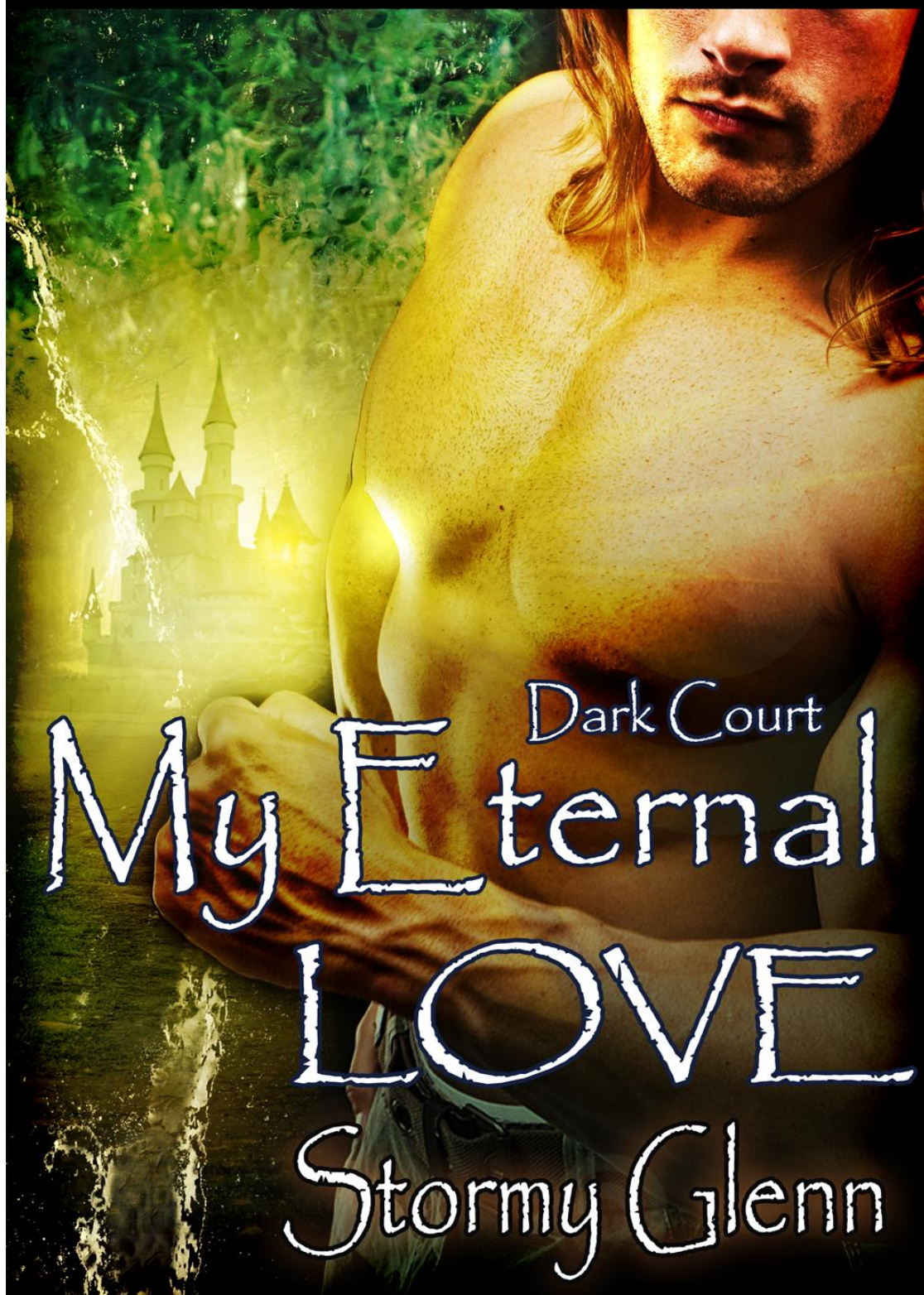


Noble Erotic Romance



Dark Court

My Eternal

LOVE

Stormy Glenn

[Noble Romance Publishing, LLC](#)

My Eternal Love

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Blurb

Brandon Thomas liked his job as an orderly at the Gervais Institute of Study, but then, things had started to get a little weird. The military moved in, and armed soldiers roamed the halls. Told to report to his supervisor, he's surprised to learn that he has received a promotion.

Brandon's promotion turns into a nightmare when he finds himself poked and prodded by a mad doctor and told he's become part of a government experiment. Escaping seems impossible, until a sexy man with beautiful blue eyes comes to Brandon's rescue.

One thing leads to another, and Brandon finds himself bonded to a *Seelie* elf from another world. On the run from the institute's retrieval team, Brandon tries to understand everything Gavin is explaining about his world and his kind, all the while wondering if the man is crazy. He has to be, right?

Seeking to keep Brandon safe, Gavin forces the man through the veil between worlds. When circumstances prevent Gavin from immediately following Brandon through the veil, Brandon ends up in the *Unseelie* Court and in the hands of a total stranger. With no hope of escape, Brandon wonders if he will ever see his perfect elf again.

Chapter One

*An orderly a day keeps the doctor away.
And playing golf,
With all his millions,
And his brand new Mercedes,
While I live in a one bedroom crappy apartment and ride the bus to work every day,
An orderly day keeps the doc –
"What are you doing?"*

Brandon Thomas stopped humming the little tune in his head and swung around to find an armed guard glaring at him. The man looked pissed . . . and like he ate rocks for breakfast. Brandon took a step back and fingered the ID tag hanging around his neck.

Oh, no. Not again.
"I'm an orderly. I work here," he said.
"What's your security clearance?"

Brandon arched an eyebrow. Every level of security had a different color. The bright, neon orange ID tag around his neck said he had level-seven security clearance. Was the guard blind as well as dumb?

"Level seven," Brandon answered.

He really hated those muscle-bound morons that inhabited the halls of the institute he worked in. And lately, they seemed to be paying him particular attention. If he didn't need the paycheck to pay the bills, he would have found another job months ago.

Unfortunately, the institute paid better than any other place in the small, piss ant town he presently lived in. If he could save up enough money to move somewhere else, he'd leave this place behind in a cloud of dust.

Another daydream.
"What are you doing?"

Brandon glanced down at the cart filled with clean sheets. Seriously? Where did they find these guys? There had to be some sort of school for idiots that produced these dummies by the hundreds; the institute seemed to be filled with them.

Lucky us.

Brandon gave the guard a forced smile. "I'm restocking the utility closet with clean sheets. It's part of my job requirements."

The guard lifted several sheets and looked under them. Brandon didn't know what the guy hoped to find, but he wished the armed man would just get it over with so he could get on with his work. He needed to get the restocking done before he could go to lunch.

"I'll need your name." The guard pulled out a pen and a small pad of paper.

Brandon held up his ID tag. "Uh, Brandon Thomas."

The guard scribbled something down. Brandon didn't like the way the man seemed to size him up, his gaze roaming up and down Brandon's body. His skin crawled beneath the creepy perusal.

"Okay, you can go."

Gee, thanks.

Brandon smiled and pushed his cart down the hallway as fast as he could. He glanced back over his shoulder, shuddering a little when he saw the guard still watching him. He spoke into the small communication piece in his ear, but his eyes were intent on Brandon.

Brandon turned away and hurried down the hallway. His breath caught in his throat until he reached the utility closet and could hide inside. He pulled his cart in after him and shut the door, then leaned back against the wall to take several deep breaths.

That was really weird. Brandon hated the armed guards that roamed the hallways. They always seemed to want to harass him, even if he didn't do anything. So much so, Brandon had taken to going out of his way to avoid them.

His job as an orderly at the Gervais Institute of Study was quickly losing its appeal. Maybe the time had come to look for a new position, even if it paid a little less. Things were just getting a little too weird around here.

Brandon had only been working at the institute for a little over six months, but in that time, the number of armed guards onsite seemed to have doubled. The security measures certainly were greater than before.

Everyone coming into the institute had to have an ID tag. There were a series of security checkpoints to pass through, every one of them manned by a number of armed guards. And now, they seemed to freely roam the hallways.

Brandon wasn't allowed in the lower underground levels of the building. His security clearance wasn't high enough, but he'd heard stories of strange things happening – military testing, alien experimentation, even genetic manipulations.

Brandon had thought the stories outlandish, but he started to think they might be true. The military had commandeered the institute's lower levels three months ago and things had been extremely strange ever since.

Brandon shook his head, laughing at his crazy ideas. Dr. Harold Gervais had established the Gervais Institute of Study in order to study genetics and their effects on the human body or some such shit like that. Brandon didn't much care. His position here wasn't some exciting career; it was just a job.

He quickly stacked the clean sheets on the shelves, then wheeled his cart out. He purposely went in the opposite direction from where the guard stood. Meeting up with him twice in one day would be more than Brandon could handle.

Brandon had something of a smart mouth, and he knew it. He didn't think he could keep his mouth shut if faced with the guard a second time. Knowing his luck, he'd get shot instead of just fired.

Brandon hurried down the hallway, took his cart back to the laundry area, then checked out for lunch. He grabbed his iPod and sack lunch and made his way to the cafeteria. He waited in line to grab a juice, then found a quiet corner to eat in.

Plugging the earphone buds into his ear, Brandon ramped up the music, drowning out all of the sounds around him. He dug into his lunch, and as he ate, he watched out the window. Brandon worked the night shift, so the darkness outside was no surprise.

What did surprise him was the level of activity visible through the floor-to-ceiling windows. Armed guards ran around by the main gate. A black car sped up the driveway. The vehicle stopped at the security gate, then drove on through.

Brandon pushed the top of his head against the glass so he could watch. A guard opened the car door, and three men in military uniforms and a couple more in business suits climbed out. They spoke with the guard briefly, then walked into the facility.

Okay, that was a little weird. Brandon didn't think it was normal to get visitors late at night. He preferred the nightshift because the place was quiet, most of the personnel having gone home for the night. Visitors this late — especially ones wearing full-dress military uniforms and looking rather intense — couldn't be a good thing.

Brandon went back to eating. Visitors or not, he had work to do, and he only had ten minutes left for lunch before he had to get to it. Besides, he was just an orderly. Whoever those people were, they meant nothing to him.

Someone touched Brandon's shoulder, and he jumped. He swung around to find his supervisor standing beside him. He pulled off his earphones and waited.

"As soon as you are done with your lunch break I'd like to see you in my office, Mr. Thomas."

"Uh, yes sir."

Brandon's heart began pumping again as he watched his supervisor walk away. He racked his brain, trying to think of anything he might have done to get called before the big boss but came up blank.

He did what was required for his job. He wasn't late for work, ever. Mostly because the last bus to the facility dropped him off a half hour before his shift started. The busses didn't start running again until an hour before he got off work.

With shaking hands, Brandon gathered up the remains of his lunch and dropped it in the garbage bin. He pulled his iPod off, shoved it into his pocket, and made his way to the supervisor's office. The entire time, he prayed he still had a job.

Brandon knocked and waited for permission to enter. Mr. Clausen called out, and Brandon opened the door and walked in. Mr. Clausen sat behind a large desk, typing away on his computer.

Without waiting for an invitation, Brandon sat down in the wooden chair across from the man and waited. As he did, he glanced around the room. The office seemed pretty typical of a supervisor's office – one large desk, a filing cabinet, a bookshelf with books, and a couple of chairs.

The room was sterile, not a personal item in sight, just like his supervisor, Mr. Clausen. Brandon never really liked the guy, but what could he do? Mr. Clausen had been at the facility for years. Rumor was they'd built the facility around the man.

Mr. Clausen finally looked up at him, and Brandon braced himself for the loss of his job. His nerves didn't settle much when the man flipped open a folder in front of him, and Brandon recognized it as his personnel file.

"You've been with us for almost six months, Mr. Thomas, correct?"

"Yes, sir."

"Uh huh, and during that time, you've served as an orderly?"

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Clausen closed the file and folded his hands together, looking at Brandon.
"Do you like your job, Mr. Thomas?"

"Well, it's not what I want to do for the rest of my life, but I suppose I'm happy enough with it for now." Brandon knew that probably wasn't the best answer he could have given his boss, but he wasn't going to lie. He figured the man was smart enough to see right through him if he tried, so why bother?

"Your immediate superiors have very good things to say about you, Mr. Thomas. You've never been late for work, you haven't taken any sick days, and you complete each task set before you in the allotted time."

Brandon twisted his hands together. He really hoped all the things Mr. Clausen said were good things. "Uh, thank you, sir."

"After some discussion, we've decided to promote you."

"A promotion, sir?" There was higher level to being an orderly?

"Yes, report to the south elevator," Mr. Clausen said. "A guard will escort you to level three, where you will receive a complete physical, which is required for your new position." Mr. Clausen handed over his personnel file and a red security pass. "Do you have any questions?"

"Uh, what is my new job, sir?" Brandon asked, completely bewildered. One moment he'd been sure he'd lost his job, and the next moment he'd received a promotion. Talk about an emotional rollercoaster.

"That will be explained to you after your physical, Mr. Thomas. Now get going. They're waiting for you."

"Yes, sir." Brandon left his former supervisor's office and walked down the hallway toward the south elevator. For the life of him, he couldn't figure out how he'd ended up with a promotion. He was an orderly. It didn't take a rocket scientist to be an orderly. He restocked shelves, ran errands, and cleaned. He wasn't trained for anything else.

He wasn't sure he wanted to attend college, mostly because he didn't know exactly what he wanted to do with his life. Growing up in the foster care system didn't give him a lot of good role models to follow.

Brandon knew there were good foster parents out there; he just seemed to have been placed with ones who didn't care for him beyond the money the state supplied for his upkeep. They weren't bad foster parents. They just didn't seem to care. He left as soon as he was legally able to.

After graduating from high school, he'd wandered for a couple of years, working one job for a little while before moving onto the next. The six months he'd had this job was the longest he'd ever been employed.

In Brandon's mind, he wasn't "promotion" material. There were a lot of other people who worked here a lot longer than he did. So, why had they picked him? Brandon pondered the question until he came to the south elevator and faced the two armed guards there.

Brandon held up the red security pass Mr. Clausen gave him. "I'm supposed to report to level three."

One of the guards took his pass and checked it over while the other just stood there and eyed Brandon. Again with the creepy perusal. Brandon hid his shaking hands behind his back. He swallowed past the lump in his throat and tried to look anywhere except at the guard.

He used to think men in uniform were the sexiest creatures on earth. He spent hours upon hours watching war movies, looking through military magazines, and hanging out where ever military men were.

And then he had come to work at the institute. At first, Brandon had gloried in all the muscle-bound men surrounding him. Then, little by little, he had come to realize that the ones stationed at the institute were complete morons and quickly lost his fascination.

If they weren't harassing him, they were pushing him around and making crude jokes. Brandon knew he wasn't some muscle-bound freak, but he wasn't exactly small, either. He stood five-foot ten-inches and weighed upward of 180 pounds, big enough.

"Come this way." The guard finally finished examining Brandon's new ID.

Brandon glanced up, watching as the guard inserted a passkey into a small security pad and typed in an alphanumeric code. A moment later, the elevator doors opened up to reveal two more guards. Brandon was ushered in.

A wave of anxiety nearly forced Brandon to step back off the elevator. No job was worth this, he thought, but someone pushed a button and the elevator doors closed before he could move. They had to see the sweat pouring down his temples; he sure could feel it.

The elevator ride seemed to go on forever, which Brandon found very strange. There were only six floors to the entire building, three of them at basement level. The military occupied the bottom three. It shouldn't have taken more than a few minutes to reach any of them.

Finally, the car came to a stop. The doors slid open. Brandon spotted two more armed guards outside the doors. Three more waited directly across from them. One of man stepped forward.

"Brandon Thomas?"

"Yes."

"Come this way, please."

Brandon fell in behind the guard, two more following behind them. The hallway they walked through looked stark. The walls were white. The doors lining the corridor were white. Even the tiles on the floor were white. Everything seemed to be blaringly white.

The only things relieving the stark lack of color were Brandon and the three guards escorting him. *Creepy*, Brandon thought. And what did his new job entail?. Why would they need an orderly?

"Wait in here," the guard said as he opened a door and gestured for Brandon to enter. Brandon stepped into the room, quickly glancing around. Again with the white everywhere. He was beginning to see a theme in the color scheme.

The room's decor was just as sterile as the hallways. An exam bed sat in the middle of the room. Cabinets with metal handles ran all along one wall. Another wall had a sink and countertop. Beyond a single chair, there was nothing else.

Brandon tried the cupboards but found them locked. He could see little bottles of stuff and trays through the smoky glass, but he couldn't tell what they were. He wandered around the room for a few minutes, pacing as his nervousness increased.

When the door opened and a man in a white doctor's coat walked in, Brandon nearly jumped out of his skin. The man had a clipboard, and he seemed to be reading it and making notes.

"I'm Dr. Carson. Are you Brandon Thomas?" the man asked as he glanced up.

"Yes."

"Please disrobe and get on the table."

"Excuse me?" Surely Brandon hadn't heard what he thought he'd heard.

The man waved his hand at him. "Take off your clothes and get up on the table. I need to examine you."

"Why?"

"It's for your benefit, Mr. Thomas," Dr. Carson said as he walked to the counter. "I need to assess your level of health."

"I was perfectly healthy being an orderly before," Brandon replied. "I should be perfectly healthy being an orderly now."

"Orderly?" Dr. Carson chuckled. "Who told you that you were going to be an orderly?"

"My supervisor, Mr. Clausen. He said I was getting a promotion."

"Oh, my, that is amusing." The man chuckled again. "I don't think I've heard that one before. I'll have to remember it. My colleagues will find it very entertaining. Now, disrobe and get up on the table, dear boy. I need to complete my exam."

Brandon started backing toward the door. "I don't think so. I think I'd rather pass on the promotion and go back to my other job."

"I'm afraid that's not possible, Mr. Thomas. You've already been chosen."

"Chosen for what?" Brandon asked as he took a couple of more steps toward the door. He was beginning to think someone was playing a huge joke on him. Either that, or this guy was nuts.

"All in good time, dear boy." Dr. Carson patted the exam table. "Now, off with the clothes."

Brandon shook his head. No way, no how. No crazy-as-a-loon doctor was getting a gander at Brandon's nether regions. Not for all the tea in China. Brandon grabbed the door handle and opened the door. He turned to run and hit a solid wall of hard flesh.

Brandon had just a moment to look up and see the face of a guard before the man picked him up and placed him on the exam table. Brandon tried to get away, struggling, hitting, and biting, but strong hands grabbed him, holding him down until the doctor wrapped restraints around his arms and legs.

Once Brandon lay secured to the table, the doctor retrieved a small bottle of clear liquid from the counter. He turned back, shaking his head as he stuck a syringe into the bottle's rubber stopper and pulled back on the plunger to fill the tube.

Brandon watched, wide eyed and speechless, as the doctor wiped a spot on Brandon's arm with an alcohol swap, then inserted the needle and the liquid into his arm.

"This could have gone much easier on you, Brandon," Dr. Carson said, "if you had just cooperated. Now we have to do this the hard way."

Brandon tried to protest, but his tongue started to feel funny, thick like, and it kept sticking to the roof of his mouth. His head began to grow heavy, so heavy he couldn't lift it. When the guards released his restraints and started to cut away his clothes, Brandon tried to stop them, but his arms wouldn't move. Nothing worked.

After that, things grew fuzzy. He knew several people came and went. He knew they stuck a syringe in his arm quite a few more times. He thought they took blood at one point but didn't have the strength to lift his head to see.

All Brandon could do was lie there while people did things to him—insert probes, draw bodily fluids, give him shots, and examine him from head to toe, inside and out. He felt invaded, attacked, but he couldn't do anything but whimper.

Someone pushed his hair back from his forehead. Brandon looked up to find the doctor from when he first came into the room leaning over him. He moaned in fear. The man was smiling down at him as if he were proud or something.

"You've done very well, Brandon," Dr. Carson said. "I'm going to give you something to help you sleep, and then you'll be taken to your room to rest. I'll check in with you in a few hours."

Brandon tried to shake his head, groaning when he felt the small pinprick of a needle entering his arm again. Within a few moments, his eyes grew very heavy, and he only wanted to sleep. He caught sight of two guards walking into the room right before he lost the ability to keep his eyes open.

Chapter Two

Brandon awoke slowly and blinked several times against the glare from the bright lights in the ceiling. They made his eyes hurt. They were way too intense. When his vision adjusted, Brandon scooted up and looked around.

Once again, he found himself surrounded by white. He sat on a thin mattress on the floor, covered by a white sheet. Even the scrub-like clothes on his body were white. Brandon was really starting to hate the color white.

He climbed to his feet. The room began to spin, and he leaned his hand against the wall for support. He stood still for a moment while he tried to get his bearings, then crossed over to the door. He wasn't surprised to find it locked.

Brandon wasn't sure *anything* would surprise him, not after his *promotion*. While things were a bit fuzzy, he still remembered every little pinprick of a needle, every insidious procedure done to his body. And he was pissed.

Brandon looked through the small, wire-mesh window. He could see a hallway, and again, white walls, but from his vantage point, he couldn't see anything else. There were no people, no doors, no windows, nothing.

"Hey! Let me out of here!" he shouted as he balled up his fists and banged on the door. "Let me out! This is kidnapping, damn it."

Brandon banged some more. He slammed his fists on the door until they started to hurt. Slumping with his back against the wall, Brandon slid down to the floor. He dropped his head into his hands. How in the hell had he gotten into this predicament?

A sudden, sharp pain shot through Brandon's head. He cried out and gripped his skull tighter between his hands, but the pressure didn't help. The pain just got worse, bigger, until he felt it throughout his entire body.

Brandon felt like he was being skinned alive. His skin burned, ached. The muscles in his arms and legs contracted. It felt like the biggest muscle seizure he ever experienced. The pain started at the top of his body and shot right down to the arches of his feet.

As suddenly as the pain came, it left. Brandon sat there, the breath entering and leaving his lungs as he sucked in great gulps of air. The aches in his body slowly faded away, the spots before his eyes clearing.

Brandon leaned his head back against the wall. His heart hammered. The pace slowed, but Brandon had a hard time catching his breath. His chest ached and felt restricted, like someone sat on him.

After a few minutes, he rolled to his hands and knees, ready to push himself to his feet. A beep sounded, and the door opened, admitting the man in the white coat from before and another armed guard.

"Ah, Mr. Thomas," the doctor said, "you're awake. Very good."

Brandon scooted back on his hands and feet as the doctor advanced on him. He hit another wall, jerking when the armed guard reached for him. The guard pulled Brandon to his feet and escorted him by his arms over to the bed, then forced him to sit down. Before he could get up or protest, the doctor stood over him, taking his pulse.

Dr. Carson shined a bright light in Brandon's eyes. He blinked several times, large spots clouding his vision again. Brandon slapped out with his hands, trying to push the doctor away. The guard instantly stepped to Brandon's side and grabbed him by the wrists, twisting his arms behind his back.

"Now, now, Mr. Thomas," Dr. Carson admonished, "we both know what happened the last time you were combative. Do I need to give you another sedative?"

Brandon shook his head. "Why are you doing this to me? This is kidnapping."

"Tsk, tsk, tsk, Mr. Thomas," the doctor replied as he shook his head. "You apparently didn't read the fine print in your employment contract."

"I didn't sign up to be a pin cushion," Brandon snapped. "I'm an orderly."

"You are an employee of Gervais Institute of Study, Mr. Thomas."

And that means what, exactly?

"As such, you are subject to the rules and regulations of this institute, which state that you must voluntarily submit to examination and transfer of duties at any time."

"I didn't volunteer for shit."

"Ah, but you did, my dear boy, when you signed your employment contract." Dr. Carson patted Brandon's arm, then reached into his pocket to pull out a syringe filled with red liquid. He pulled the cap off and squirted a bit into the air.

The doctor nodded to the two guards. *Oh, hell no.* They weren't sticking him with any more needles. Brandon started to struggle, but they flipped him over and held him down to the small bed, one of the men jerking Brandon's pants down and off his legs. They just as quickly removed his shirt.

A moment later, Brandon cried out and went stiff as the needle sank into the soft flesh of one butt cheek. Intense pain followed the injection of the liquid in the syringe. Brandon didn't know what it was, but he could feel it burning through his body like acid. It made him feel achy, hot . . . needy.

He inhaled sharply as what felt like hot lava started flowing through his body. The guards holding Brandon down let him go and stepped toward the door. He quickly rolled over and glared at the doctor.

"Wh-what did you do to me?" he panted.

"I've given you a wonderful serum I constructed, something to insure your compliance." The sinister grin on the doctor's face gave the impression the man was proud of what he created.

"Compliance with what?"

