would have no choice but to publicly embrace Cinderella as the future queen.

There was a darker thought marring Reina's pleasure, the thought of what would happen between her and Tiernan once they returned to the FG Compound. It had been so easy to ignore that reality these last days as they became caught up in Cinderella's life.

During the day they worked, made friends with Cinderella, Cook, and Henry. They watched for interruptions from the Elf King, interruptions that never happened. They did their magic and placed hints to ensure Cinderella and Henry's HEA.

At night, they explored each other with the ferociousness of two people who had wanted each other for a long length of time, who never thought the possibility of touching their desire would happen.

It was a wonderful interlude.

Interludes were not made to last.

At times, she could feel Tiernan's questioning gaze on her. She saw him puzzling about what to say to her, opening his mouth to confront her. Every time, she changed the course of events. Every time, he allowed her to do it, hurt crossing his features.

The problem was she didn't know what to say. She had started this with the thought that she would get him out of her system. She would enjoy herself, and she would exorcise the tension, the heaviness that always existed around him. They would come to an understanding, and once this mess was behind Tiernan, she would be able to see him around the compound without the negative emotions she always battled.

Their time together accomplished none of that. Now the thought of the other women approaching him made her physically ill. She was also sure she would banish Katarina to the Mortal Realm with a job that would keep her occupied for the next few centuries, just to get rid of her.

She wanted his hands only on her, his eyes only on her, his mouth for her alone.

Reina shook her head. No more on that. She would deal with the future later. This was about Cinderella. She genuinely had grown to love the young woman, and though her overriding interest in this HEA was to protect Tiernan, Cinderella's happiness mattered a great deal to her as well.

Cinderella was not acting as herself, though. Reina had thought she would be experiencing nothing but pleasure in the thought of this ball, but Cinderella kept falling into periods of deep contemplation, and it was obvious not all her thoughts were pleasant ones.

"Cinderella," she said.

Cinderella's head jerked up. "Reina, what is it?"

Reina smiled at her. "I have a surprise for you."

A shocked smile blossomed over Cinderella's face. "A surprise? For me?"

“Follow me.”

Up to the room she and Tiernan shared, Reina brought Cinderella and seated her in front of a worn trunk. “Please do not think I am pitying you,” Reina began. “But I know the dress you are wearing tonight is older and not in the best shape. I would like you to borrow something from me.”

Reina opened the trunk and pulled out a long silvery dress that appeared to be spun from moonlight, the finest most delicate lace adorning the long lines of the bodice and skirt. Along with that, she pulled matching shoes.

“Reina?” Cinderella asked, awe in her voice and look as she took in the beautiful dress.

“My mother was a seamstress,” Reina lied. “This was my wedding outfit, the finest thing my mother ever created. I want you to wear it tonight.”

Cinderella was shaking her head. “No, I could never do that. What if I tore it?”

“So what if you did?”

Cinderella’s brows drew together. “You said it was your wedding dress?”

“Well, I don’t want you to tear it on purpose,” Reina replied, her hand smoothing the dress. “The dress is a nice reminder, but what is truly worth savoring is the union it witnessed.”

If only it had truly seen such a union...

Reina tamped that thought down, watching Cinderella’s face. Her words resonated with the young woman, who began taking tactile pleasure in the dress. “Henry... Henry will like seeing me in this dress.”

“Henry will like seeing you,” Reina said gently. “I think, though, he will be beside himself with how beautiful you will be tonight.”

That night, Reina and Tiernan were at the entranceway, seeing the Stepmother and her two bitch daughters off. Something about the skinny one set alarm bells clanging in Reina, warning her the stepsister had done something.

Calm yourself, she thought. Keep your eyes open and all will be well.

Before she could pursue the thought beyond that, Cinderella appeared.

Reina had styled her hair, leaving the tresses long with a slight curl. Add those to her delicate face, lush figure, and silver gown, and she appeared to be an angel sent to Earth, something otherworldly, too precious to truly exist.

“I feel exposed,” said Cinderella as Reina and Tiernan could only look at her with open-mouthed wonder.

Since this was where Tiernan usually said a semi-lewd comment, habit had Reina smacking his arm in warning. “You are truly a sight, and Henry will be known far and wide as the luckiest man who ever lived,” Reina told her.