"We're conducting a little experiment here, my dear Brandon," the doctor said, "and the genetic anomaly in your DNA has just made you a major subject in that experiment."

"What experiment?" Brandon cried out. "What anomaly?" He really didn't like the smirk on the doctor's face. The obscene look sent a cold shiver up his back and made the hairs on his arm stand up.

"Ah, but see, you did volunteer. When you were examined for your position as orderly, you voluntarily gave us a sample of your blood, and we discovered you have a genetic anomaly that makes you unique in the human population."

Human population? No doubt about it, the doctor was not playing with a full deck. He was nuts. Brandon scooted back onto the bed and held up his hands. "Hey look, I don't know what you're into here, but I want none of it. You gotta let me go."

"I'm afraid that is impossible, Brandon, we have established that your DNA is compatible with one of our test subjects. Since only one percent of the world's human population has compatible DNA, we need you for this experiment. Now, I don't want you to worry; we've learned a lot from past experiments and have taken actions to insure a successful union."

"A successful union?" Brandon's eyes widened. "What did you do to me?"

The doctor held up the syringe in his hand, the *empty* syringe. "I simply combined our test subject's blood with another one of my serums and gave it to you. That should enable us to get the results we need."

Brandon started to jump to his feet and protest, but his legs crumbled beneath him, and he crashed to the floor. He barely caught himself before his head hit the cold tile. He felt weak, unable to push himself up. The room around him began to spin.

The doctor's chuckle was cold and sterile. "Your body is no longer your own, Brandon. It now belongs to the institute until we no longer have use of you."

"No, I—" He looked up when the doctor squatted down in front of him. "Wha — ?"

"I do not want to make this hard on you, dear boy, but I must insist on your compliance. The sedative I gave you will keep you from fighting what is to come. I've given you just enough of my special serum to make you *need* what is to come, as well." The doctor stood and walked to the door. He glanced over his shoulder and smirked. "Cheer up, Brandon; from what I've read in your personnel file, you should enjoy it."

Brandon tried to climb to his knees, to get up and chase after the doctor, but his legs felt like wet noodles. He could barely climb up onto the bed and roll over onto his back. He grabbed his head to try to stop the room from spinning, but nothing seemed to help. He felt so dizzy.

He also felt hot again. Lava had replaced the blood in his veins. The blazing heat started at the tip of his toes and the top of his head, moving until it came together in one huge explosion of fervor in his groin.

Every nerve in his body felt like it was on fire. He could feel the cool air from the vent on the wall brushing across his skin, each systematic, mechanical motion like a tongue licking at his naked skin.

Brandon clenched his fists and screamed out his frustration. The sound bounced off the walls and echoed in the nearly empty room. There didn't seem to be much more he could do. Lifting his arms took effort.

When the door opened and a dark figure crept into the room, it was all Brandon could do to turn his head and look. He had just enough time to take in a rather tall figure dressed in a dark suit before the lights flashed off and the room plunged into total darkness.

The man reached for him, and Brandon tried to push himself away, panic overcoming his shock at the man's sudden appearance. His body just wouldn't cooperate. Brandon whimpered in fear as the man picked him up. His head rolled against a strong chest, and the pure, masculine scent of the man filled his senses.

"Shh, *mo shíorghrá*, I have you," the man whispered.

"Wha — ? Who — ?"

"No talking," the man said quietly "I'm here to get you out of this mess. If they hear us, they might catch us. I need you to be very quiet."

Brandon cried out at the touch of the man's hands on his hot skin. He clutched at the man's shoulders as he arched into his body, needing more contact. "Touch me!"

"Oh, *mo shíorghrá*, I can't," the man whispered. "You've been given something that makes you feel this way. I can't—"

"Please!" Brandon cried desperately. "I hurt."

The deep blue eyes staring down at Brandon seemed to waver for a moment. Brandon almost cried out again, but then the man nodded and laid Brandon back on the bed, following down to lie next to him.

Strong, callused hands skimmed over Brandon's body. His skin tingled as the heat in his body flamed. When firm fingers finally wrapped around his throbbing cock, Brandon had to swallow back a scream of relief.

But that feeling was fast fleeting as the man began to stroke his heated shaft. The faster the hand wrapped around him moved, the more aroused Brandon became. He could feel the very air in the room move across his skin.

Brandon humped his hips, trying to speed up the stimulation to his body. He could feel himself teeter on the edge of a momentous orgasm. He just couldn't seem to fall over the edge. The faster the man stroked him, the more Brandon needed, until he tears fell from the corners of his eyes.

"I can't— I can't—" Brandon just knew he was going to die if something didn't happen soon. His balls had drawn up so tight to his body they felt like rocks. His cock was becoming too sensitive. Brandon clutched at the man's shirt and pleaded. "Please, help me. I can't—"

The man's azure blue eyes closed for a moment, and he seemed to draw in a deep breath. When they opened, Brandon detected a hint of sadness in their depths. He didn't understand the emotion he saw there.

"Okay, *mo shíorghrá*." There was a resigned tone to the man's voice that hadn't been there before.

Brandon briefly wondered about it, until the man rolled to the side of the bed and started unzipping his slacks, and Brandon's thoughts scattered.

The hard cock revealed to Brandon's hungry gaze made him lick his lips as lust spiraled through his body. Brandon's breath caught in his throat. The man was beautiful, stunning, an Adonis.

"Sexy man," Brandon whispered as he reached for the hottest looking man he'd ever seen in his life. He whined in protest when the man rolled him to his stomach, but then strong hands gripped his hips and pulled him to the edge of the bed.

Brandon eagerly spread his legs, impatient for what he hoped was coming. He'd seen the cock this man sported. He wanted it; he needed to feel it pounding into his ass. Brandon was pretty sure his life depended on it, and not because of some fucked-up serum some lunatic doctor gave him.

As a lubed finger breached his ass, Brandon had just a moment to wonder where the lube had come from before the pleasure of being impaled overwhelmed him. Brandon started moaning, pushing back with his hips.

"More, please, more!"

Another finger was added, then another. The more the man touched him, the more pleasure Brandon felt. Even the slight burn of having three fingers in his ass only added to the exquisite sensations bombarding Brandon.

When the fingers pulled out of his ass, Brandon started to sit up and protest only to have a hand push against the middle of his back, forcing him down onto the mattress. A moment later, Brandon felt his legs pushed farther apart.

"Are you sure, *mo shíorghrá?*" the man whispered into the dark.

"Yes!"

"I'm sorry, Brandon."

Brandon opened his mouth to ask what those words meant, but the quick thrust of a cock in his ass stole his breath. Brandon felt each movement, no matter how small. They fit together so perfectly, he was certain he could feel the man behind him breathing.

Brandon pushed a pillow under his stomach and buried his face in his arms. He pushed back with his hips. There was a very distant part of him that was shocked that he was allowing — no, *begging* — some stranger to fuck him. But the intense pleasure that shot through his body when the man started to move his shock quickly overshadowed his surprise. Brandon wasn't sure he'd ever felt anything so good in his life.

His wasn't a virgin by any stretch of the imagination, but he wasn't a slut either. He'd had his share of relationships and one night stands. Nothing in his entire sexual experience prepared him for the feelings this man produced in him.

Brandon's entire body quaked as the man pounded into him. Each thrust pushed him forward on the bed, driving his cock into the pillow bunched beneath him. Each withdrawal of the man's cock pulled him back, dragging Brandon's cock back against the soft material. The movement provided just enough sensation to drive Brandon out of his mind.

The heat in Brandon's body built until an inferno blazed inside him. He knew he was going to combust at any moment. Just when Brandon thought he couldn't take any more, the man grabbed a handful of his hair and pulled his head back.

Brandon turned his head a bit, just enough to make out a strong, chiseled jaw from the corner of his eye. Deep, azure blue eyes blazed at him, almost glowing in the darkness of the room.

"Give me your life, your love, your forever, as I give you mine," the man said sternly. "Repeat the words to me, *mo shíorghrá*."

Brandon blinked, confused, until the man gave him a little shake. "Brandon, you must repeat the words."

"Give me your life, your love, your forever, as I give you mine," Brandon said. He started to turn his head more, wanting to question the man, but a sudden, aching pain in the back of his neck made him cry out. The pain intensified until it almost engulfed Brandon. Then, as fast as the pain came, it was gone, replaced by pleasure so intense, he came close to blacking out.

He gritted his teeth to keep from screaming as his entire body exploded. Wave after wave of ecstasy flowed through him and he erupted all over the pillow beneath him.

Brandon panted heavily, barely able to catch his breath as he floated in a euphoric cloud. He heard a loud growl in his ear right before wet fingers pressed against his lips. Brandon opened his mouth, surprised when those fingers pushed inside.

"Suck them."

He distantly noted a coppery taste as he licked the fingers, but he was more interested in the groans coming from the man attached to those fingers. In the sudden, frantic way he thrust into Brandon's ass, then stiffened, in the heat filling his ass, and in the hand gripping his hip so hard Brandon knew it would leave marks.

"*Mo shíorghrá,*" the man whispered reverently as he collapsed over top of Brandon. The weight of the man's heavy body pinned Brandon to the bed, but the heart beating against his back was reassuring in some odd fashion.

Brandon felt cherished, protected, and safer than he could ever remember feeling. That in itself was very confusing to Brandon considering a maniac held him hostage.

Hell, he didn't even know *this* man's name, and the guy's dick was still deep in his ass. Brandon knew he should feel ashamed, mortified even. He just couldn't seem to summon the proper emotions. Doing so took too much effort.

Besides, he felt like he was right where he was supposed to be. He certainly didn't want to be anywhere else, which was why Brandon let out a moan of protest when the man pulled out of him and rolled to the edge of the bed.

Brandon turned over and watched him dress, disappointed to see the greatest cock in the world get covered up. What he could do with that cock and a few hours on a flat surface

Brandon was shocked when the man wrapped him in a sheet and picked him up as if he didn't weigh anything at all. He didn't even grunt or breathe heavy, just carried Brandon toward the door.

"I need you to be very quiet now, Brandon."

Brandon started to open his mouth to ask how the man knew his name, then thought better of it when he heard someone walking in the corridor outside his room. If this guy wanted to help him escape, Brandon was all for it.

The man lowered him to his feet and pressed him against the wall, pinning Brandon with his weight. He inhaled, feeling as if he were being held there by a body made of steel. Thick, muscular thighs pushed against his.

The man opened the door just a small slit and peeked out. A moment later, he closed it and turned his gaze to Brandon. "Can you walk on your own?"

Brandon shook his head. He could feel his legs trying to give out as it was. Only the press of the body holding him against the wall held him up and kept him from collapsing to the floor.

Brandon tilted his head back and let it rest against the wall behind him. He still felt a little dizzy, woozy. His eyes wouldn't quite focus, but he was pretty sure the man in front of him was gorgeous. The azure blue eyes staring down at him certainly had his attention.

Brandon giggled. "You're hot."

"And you're stoned." The man chuckled and gently stroked the side of Brandon's face.

Brandon inhaled softly, drawing in the man's rugged scent. "Who are you?"

"That takes a longer explanation than we have time for, *mo shíorghrá*, especially if we want to get out of here before the guards figure out you're not in your cage."

Brandon liked the deep, whiskey sound to the man's voice. It sent shivers down his arms and made him feel all warm and fuzzy inside. Of course, it could have been the serum the doctor gave him too. Brandon wasn't sure. He just wanted to hear the man talk some more.

"What's your name?" he asked. He laid his head on a solid shoulder and twirled his fingers in the soft, white blond curls at the man's nape. "You have the softest hair."

"My name is Kevin." The man chuckled. "And thank you. Now, you need to be very quiet, Brandon, please. We have a limited amount of time to get you out of here. Understand?"

Brandon nodded absently. He was more fascinated with the way the man's soft, blond hair curled around his fingers than he was with what Kevin said to him. He looked up when Kevin shook him suddenly.

"Brandon, are you listening to me?"

"I heard you."

"What did I say?"

"I . . . uh" Brandon racked his brain and tried to remember what the man said. "Your name is Kevin, and you called me *mo shíorghrá*." Brandon frowned. "Why did you call me your eternal love?"

Kevin's dark blond eyebrows shot up as he stared down at Brandon.

"*Mo shíorghrá*," Brandon said, "it means my eternal love, right?"

"Yes, it does, but how did you know that? Do you speak Gaelic?"

"No, at least, I don't think I do." Brandon frowned again. "Do I?"

Kevin laughed lightly and gave Brandon a little squeeze. "I have no idea, *mo shíorghrá*, but it appears that you might know some." Kevin leaned forward and checked out the crack in the doorway again, then leaned down and picked Brandon back up in his arms. "Hold on tight, Brandon, and stay quiet. It's time for us to go."

Brandon had no trouble keeping quiet. He found it harder to keep his lips from pressing against the skin exposed by the open collar of Kevin's white dress shirt. The man simply smelled fantastic.

Brandon stuck his tongue out and licked at a small patch of bare skin, wanting to find out if Kevin tasted as good as he smelled. Brandon groaned as an explosion of different tastes blasted across his tongue.

"Christ, Brandon," Kevin whispered harshly. Brandon felt a small shudder run through Kevin's body. "Knock that shit off. I can't concentrate when you do that."

"But you taste really good." Brandon protested. "I want to lick you up."

"Oh, you are so going to hate yourself when this shit wears off."

Brandon knew Kevin was probably right. He never talked the way he was talking now. He never behaved in this manner. He just couldn't seem to stop himself. And there was a small part of him that didn't want to. He felt free.

He also felt the need to crawl into the shirt of the man holding him. He wanted naked skin pressed against him, not a dress shirt. With that thought in mind, and only that thought, Brandon started tugging on the buttons of Kevin's shirt. He grew frustrated when the buttons slipped through his fingers.

Giving up on the shirt after a few moments, Brandon started to explore the expanse of skin above Kevin's collar. He giggled again when he brushed the curve of Kevin's ear and the man growled.

"Damn it, Brandon," Kevin snapped.

Brandon leaned up and blew in Kevin's ear. He felt the man's shudder move through his entire body and knew he was right. Kevin's ears were a hot spot for him. And Brandon was in heaven.

He flicked his tongue out, stroking it across the curve of Kevin's ear. He barely reached the oddly pointed tip when he was suddenly dropped to his feet and pressed against the wall, Kevin's body leaving no space between them.

"I'm trying to get us out of here, Brandon," Kevin snapped quietly, "but if you don't knock that shit off, I'm going to fuck you into the wall, and to hell with who catches us."

Brandon blinked up at Kevin, then slowly grinned at the idea of this big, sexy man fucking him. Hell, he was already naked. He ached, and he knew if he could just get Kevin to touch him again, the ache would go away. "Okay."

Kavin's blue eyes widened for a moment, then the man's shoulders shook as he laughed and leaned his forehead down against Brandon's. "Damn, you're going to be the death of me, aren't you?"

Brandon pushed his hands inside Kavin's suit jacket to rub against his chest through his shirt. "I ache."

"Man, the doc really jacked you up, didn't he?"

"I need you to touch me." Brandon allowed his gaze to roam over as much of Kavin's large frame as he could see. God, the man was just breathtaking. Brandon looked at the buttons on Kavin's shirt again. If he could just get them open . . .

"Brandon, that's enough!"

Chapter Three

Kavin's heart ached at the hurt he could see in Brandon's eyes before he looked away. He almost protested when Brandon's hands fell from the collar of his shirt but pressed his lips together, stopping himself just in time.

As much as Kavin wanted to feel Brandon's hands on him, he knew their first priority needed to be escaping the institute. It was only by blind luck that he'd discovered that Brandon was being held here.

Kavin had been masquerading as the assistant to one of the investors of the institute, trying to discover information on who was kidnapping his kind and why. He'd spotted the gorgeous orderly on his first day and meant to approach the man to declare his interest. There just never seem to be the right moment.

Finding out that Brandon had been recruited by Dr. Carson had sent a shiver of fear down Kavin's back. He still could barely stand to think about what might have happened to Brandon if Kavin hadn't interfered.

Dr. Carson was a sick man, but he was a sick man with a lot of money and power behind his name. Kavin learned enough to know that a high-level, secret government

agency — one of those ones that didn't exist on paper — and several private investors, funded this little experiment.

Kavin still hadn't been able to figure out what exactly the doctor hoped to learn by experimenting on his kind, and he wasn't sure he really wanted to know. He just knew he couldn't allow Brandon to be part of the experiment.

Brandon belonged to Kavin.

"I'm sorry, Brandon, I didn't mean to yell at you, but we really need to get out of here. The doctor who gave you that shot and the guards could come back at any moment. We need to get out of here before they do." Kavin gently stroked the side of Brandon's face. "I arranged for a distraction, but it won't last forever. Sooner or later, they will come to check on you again. If I don't get you out of here before that happens, we'll be screwed."

Brandon's lips twisted for a moment, then he heaved a huge sigh. "I just need —"

"Not to worry, *mo shíorghrá*," Kavin murmured, "I know what you need, and I promise to take care of you the moment we get away, okay?"

The groan that fell from Brandon's lips, combined with the lust he could see in the man's grayish blue eyes, almost made Kavin change his mind. But the loud clatter of something falling outside Brandon's door cemented his decision to start moving. Getting Brandon to safety was more important than anything — even Kavin's desire to fuck the man into the wall.

Kavin wrapped the sheet tighter around Brandon's body, then cracked the door open again. The darkened corridor looked empty. Kavin hoped it stayed that way. He lifted Brandon into his arms and nudged the door open with his foot.

He glanced left then right, then carried Brandon out of the room he'd been housed in and quickly made his way down the hall. Alarms blared, but they sounded distant, almost as if the disturbance was on a different floor.

Kavin hoped so. That's how he'd planned the distraction to go. Putting a security card and the keys to leg shackles in the lunch being served to his cousin, Monte, and his lieutenant had been a stroke of genius.

Kavin had been horrified to see Dr. Carson examining Monte when he arrived. He'd needed to exert every ounce of self control he possessed to keep from leaving the observation room he sat in and running down to rescue his cousin.

Only by a slim thread had Kavin been able to rein in his rage at the treatment Monte underwent. He knew Monte had bonded with the human lieutenant by the way the human protected his cousin. That gave Kavin some measure of relief, but not much.

Kavin had planned to send word to his family regarding where Monte was being held so they could rescue him, but then he'd discovered that Brandon had been taken as well. After that, Kavin's attention and concern focused on the man in his arms.

Kavin came to a cross in the corridor. He paused, leaning back against one wall, and peaked around the corner. He could just make out a guard, holding Monte by the arm, at the other end of the corridor.

On a rush of fear, Kavin took a step toward his cousin, but before he rounded the corner, Monte leaned up and quickly kissed the guard. Narrowing his eyes, Kavin looked closer. Relief flooded him when he recognized the guard as Monte's lieutenant.

Knowing his cousin was in good hands, Kavin decided to go in the other direction. He wanted to join up with Monte, but no one was supposed to know he was here. He might need to come back to finish his investigation. If they saw him with Monte, the jig would be up.

Kavin glanced over his shoulder one more time, worried about his cousin. He watched as Monte and his lieutenant opened a couple more doors, releasing other test subjects. Well, at least Monte wouldn't be alone.

Kavin snuck down the corridor toward the double doors that led to the observation room. Kavin felt pretty sure that would be the last place people would look for him or Brandon.

The observation room had two entrances. One led to the corridor and into the exam room. The other entrance led to a secure elevator, which was Kavin's destination, and hopefully, their escape route.

"Just a little farther, *mo shíorghrá*," Gavin whispered to Brandon when the man squirmed in his arms. He tilted his head down and rubbed his cheek against the top of Brandon's head.

Kavin still didn't have a clue how he would smuggle Brandon out of the institute. Getting him to the observation room would be the easy part. Getting Brandon past all of the guards walking around would be near impossible.

Kavin paused outside the observation room and listened at the door. Hearing nothing inside, he pushed the door open and carried Brandon in. Kavin set Brandon down in the closest chair, then hurried to bar the door against anyone who might try to get inside.

He didn't think they had long before they were discovered, but a few minutes could make all of the difference. If Kavin could find something for Brandon to wear besides a sheet, all the better.

Kavin started searching the cupboards and desk drawers, but came up empty. He pushed his hand through his hair as he scanned the room. He was running out of time and options.

"Wh-where'd you go, sexy?"

Kavin chuckled, Brandon's words hitting him as funny, especially under the circumstances. He walked over and knelt down next to the man. He reached up to brush the brown hair back from Brandon's face. "I'm right here, *mo shíorghrá*."

Brandon's head rolled in Kavin's direction. Kavin couldn't help but return the smile Brandon gave him. "There you are, sexy."

Kavin was shocked at the strength Brandon used to grab his hand and press it against the hard bulge between his legs. He couldn't believe how much heat shot through his body at the feel of the hard shaft under his palm.

"I ache, sexy."

"*Leannán*, Brandon, call me *leannán*." Just whispering the words, even if they were to a man who most likely wouldn't remember them in the light of day, made Kavin's heart squeeze.

"*Leannán*?" Brandon frowned for a moment, then grinned, his gray blue eyes sparkling. "You want me to call you lover?"

"You do know Gaelic, don't you?" Kevin chuckled.

"Do I?" Brandon frowned again, looking confused. "How do I know Gaelic?"

"You must know it," Kevin said. "You've translated every word I've said."

"Say something else."

"*Tá tú go h-álainn, a chuisle, a chroí, mo shíorghrá.*"

Brandon grinned. "You're beautiful, my pulse, my heart, my eternal love."

"Very good, *mo shíorghrá.*" Kevin's pleasure at Brandon's translation of his words knew no bounds. He'd not gotten it exactly right, but he'd come close enough for Kevin. "We'll have to practice some more when we get home and find out just how good you are."

"Home?"

"Yes, Brandon, I'm taking you home."

"Your home?"

Kevin sighed. "Yes, *mo shíorghrá*, I'm taking you to my home."

Brandon seemed satisfied with that answer as he tucked his head into the crook of Kevin's neck. Kevin just wondered if the man would feel the same when Dr. Carson's serum wore off, and Brandon regained his senses.

Kevin regretted that their first time together had to come when Brandon wasn't completely aware of what he was doing. If it wasn't for the fact that he knew exactly what would happen to Brandon if he didn't receive physical release, Kevin would have said no.

But he did, he'd seen it with his own eyes inside the institute, and he couldn't let Brandon go through that pain, not if he could prevent it. Indulging in the opportunity to make love to his *leannán* might have played a small part in his decision, as well. Kevin just hoped Brandon forgave him when the serum cleared out of his system and he fully regained his senses.

Now he had to get Brandon safely out of the institute, hope that Cousin Monte and his *leannán* got out as well, then get Brandon home. Not an easy task, not by a long shot.

Kavin hadn't been home in ages, not since he argued with his mayer, King Tuathal. He didn't relish going back, but he couldn't think of any place Brandon would be safer than in his family home, surrounded by loyal guards, maybe in a locked room, dressed in Kevlar.

Hearing a commotion in the other room, Kavin jumped to his feet and raced to the observation window. He leaned against the wall and looked around the edge into the room. Flashlights lit the room, but didn't provide enough light for Kavin to tell who held them. He had a pretty good idea, though.

And that meant time had just run out for him and Brandon. If the guards were checking the exam room, the observation room would probably be next on their search agenda.

Kavin hurried back over to Brandon and pulled him to his feet. The man wobbled a bit, but he didn't go crashing to the floor. That was a plus. Kavin tried to wrap the sheet around Brandon as best he could. It would just have to do until Kavin could find him some clothes.

Kavin wrapped an arm around Brandon's waist. He grabbed Brandon's jaw with the other and tilted his head back so he could look into his eyes. They were still a bit dazed but clearing.

"We have to go, *mo shíorghrá*," Kavin said. "The men who were holding you are looking for us. I need you to do exactly what I say, when I say it. Can you do that for me?"

"Yes, *leannán*."

"*Mo chroí, mo shíorghrá*," Kavin whispered as he rubbed his thumb along Brandon's cheek. "I pray you do not hate me when this is over."

"I like you, *leannán*." Brandon's smile was sweet and Kevin wished he could believe in it and in the man's softly spoken words, but only time would tell the truth. Only time would tell if Kevin lost his *leannán* before he really had him.

With one arm wrapped around Brandon's waist, Kevin led him toward the concealed elevator he knew was situated at the back of the room behind the bookcase. He'd been in the room enough times to know it was there.

Hitting the hidden buttons to open the bookcase, Kevin waited for the elevator to open. He knew once he activated the elevator, they had just minutes to get through the secret tunnel to the outside.

They'd need to travel by foot a couple miles into the woods, where Kevin had a vehicle hidden from sight. He'd parked the Jeep there several weeks ago when he started coming to the facility on a regular basis and became clued in to what was happening there. He'd had an idea he might need an escape route.

"It's not too far, Brandon," Kevin said as the elevator doors opened and they walked in. Kevin hit the main floor button and watched the doors close, hoping for the best.

He watched the floor numbers pass, flattening Brandon between himself and the wall when they reached the main floor. Kevin didn't know if anyone would be waiting for them, but he wasn't going to take any chances with Brandon's life.

"Quiet now, Brandon." Kevin pulled his gun from his shoulder holster and readied himself for whatever—or whoever—might be on the other side of the elevator doors.

His palms were sweaty, and drops of perspiration slid down his temple. Tension made the muscles at the back of his neck bunch together. Kevin gripped his gun tighter and pushed Brandon back just a little more when the elevator came to a stop and the doors started to slide open.

Kevin fired his weapon the moment he saw the black material of the guards' uniforms. The loud retort echoed through the small space as did the cry of the soldier who fell. One more shot took out the other guard.

Kavin could feel Brandon trembling behind him, but he didn't make a sound. For that, Kavin was grateful. He needed to keep all his attention on the wounded men lying on the ground in the small, cement corridor.

He pulled Brandon from the elevator, then shot out the control panel so the elevator couldn't be recalled downstairs. After quickly assessing which soldier was the least hurt, Kavin gestured toward the man.

"Strip off your clothes."

The man protested until Kavin pointed a gun at his head, then started taking his clothes off the best he could with a bullet in his arm. Kavin had aimed to incapacitate, not kill.

The moment the clothes started coming off, Kavin took them and handed them to Brandon. "Get dressed, *mo shíorghrá*," he said at Brandon's confused look. "Going outside dressed in a sheet will not help you blend in."

"I'm supposed to blend in?" Brandon asked as he held up a bloody shirt. "In this?"

Kavin chuckled. Brandon's attitude told him the serum was wearing off. He didn't know if that was a good thing. Presently, Kavin needed Brandon's full cooperation, not his defiance. Of course, having the man not be stoned out of his mind could only be helpful.

"It will have to do until I can get you something else, *mo shíorghrá*."

Brandon rolled his eyes but put the shirt on, then slipped into the pants. He scowled a little as he pulled on the green military jacket. "You don't think a bloody hole will be detrimental to my *blending in*?"

Kavin pressed his lips together and walked over to relieve the other soldier of his jacket. At least this one didn't have a hole in it. Kavin had shot this soldier in the leg. Between the two guards, Brandon had one clean outfit.

Kavin tore off several strips of the sheet and bound each guard's wounds and then tied their hands. He didn't know how long it would be before the injured men were discovered, and he didn't want them to bleed to death. He had nothing against

them, personally. They were just soldiers doing a job, guarding a post as they were ordered to do. Kavin couldn't fault them for that.

"Come on, *mo shíorghrá*, it's time to go," Kavin said as he held his hand out to Brandon. Considering the man was coming out from under the effects of the serum, he was surprised when Brandon walked right over and took his hand.

"Where exactly are we going?" Brandon asked as they started down the long, cement tunnel toward the entrance concealed from the outside world.

"I told you; I'm taking you home."

Chapter Four

Brandon turned his head to look over at the man driving. After travelling several miles with Kavin, Brandon still wasn't quite sure who the man was or where they were going. Whatever the doctor gave him wore off ages ago, and Brandon had been asking himself these questions ever since.

Brandon didn't need to wonder why he'd had sex with the man. All he had to do was look at him. Kavin was every man Brandon ever fantasized about, all rolled into one sexy, muscle-bound package.

He wasn't stupid. He knew he'd been doped up on some strange aphrodisiac serum created by a mad scientist. While the drug might have loosened his tongue a bit, because Brandon didn't think he'd ever begged for sex before, it hadn't made him want Kavin. The scent and feel and look of the man had done that.

Brandon never met anyone who smelled like Kavin. Some people had foot fetishes, some liked tight asses. Brandon liked the way a man smelled. The right scent on a man and he had Brandon's undivided attention. The wrong scent and Brandon was gone.

Kavin smelled better than anyone Brandon had ever met. He couldn't quite place all the fragrances, but the ones he'd identified – woods, earth, musk, sex – Kavin had them all. Only by digging his fingers into the cushion of his seat did Brandon keep from

leaning over and inhaling Kevin's arousing aroma. He cleared his throat and decided a bit of conversation might serve as a distraction.

"You never did say where you live."

"It would be too hard to explain to you, *mo shíorghrá*," Kevin replied without taking his eyes off the road. "It is better if I just show you."

Brandon frowned. "You've called me that before . . . *mo shíorghrá*. What does it mean?"

Kevin's eyebrows were up near his hairline as he turned to look at Brandon. "You do not remember?"

"Some things are a little . . . fuzzy." Brandon shrugged and turned to look back out the passenger window, waving his hand absently. "Maybe it was whatever the mad doctor gave me."

"What do you remember?"

Brandon hid his smile behind his hand even as he felt his face heat up. He remembered a whole lot more than he was sure Kevin thought he did. He would have to be dead to forget what it felt like to have Kevin's cock pounding into his ass.

Once he felt like his face wasn't blaring red, Brandon turned to look at Kevin. "I remember enough."

Kevin looked shocked, then a little flushed himself. "Yeah, about that"

Brandon was filled with curiosity as he watched Kevin lick his lips, his hands tightening around the steering wheel until his knuckles were almost white.

"I'm really sorry. I had no right to do what I did, and . . . well, if you weren't under the influence of that drug I wouldn't have" Kevin kept his gaze pinned on the road.

"Are you saying you would never have fucked me if I hadn't been drugged out of my mind?"

"No, of course not, but you were drugged and" Kevin pounded the steering wheel with the palm of his hand. "I wouldn't have I mean, you . . . ah, hell."

Brandon didn't know whether to feel insulted or not. He couldn't quite figure out what Kavin was saying. Either the man wanted him – but was upset that he'd done something about it while Brandon was doped up – or Kavin *didn't* want him and never would have had sex with him if he wasn't stoned.

Brandon didn't know what to think.

"Could you be a bit more specific?" he finally asked. "Either you wanted to fuck me or you didn't. Which is it?"

Kavin looked shocked for a moment, his mouth hanging open. Then he snapped it closed and started chuckling. "Yeah, I wanted to fuck you. Hell, I still want to fuck you."

Brandon grinned, elation filling him at Kavin's words. He would have started whooping and hollering if such a response weren't so undignified. "Good to know. Maybe we can revisit that subject here soon?"

"Brandon, you do realize that you were being held in an institute by a mad doctor bent on using you in some crazy experiment, right? He shot you up with some sort of serum he concocted to make you compliant and very aroused."

"Yeah, I kind of got that part." *And then some.* Brandon remembered the heat that rolled through his body, the need he felt, the ache. He'd been desperate to have Kavin fuck him, more desperate than he ever remembered feeling in his life. "So, what of it?"

"You might not have wanted me to . . . well, if the doc hadn't drugged, you then you wouldn't have" Kavin seemed at a loss for words. Brandon found the reaction strange in a man who seemed so self-assured.

"Oh, I would have." Brandon snorted. "I might have been doped up, but I wasn't totally out of my mind. You're the sexiest damn thing I've ever seen. I'd have to be dead six months not to want you to fuck me."

Brandon didn't know where his bravado came from, but he was glad it reared its head when Kavin's face flushed and he smiled.

"Yeah?" Kavin asked.

"Definitely." Brandon reached over and patted Kevin's thigh, then leaned in to blow gently across the man's ear. Brandon felt the small shudder that passed through Kevin's body and the answering heat start in his own. "I'd also like to find out if I dreamed this hot spot of yours or not."

"Damn, *mo shíorghrá*," Kevin growled softly. He gripped the steering wheel again.

"Guess not." Brandon chuckled.

"*Mo shíorghrá*," Kevin groaned, leaning into Brandon even as he spoke, "you just don't know . . . you shouldn't do that while I'm driving."

"Then pull over somewhere." Brandon was all for the idea. He wouldn't mind finding out what sex was like with Kevin when he wasn't stoned. He remembered bits and pieces, mostly the intensity of what he felt. He wanted to remember more. He wanted to feel that intensity when he was fully awake and could really enjoy it.

Brandon moved his hand as he blew on Kevin's ear again, rubbing it against the tense muscles of Kevin's thigh then farther up to the hard bulge beneath the man's zipper.

Brandon felt certain his actions could be considered slutty. He just didn't care, especially when he inhaled a strong dose of Kevin's masculine scent. It was heady, rich, and musky. It made Brandon's body flame.

He suddenly needed to find out if all of Kevin smelled the same. He pulled back just enough to look into his face, then palmed the man's erection through his pants.

"You need to pull over now!"

Brandon didn't wait for Kevin to follow his order before he unzipped and unbuttoned the man's pants. He spread them apart at the zipper, then unbuckled his seatbelt, leaned over the bench seat, and inhaled deeply.

He groaned as the strong, musky scent flooded his senses. "Fuck, you smell good," he whispered as he buried his face in Kevin's groin. He no doubt sounded like a rooting pig around as he continued to inhale, but he couldn't help himself. He couldn't get enough of Kevin's unique fragrance.

Brandon stuck out his tongue and licked at the hard flesh pushing against his cheek, groaning as he did. Kevin tasted even better than he smelled, and Brandon would have bet that was impossible. He had to have more.

Brandon wrapped his lips around the top of Kevin's cock, then slowly lowered his head, feeling the hard shaft sink into his mouth. Kevin shuddered beneath him, the man's thighs going rock hard as he stiffened.

"Fuck, Brandon, I can't—"

Brandon sucked Kevin's cock the rest of the way into his mouth, then slowly raised his head, pressing his lips together over the long shaft as he did. He let the head of Kevin's cock gradually pop out of his mouth and peered up at the man.

"Then I guess you'd better find a place to pull over, huh?"

Brandon laughed as he suddenly felt the car swerve and come to a quick stop. Kevin turned the ignition off, then scooted his seat back as far as it would go. Brandon let out a little yelp, surprised at the speed with which Kevin reached for him. Before he knew it, Brandon found himself straddling the guy, pressed chest to chest, their faces a mere breathe apart.

"Hi." Brandon chuckled.

"You know if anyone sees us we could be arrested, right?"

Brandon wiggled his hips, pushing his hard cock against Kevin's until the man's head dropped back against the seat rest, and he let out a long moan.

"Do you care?" Brandon asked.

"Not right now." Kevin tugged at the material of Brandon's pants. "How fast can you get out of these and grab the lube out of the glove box?"

Brandon was all for finding out. He rolled to the passenger side of the bench seat and untied his shoes. He pushed them off his feet, and his pants followed a moment later. He quickly reached into the glove compartment and retrieved the lube, thankful Kevin was prepared.

Not two seconds later, he climbed back onto Kevin's lap, straddling him. "Was that fast enough for you?" he asked as he held out the bottle of lube.

Kavin growled. Brandon gasped as Kavin grabbed handfuls of his hair and yanked his head forward. Hot lips pressed against his. Brandon groaned, his eyes falling closed as he opened his mouth and allowed Kavin in, their tongues warring together.

Shivers of delight raced over Brandon's skin at Kavin's dominating gesture. Brandon wasn't anyone's submissive, but he did like a man who knew how to take charge in bed. Maybe that was why Kavin fucking him earlier hadn't upset him. He liked a man who knew what he wanted and wasn't afraid to take it.

Brandon was in heaven when the hands in his hair moved down to grab his ass. Kavin massaged his cheeks, then pulled them apart. A moment later, Brandon heard the snap of a lid opening. He shivered as cold lube drizzled along his ass crack.

"Fuck, that's *freezing*!" Brandon yelped as he tore his mouth away from Kavin's.

"I'll warm it up for you."

Brandon's breath caught in his throat as Kavin's fingers moved over him, grazing his puckered hole with every pass. His eyes tried to close but the mesmerizing flames burning in Kavin's gaze kept them open and looking directly at the man touching him.

When Kavin pushed in, his fingers breaching Brandon's tight entrance, Brandon's mouth fell open. He started panting softly, small whimpers of pleasure falling from his lips.

"Kav-Kavin."

"*Leannán*, remember?"

Brandon nodded, unable to speak as another finger pressed into him. He vaguely remembered something like that, something about calling Kavin *leannán*. He just didn't quite remember why.

At the moment, with three fingers thrusting into his ass, Brandon wasn't sure he cared. He just wanted to enjoy the sensations burning through his body. His head started to fall back on his shoulder when he suddenly got a glimpse of Kavin's ears.

Brandon leaned forward, sucked the bottom of one lobe into his mouth, and bit down gently. Gavin hissed and inhaled sharply. He stopped plunging his fingers into Brandon's ass, and his entire body stiffened. A long groan fell from his lips.

Feeling enthused by Gavin's response, Brandon bit down again, then ran his tongue over the soft curve to the unusually pointed tip. At the same time, he moved his hips, impaling himself on the fingers in his ass. Gavin seemed to get the idea and started moving his fingers again.

"Damn, *mo shíorghrá*, you have no idea how good that feels."

"Mmm," Brandon whispered. He released Gavin's ear to lean back and look him in the face. "About as good as your fingers feel in my ass, I imagine."

Kavin looked slightly shocked for a moment, his mouth hanging open, then he chuckled and dropped his head forward to lean against Brandon's shoulder. "I'm never going to understand you, am I?"

"Now, where would the fun be in that?"

A moment later, Kavin removed his fingers and replace them with the head of his cock. Brandon groaned and let his head fall back on his shoulders. The slow push into his body was excruciating, agonizing, and the most wonderful feeling on earth.

"Oh . . . *oh* . . . *oh* . . . *oh*, fuck me!" Brandon cried out.

"Yes!" Kavin shouted as he slammed home.

Brandon didn't care that his back rubbed against the steering wheel every time he moved. He didn't care that his knees were cramping. He only cared about the cock pounding up into him over and over again.

He hazily admired Kavin's strength and stamina as the man repeatedly lifted him up, then pulled him back down, shoving his thick cock deep into Brandon's ass.

Brandon clutched at Kavin's shoulders and leaned forward to suck on his ear again. Every time he bit down, not matter how gentle or how hard, Kavin's thrusts seemed to go a little wild.

"*Mo shíorghrá*," Kavin whispered against the side of Brandon's neck, "give me your life, your love, your forever, as I give you mine."

With the last of Kevin's words echoing in his ears, Brandon felt the man bite into the side of his neck. He shuddered, the sensation igniting a fire that started in his neck and moved out from there until it encompassed his entire body.

Brandon cried out as he filled the space between him and Kevin with his release. He felt an answering pulse in his ass, then hot seed filled him, a loud roar in his ears drowning out every other sound around him.

Brandon dropped his head onto Kevin's shoulder as he panted, waiting to regain the air his lungs so desperately needed and seemed to be without. Kevin breathed heavily next to him.

Finally breathing normally again, Brandon lifted his head to look at Kevin. The man's face was flushed again, but Brandon didn't think he was embarrassed or tongue tied this time. He seemed almost peaceful.

He leaned into the hand Kevin cupped around the side of his face. A peculiar sparkle in Kevin's deep azure eyes told Brandon the other man looked upon this as a tender moment, one of great importance. Brandon wished he knew why.

"Mo chroí, mo shíorghrá, mo álainn leannán."

"Why do you keep calling me that?"

Kevin smiled. "Because you are my *leannán*."

"We just met a few hours ago, remember?"

"And yet you let me fuck you twice in that time."

Brandon felt his face flame. "Yeah, well" He spoke solemnly as he glanced away from the eyes looking so intensely at him. "I'm not sure I can exactly explain that."

Certainly not with your cock still in my ass, Brandon thought to himself.

"But I so enjoy having my cock in your ass." Kevin's answer sounded clearly in Brandon's mind. As clearly as if he'd spoken aloud.

But he hadn't spoken out loud, and Brandon inhaled sharply as he looked at Kevin. The man had one dark blond eyebrow arched as if he dared Brandon to acknowledge he'd heard Kevin's words in his head.

"Um, you" Brandon cocked his head to one side as he regarded the amused look on Kevin's face. "Did you just . . . ?"

"Did I just what?"

"Never mind." Brandon shook his head. *Now I'm hearing voices.* He must still be feeling the effects of the drugs the doctor gave him.

"*It's not the drugs, mo shíorghrá.*"

"Holy shit. You can actually speak to me in my head, can't you?" Brandon whispered in awe.

"*Yes, mo shíorghrá, I can,*" Kevin replied mentally.

"But how? How is this possible?"

"You are my *leannán*," he said out loud. "We are bonded."

Brandon pushed back a little from Kevin and frowned. "Bonded how?"

Kevin chuckled, but the sound reflected more nervousness than amusement.

"Why don't we get cleaned up and dressed. I will explain things to you while we're on the road. We're not safe out in the open like this."

Even as Kevin said the words, headlights came into view, headed in their direction. Brandon cried out as Kevin snatched him off his lap and sat him in the passenger seat.

"Get dressed!" Kevin snapped as he quickly pulled his pants up and buttoned them. He had the car started and on the road before Brandon even got his pants up over his legs. With all the sharp turns and swerves the vehicle made, it took Brandon several minutes to get dressed.

Brandon finally strapped his seatbelt in place, then turned to look at Kevin.

"Okay, talk. I want to know what you meant by 'bonded'. I want to know why people are chasing us. And I want to know what the hell this experiment is that you keep talking about. What in the hell is going on, Kevin?"

Chapter Five

Kavin grimaced as he glanced over at Brandon. How was he supposed to explain what was going on to a man who had no concept of Kavin's world or the things the man was now involved in?

"It's a really long story, Brandon," Kavin said, "I'm not sure we have time right now, not with someone following us. It might be better to – "

"Talk!"

Kavin could see Brandon glaring at him out of the corner of his eye. The man had his arms crossed over his chest and his lips pressed tightly together. Kavin was intrigued by the show of bravado, but he'd never admit that to Brandon. The man would probably punch him.

"Kavin, I'm waiting."

Kavin rolled his eyes. "Okay, look, I don't know exactly what the experiment was, but I have a good idea. The good doctor – and I use that term loosely – is trying to combine certain DNA to create some sort of super soldier."

"And I come into this how?"

"Your genetic code is compatible with that of another test subject." It worried Kavin that he didn't know who the other test subject was. The only identifying information he'd uncovered connected with Brandon was Test Subject 639. There'd been no name or physical description.

The car swerved suddenly as they were hit from behind. Kavin struggled with the wheel until the vehicle straightened, then slammed on the gas, shooting ahead of the other car.

"Who are these assholes?" Brandon snapped as he clutched at the dashboard.

"They would be the facility's retrieval team."

"Retrieval team?"

Kavin nodded. "You're not the first test subject to get away. As far as I can tell, several others have escaped and they have been unable to get them back. Dr. Carson is

quickly losing his little experiments. As this is a highly funded government project, they don't like that much."

"Super soldiers? Seriously?"

"Yep."

"And where do you come into this?" Brandon asked. "How did you even know I was there?"

Kavin had known this question was coming. He just wasn't sure how much he could tell Brandon without sounding like a complete nutcase. "I was undercover, investigating what was going on at the institute. I saw you when you were working as an orderly. I meant to talk to you before the doctor took you, but there just wasn't time."

"Talk to me?" Brandon asked. Kavin grinned at the curiosity he heard in Brandon's voice. "Talk to me about what?"

Kavin glanced over at Brandon and winked before quickly returning his gaze to the road in front of him. "About how damn cute you are."

"Yeah?"

Before Kavin could confirm Brandon's question, they were hit from behind again. Kavin was barely able to keep the vehicle on the road this time. He stepped on the gas again, then glared into rearview mirror.

"Fuck," Brandon exclaimed, "these guys aren't giving up."

Considering the situation, Kavin knew he needed to tell Brandon exactly why the people chasing them were not giving up. Now just didn't seem like the appropriate time.

"Hold on, *mo shíorghrá*, this is going to get bumpy," Kavin said as he swung onto a side road.

The car behind them shot forward, missing the turn off. Kavin hoped it would give him and Brandon enough time to get away or at least put some space between them and their pursuers.

"Brandon, I want you to listen to me very carefully. There's a good chance both of us won't be able to get away from these guys. If they force us off the road, I want you to run as fast as you can and get away. They cannot capture you again."

"What? No, you have to — "

"I mean it, Brandon, please." Kavin blew out a deep breath. "I don't know what I'd do if they got their hands on you again."

"Can't we just go together?"

Kavin tried to sound reassuring as he smiled over at Brandon. "That's the plan, *mo shíorghrá*, but if for some reason we get separated or I get hurt, you need to find your way to safety."

"There's no way in hell I'm going to leave you if you get hurt!" Brandon snapped.

Kavin turned to see a heated anger in Brandon's eyes. He swallowed hard, unused to people fighting for him.

"Just what kind of man do you think I am?" Brandon asked.

Kavin waited until they reached a straight section in the road before turning to smile at Brandon, reaching out to give his leg a squeeze. "I think you're wonderful, and I promise to do everything in my power to keep us together, okay?"

Brandon's mouth dropped open a little, and his skin took on a light flush of color. "Yeah, okay, that sounds better."

"Just promise me that you'll follow my directions, no matter how strange they sound," Kavin said. "It could mean our lives."

And Kavin knew his directions were going to sound outlandish. He'd been in the human world long enough to know he was going to sound like a complete fruitcake.

"There's a lake just up the road a bit. We — "

"You've been there before?"

Kavin nodded. "I told you, I was undercover. I scouted this entire area a few weeks ago for possible escape routes. Where do you think this car came from?"

Brandon shrugged. "I kinda thought you boosted it."

"No, I parked it the woods in case I needed a quick getaway."

"I guess you did, huh?" Brandon's face brightened as he laughed. "I'll bet you didn't think you'd have a passenger though."

"Not true, Brandon, I knew from the moment Dr. Carson took you that I would be getting us both out of there. Who do you think turned the lights off? I needed a distraction so we could escape. I wasn't about to let the doctor experiment on you."

Kavin wanted to growl just thinking about Brandon being under that sick freak's control. No one would touch his *leannán*, no one. Knowing that there was some *test subject* out there that was supposed to be Brandon's perfect match made Kavin see red. *He* was Brandon's perfect match.

He was Brandon's *leannán*, damn it!

A sudden thought popped into Kavin's head, and he almost lost control of the car. As if to confirm his suspicion, headlights appeared in the rearview mirror again. He glanced over at Brandon, looking the man up and down.

Brandon arched an eyebrow at him. "What?"

"When the doctor examined you, what happened?"

"What do you mean, 'what happened'?"

"Did he give you anything? A shot, maybe? Did he cut you anywhere?"

"I don't know about being cut," Brandon replied. "When I refused to cooperate, he had a guard hold me down while he gave me some sort of shot. Afterward, I couldn't move, and everything was kind of hazy. I'm not real sure what happened after that. I know I woke up with a blaring headache."

Kavin's breath caught in his throat. "Run your hands over your head; see if there are any tender spots."

Brandon looked extremely confused but did as Kavin asked. He pushed his hands through his hair, slowly working from front to back. A soft gasp made Kavin's heart sink.

"Brandon?" he asked softly. "Did you find something?"

"Behind my left ear, feels like a small cut. It's scabbed over a little, but it's real tender." Brandon's eyes were wide and filled with fright as he looked over at Kevin.
"What is it? What did they do to me?"

Kevin took a deep breath before he replied. "I think they put a tracking device in your head, Brandon. It's the only way to explain how easily they found us."

"Fuck!"

An array of thoughts flashed through Kevin's mind. They felt chaotic, out of control. He didn't know which one to settle on. Brandon was his *leannán*, his sole responsibility in the world. Nothing else mattered.

Getting home to Seelie Court was still their best option. But not while Brandon had a tracking device implanted in his head. They could end up leading the doctor right to others of Kevin's kind.

"Okay, listen, we're almost to the lake. There's a cave on the far side. If we can reach that, we should be safe."

"A cave, seriously?" Brandon snorted. "How in the hell will we be safe in a cave?"

"Trust me."

"You're nuts!"

"Does that mean you don't trust me?"

Brandon seemed to fidget with the edge of his shirt, glancing out the window for a moment. "No, I guess not. I just —"

"You're scared, and you have no idea what in the hell is going on?"

"Yeah." Brandon uttered a small, nervous chuckle. "That about sums it up."

"Brandon, I swear I'll explain everything the moment I can."

Brandon was so quiet, Kevin couldn't help but glance over at him. The man's forehead was wrinkled as if he were in deep thought, trying to figure something out. Kevin wondered what, but when Brandon looked over at him, he knew he was about to find out.