Strong arms wrapped themselves around Reina, pulling her back into an embrace. “Second luckiest man, my love. Second luckiest.”

Reina’s cheeks heated, and Cinderella let out a giggle at her expression, both women calming down with that bit of normalcy.

Chapter 11

The ball was truly amazing, Cinderella thought, taking in the pageantry that surrounded her. It was nice to see the people in their finery, to hear the music and smell the food and enjoy everyone's happiness.

Someone mentioned dancing, and her stomach turned over on itself. That was what she was truly looking forward to, dancing with Henry this night.

"Why, Cinderella, I would have never taken you for that type of woman."

Cinderella turned to see an older woman from the village. She was titled, but amongst the peerage, her importance was negligible. She had only seen the woman a few times but didn't remember her eyes to be so dark, the color almost as black as the center. Her tone, sly and insinuating, set Cinderella's shoulders back. "What type, Madam? I don't understand your meaning."

"Looking like that, you are trying to pretend truly to not know?" When Cinderella, didn't answer, the woman continued, "Well, no matter. Keep your front. To answer your question, I never took you as a woman looking for a benefactor."

"A... no," Cinderella whispered, her stepsister's earlier conversation rampaging through her mind.

"What do think the purpose of this ball is? All unmarried maidens invited? True, some marriages will be brokered, but it because the Prince himself is looking for a mistress."

"No, the Prince would never throw a ball for such a reprehensible purpose. Our Prince is not even married."

Cinderella was treated to a look implying she was a simpleton. She continued on, the s of the words pronounced as if a snake made human were speaking "He has a wife... well, I should say, he will have a wife. The very credible rumor is treaty papers have been signed with a neighboring king, with marriage promised on both sides. However, as their princess is not highly attractive, our prince must find someone to meet his needs."

Cinderella couldn't stand to hear any more. "If you will excuse me, Madam, I must find my Stepmother."

Both her stomach and her thoughts were roiling. Cinderella couldn't believe such disgusting people could truly exist. How they could stand there and smile, talking about such things? Did they truly have no shame?

She didn't want to see this prince, or any of these other men here who thought of women only as things to satisfy their lust.

Henry, she just wanted Henry. She wanted Henry to engulf her in his arms, let her know that decency still existed, that love was real.

Then she spotted him, in a corner, looking at the people in the ball, not having spotted her yet, and suddenly she could breathe again.

He was beautiful, sharply tailored, his clothing nicely displaying broad shoulders and thick legs.

She needed to be by his side, now. She needed to tell him how much she loved him, how much she appreciated his decency and honor, especially here, surrounded by such people.

Then his eyes found hers.

His gaze took her in, from the long tresses to the nicely displayed curves to the shoes peeping from underneath the hem.

Then he looked into her eyes again, and the heat in his made her take a step back. Having seen Tiernan with Reina, Cinderella now knew what that look meant, and she was sure he was going to sweep her in his arms and take her to the nearest bedchamber.

“Your Highness!”

Henry jumped, looking in the direction the voice came from. To Cinderella’s ears, it sounded similar to her stepsister.

The voice’s owner was nowhere to be found, but the commotion it caused turned all gazes to Henry.

A steward from the castle rushed over. “Your Highness, there you are. Your father is asking for you.”

While those who lived in the town looked on with confused eyes, other royals came over to greet Henry, speaking to him as if it was a common occurrence.

Somehow, the news wasn’t a surprise. Somehow, it seemed right that Henry, always so regal, so beautiful, it never fit that he was a mere messenger, of course he would be the prince. Of course he was not meant for someone like her.

Cinderella looked around, saw the women covered with jewels and the finest cloth. Saw, without even knowing their names, the pedigree each of them brought to the ball, the family names they clothed themselves in.

Her stepsister was correct. Yes, she was comely enough to attract a prince, comely enough that he had groomed her with years of lies to get her to this point, but she saw, standing here amongst those who were truly suitable to become queen, that he never had any intention of making her a wife.

She turned on her heel and fled.

“Cinderella!”

*

“What happened?” cried Reina as she saw Cinderella fleeing the ball.

They were invisible to the humans around them. They had just come back from a perimeter check to make sure none of the Elf King’s subjects were laying in wait when they saw Cinderella flee from Henry. This was most assuredly not how this night was supposed to end.

“Trip,” Tiernan said, letting the magic flow to Cinderella. Unfortunately, Cinderella was spry on her feet, and though she ended up losing a shoe, she kept going. Too many people surrounded Henry, including eventually his own father, and by the time he escaped their clutches she was long gone. He grabbed her shoe, holding onto it as though it were his last link to happiness.

“What do we do now?” asked Reina.

“Find out what happened,” Tiernan replied, voice and expression grim.

“The stepsister, the skinny one, she’s the key, I felt it earlier,” Reina said, self-loathing twisting her stomach. “I dismissed her. I was too sure she was nothing but a jealous twit, and I didn’t stay close.”

Tiernan nodded, but said nothing else.

Studying him, Reina realized his anger was not solely directed towards the stepsister or towards her mistake. “Why are you mad at me?”

"I'm not mad at you," he denied.

"Then who else beyond the stepsister are you mad at?"

He started to shake his head as if to deny it again, then stopped. "I'm mad at this situation, of your stupid rules that forced me to try for a HEA. If I had been left alone, Henry would have proposed to her several days ago, and right now, they would be announcing their engagement."

Reina grabbed his shoulders. "Yes, they would be engaged, but it wouldn't have been a HEA. The king would actively fight the engagement, and without the king's blessing, the kingdom would never accept her. If that happened, Cinderella, being the person she is, would probably break the engagement off when she saw how it was hurting Henry's relationship with his father and with his people. And Henry would probably let her. That's why we needed an HEA."

Tiernan gave her a look filled with disgust. "Why do you always assume the worst possibility? Henry would fight for her."

As Tiernan's anger started to direct towards her, Reina reacted. "How can you be sure of that? Why do you think he wouldn't let her go? He's a man of power, and she is a sweet, pretty young woman who has only love to give."

His lip curled. "Just like once you were nothing but a woman with only love to give?"

Every line of her body tensed. "What are you saying?"

"I'm saying not all of us are like your bastard ex!"

She jerked back as if slapped. "That has nothing to do with it."

"It has everything to do with it," he roared. "It has to do with you not giving me a chance for thirty years. It has to do with you now not mentioning anything of our future once we go back. Why? Do you expect me to cast you aside?"

"Why not?" she screamed back at him. "You've had me now. There is no more challenge to be had, and you have your entire harem waiting for your return!"

"If all I wanted was meaningless fucks, I wouldn't have been celibate for the last thirty years!"

The shock at those words nearly caused her knees to give out. "That's a lie," she said.

His eyes blazed. "I don't lie, ever. I have loved you for thirty years, and I have waited for you. I've tried every way to get you to notice me. I acted professional, and when that didn't work, I started flirting. I kept myself away from all the other women, then I feared you thinking I hated the life I was given, so I made friends. No matter which way I went, you blocked me, when every other FG in that compound knew how I felt about you. And if you ever bothered to take your head out of your ass and look at what was in front of you, you would have seen that!" As though he didn't trust himself to be around her anymore, he abruptly left.

Henry left the ball after Cinderella's exit, and with his disappearance came the gossip. When it was learned that Cinderella had left in a great upset, most of the villagers rushed from the ball themselves, their only intention to arrive at Cinderella's home and see if they could help her.

Reina took all this in as the humans rushed past her incorporeal form, but she herself was removed from the situation. Tiernan and his words took up every spare space in her chest, and nothing else, not even worry for Cinderella, could penetrate.

She was barred, forced to do nothing but wait until she got word about Tiernan. It had to be his HEA, and if she did anything now, the Elf King would claim both victory and Tiernan's life. Used to action and authority, at the time she needed both desperately to keep her mind occupied, and she was reduced to stillness.

With stillness came memory. With memory came doubt, doubt over what she knew. She saw Tiernan's flirtations so clearly, but never in that time did she see anything romantic between him and any female. Innuendo, yes. Desire and yearning... but only on the part of the women. The only time she ever saw true desire in his eyes was when he looked at her.

She sank onto a bench at the banquet, the room only half filled, if that. Too many had left to check on Cinderella. The Stepmother and her daughters were here. While Reina was gratified they were alone with no one sitting near them, the joy she would have felt at that sight just this morning was absent.

Could she truly have been that great a fool? And a name, a name and face she had pushed away from her thoughts for almost a century, came unbidden.