"You've called me everything from Brandon to *leannán* to *mo shíorghrá*. Why? What do all those mean?"

Kavin's eyes widened. He suddenly knew what a deer caught in the headlights of a car felt like. "You remember me telling you about that bonding thing?"

"Yeah."

"In my wo – family, we call our bondmate, our . . . uh . . . lover, *leannán*. That's what the word means. You are that." Kavin gripped the steering wheel tighter as he readied himself for the rest of his words. "You are also my *mo shíorghrá*. It is an endearment, of sorts, like sweetheart. And Brandon is your name."

"It's just an endearment?" Brandon sounded disappointed.

"It means more than that to me." When Brandon didn't say anything, Kavin turned to look at him. Again, Brandon looked like he was thinking something through. Kavin decided to answer Brandon's question before he could even ask it. "Being my *mo shíorghrá* makes you the most important person in the world to me."

"How can you know that? You don't know anything about me. I could be some horrible person." Brandon waved his hand back and forth between them. "I could be part of this craziness."

"You are perfect for me." Even as Kavin said the words, he realized he spoke the truth. Not that he'd had any doubt, but he suddenly realized that Dr. Carson knew it to. They had been set up from the very beginning.

The knowledge increased Kavin's worry tenfold, and he nearly hyperventilated. He had no doubt Dr. Carson knew exactly who he was and what his connection to Brandon was. It increased the level of danger they were in by a lot.

Kavin didn't understand why they had been allowed to escape, and he now knew that they had been *allowed*. It had seemed a little too easy. Everything Kavin planned fell into place perfectly. He'd been so focused on and worried about getting Brandon away, he hadn't questioned how smoothly everything had gone at the time.

Now, Kavin began to wonder if the escape he planned for Monte and his *leannán* had been part of the entire set up as well. Kavin had been the one to assist in their escape, but what if the doctor and his cronies had anticipated as much? What if they were hunting Monte and his *leannán*, too?

"Brandon, we're going to have to get that tracking device out of your head. You know that, right?"

"I kind of figured as much."

"I won't lie to you, *mo shíorghrá*, it will hurt." Gavin frowned at the small grimace on Brandon's face. "But I promise to be as gentle as possible. It's just . . . if they follow us, then a lot of people are going to be in danger. I can't have that."

"I understand." Brandon spoke softly, but his pale skin and the way he twisted his hands together in his lap spoke volumes to Gavin.

"I'm sorry, *mo shíorghrá*; I wish things could be different. I would never hurt you willingly, not for the world."

Kavin knew Brandon was trying to reassure him when the man sent a small, tight smile in his direction. It didn't help much. Kavin knew retrieving the tracking device would hurt a lot. It made his skin crawl to think he would cause pain to his *leannán*.

"Have you ever heard of the legend of the *Aes Sídh*?" Gavin asked, hoping to get Brandon's mind off their current situation.

"The what?"

"The *Aes Sídh*."

"No, I don't think so."

"Legend says the *Aes Sídh* are a powerful, supernatural race, like fairies or elves. They don't live on another planet but rather in a parallel universe, of sorts. There is a thin veil between the human world and the *Seelie/Unseelie* world, and no one can pass through that veil unless accompanied by an *Aes Sídh*."

"And you're telling me this, why?"

"It's not a legend, Brandon. I am *Aes Sídh*."

The look Brandon gave Gavin said the man thought he might not be playing with a full deck. Kavin chuckled, wondering if Monte and Eljin had gone through this much trouble when explaining things to their *leannans*.

"I'm not high or stoned, Brandon. I'm also not crazy, even if I sound like it."

Kavin pushed a lock of hair back behind his ears. "How many people do you know with pointed ears?"

Brandon's soft inhale was the man's only response. Somehow, Kavin expected more. Maybe Brandon didn't understand everything Kavin was trying to explain to him. It was a pretty outlandish tale for humans to accept.

"I was born in the *Seelie* Court, the second son of King Tuathal and Gavin. I have four brothers, Conall, Torin, Uriah, and Eljin." Kavin took a deep breath. His next bit of news would be even more shocking for Brandon. "I have two fathers and no mother."

"You don't have a mother?"

"No. In my world, those of royal blood are all male. It means that the men in my family also give birth to the next generation."

Brandon's facial expression didn't change for several moments as the man looked across the car at him. He didn't laugh hysterically or even berate Kavin for trying to tell such an outlandish tale. He just stared. Kavin grew nervous under the intensity of his gaze.

"I swear I am not joking, Brandon."

"You seriously expect me to believe that the men in your family give birth?"

"It's true."

"How?" Brandon crossed his arms over his chest.

"Our gestational period lasts five months, a bit quicker than human females. We still have all the symptoms of pregnancy though—morning sickness, cravings, swollen feet, mood swings. When it's time for our children to be born, a small slit appears here." Kavin gestured to his lower stomach area with his hand. "After we give birth, the slit disappears until the next child comes along."

"You know this sounds like some plot out of a sci-fi movie, right?"

"Yeah." Kavin chuckled. "It probably does. But, I swear I'm telling the truth."

"Prove it."

Kavin blinked. "Uh, how?"

"Show me the slit."

"I can't. I don't have one right now. It only appears when we're ready to give birth, and I'm not even pregnant."

"Geez, you talk about it like you actually expect to get pregnant."

"I do, well, at some point, anyway." If Brandon agreed to have a child with him.

"Do you know how crazy this sounds?"

"Believe me, I do. However, I think you'll believe me when we reach my home."

"Your home," Brandon whispered. "You said you were taking me home. By that, you mean to the *Seelie* Court?"

"Yes. The safest place for us right now is back home in the *Seelie* Court. I know the humans have somehow learned how to cross between our worlds, so it's not totally safe, but it's better than being here right now."

"What do you mean by crossing between our worlds?"

"Remember that lake I mentioned?"

Brandon nodded.

"Water acts as the doorway between our worlds. Lakes, ponds, waterfalls, anything like that can be used to pass into my world. When we reach that cave, we'll go through the waterfall into my world, and then you'll see that I'm telling the truth."

"If we reach the waterfall, you mean."

Kavin glanced in the rearview mirror. He could still see headlights reflected there. He nodded, grimacing as he returned his attention to the front window. "Yeah, *if* we reach it."

Their chances of that happening looked pretty slim, especially considering Brandon probably had a tracking device in his head. The institute's retrieval team could track them almost anywhere.

Kavin needed to figure out a way to remove the device before they reached the waterfall and went through the veil between the two worlds. Kavin didn't know if the device could be tracked through the veil.

Bringing the retrieval team into his world would be more dangerous than staying in this one. Before, they could have easily gotten away, because only the *Aes Sídh*e could travel through the gate. Now the humans were passing through on their own, which meant they could follow him and Brandon through the gate.

And he couldn't chance it.

Chapter Six

Brandon wanted to scream in frustration. He'd found the sexiest man on the face of the planet, one who seemed truly interested in him, and the man was nuttier than a fruitcake. Was there no justice in the world?

If it were only the pointed ear thing, Brandon could probably look the other way. But the whole '*I can get pregnant*' thing was way beyond what Brandon could overlook, no matter how sexy Gavin was.

"Look, if I have this tracker thing in my head, wouldn't it be easier just to let me out here?"

"No!"

Brandon's eyes widened at the vehemence in Gavin's voice. "It was just an idea," he mumbled, trying to figure out another way to get free. He suddenly felt like he had left one cage only to find himself in another. There was no telling how dangerous Gavin could be.

"Being separated is not an option," Gavin said after a minute. "I'll figure out how to get us out of this mess, Brandon, I swear."

"Well, you'd better think quickly because your lake is right up ahead."

"The cave is just on the other side of the lake." Gavin started driving in that direction, but Brandon couldn't see anything beyond some trees and the lake. "When we get there, you must remember you need me to get through the veil. Only the *Aes Sídh*e can pass through the veil without assistance. You'll need me. The other humans who've passed through have other assistance."

"Other Assistance? What sort of *other* assistance?"

"From what I understand, there are some ancient relics that were stolen from my world. If someone has one of those relics in their possession, then they can pass through the gate unaided. Other than that, you have to be *Aes Sídh*."

"What sort of relics and how did they get stolen? Who has them?"

"No one knows for sure. Until recently, we didn't even know these relics existed. My brother, Conall, is looking into it right now, trying to see what he can find out. Those relics, in the hands of the wrong people, could be the end of my world."

Okay, if Gavin was living in a fantasy world, it was a very imaginative, *detailed* fantasy world. It had everything from pointed-eared elves, to men who got pregnant, to relics that were the keys to the kingdom. At least Gavin made himself of royal blood. *If you're going to dream, you might as well dream big.*

"I think I understand," Brandon said softly.

He sent Gavin a reassuring smile. Brandon didn't have a clue, and he knew it. He just didn't want Gavin to know how confused he felt, how much he doubted everything the man had told him. He didn't know what Gavin's reaction would be.

Brandon didn't think Gavin would hurt him, not really. The man seemed to be too concerned with his safety. Brandon just didn't know what an imagined *elf man* was capable of.

"So, how much farther to this waterfall of yours?"

"It's just through those trees up ahead," Gavin replied. "The actual waterfall is inside the cave. It can't be seen from here."

"If any body of water will do, why don't we just get in the lake?"

"It's too dangerous. Anyone could see us go into that lake. Can you imagine the chaos that would happen if someone thought we went into the lake, and then we didn't come out? It would be nuts."

"And this isn't?"

Kavin chuckled, much to Brandon's surprise. "Oh no, this is *very* nuts. Unfortunately, right now, it's also our reality. Mad scientists, secret government facilities, and a combat-ready retrieval team is a fucking nightmare."

Brandon couldn't agree more, although he would have added elf men, male pregnancy, and waterfall gates to an alternate world to Kavin's list. He felt like he was living inside some strange fantasy book.

At least he had chosen a sexy man as his sidekick. Brandon turned to look out the window, pressing his hand against his mouth when hysterical laughter threatened to break free. Maybe the drug the doc gave him was still in his system, and he was really back at the institute.

"Ouch!" Brandon shouted when he felt a sharp pinch on his arm. He turned to glare at Kavin. "What did you do that for?"

"To prove to you that you're here and not back at the institute."

Brandon blinked. It was about all he could do. Shock rolled through him. Kavin could read his mind. Had he "heard" everything Brandon had thought in the last few minutes? The idea scared the crap out of him.

"You" Brandon licked his lips.

"No, I can't read your mind."

"Then how did you know I was going to ask that?"

"Because you're broadcasting your thoughts to me."

"I am not!"

"You are, Brandon, and you're very loud. You're new to our bond, and you're human, so it's understandable. The *Aes Sídh*e are taught at a very early age to sensor their thoughts. You'll learn in time too."

"How?"

"I'll teach you."

"So everything I'm thinking is being broadcast out to you?"

"Yeah, pretty much."

Brandon groaned and slumped down in his seat as he face flamed. He was so embarrassed he wished a hole would open and swallow him up. Kavin had heard each and every one of his chaotic thoughts.

Peachy.

Brandon folded his hands together in his lap and tried not to look as flipped out as he felt. "So"

Kavin chuckled. "I know you don't believe me, Brandon, but I am not crazy, I promise. Just try to trust me a little longer. Everything will make sense to you once we get to my world."

"Yeah, do you have any idea how weird that statement is?"

"I do." Kavin nodded. "Can you imagine how weird it was for me the first time I came to this world? Everything was different here, and I needed to hide who and what I was."

"For someone who grew up as royalty, that must have been a big blow to your ego." Brandon could just imagine the shock. He bit back a laugh.

Kavin grinned. "You would think so, but my fathers never let our royal status go to our heads. We've all served in our military at one time or another, then taken on supportive roles running our world."

"You served in the military?"

"I did, made it all the way up to the rank of Second Lieutenant too."

"What happened? Why did you stop?"

"We received word that someone was kidnapping people and experimenting on them. My father sent me here undercover to find out what was happening."

"Doctor Carson?"

Kavin nodded.

Brandon shivered. "Yeah, that man is certifiable."

"Unfortunately, he has the financial backing of the government and a lot of very rich people. If he can create this super soldier of his, then there will be an all-out war against my kind."

"How can you stop it?"

Brandon didn't much understand about this whole super-soldier thing, but he knew what being held against his will and experimented on felt like. He didn't wish that on anyone.

Brandon frowned and looked out the window again. He knew Kevin was reading his thoughts, but he couldn't seem to stop them from tumbling around in his head.

He liked Kevin, a lot. The man was, simply put, sex on a stick. He just wasn't sure if that was enough for him to dismiss the fact that Kevin was nuts.

Brandon turned to look at Kevin when the man started laughing. "What?"

"Sex on a stick?" Kevin asked. "Really?"

Brandon rolled his eyes. "You have got to stay out of my head."

"Why? I like it in there. I learn the most interesting things."

"Kevin, you —"

"There it is," Kevin said as he pointed out the front window.

Brandon looked, but all he could see were green pine trees and brush. "Where?"

"Right through those trees."

"Of course."

Kevin brought the car a stop. He was out of the car and around to Brandon's side before Brandon could even get his seatbelt undone. Brandon stared at the hand Kevin held out to him after opening the door.

This was the make or break step. If he took Kevin's hand and followed him, he'd be admitting that all Kevin's crazy talk was real. If he didn't and stayed behind, he might never see Kevin again.

The decision was a no brainer for Brandon, even if it made him just as nuts as Kevin. Brandon took Kevin's hand and allowed the man to pull him from the car. He expected Kevin to start running for the trees. He didn't expect Kevin to suddenly hug him close and stroke the side of his face.

"Thank you, *mo shíorghrá*."

"Don't thank me yet." Brandon chuckled. "I still think you're nuttier than a bed bug."

"I think I can live with that for now."

"For now?" Brandon's eyebrows shot up in surprise. "You think it's going to change anytime soon?"

"Oh, yeah." Kevin grinned and started pulling Brandon toward the trees. "Just you wait until we reach my home, Brandon. You'll see."

"I'll take your word for it."

The trek through the trees was a short one. Before Brandon knew it, they came to a rock cliff face that stood at least two stories tall. The trees grew right up to the base of the rock face, hiding it from view until they were right in front of it.

"Come on, it's just around here."

Brandon followed, glancing over his shoulder several times when he thought he heard noises behind him. He didn't see anyone. After awhile, he began to suspect that the sounds he thought he heard were just another part of his living fantasy and pushed them from his mind.

When they rounded a corner of the rock cliff, Kevin suddenly turned and disappeared from sight. Brandon blinked in surprise and stumbled to a stop. Kevin had simply vanished.

"Kevin?"

A hand seemed to come from out of nowhere and grabbed his arm. Brandon yelped as he was yanked into a small hidden crevice in the side of the rock wall. Inside, Brandon couldn't see anything in the pitch black darkness, not even the man pulling on his arm.

His heart pounded, fear filling him. "*Kevin, that's you, right?*" Brandon asked in his head. He figured if he had this mental telepathy thing going on with Kevin, he might as well use it.

"*It's me, mo shíorghrá.*"

"Oh, thank god." Brandon breathed a sigh of relief. "You disappeared, and then someone grabbed me. I didn't know who it was."

"Sorry, mo shíorghrá, I didn't mean to frighten you."

"Where are we?"

"Remember that cave I told you about?"

Brandon nodded, then realized Gavin probably couldn't see his answer. "Yeah, I remember."

"This is it. Just hold on to me for a moment longer. The place lightens up in just a moment."

Brandon saw what Gavin was talking about when a green light started filling the passage. The farther they walked, the more illuminated the place became, until the small passage suddenly opened up to a large cavern totally lit with green, iridescent light.

"Gavin," Brandon whispered, awestruck as he looked around the cavern. "I've never seen anything like this. It's amazing."

Large, glowing, crystal-like stalagmites hung from the ceiling, lighting the room. A small pool of clear water sat against the far wall, a waterfall pouring down into it. Except for the water noise, which echoed off the walls, the room was eerily silent.

"How did you find this place?"

"This is the gate I came through when I came from my world."

"Here?"

Gavin nodded. "It was the closest body of water to the institute, besides the lake. I needed a place close by that I could come and go from where no one would see me. It's safer that way."

"Yeah, I can see that."

"Okay, come over here." Gavin gestured to a small pile of blankets and medical supplies. "I need to look at that spot on your head."

Brandon grimaced but followed Gavin. He was starting to get the sinking feeling that everything Gavin had told him was true. *But if it's true, Brandon thought, focusing on the upside, then Gavin is really mine.*

"Sit down, Brandon," Gavin said. "I'll try to make this as painless as possible."

"Do you really think there's a tracking device in my head?" Brandon sat cross-legged on the dirt floor. He clenched his fists for a moment as a spike of fear flickered through him, then pressed his hands flat against his thighs.

"Unfortunately, I do. It's the only way to explain how easily they've followed us. We should have lost then several times, but they kept showing up."

Brandon closed his eyes as Gavin's began probing his head behind his left ear, feeling over the small scab there. Gavin pressed particularly hard on one spot, and Brandon winced.

"Okay, Brandon, brace yourself. This is going to hurt."

Brandon nodded and pressed his lips together. His heart rate sped up as the seconds ticked by. A sharp pain stabbed through his head, and he cried out, then clenched his jaw together to keep his cries locked safely behind his lips.

"Just a moment more, *mo shíorghrá*, I swear."

Brandon didn't nod. He couldn't. Gavin pressed something sharp against his head. He was afraid if he moved, he'd end up with his throat cut. That would suck on way too many levels.

Something pulled against his skin, then Gavin let out a little whoop and stepped back. Brandon turned his head to see Gavin holding something small and black in his bloody fingers. It was about half the size of a dime.

"Is that it?"

Gavin nodded. "Yep, this, my love, is a government tracking device." Gavin dropped it to the ground and started to lift his foot to stomp on it. Brandon reached out and snatched up the small, black circle before Gavin could destroy it.

"Brandon, what — ?"

"You can't crush it, Kavin. If they are tracking us, they will track it to the last place they had a reading. We need to take it somewhere else and smash it. That way, they'll go there."

"Smart and handsome." Kavin grinned. "I'm a lucky man."

Brandon's face grew hot. He held the small device out to Kavin. "Here, you can have it. I think I've messed with it enough."

Kavin took the little chip and slipped it into his pocket. He grabbed a cloth and poured some antiseptic on it. "Let's get you cleaned up. I don't want you getting an infection."

"You don't think there's any more, do you?" Brandon asked as he bent his head to the side and let Kavin clean him up.

"No, I'm betting they didn't think to put in a second tracking device. They probably thought we wouldn't find this one. We can always check later when we get home."

"Won't that be dangerous? Checking later, I mean." Brandon glanced over at the waterfall, worry filling him. "Can these things track us to your world?"

"Honestly, I don't know."

"That's helpful," Brandon snapped.

"Brandon, my world is not technologically advanced like this one. We don't have televisions and cell phones. We don't use tracking devices. This is all new to us. I spent six months just learning about this world before I could go undercover."

"Sorry, I guess this is all just a little strange to me."

Kavin suddenly cupped the side of Brandon's face and turned him so they faced each other, their noses mere inches apart. Kavin's look was tender, a small smile on his lips.

"I know, *mo shíorghrá*. And I'm sorry about that. I wish we could have met under better circumstances. But I'm not sorry we met. I'll *never* be sorry we met." Kavin waved his free hand around the cavern. "All this, it was worth every second to have you here with me."

Brandon swallowed hard as something fluttered deep inside of him. No one had ever spoken to him the way Kavin was talking to him now. No one ever wanted him long term. He wasn't quite sure how to deal with it or even what to say.

"Thank you?"

Kavin chuckled. A little sparkle filled his eyes. He brushed a strand of hair back from the side of Brandon's face. Brandon hungrily drank in the look of reverence on Kavin's face. The adoration he saw there made his chest tighten and his throat dry up like the Sahara Desert.

"You do not understand what the bond between us means, *mo shíorghrá*. It is not a concept in your world. But I have every confidence that I can show you how special our bond is, how very special *you* are."

Brandon tried to swallow, but the size of the lump in his throat prevented it. His eyes started to tear up. Brandon put the reaction down to not being able to swallow. There was no way Kavin's words were affecting him to the point of crying . . . no way.

"Kavin, I—" Brandon shook his head. He just couldn't think of how to put his thoughts into words. Kavin was a dream. He was unreal. The connection Brandon felt with him was unlike anything he had ever had with anyone. *But is this real, or just a fantasy?*

Kavin pressed his fingers over Brandon's lips. "It's okay, Brandon. I know this is all very sudden for you, and you do not feel for me what I feel for you. I accept that. I can only hope, in time, you will return my feelings."

"F-feelings?" *What feelings?* When did feelings come into this conversation? Brandon's heart started to thunder as panic set in.

Kavin smiled. "I love you, *mo shíorghrá*."

Brandon gasped. "But . . . you don't even know me."

"Oh, but I do." Kavin lightly tapped his fingers against the side of Brandon's head. "I've seen what you have in here. I've seen what kind of man you are."

Kavin pressed his hand over Brandon's heart. "And I've seen what is in here."

Kavin grinned. "I'm in there whether you know it or not."

"Kavin, I – "

A sudden scraping noise came from down the passageway. Kavin stepped forward and placed himself between Brandon and the passage. He tilted his head slightly and stilled.

Brandon held his breath.

When Kavin turned backed to him, his face was pale. He reached out, grabbed Brandon's hand, and yanked him toward the waterfall. Brandon stumbled after Kavin, confused and scared.

"Kavin, what's – ?"

Kavin suddenly stopped and turned to Brandon, grabbing both of his arms. "Listen to me, Brandon; no matter what happens, you have got to make sure you don't get captured again. If they take you, they will return you to Dr. Carson."

"What are you talking about?"

"Just listen." Kavin gave Brandon a good shake. "If we get separated, I want you to seek out my brother, Conall. He can keep you safe."

"No!" Brandon started shaking his head, unable to wrap his mind around Kavin's words. He didn't even want to *think* about how much they made his chest ache. "We're not going to be separated."

"It's just a precaution, Brandon. Remember, his name is Conall."

"Right, Conall."

"If anything happens to me, find Conall. Tell him that you are my *leannán*. He'll understand and keep you safe until I can find you."

Brandon frowned. "You're talking like you're going to leave me."

Kavin glanced beyond Brandon's shoulder for a moment. When he turned back, his brow was puckered in a deep frown, and the sight made Brandon's heart freeze. He knew what Kavin was going to say before he even opened his mouth.

"Kavin, no!"

"I'm sorry, *mo shíorghrá*."

Brandon's eyes widened, and a loud, frightened cry was ripped from his lips as Gavin suddenly swung him around and gave him a large push. Brandon's arms flailed wildly as he fell into the water.

Panic immediately filled Brandon as the clear water closed over his head, and he began to sink. He could still feel Gavin's hand on his ankle and thought the man was going to pull him up.

Suddenly, Gavin's hand was ripped away. The clear water turned dark, suffocating Brandon. He gulped, swallowing a large mouthful. *I'm dying, drowning, and Gavin is gone.* Just as Brandon started to close his eyes and give up, he heard Gavin's voice in his head.

"Don't give up, Brandon!" Gavin shouted. "*Fight, mo shíorghrá, fight for us.*"

Brandon inhaled deeply and realized air filled his lungs, not water. He was also on solid ground, not sinking into endless water. Brandon rolled to his side and coughed harshly, spitting up the water he had swallowed. He lay there for several moments, coughing sporadically as he tried to bring enough air into his lungs.

He felt more than heard someone squat down beside him. Hope blossomed in Brandon's heart. He struggled to open his eyes. "Kavin?"

"Afraid not, *chara*," the man replied in a deep, whiskey voice.

Brandon looked up, and then up some more. His eyes rounded in surprise as he gazed into the dark blue eyes so much like Kavin's they stole his breath away. The long, black hair was in total contrast to Kavin's white blond hair but the man looked just as handsome.

"You're not Kavin."

"No, I'm not." The grimace that came to the man's face told Brandon he was in deep trouble. "You've landed in the *Unseelie* Court, beautiful, a long way from the home of your Kavin."

Chapter Seven

Brandon grimaced, then pressed his hand against his stomach as it threatened to rebel. It was the third day in a row that the mere sight of food made him sick. It had to be the food. Elf food wasn't something his stomach was used to.

Maybe it was his near drowning, although, that had been nearly a month ago, and he seemed to be fine for the first couple of weeks. Maybe his body was reacting to his being locked up and held prisoner.

Brandon glanced around the room that doubled as his cell. As prisons went, this one was actually pretty nice. His bed consisted of a mattress, which sat directly on the floor, covered in pillows and plenty of warm blankets. Rugs covered most of the hard, stone floor.

Colorful tapestries covered the grey stone walls. A single desk and chair sat in the far corner. Brandon even had a balcony, although it provided no escape. He was so many floors up, he could swear the clouds floated right into his room.

"How is your food today, *chara*?"

Brandon purposely turned away from the man standing in the doorway to his cell. Torin hadn't been cruel since Brandon came through the veil, but he was still the warden of Brandon's cell.

"Still not talking to me?"

Brandon rolled his eyes but stayed turned away from the man. He refused to converse with someone who insisted on keeping him a prisoner, no matter how nice the man seemed.

The mattress dipped as Torin sat down on the bed next to him. Brandon quickly scooted away.

"You know you are going to have to talk to me at some point, *chara*."

"My name is Brandon, not *chara*," Brandon snapped. "Use it."

"Oh, he speaks." Torin sounded amused.

Brandon wasn't. "Why are you holding me here? I want to go home."

Torin's hand grazed his cheek, and Brandon jerked away from the gentle touch.

Torin sighed, his hand dropping away. "I am sorry, *chara*, but returning you to your world is not possible. The *Unseelie* can't use the veil. It is against our laws."

"Then let me go; turn me over to the *Seelie* Court."

"That, also, is against our laws. We are forbidden from having any contact with the *Seelie* Court. Guards regularly patrol there, anyway. It wouldn't be safe for either of us."

Brandon groaned in dismay and turned his face into the pillows beneath his head. Tears sprang to his eyes, and he closed them tightly. He missed Kavin. He couldn't stop thinking about what might have happened to him after he tossed Brandon into the water.

Torin assured Brandon that Kavin never came through the gate. Brandon wanted to believe him. Torin seemed sincere, but the man was also Brandon's captor, which meant Brandon couldn't totally trust him.

"Then why can't you just let me go?" Brandon whispered.

"Again, it is forbidden. Humans are not allowed to roam free in the *Unseelie* Court. If I do not keep you here with me, you will be captured by the *Unseelie* guards and *they* will keep you. Believe me, I am a much better choice."

Brandon sighed and flopped over on his back. As soon as he did, his stomach started rolling again. He covered his mouth, scooted off the bed, and raced for the bathroom.

He barely reached the toilet before falling to his knees and losing what remained in his stomach. After the last three days of not being able to keep anything down, he mostly threw up water.

He heard Torin follow him into the bathroom. A moment later, Torin squatted down next to him and ran a wet cloth over his face. Brandon leaned against the toilet and groaned.

"I'm dying."

"No, *chara*." Torin rubbed his hand up and down Brandon's back. "You are not dying."

Despite how awful he felt, the sadness in Torin's voice caught Brandon's interest. He lifted his head and turned to look at the man. Judging by the look on his face, something definitely had Torin upset.

Brandon hadn't spent that much time in Torin's company, but he'd come to understand him well enough to know the darkness of his blue eyes and the tightly drawn features were not his usual look.

"If I'm not dying, then why do you look so upset?"

Torin's faint smile held a touch of misery. "I am sad because I am not your *leannan*. I am not the cause of your illness, *chara*."

"I'd have to disagree with you on that last part," Brandon said sharply, suddenly remembering that Torin was his captor and not his friend. He pushed away, putting space between them. "You're the one holding me captive."

"Your illness began before we even met."

Brandon's eyebrows drew down. "Before we met?"

"Sadly, yes."

Brandon's stomach started to tense again. "They must have done something to me at the facility." Brandon covered his mouth as horror filled him. "Oh, my god, I am going to die."

"No, *chara*, no," Torin said quickly.

This time, when Torin wrapped his arms around Brandon, he didn't resist. He even leaned back into the man's chest. He needed the close contact, the comfort.

"You're not dying, *chara*," Torin whispered against Brandon's temple. "You're carrying."

"I'm a carrier?" Horror filled Brandon. He had thoughts of being Typhoid Mary. The flea-bitten rats of the plague filled his mind. Not only was he going to die, he was going to kill millions with whatever illness he had.

"No, *chara*, you're carrying. You know, pregnant."

* * * * *

Kavin slammed his hands down on the desk in front of him. "There has to be some sign of him," he snapped. "A human can't just disappear here. Someone had to have seen him. Brandon would stick out."

"Brother, I'm sorry," Conall said. "There has been no sign of him, and we've searched everywhere."

"Then search harder."

"Kavin."

Kavin dropped into the chair behind him and buried his face in his hands. More than a month had passed since he pushed Brandon into the pool of water and forced him through the veil between their worlds.

After getting rid of the tracking device and determining that they hadn't been followed into the cavern, he had gone through, as well. When he came out on his side of the veil, Brandon was nowhere to be found. And there had been no sign of him since.

The guards at the gate nearly broke Kavin's heart when they informed him no one had come through the gate before him. Kavin could only conclude Brandon had landed somewhere else in his world. He just didn't know where.

There were only four gates: two in the Seelie Court, and two in the Unseelie Court. When someone came through into the elvin world, he or she had to land at one of those gates. Kavin couldn't figure out which gate Brandon had gone through. It gave him chills not knowing.

"Kavin, I'm sorry. I truly am."

Kavin leaned back in his chair, the anger leaving him as quickly as it had come. Brandon's loss was not Conall's fault. That bit of guilt rested totally on Kavin's head. He should have kept Brandon with him until they could go through the gate together.

"He's got to be going out of his mind, Conall," Kavin said. "He's totally unprepared for our world. I was supposed to show it to him, teach him about it, not lose him the moment he stepped through the gate."

"We will find him, Kavin."

"How?" Gavin asked. "We've been looking for him for over a month now, and there's been no sign of him. I just don't understand where he could have gone."

"Kavin, the gates can be unpredictable in the best of times," Conall said. "Have you ever considered that Brandon could have ended up in the *Unseelie* side?"

Kavin inhaled slowly. He gripped the edges of the chair and tried not to roar out his anguish. If Brandon had ended up on the *Unseelie* side of the world, he could already be dead.

To say the *Unseelie* Court did not treat humans kindly was an understatement. From what Gavin had heard, they considered humans to be outlaws. The *Unseelie* Court forbade their presence and gave orders that they be executed on sight.

"Is there any way to find out?" Kavin whispered.

Conall pressed his lips together for a moment, regarding Kavin with an intense stare, then he nodded. "Yeah, there might be a way. You'll need to give me a couple of days."

Kavin could barely nod. He wanted to scream and rail at his brother, to demand that he act *now*. He wanted to know where Brandon was. He wanted Brandon back in his arms, not lost somewhere out in the elf world.

And yet, he had to accept the fact that he had to wait. Patience had never been one of Kavin's strongest virtues. He preferred instant gratification. He wanted results now. He wanted Brandon in his arms right that second.

"You know Monte came home while you were out searching for Brandon."

"Monte?" Kavin turned his attention back to his brother. "He's back?"

"Yep."

"Is he okay?"

"He's mated to two men and carrying."

Kavin sat back in his chair and blew out a deep breath. "Wow. I knew there was something between him and that lieutenant of his. But I didn't expect Monte to come home with two mates."

"His lieutenant?" Conall suddenly sat forward. "What do you know about him?"

"I saw them at the facility." Gavin shrugged. "I tried to help them out the best I could without giving up my cover. The last I saw of them, they were sneaking away with some others."

"Ah, yes, that would be Sareed and Natiri." A mysterious look came over Conall's face. "Sareed is actually an *Unseelie* Elf. Natiri is a fairy."

"Seriously?"

Conall nodded.

"Can this Sareed guy find out about Brandon?" Gavin held his breath as he waited for Conall to answer.

"Sadly, no. The *Unseelie* drove Sareed from his home because he refused to slaughter innocent men, women, and children on the borderlands. His life is worth nothing if he returns to the *Unseelie* Court." Conall had a strange look on his face, and the quill pen he'd been holding suddenly snapped in two.

Kavin jumped a little, and Conall looked even more surprised, then his face flushed furiously and he dropped the broken quill into the garbage can.

"Conall, is there something you want to tell me?"

"No!"

Kavin blinked in surprise. Okay, his brother was losing his mind. Something was obviously bothering Conall. Kavin shook his head a little. His brother always did play things close to his chest. Being the oldest wasn't easy.

Conall sat next in line to rule the *Seelie* Court. Everyone expected more of him than they expected from the rest of the brothers. He worked harder, spent more time doing things for the entire country than he did for himself. Sometimes, it seemed like he never had a free moment. People watched his every move, scrutinized his every action.

Kavin wouldn't wish that on anyone, not even his worst enemy. And he knew if anything happened to Conall, as the second son, he was next in line to the throne. Kavin shivered at the idea of being the next king. The thought was enough to make his stomach roll.

"If you need someone to talk to, Conall, you know I'm always here for you."

Conall's face softened, a small smile spreading across his lips. "Yeah, I know. This is just something I have to figure out on my own."

Kavin nodded. He understood that. There were just some things a man had to figure out without the help of anyone else. Kavin wished he could say the same about the situation with Brandon, but he knew he needed help. He'd known it the moment he came through the veil and couldn't find his mate.

"Okay, I'm going to head out. There're a few people I need to talk to, a few leads I need to follow." Kavin pushed himself to his feet and rubbed his sweaty hands on his pant legs. His nerves were totally frayed.

"I'll talk to a few people about that *Unseelie* Court angle and get back to you."

Kavin nodded, too choked up to speak. Would they ever find Brandon? After more than a month, there wasn't a single sign of the man. There should have been something.

What would he do if he never found his *leannan*? The moment they bonded, Brandon became Kavin's entire world. Keeping Brandon safe and happy were his two utmost goals in life. And he couldn't do either with Brandon missing.

"We will find him, Kavin."

"I hope so," Kavin whispered as he turned away from his brother and left his office.

Kavin pushed his hands into his pockets and headed slowly down the large, stone hallway. He really had no idea where to go from here. He had exhausted every lead he could find, searched in every place he could think of.

Brandon had simply disappeared as if he had never been here.

"Hey, Kavin, how's it going, man?"

Kavin swung around and forced a smile when he saw Zack Banning, his brother Eljin's *leannán*. His plastic smile grew into a real one when he saw the small baby cradled in Zack's arms.

"Hey, is that Calum?"

Zack grinned and laid the baby back in his arms, pulling the blanket away from his face. "Yeah. Eljin had a meeting with your mayer, so I'm on walking duty."

"He's getting really big."

"You're telling *me*." Zack chuckled quietly. "He got his first tooth in last week, screamed his head off for hours. Eljin and I can't wait to see what happens when he gets the rest of them."

"Can I hold him?"

"Of course." Zack held out the baby and carefully laid him in Gavin's arms.

"Just look at him," Gavin whispered so he wouldn't wake up the sleeping child.

"He looks just like Eljin did at this age, all that blond hair."

"He has his mayer's eyes too."

Gavin glanced up. "I thought Eljin said Calum had your eyes."

Zack chuckled. "We've agreed to disagree about it. Eljin thinks our little dove has my eyes. I think he has Eljin's eyes. I doubt it will ever be something we agree on."

"You both do have blue eyes; they're just a slightly different color."

"Yeah, but Calum's eye color changes with his moods." Zack grinned as he took Calum back into his arms and placed the baby against his shoulder. "I'm the happy blue. Eljin's the stubborn, I'm-not-getting-my-way blue."

Gavin smiled as he thought about whether his and Brandon's child would have his eyes or Brandon's. Like Zack and Eljin, both Gavin and Brandon had blue eyes, but different shades of blue. Would they have the same type of argument regarding who the baby resembled? If they did, Gavin would let Brandon win. Gavin didn't care what color eyes their baby had; he just wanted a healthy child.

He suddenly wished he had allowed Brandon to top him when they had been together. They might have created a child together. At least then, he would have something to hold onto while he searched for Brandon.

He tried to keep a neutral face but knew he failed when Zack frowned at him. Gavin shook his head before Zack could voice the question Gavin knew was coming.

"No, there's been no sign of him. Conall thinks Brandon might have landed in the *Unseelie* Court. He's going to talk to some people, maybe Sareed, and see if they can get some information."

"What about Dorthal?" Zack asked. "Doesn't he have some sort of ties to the historians in the *Unseelie* Court? Can't he ask?"

Kavin's eyes widened. *Gods*. Why hadn't he thought of that? "I have to go."

He didn't wait for Zack to respond. He took off running down the hallway toward the library. The sound of Zack's laughter followed in his wake.

It took Kavin a few minutes to make his way down the stairs from the residential wing of the castle, across the courtyard, and back up the stairs to the library where Dorthal worked. He ran into the large, two-story room, the doors banging against the walls as he thrust them open.

"Dorthal!"

"Kavin, what is the meaning of this?" The old man came running from one of the long aisles of books and scrolls.

"Dorthal." Kavin took a moment to catch his breath, panting heavily. "You still have contact with those in the *Unseelie* Court, right? Other historians?"

"Yes."

"I need a favor, a huge favor."

"If I can be of service, Fayerye"

"I need you to contact whoever it is you know over there, and find out if Brandon somehow landed in the *Unseelie* Court. Conall and I haven't been able to locate him on our side of the border anywhere."

"I can certainly send along a message," the old man said, clasping his hands calmly in front of him, "but I am afraid I do not know when, or even *if*, I will receive a reply."

Kavin wished the man would understand the urgency. He wanted the message sent right that minute, an answer back as fast as possible. He didn't want to wait or possibly never receive a reply.

"I'd really appreciate it, Dorthal," Gavin said.

He wanted to shout at the man, but it wasn't Dorthal's fault that Brandon was missing. He couldn't risk offending the man; Dorthal might be the only way to discover if Brandon was even in the *Unseelie* Court.

"Brandon's been missing for over a month, Dorthal. I hate to even *think* of what could be happening to him if he landed in the Unseelie Court. Seelie elves don't fare well there."

"Your *leannán* is human, is he not?"

Kavin nodded. "And that makes it even worse. You know how the *Unseelie* Court feels about humans."

"Actually," Dorthal said as he held up his hand, "that may not be true, Fayerye."

"What?" Gavin's eyebrows shot up. "Do you know something, Dorthal?"

"It's not so much what I may know but what I have been able to put together." Dorthal motioned for Gavin to follow, then turned and started slowly walking through the library.

Kavin hurried after him, matching his steps to Dorthal's when he caught up.

"What are you talking about?"

"Well, look at the evidence, Fayerye. The *Unseelie* Court wishes us to believe they disdain humans, yet they have allowed humans to come into our world from their gate. Add in the fact they have been trading with the humans, trading *us*, in fact, and I think it's less that they hate humans and more that they hate us."

"Okay, I agree that makes sense, but it still wouldn't explain why they would be holding Brandon hostage. Wouldn't we have received some sort of ransom demand or something?"

"Possibly, unless the powers that be do not understand who they are holding. Brandon may not have informed the *Unseelie* Court of his connection to you. If not, they may think he is just a human."

Dorthal's words made sense, but they didn't make Gavin feel any better. In fact, they just gave him more reason to believe Brandon was being held by the *Unseelie* Court.

"Please, just contact whoever it is you know in the *Unseelie* Court and ask about Brandon. I need to know if they are holding him." Gavin pressed his lips together as he shook his head. "I need to find my *leannán*."

Chapter Eight

Brandon could feel Torin watching him as he paced the room. The man was supposed to be working on some papers at his desk, but he kept looking up, staring. His behavior was weird.

"You should really stay in bed, and get some rest, *chara*," Torin said.

"Why do you keep calling me *chara*?" Brandon asked as he turned to glare at Torin from across the room. "I told you my name is Brandon."

Torin grinned. "*Chara* means handsome, beautiful. The entire word is actually *anamchara*. *Chara* is just the short form, like saying 'my sweet' instead of 'my sweetheart'."

Brandon frowned, then went back to pacing. He wasn't sure how he felt about Torin calling him beautiful. Torin was a handsome man, and under any normal set of circumstances, Brandon would have been thrilled at the attention. But these circumstances weren't normal, and Torin wasn't Gavin.

"What are you doing?" he asked when Torin frowned down at the papers on his desk.

"There's a mystery here that I need to solve and solve fast. Someone is using the gate in the city to travel to and from the human side of the veil. I have a very bad feeling that someone is human and up to no good. I just can't figure out how they're doing it."

Brandon walked over to stare down at the papers, but the words written there looked like gibberish to him. "Why? What makes you think it's a human?"

"The Gorias gate is smack-dab in the middle of the city. Everyone passing by and the soldiers guarding the gate would see anyone who used it. They'd easily spot a human and take them into custody. The city of Gorias is under martial law, but people still come and go during the day."

"Could they have permission to use the gate then?" Made sense to Brandon.

"That's kind of what I'm thinking. No one can use the gate without express permission from the ruler of the *Unseelie* Court, but someone is, and that someone is causing trouble. I didn't notice it at first, but then little by little, I began to see more items appearing that were decidedly not *Unseelie* in nature."

"Could they be *Seelie* items?"

Torin shook his head. "No, these items are not from my world. At first, I put it off as a fluke, until I saw some *Unseelie* soldiers training with automatic weapons. I've been searching for clues ever since."

"Maybe I can help you search for clues." Brandon shrugged when Torin glanced up at him in surprise. "I'm from the human world. I might recognize things you do not."

Torin smiled. "While I appreciate the thought, I cannot accept your help. We're forbidden to harbor anyone not from the *Unseelie* side of the border. Humans are expressly forbidden. If you were discovered, you would be turned over to the *Unseelie* guards."

Torin leaned back in his chair and pushed his hand through his long, dark hair. "It was just by chance that I had even been in the city center when you came through the gate as it was. I was standing in for a friend who had been guarding the gate, a friend who wanted a few minutes away from his post to visit a tavern girl he had the hots for."

Brandon sighed and walked over to one of the windows. He hated being locked up, even if his cage was luxurious. It was still a cage. He just wanted to go home.

"Brandon, please, you must not look out the curtains." Torin jumped to his feet and hurried across the room. He grabbed the curtains away from Brandon and pulled them back together. "We've discussed this, *chara*. You have to stay away from the windows. It's not safe."

Brandon rolled his eyes and walked away. "I'm tired of being locked inside, Torin. I've been here for weeks. I want to go outside."

"You cannot, *chara*. If the guards were to find you . . ." Torin shook his head. "If they discover you're a human carrying a *Seelie* child, I can't even begin to imagine what would happen to you."

"Why? I mean, yeah, carrying a child is totally weird, but why would they be so upset?"

Just saying the words — carrying a child — still freaked Brandon out a little. He was actually pregnant. Men didn't get pregnant, but the proof was growing inside him. He was going to smack Gavin when he found him . . . right after he hugged him.

"You're human, Brandon. As far as I knew, only the Fayerye males could carry young, not human males." Torin waved his hand at the small baby bump at Brandon's abdomen. "I still haven't figured out how this happened."

"And you think I have?" Brandon rubbed his stomach gently. No matter how crazy the current circumstances, it was still his child. "Gavin told me *he* could get pregnant. He never said anything about being able to knock *me* up!"

"I'm not sure you were supposed to get pregnant, Brandon."

"Right? I mean, I always felt a little bad for pregnant women — you know, morning sickness, swollen ankles, mood swings, exhaustion, and all that — but I never really dwelled on what it might be like to *be* in this condition." Brandon absently waved his hand in the air. "Suffering through all that stuff — well, it just never really meant anything until now. This is ridiculous. The weird cravings I have are enough to drive me nuts. If I eat one more strawberry jam and ham sandwich, I'm going to lose my mind."

"You'll be fine, *chara*. The morning sickness is almost over. Pretty soon, you'll be able to feel the baby move."

"I just want to go home, Torin. I want to share this with Gavin," Brandon groaned as he turned to look back out the window. Just thinking about Gavin made his heart feel heavy. "I've been locked up in here for weeks. I'm going stir crazy."

"I'm sorry, *chara*. If I could take you outside, I would, but I can't. It's just not safe. The *Unseelie* Court is a very dangerous place, and that's just for the people born here. It's even worse for those not born here."

Brandon turned, his brows draw deep into a frown. "Why?"

"Many reasons, I suppose." Torin turned to look out the window through the small slit between the curtains. "The two courts have been at war longer than I have been alive, hundreds of years, actually."

Torin turned and looked at Brandon when the man inhaled sharply. "I'm afraid, *chara*, you've landed in a world filled with things you've never experienced."

Brandon shrugged. "Wars happen in my world too."

"Not like this one, *chara*. Until recently, we fought with swords, with our hands. Hell, we threw rocks if we had to. Now, humans have brought automatic weapons into this world but only to one side of the fight . . . to this side." Torin crossed his arms over his chest. "I wonder, do you know what that will mean?"

"Holy Mother of . . ." Brandon whispered. "It will be a slaughter."

"I agree."

"We have to do something, Torin."

"Again, I agree. Unfortunately, I haven't figured out exactly what we should do. It's too dangerous to bring my theory to the High Court here in the *Unseelie* Court. We'd be branded as traitors and put to death."

"So, let's go to the *Seelie* Court then." Brandon wrung his hands together. "Gavin can help us."

Torin grimaced. "Again, that is impossible, *chara*. I am not allowed to travel to the *Seelie* Court."

"Then send me."

"That, too, is denied us." Torin sighed deeply and leaned back against the edge of the window. "If anyone were to discover your presence here, you would be turned over to the High Court. From there . . . well, I doubt you want to hear what would happen after that."

"I am not a weakling," Brandon snapped.

"No, I never said you were, but you are also not strong enough to survive what the king's guards would do to you if they caught you." Torin pointed to Brandon's abdomen. "And neither would your child."

Brandon sighed and stomped over to flop down on the edge of the bed. "So, what are we supposed to do?"

"That is the big question, *chara*, and one I have yet to solve. If we stay here, at some point, someone will discover you. Of that, I have no doubt. However, I have *great* doubt that we can find another place in the *Unseelie* Court where you will be safe."

"Don't you have any friends?"

"I have a great many friends, *chara*, but none that I would put into danger just to save ourselves. I am also not liked by all who reside here. More than one person would love to see my hide hung from the nearest tree."

Brandon suddenly laughed. "Yeah, I've thought that a time or two myself."

Torin smiled. "Yes, I do seem to have that effect on people."

"So, if we can't stay here, we can't go to the *Seelie* Court, and we can't hide with your friends. What's left?"

"Your world?" Torin asked, raising one eyebrow.

"Oh, I don't know, Torin, hiding you in the human world might be harder than you think." Brandon waved his hand toward Torin, frowning. "There's not a lot of us running around with pointed ears."

"Ears can be hidden, *chara*."

"Okay, fine, so we can hide your ears. That still doesn't mean we have anywhere to go if we do get to my world. It's not like I can go home again. I'm sure the retrieval team is staking the place out as we speak."

"So we'll go somewhere else."

"Where?" Brandon snapped. He jumped up and spread his arms out wide. "I have no job, no home, and no friends. I also have a mad scientist hunting my ass down. Just where do you expect us to go?"

"We can go wherever you want to go, Brandon. I have money."

"Real money? Like the green stuff?"

"Green stuff?"

"You know, dollar bills."

"Uh, no, I have gold and gems." Torin frowned. "What is a dollar bill?"

* * * * *

"I still don't think this is a good idea, Torin," Brandon whispered as he quietly followed the man out of his rented rooms. "We should just try to make it to the border, and go find Kevin."

"I told you that wasn't an option, *chara*. I am forbidden to travel in the *Seelie* Court."

"Yeah, but you never told me why," Brandon grumbled.

Torin seemed very touchy about the subject. Every time Brandon brought it up, Torin turned angry and refused to discuss it. Several times, Torin had actually stormed out of the room, and had not returned for hours.

Brandon had mellowed toward Torin as they tried to prepare for their escape from the *Unseelie* Court, and he knew it. The more time he spent with the man, the more Torin grew on him.

He just wasn't Kevin.

But the more time that went by, the harder it was for Brandon to remember that. Gavin almost seemed like a dream. They'd had just a few hours together, and then Gavin was gone from his life.

In all actuality, Brandon had spent more time with Torin. Torin was real. Torin was right in front of him. Gavin was someone Brandon dreamed about at night and ached to be with when his heart felt heavy.

The only thing that made Gavin real was the slight bump that had begun to grow in Brandon's abdomen. Torin said he was carrying, pregnant. Brandon thought he was off his rocker, just like Gavin. But the proof was there, just under the waistband of Brandon's pants. And if the baby was real, then Gavin was real.

"We're almost there, *chara*," Torin whispered. "Stay as quiet as you can, and keep your head down. I don't want anyone seeing your face."

"Why not?" Brandon asked even as he lowered his head. He wasn't stupid enough to ignore Torin's experience in this world. He pulled the hood of the cape he was wearing down more tightly around his face.