Charm. Outside of both being beautiful men, charm was the first way Reina connected Tiernan with Denholm. Denholm's manners were effortless, his smile able to turn women towards him without any words necessary. Certainly it took no effort to convince Reina of his intentions, of his sincerity, of how she was the only woman he wanted in his life and in his bed.

It was that damn charm that had put her defenses up against Tiernan, even more so than his looks. Yes, he had appealed to her physically in a way even Denholm hadn't touched, but it was that charm that had her determined to erase him from the beginning. She refused to be such a fool, simpering over a man who could smile the same soulful smile at any woman. Who could smile at her in that special way, and then later that night be found in bed with two other women only days before their wedding.

But Tiernan had never done that, had he? His smile never held deceit. She stripped away his charm coloring her memories, and found only a man who honored his commitments, who took care of all those he considered under his care.

He never made a promise he didn't keep.

He never lied by either word or deed.

He never looked at another woman while he was with her.

Denholm had. Even after their engagement, his eyes were always darting, taking in his surroundings, searching for something, someone. She never knew what exactly he desired. She only knew she never felt she was enough.

However, Tiernan's eyes had never left her, no matter what their conversation, no matter what surrounded him. He only ever looked at her.

Tiernan said he loved her, and Tiernan never lied.

Her head sank. She felt the hard wood surface beneath her cheek, rough even with the linen covering. She had destroyed everything. She had taken a good man and thrown him away because of pride and willful blindness.

This night, she may not have only destroyed Cinderella's Happily Ever After, but her own as well.

Chapter 12

Cinderella never returned home that night. The house was in an uproar the next day, all the townspeople who loved her having come to the manor after hearing that she had disappeared the night before. Search parties formed, prayers were held at the chapel, and the children cried in the streets.

Tiernan knew where to find Cinderella. It came to him, as his own heart cracked and bled when he left Reina.

He saw this in her file, a field of flowers beside a lake, the place where her parents met and the place she had gone often with them when they were alive. It was a place she associated with happiness, a reminder that even though her own chance at love may be gone, true love really does exist.

He gave her until late morning then appeared to her. She was still wearing the dress she wore the night before, her face still so beautiful even after the effects of a night of crying.

She didn't show any surprise as he came to sit beside her, as if all her emotions had been drained from her the previous hours. "You found me," she said, her voice dull.

"Yeah, I did."

They sat in silence for several minutes, both looking out over the water.

"Aren't you going to ask me what happened?" Cinderella finally asked.

"I heard that you ran away from Henry," Tiernan said, and at hearing his name, Cinderella's eyes started welling up again.

Tiernan put one arm around her shoulders, giving her a comforting squeeze. "I don't need the details," Tiernan said. "There is only one thing you need to answer."

"What's that?" Cinderella sniffed.

"Is Henry a good man?"

"Before I heard—"

"No," Tiernan interrupted. "You have a good heart, Cinderella. If you trust it, you'll know exactly how to read people. So I ask you again, is Henry a good man?"

Cinderella closed her eyes, taking a deep breath. "Yes," she answered.

"And you love him."

"Yes," she readily agreed. "But he lied to me, and I heard all these things, and I don't know what to do."

"You ask Henry, and you hear what your heart tells you," Tiernan replied simply. "If he's a good man, then you ask him, you listen to his answers, and you decide after that what happens. If he's a good man, and you love him, that is the least you can do."

Cinderella gave a watery laugh, wiping the tears from underneath her eyes. "What if I don't like his answers?"

"Then you move on, because no one is worth you sacrificing your self-respect for. That way, though, you are moving deliberately with your head held high, not running scared."

She nodded and sat looking at the water for several more minutes. Finally, she rose. "It's time to get my answers. Do you want to join me?"

He stood as well and offered his arm. "Let's go."

In silence they made the trip from the pond to Cinderella's home. As they neared the manor, Tiernan saw that the crowd has not dispersed. It had in fact grown larger waiting for Cinderella to return. From the opposite direction, he saw Henry riding up on a horse. Henry jumped off, running towards Cinderella, not stopping until he was in front of her.

"Tiernan," he said, his eyes not leaving hers, "please let us alone."

Cinderella took her arm from Tiernan's and gave a nod of her head. Satisfied with that, Tiernan stepped back.