"There's always a possibility that someone might figure out that you're human. The fewer chances we take, the better."

Made sense, although Brandon still hadn't figured out why humans were forbidden in the *Unseelie* Court if they were bringing weapons in. Maybe it was just certain humans?

"Torin, I have a question."

"What?"

"If there are humans bringing in weapons, then someone from this side had to allow it, correct?"

"Probably."

"Who? I mean, besides the obvious, who has the most to gain from human weapons being introduced to your world?"

"I seriously don't think anyone will win, *chara*. The weapons of your world will decimate my entire world. It doesn't matter who has them. Once they are used, they will eventually get to both sides of the border. And then many will die."

Brandon frowned. "War tends to evolve that way, yes."

Torin snorted but continued walking. Brandon looked up when he heard some people laughing. Torin suddenly turned and pushed him back against the wall of a brick building. His eyes widened as Torin pressed their bodies together.

"Torin, what – ?"

The rest of Brandon's words were smothered beneath Torin's hand. Fear filled Brandon when he heard people talking. The voices grew louder, and Brandon feared they'd be discovered, but then the people moved off in another direction, and their voices slowly faded away.

After a few breathtaking moments, Torin leaned back. His cheeks were tight and his breathing ragged. Torin's eyes seemed to bore into Brandon's, asking something, but Brandon's mind was too muddled to know what.

Brandon suddenly wondered if being back in his own world, even at the institute, was such a bad thing. At least there, he had a clue as to what was going on. He didn't feel like he was on a constant rollercoaster ride.

"Come on, *chara*," Torin said briskly. "We need to keep going. We have to reach the gate before dawn."

Brandon pulled the hood of his cloak back down around his face and pushed away from the wall to follow after Torin. His thoughts were chaotic, his emotions even more so.

Brandon felt like he was on the verge of tears, and he gave up crying when Child Protective Services moved him to his third foster home by the age of five. He quickly wiped away a stray tear that started to trickle down his cheek and tried to put on a brave face.

"Brandon," Torin whispered as he came to a sudden stop. "Get back in the shadows, hide yourself. Whatever happens, stay hidden."

Brandon frowned as he stepped back into the darkness between two buildings. His heart started to pound. Fear filled every cell of his body as he watched Torin walk out into the lit courtyard just beyond him.

Brandon leaned back into the shadows even more when two soldiers walked up to Torin. They talked for a few minutes, but Brandon couldn't hear what they said. He just saw a lot of gesturing by Torin and more than a few stern looks from the guards.

Just as Torin started to turn away, one of the guards pulled out his sword. The other guard grabbed Torin and started to wrestle him to the ground. Brandon stepped forward to help Torin when he remembered the man's words.

Heartbroken, Brandon stepped back into the shadows again. He quickly covered his mouth to keep from crying out when one of the guards got in a good hit, burying his fist in Torin's stomach. Torin grunted and dropped to his knees.

The next thing Brandon knew, guards seemed to be coming out of the woodwork. One of them held a very long, very lethal-looking sword against Torin's neck, keeping him on his knees as a guard secured his hands behind his back.

Brandon saw Torin say something to one of the guards. He didn't know what Torin said, but apparently the guard didn't like it. It earned Torin a hard crack of the guard's hand across his face.

Torin spit something out on the ground then glanced in Brandon's direction. If Brandon hadn't been watching so closely, he would have missed the slight shake of Torin's head.

He knew what the man was saying. He just didn't like it. He knew Torin was in a lot of trouble, and he didn't have a clue how to get him out of it. He didn't know how to get *himself* out of it either.

He was stuck in some world he knew nothing about, and he was a human, forbidden in the *Unseelie* Court. He didn't know who to trust or even if he could trust anyone. He had no idea where the *Seelie* Court was or if he could reach it if he tried.

He was screwed.

Brandon slumped against the wall and watched the guards drag Torin away. He couldn't go back to Torin's place. The guards were probably already headed there to search the place. And he had no idea where else to go. He didn't even know which direction the *Seelie* Court was located.

Brandon nearly jumped out of his skin when he felt a hand tap him on the back. He swung around, expecting more guards, but instead found a hooded man gesturing for Brandon to follow him.

Brandon didn't know if he could trust the stranger man but he did know he couldn't stay where he was. He cast one more look at the courtyard where Torin had been moments before, then followed the mysterious, hooded man down the alley.

They wove their way in and out of dark alleys, down beside buildings, and through hidden walkways. Brandon didn't know how far they walked, but it seemed like forever.

The neighborhood seemed to get less luxurious the farther they went. They no longer walked along cobblestone walkways, but rather dirt paths. The buildings started to look more dilapidated.

Brandon was beyond shocked when they stopped at one particular building that looked like a stiff wind would blow it over. The hooded man knocked softly, and a small crack in the door appeared as someone opened it.

A few whispered words were exchanged, then the door opened to allow them entrance. The hooded man hurried inside. Brandon hesitated on the doorstep. He didn't know what was waiting for him in there, and fear held him frozen.

However, a sudden noise behind him changed Brandon's mind. He quickly stepped inside. The door was closed behind him before he took two steps into the room.

His heart started to pound faster when the lights were dimmed, and the room fell into darkness. *God, this has to be a bad idea.* He started to turn and grab for the door, but a hand closed over his arm.

"Come this way." A whispering voice sounded in the darkness. Brandon recognized it as belonging to the man he'd followed there.

Not knowing what to do, Brandon once again followed behind, through a door in the back of the room and down a flight of stairs. Light spilled out from the room below, illuminating the bottom steps.

Brandon was shocked to find a room full of people when he reached the bottom of the stairs. There were men and women, little children. Most of them sat on the dirt floor, some were sleeping.

A few men sat around a table playing some sort of game with stones. They looked up when Brandon walked in, staring at him intently. The hooded man shook his head, and the men went back to playing.

"Back here."

Brandon kept his head down and tried to avoid eye contact with everyone as he followed his escort to another room. The man lit a small, wick lamp and turned it up, flooding the room with light.

When the door closed behind them, Brandon realized they were the only two people in the room. The man sat down on the edge of the table and pulled the hood back from his face. Long, black hair fell down the man's back, his pointed ears sticking up through the top. Vivid blue eyes looked back at Brandon.

"I'm Sareed."

Chapter Nine

"Kavin!"

Kavin spun around at the sound of his brother calling out to him. He was surprised to see Conall running down the stairs toward him. He seemed to be in a huge hurry. Driven by a sense of foreboding, Kavin started toward his brother.

"Is it Brandon?" he asked. "Have you found Brandon?"

"I didn't, but someone else did," Conall said as he came to a stop right in front of Kavin. "I just received word. Brandon is alive. Unfortunately, he's also in the *Unseelie* Court."

"But he's alive?" Kavin could panic over the fact that Brandon was a human in the *Unseelie* Court another time. Right now, he just needed to take in the fact that his *leannan* was alive.

"Yes, he's alive, and so far unhurt."

"The royal court has him?"

Conall chuckled. "No, believe it or not. I don't know how he did it, but your little human landed with the underground."

"The *Unseelie* court has an underground?" Kavin frowned. Why had he never heard of this? It would have made things so much easier if they had someone to work with on the other side of the border.

"Yeah, it's news to me too. Whoever is running it, though, got a message to the historian in the *Unseelie* court and asked him to send a message about Brandon to Dorthal. They want to arrange to get Brandon to us."

Kavin leaned over and rested his hands on his knees as his head suddenly began to swim. Brandon was safe and coming home to him. Kavin couldn't believe it. Somehow, he had doubted it would ever happen.

"Breathe, brother."

Kavin nodded and tried to take in a few deep breaths. After a few moments, he leaned back and looked at his brother with desperation. "How do we do this? I want Brandon home now."

"And we will get him home, Kavin, but we need to be careful about this. One wrong step and we're all going to be in trouble."

Kavin nodded. He knew Conall spoke the truth, but still . . . "Are you sure they have Brandon? Could this be a trap set up by the *Unseelie* Court?"

"You tell me," Conall said, holding out the piece of paper.

Kavin eagerly grabbed it and started reading over the words. His heart beat faster, then leapt in joy.

Mo shíorghrá wants to come home.

"It is him," Kavin whispered.

He rubbed his thumb over the hastily scribbled words, knowing that sometime in the past few weeks, Brandon had written them. He had touched the piece of paper in Kevin's hand. It was as close to Brandon as Kevin had been since his *leannán* disappeared.

"How do we get him, Conall?" Kevin looked over at his brother, still clutching the note tightly. "How do we bring *mo shíorghrá* home?"

"Let's go discuss that with Fayer." Conall patted Kevin on the back. "I'm sure we can come up with some sort of plan to bring your *leannán* home."

Kevin followed Conall back up the stairs and down the hallway toward the quarters occupied by his mayer and fayer. He kept the note in his hand. It felt like a lifeline to Brandon. He couldn't let it go.

Conall knocked, and they walked in after receiving permission to enter. Kevin was surprised to see the room full of people. Apparently, his fathers were holding court with the rest of their family.

Roland and Gunny sat on one couch, their grandson in Roland's arms. Roland's son, Monte, sat curled at their feet. His two *leannáns*, Doc and Rocky, sat a few feet away at a small table.

Kevin's youngest brother, Eljin, sat on his *leannán's* lap. Their son, Calum, lay cradled in King Tuathal's lap. Kevin's fayer, Gavril, sat next to his *leannán*, the king. It was the perfect picture of a happy family gathering, except Brandon was missing.

"Fayer," Kevin said, "we've had word of my *leannán*. He's in the *Unseelie* Court."

"He's alive?"

Kevin swallowed hard and nodded. He still wasn't used to the words himself. He couldn't believe Brandon was so close to being home, yet so far away. The *Unseelie* Court wasn't more than a couple days ride, but Brandon might as well have been on the moon.

"We've got to go get him, Fayer." Kevin was desperate.

"We will, my son, but we must make plans first. We cannot just run in and grab him. That could cost all of us our lives, and his."

Kavin knew his fayer spoke the truth, but the waiting was killing him. It was all he could do to hold onto his control. He wanted to run outside, jump on the nearest horse, and ride for the Unseelie Court as fast as he could. But then what would he do? No, he had to stay calm. They needed a plan.

"Eljin, Monte, would you please take the babes back to your rooms," Gavril said. "They may be young, but this is still not a conversation for their ears."

Kavin walked over and took the seat Eljin vacated when he left the room with his son. After both men had left, Gavril closed the door behind them and faced the room. Kavin clasped his hands tightly together at the grim look on his fayer's face. Had the man thought of something that would prevent them from getting Brandon back? Did he think the task impossible?

"How did you discover Brandon was in the *Unseelie* Court?" Gavril asked.

"A message was sent to Dorthal by the historian in the *Unseelie* Court," Conall said as he held the note out to Gavril. "Apparently, Brandon is in hiding with the underground."

"Underground?" Gavril asked. "There's an underground in the *Unseelie* Court?"

Kavin smiled despite his agitation at the situation. "I asked the very same thing."

"Do we know anything about this underground?" King Tuathal asked. "Who is running it and why?"

"I don't know who is running it, but the why should be fairly obvious." Kavin's grin slowly turned into a deep grimace. "From all the reports we have received, things are pretty bad in the *Unseelie* Court, at least for the common citizen. Things seem to be a little nicer for the royal court."

"Can we trust this note?" Gavril asked, holding it up in the air.

"Brandon sent it," Kavin said. "I trust him."

Kavin sat motionless beneath the weight of his fayer's stare for several moments. Gavril finally nodded, and Kavin blew out the breath he'd been holding.

"Very well, Kavin, we'll trust your judgment." Gavril glanced around at those in the room. "We just need to figure out the best way to get Brandon back."

"Well," Zack said, gaining Kevin's attention, "Conall snuck into the *Unseelie* Court once before. I don't see why we can't do it again."

Kevin's jaw dropped and he turned to face his brother. "You snuck into the *Unseelie* Court?"

"I did. I had a little help at the time, though. I'm not sure I could do it again if I was on my own."

"Who helped you before?"

"Sareed, but he's no longer available to help."

"Why not?"

Conall's jaw tightened. "He's just not, okay?"

"Yeah, okay." Kevin hid his surprise by turning his gaze on his fayer, then looking to Eljin. Both men just shrugged. Kevin knew there was more to Conall's story, but neither man seemed to know what it was. Kevin would have to ask Conall later.

"So, is there another way we can sneak in?"

"How much hair dye do you have left, Conall?" Zack asked.

Kevin's eyebrows shot up. "Hair dye?"

"Well, you're not going to get far with those blond locks." Zack snickered. "You'd stick out like a sore thumb. We need to dye your hair black so you look like an *Unseelie* elf. That's what we did with Conall when he went into the *Unseelie* Court."

"Dye my hair black?" Kevin asked as he fingered a blond strand. It was just starting to grow back after cutting it for his Earth-world disguise. He didn't want to dye it now.

"Don't worry," Conall said. "It washes out after a couple of weeks."

Kevin had to admit that was the truth. His brother's hair was once again bright blond. He never would have known Conall had changed his hair color if someone hadn't said something.

"So, I dye my hair black, then what?"

"We, brother," Conall said. "We dye our hair black. I'm not letting you go alone. It wouldn't matter if you dyed your hair black or not, you'd still end up in chains. You're just not that good with people."

Kavin stuck his tongue out at his brother. That got Conall to laughing, then the rest of the room joined in, easing the tension they all felt. After the laughter died down, Kavin looked around the room at his family.

Every single one of them was willing to step up and help him get his *leannán* back, even the ones not related by blood. Kavin couldn't wait to bring Brandon home so he could experience this. The man had been alone far too long.

"I'll send a message back through Dorthal to the underground," Conall said. "I'll tell them to send a location for us to meet them so we can get Brandon back. Hopefully, we'll have their answer soon."

* * * * *

Kavin squatted next to Conall and looked out over the small clearing where they were supposed to meet up with Brandon and whoever was hiding him. Once again, Kavin wondered if this could be some sort of trap planned by the *Unseelie* Court.

It had taken nearly four weeks to send a message to the underground and receive one back. They had the coordinates of the meeting and a time to be there. That was it. No word on who was bringing Brandon.

"Are you sure this is the spot?" Kavin whispered.

"That's what the message said," Conall replied.

Kavin pressed his lips together and scanned the area carefully. The small bit of light offered by the full moon lit up the area just enough for Kavin to see the clearing. It wasn't enough to see if anyone stood in the shadows waiting to attack them.

"Shouldn't they be here by now?"

"Shh," Conall hissed. "Keep your voice down."

Kavin rolled his eyes. He wasn't speaking above a whisper. Why was Conall so bent out of shape? You'd think they'd come to rescue his *leannán*, not Kavin's beloved.

"The waiting is driving me crazy, Conall. I haven't seen Brandon in two and a half months. You'd be going crazy, too, if you had been separated from your *leannán* that long."

"Don't be ridiculous," Conall snapped quietly. "I've been separated from my –"

Conall snapped his mouth closed, and Kavin raised a brow. Interesting.

"From your *what*, Conall?" he asked.

"Never mind, it's not important."

Kavin could swear he saw pain cross his brother's face, but not from any physical ailment. Conall had been tense since they dyed their hair and started across the border into the *Unseelie* Court. Kavin was beginning to think Conall's sour mood had nothing to do with their current mission and a whole lot to do with something, or someone, else.

"Conall, have you found your *leannán*?"

Conall's face darkened, and he quickly looked away. "None of your damn business."

"You have." Kavin wasn't put off by his brother's refusal to talk about it. Conall had always been a very private person. He had to be. He was next in line for the throne. Everyone watched his every move. What confused Kavin was why Conall hadn't brought his *leannán* home.

"Who is he?" Kavin shrugged.

Conall turned to glare at Kavin, his jaw clenched. "I told you that it was none of your damn business. I meant it."

"Conall!"

"Just drop it, okay?"

And so Kavin did. Silence hung in the air between them. Kavin didn't know what to say to his brother. The idea of knowing who his *leannán* was and not being with him was almost as horrible to him as being separated from Brandon.

The situations were nearly identical, with only one major difference. Kavin had every intention of getting his *leannán* back. Conall apparently did not. And Kavin couldn't understand that. Brandon was his life.

"He's an *Unseelie* elf," Conall whispered. "He's not even royalty, just a common, everyday, *Unseelie* elf."

"And?" Kavin still didn't see the problem. A *leannán* was the other half of their soul. "Brandon is human. Zack is human. Rocky and Doc are human. None of us care."

"I care, damn it," Conall snapped.

"You pretentious asshole! You care more about your *leannán*'s status than you do your *leannán*?" Kavin's insides seethed with anger at his brother's attitude. "You don't deserve him."

"You don't know what you're talking about."

"I do know," Kavin snapped, "and you should be ashamed of yourself. Mayer and Fayer taught you better than that. I know you've been granted something special, and you're tossing it away because your *leannán* isn't perfect."

The anguish that came over Conall's face almost broke Kavin's heart. "I didn't leave my *leannán*. He left me."

Kavin pushed himself forward and dropped down to his knees in front of his brother. "What happened?"

Conall rubbed his hand down his pale face, then looked off toward the small clearing. His voice was void of emotion as he spoke, almost as if he were trying to suppress his feelings.

"He doesn't want to be mated to the heir to the *Seelie* Throne."

"Does he hate us?"

The corner of Conall's mouth curled up. "No, I don't think so. He says he isn't royal material, and he doesn't want to stand in my way of being the next *Seelie* Court ruler, that I'm more important than our mating."

"That's bullshit!"

Conall's grin was full of sadness. "Yes, that's what I told him. I didn't care that he wasn't of royal blood. I would give up the throne if that's what it took to keep him."

Kavin frowned. "As much as I don't want to be the next ruler, if that's what it takes for you to be with your *leannán*, I will."

Conall reached over and grabbed Kavin's hand, sending him a small squeeze and a smile. "Thank you, brother, but it's no longer an issue. My *leannán* made his wishes perfectly clear when he left me in the middle of the night without saying goodbye. I just have to learn to live with the fact that he doesn't want me."

"No, Conall, surely —"

"Please." Conall held up his hand to stop Kavin. "Just let it go. I can't make Sareed stay with me if he doesn't want to."

Kavin's heart ached for his brother. He couldn't imagine knowing who his *leannán* was, and then being rejected by him. He had feared a similar response from Brandon, but now the man seemed to want to be with him. He could at least hope.

"I'm sorry, Conall. If there is anything I can ever do to help"

"Just keep it to yourself," Conall said. "I'd prefer no one else knew that I've found my *leannán*. I don't want his life in any more danger than it already is, and you know the *Unseelie* Court would use him against me if they could."

Kavin nodded. He did know. The royal family of the *Unseelie* Court had an unnatural hatred of them. Kavin had never understood why, but the abhorrence existed. The *Unseelie* Court would use any means at their disposal to get at them, even torturing Conall's *leannán*.

"Shh!" Conall spoke suddenly. "I think I hear something."

Kavin froze, then turned toward the clearing, desperately searching the shadows for any sign of Brandon. "I don't hear anything," he said after a moment of absolute silence.

"How could you?" A light, male voice sounded from behind them. "You're so loud, I'm surprised the entire *Unseelie* army didn't hear you."

Kavin jumped to his feet and pulled his sword free of its sheath. He swung around to face whoever stood behind them. He was surprised to find a rather short figure covered from head to toe in a dark brown cape. A hood hung down over the man's face, hiding his features from view.

"Sareed?" Conall whispered as he slowly stood.

Kavin blinked at his brother for a moment, then looked at the small figure. Stunned, he watched the man reach up and lower the hood back to reveal a breathtakingly beautiful face.

"Hello, Conall," Sareed said softly.

"What are you doing here?"

"Is this not where we agreed to meet?" Sareed asked as he waved his hand toward the clearing.

"You're with the underground?" Conall gasped.

"I am." Sareed turned to smile at Kavin and gestured behind him. "Your *leannán* waits for you there."

Kavin turned. His heart started beating rapidly as he watched another hooded figure emerge from the trees on the other side of the clearing. "Brandon," he whispered and took off running toward his *leannán*.

Kavin dropped his sword to the ground and caught Brandon in his arms the moment the man reached him. He buried his face in Brandon's neck and drew in the man's sweet scent.

"Brandon, mo shíorghrá," he whispered through the tears clogging his throat, "I never thought I'd see you again."

"Kavin."

Brandon clutched at Kavin as if he couldn't get close enough. His warm breath blew out over Kavin's neck. Kavin could feel the man's tears dropping onto his skin.

He drew back and cupped Brandon's face in his hands, looking him over, checking him for signs of injury and just generally drinking in his presence. "Gods, I've missed you."

"I missed you too," Brandon murmured. "But I knew I'd see you again. You promised, and I knew you wouldn't break your promise to me."

Kavin chuckled and pulled Brandon to him once again. "I did promise, *mo shíorghrá*. We were meant to be together always. I told you that."

Brandon leaned back, smiled, and smacked Kavin right across the face.

Kavin jerked away, holding his hand to his cheek as shock rolled through him. "What did you do that for?"

"Apparently, you forgot to tell me a few things. A few very *important* things." Brandon pulled his cape apart, revealing a large, distended stomach. "Want to explain this?"

Chapter Ten

Brandon could see the shock in Kavin's face as he stared down at his stomach. The man's eyes were huge. His mouth hung open. Brandon started to feel self-conscious. He closed his cape and wrapped his arm around his stomach.

"Brandon, what – ?"

"You tell me. You're the expert here."

"But . . . Brandon, you're human."

"So I've been told," Brandon snapped. "Which doesn't come close to explaining how I ended up pregnant. I thought you were the one who was supposed to carry the kids."

Kavin seemed horrified. Some part of Brandon had feared this would be Kavin's reaction from the moment he learned he was carrying. He wasn't an elf, and he wasn't royalty. Did that mean Kavin wouldn't want their child, or him?

"Kavin?"

Kavin's gaze snapped up to his. "Brandon, I don't" Kavin shook his head.

Brandon's heart squeezed. He tried to swallow past the despair swamping him at Kavin's rejection. He felt a deep sense of loss, so deep it made it hard to breathe.

Brandon pressed his hand against the bottom of his throat and tried to gather his pride. If Gavin didn't want him or their child, then fine, but Brandon still had a baby to prepare for and care for. He wouldn't beg.

He could feel the baby moving under his cape and absently rubbed his hand over his stomach, trying to soothe the babe. Gavin's gaze flickered down to watch his movements, and Brandon instantly stopped.

"Please tell Sareed I'll be waiting for him over here," Brandon whispered as he backed away from Gavin toward the trees. He took one more long look at Gavin, wanting to imprint the man's image into his mind, but all he saw was the shock still lingering in Gavin's expression.

It wouldn't be a good memory.

Tears flowed freely down Brandon's cheeks as he turned away and walked back toward the line of trees he had been hiding in. He wasn't sure he'd ever get Gavin's horrified look out of his mind. It would overshadow every other image he had of the man.

"Brandon."

Brandon's knees nearly gave out beneath him when he heard Gavin call out to him. Only the knowledge Gavin didn't want him anymore, didn't want their child, kept him from turning. He continued walking until he reached the trees.

"Mo shíorghrá," Gavin whispered through their bond, "*why are you leaving me?*"

A sob escaped Brandon's lips. He quickly covered his mouth with his hand and wrapped his arm around his stomach. His mind was languid, without hope. He had no idea where he was going or how he was going to survive without Gavin. He just kept walking.

"*Brandon!*"

Brandon's legs wouldn't hold him anymore as grief overtook him. He grabbed onto the nearest tree and collapsed down onto his knees. Deep sobs shook his body as his heart shattered. He didn't even have the strength to push Gavin away when the man wrapped his arms around him.

"*Mo shíorghrá*, please," Gavin whispered, "you must not cry so. You'll only upset the babe."

Brandon gave a choked, desperate laugh. "What do you care?"

"I care very much."

"No, you don't." Bitterness welled up inside of Brandon.

"How can you even say that, Brandon. You are my *leannán*. This is our child. How can you say that I don't care?"

Brandon turned to glare at Gavin through his tears. "If you had cared you wouldn't have looked at me like you were disgusted."

Kavin's face suddenly softened as he drew Brandon closer. "Oh, *mo shíorghrá*, I was simply stunned, not disgusted. I never thought you would be able to carry our babe, and to see you so"

"I'm sorry," Brandon whispered. "I know I don't look like I did but —"

"No, Brandon, you misunderstand me." Kavin grabbed Brandon by the chin, forcing his head up so their eyes met. "I don't think I've ever seen you look more beautiful."

"Men aren't beautiful," Brandon grumbled, even though his heart lightened at Kavin's words.

"You are, my *leannán*, you're stunning." Kavin grabbed the edge of Brandon's cloak and pulled it back, revealing his distended stomach. Brandon's breath caught in his throat when Kavin tentatively touched him, then stroked his hand over the bump. "Have you felt him move yet?"

"A little." Brandon was mystified by the reverence on Kavin's face. An expression so vastly different from the stunned look he'd worn moments ago. But could he trust this was how Kavin truly felt?

"Did Sareed explain to you what to expect?"

"No, Torin did."

"Torin!" Kavin's gaze snapped up to Brandon's. His arms tightened around him. "When did you meet Torin?"

"He's the one who found me at the gate. He hid me in his apartments until he was taken, and then Sareed found me."

"Taken?" Gavin gasped. "Torin was taken?"

"Yes, we were trying to escape to the human side of the veil, but guards caught us. Torin distracted them while I hid. They took him away, then Sareed found me. I never saw him again."

"Come on, *mo shíorghrá*." Gavin climbed to his feet, then helped Brandon stand. "We need to go talk with Conall and Sareed."

"Kavin, what's wrong?" Brandon followed after Gavin. "What's going on? Are you mad at me for staying with Torin? I didn't have a choice. He said the guards would have killed me or worse if they caught me. I had nowhere else to stay."

Kavin turned suddenly, stopping Brandon. "No, Brandon, I'm not mad, just concerned."

"Why?" Brandon frowned. "Torin wasn't bad to me. He kept me safe."

"I have absolutely no doubt he kept you safe."

A sudden thought filled Brandon's head. "He never touched me, Kavin, I swear. This is your child."

"Oh no, *mo shíorghrá*," Kavin said as he cupped the side of Brandon's face. "That was never my worry. I know this is my child."

"Then why —?"

"Torin is my brother."

"Your brother?" Brandon shouted.

"Shh." Kavin covered Brandon's mouth with his hand and glanced around quickly. After a moment, Kavin lowered his hand. "Yes, Torin is my brother. He's been missing for years. No one knew where he was."

"I do. He's in the hands of the *Unseelie* Court."

"Which is why I need to talk to Sareed and Conall." Kavin turned and started leading Brandon back across the clearing, only pausing to scoop up his sword. "We need to figure out how to get him out of there before they discover who he is."

Brandon nodded like he understood, but he didn't. This whole war thing between the *Seelie* and *Unseelie* courts just didn't make sense to him. He didn't understand why the two sides weren't working together to make everyone's lives better.

Sareed and Conall were arguing quietly when Gavin and Brandon walked up. Conall turned to stare at Brandon, and Brandon edged a little closer to Gavin. At least, Brandon *assumed* the man was Conall, as he had never met the man.

"Conall, this is Brandin, my *leannán*" Gavin gestured toward Brandon. "Brandon, my older brother, Conall."

"Hello."

"Brandon, it's good to finally meet you." Conall gave Brandon a slight nod. "Your *leannán* has spoken of you often."

"Yeah?" Brandon's smile widened as he looked over at Gavin and found the man blushing, obviously just a little embarrassed. "What has he said?"

"I was unsure anyone could be as beautiful as he described his *leannán*, but I find he was correct." Conall grinned. "You are simply stunning."

Brandon felt his face flush. He opened his mouth to reply, but the sound of a soft inhale stopped him. He glanced over to see Sareed's face pale as the man quickly turned his gaze away from Conall to look at him. Sareed gave him a slight shake of his head.

"Uh, yeah, that's probably because I'm carrying," Brandon said. "I don't usually look this good."

"Do too," Gavin said, nudging Brandon.

"You're carrying?" Conall's gaze dropped to Brandon's waist. "How is that possible?"

Brandon shrugged. "Got me, this is your thing, not mine."

"It looks like it's your thing now." Gavin chuckled.

Brandon turned and glared up at Gavin. He poked his finger into Gavin's chest. "If I get swollen ankles, you're going to wish you were a dead man."

Kavin chuckled. "Not to worry, *mo shíorghrá*, I'll rub them for you."

"You'd better."

"You must have some Elvin blood in you somewhere," Conall said. "That's the only way to explain it."

Brandon turned back to look at Conall, frowning. "I wouldn't know. I was raised in a series of foster homes since I was a small child. I don't really remember my parents."

"Then that has to be it." Conall pushed his hand through his long, dark hair. "You must be part elf."

"But which side of the border is he from?" Gavin asked. "Is he *Seelie* elf or *Unseelie* elf?"

"Is that an issue?" Brandon asked, suddenly feeling a deep tightening in the pit of his stomach. "Does it matter if I'm a *Seelie* elf or an *Unseelie* one?"

"Brandon." Conall glanced at Gavin. Brandon felt the man nod behind him, then Conall looked back at him. "Only men of royal blood can get pregnant. If you're a *Seelie* elf, then you're related to us."

Brandon wrinkled his nose. "Eeewww."

"Torin felt that Brandon was an *Unseelie* elf as he landed in the *Unseelie* Court when he came through the gate. *Seelie* elves go to the *Seelie* Court. *Unseelie* elves go to the *Unseelie* Court." Sareed gestured to Brandon's head. "It might also explain the dark hair."

"Torin?" Conall exclaimed.

"Yeah," Gavin said, "we were coming over here to tell you about him, but we kind of got side tracked."

"You've seen Torin?" Conall asked as he looked at Sareed. "Why didn't you say something?"

"I didn't know he was your brother at the time," Sareed replied. "It wasn't until I returned to the *Unseelie* Court and started the underground that he told me. He said I could pass messages to Dorthal through the *Unseelie* historian."

"You?" Conall whispered. "You're the one who started the underground?"

Sareed shrugged. "Someone had to. My people are dying by the hundreds on a daily basis. Someone had to stand up for them."

"But why you?" Conall asked. "Why couldn't you just —?"

Conall suddenly stopped speaking and turned to walk several feet away. Brandon blinked in surprised. His brother seemed to be muttering to himself, but Brandon couldn't make out what he was saying. He glanced over at Gavin, but he just shrugged.

Sareed, on the other hand, looked pale. His lips were pressed tightly together, and he had his arms crossed over his chest. Something was going on between Sareed and Conall. Brandon just couldn't figure out what.

"Fine, you're obviously going to do what you feel you need to. It's none of my business," Conall said as he turned and walked back over to them. "Torin, however, is my business. Where is he?"

"I explained that to Gavin," Brandon said quickly. "He was taken away by the *Unseelie* guards at the city center where the gate is."

"How long ago was that?"

"I don't know." Brandon glanced at Sareed, uncertain. "Five, maybe six weeks ago. It was the night Sareed found me."

"What in the hell were you two doing in the city center?" Gavin snapped. "You could have been killed."

"We were trying to get to the human side of the veil."

"Why didn't you just come to me?" Gavin asked.

"Torin said he was forbidden from traveling to the Seelie Court," Brandon said. "The only place we could think of that was safe for both of us was my world."

Gavin frowned. "But that's ridiculous. Torin is *Fayerye*, of royal blood. His *home* is in the *Seelie* Court."

"Actually, Brandon is correct," Conall said. "Our mayer and fayer banished Torin when he went to search for Roland against their wishes."

"What?"

Kavin paled, and Brandon moved closer to him, hoping to offer comfort. Kavin seemed even more shocked and horrified at Conall's news than he did when he discovered Brandon was carrying.

"It was many years ago, Kavin, and I don't think they meant to banish Torin permanently." Conall looked kind of sad, the corner's of his mouth pulled down in a frown. "They were just afraid of losing him."

"So they *banished* him?" Kavin snapped. "That worked well, didn't it? He hasn't been home since."

"Kavin, you don't remember what it was like at that time," Conall said. "Mayer and Fayer were —"

"Shh," Sareed suddenly said, tensing. "Someone's coming."

Brandon barely kept his yelp of surprise locked behind his lips as Kavin grabbed him and pulled him back against a large tree. Sareed and Conall did the same, both men pulling their swords and bringing them to the ready.

Brandon wanted to roll his eyes. "*Kavin, Torin told me that someone from the human world was supplying the Unseelie Court with automatic weapons. Conall and Sareed are bringing knives to a gunfight.*"

"*Fuck!*" Kavin exclaimed through their bond. "*We've got to get out of here.*"

Brandon couldn't agree more. He didn't know if whoever was coming presented a threat, but he didn't want to wait around to find out. They needed to get the hell out of there, and the faster the better.

"Conall," Kavin whispered. When the man didn't respond, Kavin called out a little louder. "Conall."

Conall had a deep frown on his face when he turned to look at his brother. Kavin made several small gestures with his hands. Conall grew more and more pale, but when Kavin stopped motioning, Conall nodded. He grabbed Sareed and gestured to him.

Brandon tried to see what they were doing, but Gavin grabbed him by the arm and started leading him back through the trees. Brandon's heart pounded. If the people following them were *Unseelie* guards, they were as good as dead.

Brandon wrapped his free arm around his distended stomach. He didn't want anything to happen to his child, their child. He wanted to live a long and happy life with his *leannán* at his side, watching their children grow.

Brandon knew he was overly emotional due to his condition. Sareed had explained it to him when he burst out crying for no reason over dinner one night. But at the moment, he felt he had a perfect reason to be tearing up. Someone was hunting them.

"Kavin, I can hear someone following us."

"It's Conall and Sareed, mo shíorghrá, don't worry."

"No, it's not." Brandon glanced over to where he could see Conall and Sareed making their way through the trees just to one side of them. *"Conall and Sareed are to our left. The noise is coming from behind us."*

Kavin stopped so fast that Brandon ran right into him. Kavin grabbed his arms, keeping Brandon from crashing to the ground. Kavin pulled him close and whispered into his ear.

"Don't move, Brandon. Don't make a sound."

Brandon thought to hold his breath but realized that might be a bad idea. When his face turned blue, he wouldn't have any choice but to blow the air out of his lungs and draw in a clean breath. That was sure to make noise.

Instead, Brandon closed his eyes and buried his face in Kavin's neck. The fresh, clean, masculine scent of his *leannán* calmed Brandon like nothing else could have. His heart rate slowed to just above normal, and his stomach stopped clenching. He was still frightened, but he felt more secure with Kavin's arms wrapped around him.

"Listen to me, Brandon," Kavin said through their bond. *"I want you to very carefully and very slowly step behind me, and then move toward Conall. Stay behind as many trees as you can."*

Brandon nodded. He took one more deep breath, then planted a small kiss on Kevin's neck. He opened his eyes and leaned back to look up into Kevin's face. *"You'll be right behind me, right?"*

Kevin smiled. *"I will, mo shíorghrá."*

"You'd better be," Brandon warned. *"I don't plan on raising this kid by myself."*

"Go, mo shíorghrá."

Brandon watched Kevin for a moment, then carefully started making his way toward Conall and Sareed. The sound of footsteps came from off to one side of him. Whoever was chasing them had caught up. His heart started to race again as panic filled him.

When Brandon reached the first tree, he flattened himself against it and looked back toward Kevin. Relief flooded him when he saw Kevin standing with his back against a tree, his sword drawn.

Kevin seemed to be waiting for something. He kept glancing around the side of the tree. Brandon looked around the edge of the tree he hid behind but he couldn't see anything except shadows.

Brandon moved to the next tree and then the next. Each time he reached a tree, he stopped to look back at Kevin. Kevin seemed to be following him, moving from one tree to the next, in exactly the same manner.

Brandon heard a noise and froze. He slowly turned his head and saw Sareed standing at the tree next to him. Conall was just beyond him. Sareed motioned with his hand for Brandon to come closer.

Brandon nodded and moved to Sareed's tree. When he glanced back to see if Kevin was following, he couldn't see him. Brandon glanced around him but Kevin was nowhere in sight. Neither was Conall. Both men had simply vanished.

"Sareed," he whispered.

A hand slapped over Brandon's mouth. His eyes widened as he looked at Sareed. Sareed held his finger up to his mouth, then gestured to the next tree. Brandon shook his head.

Sareed rolled his eyes and grabbed Brandon's wrist, yanking him along. Brandon resisted, pulling at the grip Sareed had on him. He didn't want to go anywhere without Kavin. He'd just found him again.

"If you don't move," Sareed growled softly, "you kill us all."

Brandon moved. He followed Sareed, moving from one tree to another, until he lost count how many trees they had hid behind. When Sareed finally stopped, Brandon looked around. He didn't recognize anything around him.

"Where's Kavin and Conall?" he whispered.

"Buying us time to escape."

Chapter Eleven

Kavin gripped his sword tighter, then glanced over to the tree next to him where Conall stood. He could hear people advancing on their position. Whoever was coming walked loudly and made no attempt to keep their presence a secret.

As the sounds drew closer, Conall met Kavin's eyes and nodded, raising his sword into the air. Both men had been trained for years how to fight their enemies with a blade and win. They had every confidence they would defeat their opponents, automatic weapons or not.

Kavin sent up a little prayer that Sareed and Brandon had gotten to safety, then took several deep breaths, readying himself for battle. When the first shadow started past his position, Kavin was prepared.

He immediately recognized the man as coming from the other side of the veil. He didn't have pointed ears like an elf did. His ears were human. He wore all black clothing and carried an automatic rifle.

Just as he stopped past Kavin's position, Kavin brought the hilt of his sword down on the man's head. He caught the man in his arms before he could hit the ground and pulled him into the shadows.

Kavin used the man's own gear to tie his hands behind his back and gag him. He stripped him of all his weapons and gear and put them in a small pile by the tree, then stepped back into position.

Conall took care of the next man, pulling him into the shadows as well. This went on and on until they had five men tied up and gagged and a huge pile of gear stacked by one of the trees.

Kavin knew it wouldn't be that easy to defeat the rest of them. The first few had come along one at a time, as if they were an advance unit sent to scout the terrain. They could hear more men coming, but they seemed to be traveling in a group.

Kavin glanced over at the pile of gear he and Conall had accumulated. He'd spent enough time on the other side of the veil to know how to use a gun. Maybe one was in order now?

Kavin stepped over and knelt down next to the pile. He searched through until he came up with two rifles and a couple magazines of bullets. He slipped one magazine into his pocket, then gestured to his brother to take the other one.

Conall shook his head. "I don't want anything to do with those damn things."

"Conall, if humans are bringing weapons into our world, we need to adapt, or we'll be slaughtered."

"No!"

Kavin rolled his eyes. He needed to have a long discussion with his brother about reality. Conall wanted to keep to the old ways. Kavin did too, but he knew it was no longer possible, not until they neutralized the threat against them.

"I'll take an extra magazine if you can spare it."

Kavin jumped and jerked around, the magazine slipping from his hand when he spotted Zack and Rocky standing behind him dressed almost exactly as the men they had captured. They even had guns.

"What in the hell are you two doing here?" Kavin asked. "Don't you have *leannáns* and young you should be caring for?"

Zack shrugged. "Eljin and Monte sent us."

"Where's Doc?" He had to ask. Rocky and Doc were almost never apart.

Zack grinned. "We met up with Brandon and Sareed on the way here. Doc's escorting them back to safety."

Kavin closed his eyes for a moment, thanking the powers that be for his *leannán's* safety. When he opened his eyes again, Zack and Rocky were both grinning. "What?" he asked, confused by how happy the two men appeared, considering the circumstances.

"Brandon and Sareed told us the good news," Zack said. "Congratulations to you both. It will be nice for Calum to have a couple more cousins to play with."

"What are you talking about?" Conall snapped as he stepped closer.

"The babies, of course." Zack glanced at Rocky in obvious confusion. Rocky simply shrugged.

"Babies?" Kavin asked.

"Well, sure, yours and Brandon's, and Conall and Sareed's." Zack turned to glare at Conall. "Although, it would have been nice if you had told us you were mated to Sareed. That came as a total surprise."

"Sareed is carrying?" Conall whispered. His face turned ash white when Zack nodded. A moment later, he took off running through the woods in the direction Brandon and Sareed had gone.

"What was that all about?" Rocky asked.

"Did I say something I shouldn't have?" Zack asked.

"I don't think Conall knew Sareed was carrying."

Zack frowned. "He did know they were mates, didn't he?"

"Yeah." Kavin nodded. "He knew."

"Then why didn't he say anything?" Zack asked. "Everyone loves Sareed. We don't care that he's *Unseelie*."

"Sareed refused to be his *leannán* and left him."

"So, that's what happened," Rocky said. "Doc and I always kind of wondered what went on between those two when we were on that mission. They seemed pretty chummy, and then one night, Sareed just up and left. Conall refused to talk about it."

Kavin nodded and looked toward the direction Conall had run. "Guess things are a little different now. They've got a child coming. Sareed has to agree to be Conall's *leannán* this time."

"I'm not so sure about that, Kavin," Rocky said. "Sareed is pretty damn stubborn when he wants to be. If he refused to be Conall's *leannán* in the past, a baby isn't going to change that."

"It should," Kavin grumbled as he turned back to the pile of stuff and started sorting through it. Anything he could find of use, he tucked away in his pockets or handed over to Zack and Rocky.

"I got to tell you, Kavin," Zack said, "these guys are pretty well outfitted. I don't even think our unit was this well equipped."

Kavin nodded. He suspected as much. "They're also human, and there are more of them coming."

Zack grinned and chambered a round in his rifle. "So, let's go welcome them."

They started making their way back through the woods, Kavin going down the middle, Rocky and Zack flanking him on each side. They moved slowly, so as not to give away their presence. Surprise would be their advantage.

Kavin stopped when he heard talking and held up his hand, hoping Rocky and Zack either heard the voices or saw him stop. He glanced to each side and saw they had. Both men were motionless and squatting down behind trees.

Kavin peeked out from behind the tree he stood next to. He could just make out shadowy forms moving toward him. The voices were getting louder as well. Kavin caught a movement out of the corner of his eye and turned to see Rocky motioning to him.

Rocky gestured with his hand that he was going to go out and around the people coming, come at them from behind. Kavin nodded and turned to see if Zack had seen. Zack had. He was moving closer to Kavin.

Kavin stepped over to take Rocky's spot. Zack took his. And then they waited. Kavin felt as if he were panting loudly, but he knew he was just imagining it because he

was so nervous and trying to stay as still as possible. He wiped his sweaty hands on his pant legs and focused on remaining calm.

"Let's just get to this meeting and get out of this damn place," someone said. "It gives me the creeps."

"Why?" Another man chuckled. "Elves give you the willies, Commander?"

"It's not natural," said the first man, their commander, Gavin assumed. "People don't have pointed ears."

"That's what freaks you out?" the other man said. "That they have pointed ears?"

"It doesn't freak you out?"

"I'm more freaked out by what Dr. Carson said about the males giving birth." The man snorted. "That's just wrong."

Kavin frowned. He could see the same deep grimace on Zack's face. This wasn't good. He thought they were just fighting humans. Now they knew the mad scientist was involved. That made things even more dangerous.

"If you ask me, they should all be wiped out before they infect any more humans," the commander snapped. "We've been able to stop them from coming into our world so far, but the minute we let down our guard, they're going to invade just like the doctor said. And then we'll be screwed."

"They fight with swords, Commander. I think we can beat them in a fight."

"We might be on top now, but mark my words, the minute one of these mutants gets loose in our world, they will spread like the plague. We should just send in a heavily armed platoon and get this over with."

"Invasion, commander?"

"Extermination."

Kavin swallowed hard. Thoughts of what would happen to his world if the commander got his wish filled his head. Invasion by armed humans would result in an outright slaughter. They might as well just send a nuclear bomb through the veil. The damage to life would be about the same.

"Come on, step up the pace," the commander said. "I want to get to this meeting, and get the hell out of here. I still don't understand why Dr. Carson needs these specimens, but if it will help us win the war against these freaks, I'm all for it. I just wish I didn't have to come in here and retrieve them."

"Someone has to, Commander. The doc says the more specimens he has, the better his chances of learning how to wipe them all out. This guy we're supposed to be meeting with has enough specimens that we won't have to come back for a few weeks at least."

"I still don't like the idea of trading weapons for specimens."

"Yeah." The man chuckled. "But if we arm them, they might kill each other off and save us the trouble."

"They also might try and kill us off."

Kavin was thinking the very same thing. He didn't have anything against humanity as a whole. He just wanted to take out the guys trying to experiment on his people and kill them off. He especially wanted to get his hands on the good doctor. That man enjoyed his work just a little too much.

The two men talking were coming closer. Kavin motioned to Zack, indicating what he planned to do. Zack nodded and moved a few trees ahead, putting himself between Kavin and the men. Rocky should be bringing up the rear.

Kavin waited, holding his breath as the seconds ticked by. He took his rifle off safety and held it against his body. The moment the two men stepped past him, Kavin pointed his rifle at them and chambered a round.

"That's far enough," he said. "Put your hands in the air and keep them there. The first wrong move and I'll shoot."

Both men put their hands in the air and froze in place. Kavin kept his back to the tree and waited for Rocky and Zack. He wasn't stupid enough to make a move toward the two humans until he knew the others had been neutralized as well.

A few minutes later, four more men walked past Kevin's position, their hands locked behind their heads. Zack and Rocky were right behind them, guns aimed at the intruders.

"On your knees, all of you," Zack said. Everyone except the commander dropped to his knees. Zack walked over and put the barrel of his rifle into the commander's neck. "I said, on your knees."

"I'll never get on my knees for you, ya freak."

Kevin enjoyed the smirk on Zack's face as he walked around to stand in front of the commander.

"Freak?" Zack asked. "Me? Hmm, you might be right. See, I don't try to exterminate people just because they're different. If that makes me a freak, so be it."

"You're . . . you're human!"

"Yes, I am. Major Zackery Banning, unit commander and marine sniper." Zack waved the barrel of his rifle toward Rocky. "Behind you is Lieutenant Rocky Rodriguez, expert in hand-to-hand combat and silent assassination."

"You're Marines?" The commander gasped.

"We are."

The commander started to lower his hands. Zack jerked the gun in his direction, and the commander instantly went back to holding them behind his head, glaring at Zack.

"How can you do this?" the commander snapped. "You're betraying your country, Marine."

"I'm not betraying shit, Commander," Zack snapped right back. "What exactly do you think the good doctor is doing with these 'specimens', as you call them?"

"He's finding ways to defeat them."

"Wrong!" Zack rolled his eyes. "He's trying to create a super soldier by combining human DNA with Elvin DNA. He's using Marines, just like you and me, and experimenting on them."

"You're lying."

"No, I'm not." Zack smirked. "I should know. I was a part of one of his little experiments. When I was no longer useful to him, he tried to have me killed along with every member of my unit."

"I don't believe you."

"I don't care." Zack laughed. "You've brought automatic weapons into the *Seelie* Court, Commander. That's against the laws here. As such, you and your men are now under arrest. King Tuathal will decide what is to be done with you."

"You can't do this!" the commander shouted.

"Watch me."

Kavin was more than willing to help tie up the men they captured. Zack held a gun on the men while Kavin and Rocky tied them up and stripped them of their gear. They also retrieved the weapons the men were bringing in to trade for specimens.

Kavin knew they couldn't carry everything back to the *Seelie* Court without help, but he didn't want to leave it out in the woods for anyone to find either. He was trying to figure out what to do with everything when Doc and a few *Seelie* Court soldiers showed up.

Problem resolved, they packed everything up and started back toward home, the prisoners walking between them with a couple of *Seelie* Court soldiers bringing up the rear, carrying the gear and weapons. It took several hours to reach the outskirts of Kavin's hometown. With a sense of relief, he eyed the towers of the castle as they came into view in the morning light.

"Almost there, Kavin," Zack said.

Kavin smiled and nodded. He wanted to get home as fast as he could and find Brandon. While he knew his *leannán* was safe, he hadn't had more than a few minutes with him. Kavin wanted hours, days, years. He wanted a lifetime to assure himself that Brandon was safe.

As they walked into town, people started to come out of their houses. Kavin was a little worried what they would do, but most just seemed curious. Soon enough, the gates to the castle came into view, and soldiers poured out.

Kavin didn't think he was ever so glad to see anyone except for maybe Brandon. As soon as the soldiers reached them, Kavin ordered the prisoners taken to cells in the dungeon. He made sure the soldiers understood they were not to be harmed. He had no idea how his men would react to foreigners in their world.

"Take these cases and all of the humans' gear to the armory. Someone will be down later to go through everything." Kavin drew in a deep breath and blew it out slowly when he saw his soldiers looking at the stuff in confusion. "Under no circumstances is anyone to mess with this stuff. Do you hear me? It's very deadly."

The soldiers nodded. Kavin could only hope they would follow his directions. He didn't want one of his men killed because they messed with something they knew nothing about.

Once the soldiers took the prisoners and weapons away, Kavin walked with Rocky, Doc, and Zack toward the castle doors. He was anxious to get to Brandon, but he also worried about the meeting they'd interrupted by capturing the commander and his men.