Henry seemed to be fighting himself to keep from reaching out to touch her. "I wanted to see my country as it truly was," he began. "I had no desire to lie to anyone, but people treat a messenger differently than they treat a prince, at least most do."

He didn't stop himself this time. He let his hand come out and stroke her face. "You don't. You treat everyone as though they are royalty. That's the first thing I noticed about you, not your beauty. It was your kindness and decency, both things that I find to be in short supply in this world. You are a generous, compassionate, fearless being, and I am privileged in the knowing of you. I may have been born to a king, but you are truly the most royal of souls I have ever known."

"You lied to me. You are to marry a princess," Cinderella said, tears coming to her eyes, not daring to believe his words.

His hands gently cupped her face, and his forehead touched hers. "I only lied about my profession. Every other word I have ever spoken to you is truth, I swear on my kingdom. And the only woman I will ever marry is you, because you are the one I love above all others. When I wake up, your smile is the first thing I see in my mind, your name is the last word I speak before I fall asleep. I want it to be that way always, but I want from now on to see your smile with my eyes, and speak your name as you are in my arms."

Her hands covered his, and her eyes closed as she pressed herself closer to him. "No one will approve, I have no name, no connections. What of His Majesty?"

"My father—"

"Is here," a voice interrupted, and out from the crowd stepped a short round shape draped in a cloak. Taking it off, the King appeared, and as one, the crowd fell to their knees. "This incognito habit is very interesting, Henry. I realize why you've been doing it so long now. Fascinating!"

"Father." Henry stepped back from Cinderella but grabbed her hand, holding it firmly to keep her by his side as he faced his father.

"So this is the girl, Henry? Everyone has been very worried about you, you know. You are quite loved," said the King, his head tilting as he studied her. Finally, he nodded. "Young woman, I have only one question for you."

"Yes, sir," replied Cinderella, even as Henry said warningly, "Father..."

"Hush, Henry," the King said. "Young woman, this is what I want to know. Yesterday at this time, before the ball, when you knew nothing, did you love Henry the messenger?"

Cinderella looked at the King for a long moment. She gently pulled her hand from Henry's, giving him a reassuring smile when he would have held her close to keep protecting her. Missing the warning glare Henry sent his father, she walked to the King, taking his hands in hers. She stood on tiptoe and put her lips to the King's ear. "My heart didn't know how to beat until I met him," she whispered. "And now it beats for him

alone.”

She pulled back, still holding his hands, waiting for his response. He gave it a moment later, leaning down and kissing her forehead. “Welcome to our family, daughter.” Then, with a twinkle in his eye, he added, “If you will have my very difficult son, that is.”

She glanced back at Henry. “Don’t try to deny me, lady,” he said to her, a smile coming over his face as he walked towards her.

“Why is that?” she asked, smiling herself as she waited for him to stand beside her.

“Because I will never let you go. Not when my happiness exists only in you.”

* * * *

“Congratulations on your HEA. I’ve just received word that the Elf King’s petition has been officially denied.”

Tiernan kept skipping pebbles in the lake, his actions not changing in the slightest with her words.

Reina continued. “I’m glad you were there. I’m not sure I could have convinced her to go back.”

Tiernan didn’t bother to look over at Reina, but he did answer her. “You are a fantastic Fairy Godmother. I’m sure you would have gotten her to come.”

“No, I wouldn’t have, because I couldn’t honestly tell her to follow her heart. It’s not something I’ve had any luck with.”

He looked over at her then and saw her eyes were raw and puffy, very similar to how he’d found Cinderella hours earlier.

He stomped on the impulse to pull her into his arms. She didn’t want that, and he wasn’t going to keep hoping. Motioning her to follow, he said, “Cinderella has her HEA, Reina, we can go back.”

“I was supposed to be your Fairy Godmother, not Naomi.”

Those words got his attention. “What?”

“I was supposed to be your Fairy Godmother,” she repeated.

That long ago day, the obvious inexperience, well, incompetence, replayed in his mind. “Why weren’t you?”

“The excuse I used was that Naomi needed the exposure, but the real reason was because I saw your picture and I read your profile. I read who you were, and I couldn’t breathe for wanting you.” The color was high in her face, but she refused to look away. She was showing him everything, not letting herself be spared.

“After you joined us,” she continued, “every time I looked at you, I felt like a hypocrite. I really thought I loved him, and after he left, I thought I was so much better than he was, so much more loyal, but all I had to do was look at you to forget that I ever loved him. How was I any better than he was? How was I any better than the sluts that surrounded you? Hell, I needed the crown of sluttiest of them all, because I wanted you forever. I wanted your heart as well as your body.”

His mouth dropped open from surprise, and it took him several moments to get it to work again. “Reina, I never knew you felt anything for me. Believe me, I never knew, or I would have dragged you into my chambers and never let you out.”

“Don’t try to excuse yourself by saying you couldn’t read me, Mr. I’m-Celibate-for-Thirty-Years!”

“If I even started walking in your direction, you turned the other way!”

“Maybe that’s because Katarina somehow always found a way to have her head somewhere in the vicinity of your crotch.”

He burst out laughing. “You are crazy, woman! Do you know that? Compared to you, the Holy Grail...cakewalk!”

Her lips curled upward in response to him. “It’s a flaw in me, one you’ll have to live with if you stay with me. I think too much, and I can make poor choices because of it. The poorest choice I ever made was I chose to listen to my head instead of my heart, and I lost thirty years with the man I love,” she said, her voice slowing, breaking over those last few words.

Reverently, he drew her to him, into his arms, into the space he wanted her to fill forever. His mouth covered hers, and his world, which he thought destroyed forever, was just like that rebuilt.

“You are going to marry me,” he said, pulling his mouth away slightly.

“I am?”

“You are making an honest man out of me, or no more nookie for you.”

Her grin was so wide he almost thought he saw the shadow of dimples on her face. “Fine, but I’m only doing it for the nookie.”

He nodded. “Understood. After we get married, we are not returning to the compound for a month, and during that month, you aren’t allowed to put on clothing.”

“That seems fair.”

“Also, I no longer wish to be a Fairy Godfather.”

That caught her attention, and her smile vanished. “After all this to keep you?”

He shrugged. “The Elf King can’t touch me now, so with that worry gone, we can do what is best for us. Think about it, Reina, just me with all the other Godmothers...”

Reina shook her head. “Tiernan, I trust you.”

“I know you do. I just don’t want that for our life, because it will always be that.” His hand cupped her face, following the arch of her eyebrow, the bridge of her nose, those wonderful lips that he’d never get enough of. Finally, she was his to touch. She was his. “I’ve been thinking about it, since we’ve been here. I don’t know why I made that wish, but I’m glad I did. Even with that, it’s not something I feel I must do. It’s not a calling for me. As long as I can help people, I’ll be happy. Besides, don’t tell me you wouldn’t hate it with everything in you.”

She sighed in relief at his words. “I’d hate it passionately.”

“Promise me you’ll love me forever, Reina.”

“Only if you promise me to keep your sword skills sharp.”

Epilogue

“Fairy Godfather Tiernan, so good to see you again. It has been a long month without you here! I see many congratulations are in order. A HEA, fully attributable to you so not even the Elf King can dispute it, and a marriage in our FG ranks! It’s been a very exciting time.”

Tiernan and Reina stood in front of Sara, having been directed to her office as soon as they arrived back in the FG Compound. No debrief seemed to be needed, as Sara had started reviewing all that had happened almost as soon as they entered. He inclined his head to the elder Godmother. “Thank you, Godmother Sara.”

“Yes, yes,” she said, waving her hand. “As you two grew quite close to Cinderella, I am pleased to share with you the news that she is currently expecting her first child.”

“So soon?” Reina asked in shock.

“Well, Prince Henry had been in love with her for years. It seems that as soon as the woman he loved accepted him, suddenly he was no longer seen outside of his bedchamber. Does this sound like something you two can relate to?”

Reina’s face burned as she looked anywhere but at Sara. Tiernan, damn him, merely got a smug grin on his face.

However, the delight and the embarrassment faded all too soon and only the weight of telling their decision to Sara remained.

“Uh-oh,” said Sara, showing once again why she was the one in charge, as she immediately sensed something unpleasant was about to unfold. “What am I not going to like?”

Reina wrapped her hand with Tiernan’s, taking strength from his touch. “We can’t remain FGs,” she said, deciding the blunt approach was the best way to break the news.

Sara blinked once, twice, then nodded her head in a sharp, decisive movement. “Hmm, can’t say I’m surprised at that. Let’s face it, Tiernan is catnip here, and you will constantly be beating down the other FGs. You’re right, it is probably best you two leave.” Sara looked up at Reina and saw Reina’s eyebrows furrowing together. “What is it? Something else wrong?”

Reina shook her head. “No, no. This sounds very immature, but I am strangely disappointed at how easily you took that news.”

“I can throw myself on the floor and start wailing if it will make you feel any better.”

“That’s quite alright.”

Sara shook her head in bemusement. “I will miss you both, because of your professional abilities, and because I enjoy you so much. Just because you won’t be FGs anymore doesn’t mean you can’t come and visit.” Sara’s eyes brightened noticeably, and she said, “I know exactly what you two need to do. There’s this new guy up north, works incredibly hard a few months at the end of the year, otherwise your time is your own. Deals with peace on earth, goodwill towards men, you’ll love working with him.”

“Up north, huh?” Reina said, and promised herself she wouldn’t cry as she had this last goodbye with Sara.

“Beautiful country,” Sara reassured her.

Reina looked at Tiernan. “What do you think?”

“Summers off? Sounds good to me.” Tiernan leaned close and whispered into Reina’s ear. “Remember, we have to get started on that decade in a bedchamber to make up for our lost time.”

* * * *

Several hours later, long after Reina and Tiernan left the FG Compound for their newest assignment, Irene found her way to Sara’s office. “What have you decided to do in regards to the Elf King, Fairy Godmother Sara?”

Sara looked up, a pleasant smile on her face, and a downright demonic light coming from her eyes. “You mean that Elf King who thought he was so sneaky with his handling of the Cinderella situation? Let’s just say I’ve had a discussion with the Green Man, and you just truly might see a pig or two flying overhead.”

Irene threw back her head and laughed. “Perfect.” She settled into a chair, her gaiety fading. “I am going to miss that boy so much. Not to mention the girls are going to be nothing but bundles of depressed moping wrapped in pink tulle.”

“Maybe it is time to reassess our policy on males joining. That is one side effect I never thought would happen when I took on this case.” Sara looked down at the open file in her hands. Two pictures dotted the file, on one side Tiernan in his knightly armor, the other a picture of Tiernan and Reina together, their smiles so full of love, secret smiles meant only for the other. She closed the folder, and in big red block letters stamped HEA – CLOSED over the cover. “I guess both Reina and I were short-sighted in that way.”

“Suggesting he wish to be a Fairy Godfather, pure genius. That boy has a way of stirring things up, I give him full credit. Moreover, I give you full credit. I’m sure that was the longest time for a HEA ending in FG history, over thirty years. The Green Man sends his congratulations.”

Sara clucked her tongue. “You can’t rush events, Irene. Precision is key.”

“I am going to miss Reina, though. That girl was so good at her job. I’m not sure how long it will take to find another one like her.”

“Yes, well, when all is done, only the Happily Ever After matters.” Sara stood and grabbed a bottle along with two glasses hidden behind a door. “Ambrosia?”

“Oooh, please.”

Sara poured the thick liquid, handing a glass to Irene. She lifted her glass in a toast. “To Happily Ever Afters.”

Irene clinked the glasses together. “Happily Ever Afters. May we all have one.”

The End

About the Author:

Danielle Monsch is a Romantic Geek Girl writing in a Fantasy World. Born to the pothole ridden streets of Pittsburgh PA, she now lives in the sunless Pacific Northwest with her amazing hubby and the two greatest kids who ever existed—even though they do their best to keep her from her daily word count. She also hosts the Podcast “Romantically Speaking”, dedicated to all things related to the romance genre. Find out

more about her at www.DanielleMonsch.com

**Meet Lsb Authors At The House Of Sin
Lsbooks.Net**

We invite you to visit Liquid Silver Books

LSbooks.com
for other exciting erotic romances.

2007: Terran Realm

Urban fantasy world: TerranRealm.com

Featured Series:

The Zodiac Series: 12 books, 24 stories and authors
Two hot stories for each sign, 12 signs

The Coven of the Wolf by Rae Morgan
Benevolent lusty witches keep evil forces at bay

Fallen: by Tiffany Aaron
Fallen angels in hot flight to redeem their wings

The Max Series by JB Skully
Meet Max, her not-absent dead husband, sexy detective Witt, his mother...

And many, many more!