"Zack, we need to find out where that meeting was being held," he said. "If they have elves that were being traded for weapons, then we can't just sit back and let them be taken to Dr. Carson. The man is nuts."

"I agree," Zack said, "but I'm not sure the commander is willing to talk."

"Then we need to question his men one at a time. If we're lucky, one of them overheard something and will spill the beans."

"We can hope." Kavin frowned. "This crap has to stop."

Chapter Twelve

Brandon watched from the balcony, searching every face of every man who walked through the main gates for any sign on Kavin. He hated leaving him back in the woods and would have preferred to stay and fight by his side. But he understood his duty was to protect their unborn child.

"Sorry to say, it never gets any easier."

Brandon turned to see a small elf standing next to him. The man couldn't have been more than five foot six, if that. He was almost delicate looking, with long, white blond hair, piercing blue eyes, and pointed ears. He held a small bundle in his arms wrapped in a blue blanket.

"What doesn't get any easier?"

"The waiting." The man smiled. "I'm Eljin, Zack's *leannán*. I am also Kevin's youngest brother, so I guess that makes us related."

Brandon gave Eljin an easy smile. The man seemed so friendly. "Hello, I'm Brandon."

"Yes, I know," Eljin said. "You're Kevin's *leannán*."

"Yes."

"Welcome to the family."

"Thank you." Brandon felt his face flush. He hadn't expected to be welcomed so freely by Kevin's family. He wasn't sure what he expected exactly, but this wasn't it. He was a human, not elf.

The bundle in Eljin's arms suddenly moved and let out a soft, mewling noise. Eljin chuckled and pulled the blanket back, revealing a small, blond-haired child with the same piercing blue eyes as Eljin.

"Who's this?" Brandon asked as he leaned closer to get a better look at the infant.

"This is my son, Calum."

"He's beautiful."

"Would you like to hold him?" Eljin held the baby out to him.

Brandon backed away, shaking his hands back and forth in front of him. "Oh no, I might drop him."

"Brandon, you have to get used to it sooner or later and guessing from that stomach of yours, the sooner the better."

Brandon glanced down at his distended stomach and gave a shaky laugh. "Yeah, I keep forgetting about that. I guess I never thought I'd get knocked up."

"I must say, I was a little surprised myself," Eljin said. "My understanding was that only the *Fayerye* could carry young, not humans."

"Torin seems to think I might have some *Unseelie* blood in my veins. It's the only explanation he could come up with."

"Torin!" Eljin's eyes widened. "You've seen Torin?"

"Why does everyone keep asking me that?" Brandon rolled his eyes. "Yes, I've seen Torin. No, I don't know where he is at the moment. The last time I saw him was about six weeks ago when the Unseelie guards took him away."

Tears welled up in Eljin's eyes.

Heart sinking over the man's obvious sadness, Brandon reached out and awkwardly patted the elf on the shoulder. "Hey, I'm sure he's going to be okay. Torin seemed like a pretty resourceful guy to me. Hell, he hid me away and kept me safe for weeks."

"Did . . . ?" Eljin cleared his throat. "Did he know who you were?"

"You mean that I'm Gavin's *leannán*?"

Eljin nodded.

"Yeah, he knew." Brandon smiled. "He kept calling me *chara*. Drove me nuts for the first couple of weeks, then I kind of got used to it. He was really nice, told me all about carrying and what to expect and everything."

"Did he seem okay?"

"Yeah, I guess. I think he missed home, but he refused to talk about it other than to say he couldn't come home. We were trying to get to the human side of the veil when he was taken."

"We've got to figure out some way to get him home."

Brandon frowned. "But I thought he had been banished?"

Eljin waved a hand at him. "That was years ago. Mayer and Fayer were angry at him. His banishment lasted all of two weeks. We just couldn't find him to tell him to come home."

"Mayer and Fayer . . . I keep hearing those words, but I have no idea what they mean."

"Mayer means birth father." Eljin pointed to Brandon's stomach. "In your case, that would be you. Fayer is what we call the man who provided the seed for our creation, our other father. It literally means the father of our creation. That would be Gavin, in your case."

Brandon nodded. "That makes sense, I suppose."

"You'll get used to it." Eljin laughed.

Brandon smiled and opened his mouth to reply when he heard a noise down in the courtyard. He glanced over the balcony railing and watched as the gates opened and several men walked through.

He searched each face. His heart leapt when he spotted the one he was looking for. "*Kavin!*"

Kavin's head snapped up and he looked around him, as if searching for Brandon. Brandon waved his hand until Kavin saw him and waved back. Kavin said something to the man standing next to him, then raced toward the building.

Brandon didn't even say goodbye to Eljin. He just turned and hurried toward the stairs as fast as his increased size would let him. As he came around the corner at the head of the stairs, he saw Kavin running up them. Brandon stopped, waiting at the top for his *leannán*.

Kavin opened his arms before he even reached the top step. Brandon stepped right into them the moment Kavin reached him and buried his face in Kavin's neck. The man's sweet, masculine scent filled his senses.

"*Mo shíorghrá,*" Kavin whispered against the side of Brandon's head. "My beautiful *leannán*."

"Kavin," Brandon whispered back.

Kavin hugged Brandon for a moment more, then pulled back. He kept one arm wrapped around Brandon's waist and reached down with the other to palm Brandon's stomach.

"How is our little one? Are you feeling okay? Do you need to rest? Have you eaten?"

Brandon laughed even as he rolled his eyes. Who knew his big, strong *leannán* would turn into such a worrywart? "We're fine."

"Kavin, my son, it's good that you have returned to us safely."

Brandon glanced over his shoulder to see a rather distinguished-looking older man standing behind him. Even though his blond hair had started to turn white, he was still a handsome man.

"Mayer, it's good to be back." Kavin nodded to Brandon. "Have you met my leannan?"

"I have not yet had the pleasure." The man smiled as he stepped forward and held out his hand to Brandon. "I am told this is the way humans greet each other."

Brandon laughed and shook the man's hand. "It is one of the ways, yes."

"Good, good," the man said as he clasped his hands together in front of him. "I am King Tuathal, but please, as you have taken Kavin as your *leannán*, you are family, and so you must call me Mayer."

"Thank you, Mayer."

"Oh!" the king suddenly exclaimed. His eyes were wide as he moved toward Brandon, his hands coming down to cover Brandon's stomach. "You did not tell me that you were carrying. But how can that be? I was under the impression you are human."

"Me too."

"Mayer," Kavin said.

Brandon looked at Kavin and frowned at the man's ominous tone.

"Torin believes Brandon has some Unseelie blood in him, which is why he landed in the *Unseelie* Court when he went through the gate and also why he is able to carry my child."

The king's face paled and his hand fluttered at his neck. "Torin? You've seen Torin? He's alive?"

"I don't know, Mayer," Gavin said sadly. "He was trying to help Brandon reach safety when he was taken by the guards in Gorias. I am sorry, Mayer, but we haven't had word of him since."

Brandon glanced between the two men, father and son, and his heart ached for the worry he saw on their faces. They were so concerned for Torin. Brandon was too. Torin had been so scary to him in the beginning — his jailer, his tormentor. In the end, Torin had been a friend.

"Can we go get him?" Brandon asked.

Kavin nodded. "Yes, we will go get him."

"He is being held in the *Unseelie* Court?" Mayer asked.

Brandon nodded. "That's the last time I saw him. We were just outside of the city center where the gate is located when the soldiers took him. He tried to fight them, but there were too many. They just dragged him off."

The king frowned. "How did you come to meet him?"

"When Gavin pushed me through the veil and I landed on the other side, Torin was there waiting. I don't know what he was doing there. At first, I thought he was Gavin and called out to him." Brandon shrugged, wishing he had more information to give them. "He hid me inside his apartments until we decided we needed to escape before we were discovered."

"Yes, that was probably for the best. Humans do not bode well inside the *Unseelie* Court."

"That's what Torin said." Brandon wrapped his hands around his stomach. "He felt that the *Unseelie* guards might try to harm us because I am human — at least I appear to be, outwardly."

"Well." King Tuathal smiled. "It seems that is not exactly true. It is always possible for humans in your world to have the Elvin gene. Elves have passed back and forth between our worlds for hundreds of years. It's just not widely talked about."

Brandon inhaled sharply as he realized something. He turned to grab Kevin's arm. "Kevin, the genetic anomaly Dr. Carson has been researching, could it be Elvin DNA?"

Kevin's eyebrows drew together in a deep frown. "That would make sense. If only certain people have the anomaly, then that would explain why those he's experimented on have found their *leannáns* in our world."

Kevin started to laugh, and Brandon's eyebrows shot up.

"It also means that Zack, Rocky, and Doc can all carry children, since they too have the genetic anomaly."

A grin began to spread slowly over Brandon's lips. He loved the idea that he might not be the only human who could carry a child. He hated the thought of being in a category by himself.

"Can I tell them?" he asked. "Please?"

Kevin grinned. "As long as I get to be there when you do."

"Come, my children, let's get you two settled. Some food and rest will do you a world of good. Afterward, we can find the rest of our family and discuss bringing your brother home. You can give Zack, Rocky, and Doc the good news then."

The king's eyes twinkled as he turned and started down the hallway. Brandon took the hand Kevin held out to him and followed after the king. He suddenly felt a little better about being in this new world. He didn't feel quite so alone.

However, not feeling quite so alone and not being nervous were two different things. He was going to face Kevin's entire family soon, with the exception of Torin. The more they walked, the tighter Brandon gripped Kevin's hand.

"Relax, mo shíorghrá, my family already accepts you. You have nothing to be nervous about."

"Easy for you to say," Brandon whispered. "You're not a pregnant *Unseelie* elf human getting ready to walk into a room full of royal elves that are at war with *Unseelie* elves."

"Ah, no, but you did mention the key word, 'pregnant'." Gavin pointed to Brandon's stomach. "You're a human carrying an heir to the royal throne of the *Seelie* Court. No one's done that before."

Brandon stumbled, grabbing onto Gavin's arm when the man tried to catch him. "Royal heir?" he gasped. "Are you serious?"

"Perfectly."

Brandon frowned. Gavin was enjoying himself way too much. He crossed his arms over his chest and glared at Gavin. "You know I'm going to get you for this, right?"

"I'm counting on it, *mo shíorghrá*."

Brandon rolled his eyes and walked away, hurrying to catch up to King Tuathal. Gavin's laughter followed him. When the king stopped at a door, Brandon stopped too.

"I will have some food sent up to you both," the king said. "Is there anything particular you would like, Brandon?"

"No . . . well, do you have ham and strawberry jam here?" Brandon felt his face flush when the king arched an eyebrow at him. "A ham and strawberry jam sandwich just sounds really good."

"Of course, I will have some made up for you." The king reached over and patted Brandon's shoulder. "Make Gavin give you a bath. I'll send up food and clean clothes and arrange for the family to come together in say, an hour?"

"Better make it two hours, Mayer," Gavin said as he settled his arm over Brandon's shoulder. "I haven't seen my *leannán* in weeks. We have a little catching up to do."

"Very well, two hours then." King Tuathal smiled, nodded, and walked away.

Brandon yelped as Gavin suddenly pulled him into the room. The man moved so fast, Brandon barely had time to take in the fact that they were in someone's private quarters before he was pushed up against the wall just inside the room. The door slammed closed behind him.

Kavin crowded up close, a feral glint entering his blue eyes. "Hello, *mo shíorghrá*. I've missed you."

"Kavin!"

"Yes, *mo shíorghrá*?" Kavin murmured as he nuzzled Brandon's neck.

"Wh-what are you doing?"

"Reacquainting myself with my *leannan*'s beautiful body."

"D-don't you think we should be getting cleaned up like your Mayer said?"

"Nope, this is much more important."

Kavin pulled at Brandon's clothes, peeling them from his body. Brandon panted with need. He had missed the feeling of Kavin's hands moving over his body almost as much as he missed Kavin — almost.

Kavin's lips were at Brandon's nipples. His hands were everywhere. Brandon didn't even have time to be embarrassed over the changes in his body that had occurred since the last time he and Kavin had been together. Kavin's silky touch drove every thought out of his head.

"Kavin," Brandon groaned.

"I've got you, *mo shíorghrá*."

Brandon's arms flailed for a moment when Kavin swung him up into his arms and carried him toward the bed. He quickly wrapped them around Kavin's neck and held on until he felt the mattress at his back.

The heated look in Kavin's blue eyes made Brandon swallow hard. Kavin had looked at him in many different ways since they met, but not once with so much desperation.

Brandon opened his arms and held them out to Kavin. "My *leannán*."

Tenderness slowly replaced Kavin's look of desperation as he shrugged off his clothes and climbed onto the bed. He stretched out next to Brandon, pressing their bodies tightly together. His gaze followed the path his hands took down Brandon's body.

"Look at you." Awe filled Kavin's voice as he rubbed his palm over Brandon's belly.

"I don't look the same, do I?"

"You look perfect."

"I'm fat."

Kavin chuckled. "You're pregnant, big difference."

"Says the man with the flat stomach."

"Ah, but I won't always look like this." Kavin scooted down until his face was level with Brandon's swollen stomach. He started planting little kisses along Brandon's skin. "Even if I carry the next one, I don't think I will look as beautiful as you do at this moment."

"Men aren't beautiful." Brandon rolled his eyes even though Kavin's words pleased him. He wanted Kavin to still find him attractive and he'd worried he wouldn't.

"You are."

The little kisses Kavin was pressing against Brandon's stomach made him wiggle a bit. His skin felt hot, achy. So did the rest of his body. Luckily, Kavin seemed to want to pay as much attention to the rest of Brandon's body as he did his stomach.

Brandon nearly bucked right off the bed when Kavin wrapped his hand around his cock. The last several weeks had been filled with loneliness and his own hand. Having someone else touch him so intimately, someone who cared about him, made all the difference in the world to Brandon. It made it so much better.

"Kav"

Kavin's mouth closed over the head of Brandon's cock. Brandon's brains melted out his ears. He could only feel. And he felt everything—the tip of Kavin's tongue moving across the small slit in the head of his cock, Kavin's lips moving up and down his hard length, Kavin's fingers stroking him.

When Kavin's fingers moved down past his balls and breached his ass, Brandon was done for. He cried out, his body stiffening as an orgasm of intense proportions ripped through his body.

But Kavin didn't let up. He continued to suck on Brandon's cock and thrust his fingers in and out of his tight hole until Brandon's waning cock came back to life, hardening up as if it hadn't experienced an orgasm just moments before.

"On your side, *leannán*," Gavin whispered when he finally lifted his head.

Brandon was all too eager to comply, but his body felt like Jell-O. Gavin helped him roll onto his side, then immediately moved in at his back, his body pressed close. He raised Brandon's leg up and rested it over his thigh.

"Are you ready to be mine again, *mo shíorghrá*?" Gavin whispered against Brandon's nape. He gripped Brandon's thigh, pulling it up close to his body.

"Yes!" Brandon groaned as the head of Gavin's cock began to push into him. He wrapped his hands in the sheet as fire ignited inside of him. "It's been so long, Gavin."

"Never again, *mo shíorghrá*." Gavin punctuated each sentence with a thrust of his hips, driving his cock deeper and deeper into Brandon. "No more missions. No more going anywhere alone. No more separation."

Brandon lost all sense of time, all connection with anything outside of the two of them. Gavin's body moved against his, becoming more powerful with each thrust. Gavin gently caressed every bit of naked skin he could reach.

"Give me your life, your love, your forever, as I give you mine," Gavin whispered.

Brandon felt Gavin's teeth sink into his shoulder a moment later. The pain was instantaneous, shooting through his muscles. An intense pleasure quickly followed. Brandon cried out and shot all over the bed as a second mind-blowing climax swept through his body.

Kavin's roar of release was muffled against Brandon's shoulder but it was no less intense. Brandon felt the man's cock thrust deeply into him, then he stiffened. Copious amounts of fluid filled him as Kavin shuddered.

Brandon lay still as his breathing slowly began to return to normal. He could feel Kavin's chest move back and forth, thought he might have even been able to feel Kavin's heart beat in his chest.

Kavin reached over and laced their fingers together. He brought them to his lips and planted a small kiss on Brandon's knuckles. He wrapped his other arm around Brandon's distended stomach, drawing lazy circles with his fingers on Brandon's skin.

"Love you, *mo shíorghrá*."

Brandon smiled and glanced over his shoulder, meeting Kevin's deep azure blue eyes. "I love you too, Kevin."

Chapter Fourteen

Kevin stood behind Brandon, his arms wrapped around him as they both watched the precession of weary men walk slowly through the gates of the castle. His heart picked up a little as he spotted Torin for the first time in years.

He was surprised by how much his brother looked like an *Unseelie* elf, right down to the long, black hair. The only things that set him apart from the other *Unseelie* elves in the group were the deep, azure eyes that looked up at the castle.

Kevin couldn't believe he was seeing his brother after all of these years. He hadn't thought he'd ever see Torin again. Even after learning he was alive, he didn't have much faith they'd rescue him from the *Unseelie* Court.

Having to stay behind while Zack, Rocky, and Conall went in to save Torin had been one of the hardest things he had ever done. But leaving Brandon, especially now, wasn't an option. Brandon needed him here.

"Come on, Brandon, let's go down and greet my brother. I imagine he will be happy to see you safe and sound."

He took Brandon's hand and carefully led him off the balcony toward the stairs. It was slow going, as Brandon's birthing time drew near. Already, Brandon was starting to feel false contractions. Certain foods sent him running toward the bathroom and still others, especially ham and strawberry jam sandwiches, made Brandon groan in pleasure.

These last few weeks of pregnancy would be hard on both of them. They could no longer indulge in any kind of sexual penetration, so they had to find some very inventive ways of being intimate with each other.

Kavin was quite pleased with some of the things Brandon came up with to bring them both pleasure. The man had a wicked imagination and an appetite for sex that blew Kavin's mind every time. He didn't know if it was hormones or what, but he wasn't complaining. He'd take Brandon any way he could get him.

"Oh, he doesn't look so good, Kavin," Brandon said about half way down the stairs. "Do you think they tortured him?"

Kavin glanced down toward the large doors that led into the courtyard. Torin and several other men were just walking in. Brandon was right. Torin didn't look well.

His hair seemed dull but not as dull as his eyes. They were filled with pain – a deep, desperate pain. Without a doubt, Torin had experienced something horrific while in the *Unseelie* Court. Kavin just hoped the love of family could pull it out of him and put him back together.

"Torin!" Brandon called out, waving wildly as he tried to hurry down the stairs.

Kavin rolled his eyes and grabbed Brandon around the waist, slowing him down. "Easy, *mo shíorghrá*. You're not going to reach him any faster if you fall down the stairs."

As soon as they reached the ground floor, Torin stepped away from the rest of the group and started walking toward them. His eyes lit up a little when he saw Brandon, but they still didn't sparkle the way Kavin remembered them.

"*Chara*, it's good to see that you are safe," Torin said as he took one of Brandon's hands between his.

"I'm so glad you're here, Torin. I was so worried about you."

"As you can see, I am fine, *chara*. Nothing for you to worry about."

Kavin swallowed past the emotions building up in his throat when Torin's gaze turned toward him.

"Hello, Kavin."

"Torin." Kavin nodded then glanced down at Brandon for a brief moment before looking back at his brother. "I can never thank you enough for caring for Brandon in my absence. If there is ever a way to repay you"

Torin smiled, the first real emotion Kavin had seen on his face since he walked through the door. "There is no repayment needed, brother. Brandon is your *leannán*. It was my duty, and my pleasure, to see him back to you."

Kavin nodded, unable to speak through the tears clogging his throat. Torin had almost sacrificed his life to keep Brandon safe and get him home. Despite Torin's protests, if there was a way to repay the man, Kavin would.

"Come, your room is waiting for you. Mayer has prepared food for you and a hot bath." Kavin waved his hand toward the stairs. "They are waiting for you in your quarters. They wanted a private greeting."

Torin pressed his lips together as he gazed up the stairs. He looked like going up the stairs to see their fathers was the very last thing he wanted to do. Kavin couldn't help but wonder if Torin harbored hatred and anger toward their mayer and fayer. They had been the ones to banish him, after all.

"Torin, they never meant to banish you for all this time. It was a mistake, a costly mistake, but still a mistake. They never thought you'd be gone this long. They thought you'd come home after a couple of weeks."

"I'm sure they did," Torin grumbled.

"Torin —"

"I will not discuss this with you, Kavin."

Kavn nodded. The wide chasm between him and Torin saddened him, but after so many years, he wasn't sure he expected anything else. He would just have to give Torin some time and show him how much he was loved here at home.

"I will go up and meet with Mayer and Fayer." Torin glanced over his shoulder and gestured with his hand. A small, dark-haired elf darted forward.

Kavin arched an eyebrow in curiosity when the man latched onto Torin's side like he was a lifeline. He barely reached Torin's chest. Torin held the man closely to his side, gently stroking his fingers through the man's dark hair before he looked up at Kavin.

"This is Kenna, my *leannán*."

Kavin blinked, then slowly started to smile. "Welcome, Kenna." He held out his hand to shake Kenna's, but the man whimpered and shrank back. Kavin's gaze shot to Torin's.

Torin's face once again looked grim. "Kenna doesn't like to be touched."

"Of course," Kavin said quickly. "My apologies, Kenna. Please know that you are welcome here. If you need anything, just ask."

Green eyes blinked up at Kavin from beneath a fall of dark hair. The man gave a slight nod of his head, the only acknowledgement he'd heard Kavin's words. His entire body shook.

"Kenna will need some clean clothes," Torin said. "And if there is a healer here?"

"Yes, we have two — Doc, who is the *leannán* of our cousin, Monte, and his mother, Mara. I will send one of them up to you right away. And I'm sure we can find something for Kenna to wear until proper clothing can be made for him."

"I have one more request."

Kavin nodded. "Anything."

Torin reached into a small bag hanging from his pants. He pulled out something wrapped in cloth and handed it over to Kavin. "This needs to be placed in a safe place, preferably under constant guard."

"What is it?" Kavin asked as he began to unwrap the object.

"That is the Stone of Fál, one of the four Treasures of the Tuatha Dé Danann."

Kavin gasped as he pulled back the cloth and revealed a small stone. He had expected a regular stone, like a rock. Instead, his gaze fell upon a large, blue stone, like a gem, only Kavin could see right through it. It sparkled as he turned it in the light.

"How — ?"

"Kenna brought it to me," Torin said. "He was in a group of *Unseelie* elves that were being traded for weapons, but they rejected him because he has green eyes instead of blue. They sent him back to the dungeon."

"Where did he get it?"

"He stole it." Torin grinned and squeezed the small man glued to his side. "He took it right out of the pocket of one of the human soldiers. I doubt the man even knew it was missing. My *leannán* is quite the little thief."

Kavin glanced away to hide his shock. Torin seemed proud of the fact that his *leannán* was a thief. Despite Kavin's attempt to hide his expression, his brother must have seen his surprise because he suddenly frowned.

"Think what you will, but Kenna saved me when one of the human soldiers tried to kill me. I owe him my life."

Kavin felt his face flush as he bowed slightly in Kenna's direction. "My apologies once again, Kenna. I did not mean to cause you any discomfort. If your talents saved my brother's life, then I will forever be in your debt."

Kenna didn't respond to Kavin's words directly. Instead, he grabbed the edge of Torin's worn shirt and tugged on it until Torin bent down closer to him. Torin began to smile as Kenna whispered something in his ear.

"Kenna says thank you and not to worry," Torin said as he straightened. "He will not be picking your pocket."

Kavin chuckled. Kenna was cute, even if he was scared. Torin had obviously been through a lot, but it seemed Kenna might have been through more. If caring for Kenna was what Torin needed to return to the land of the living, Kavin was all for it.

"Maybe we can get together later, after Kenna and I get some rest?"

"I'd like that, brother," Kavin said.

"Until later, then" Kavin watched Torin and Kenna go up the stairs.

His brother looked like he had lost far too much weight. His worn and dirty clothes hung on his frame. It would take a lot of time and care before Torin regained his health and vigor, and Kavin wondered if he'd ever fully recover. Torin had been through something horrendous. Kavin just didn't know what.

He did know that Torin's salvation came in the form of a timid little *Unseelie* elf with green eyes, a fact Kavin could easily understand. A half-*Unseelie* elf, half-human had saved him, after all.

"Kavin."

Kavin took his eyes off Torin and turned to see Zack coming through the small group of elves. He smiled and shook the man's hand when he walked up. "A successful mission, I see."

"Yes, well." Zack glanced back at the elves standing around the door. They looked lost and more than a little confused. "We seemed to have rescued a few more people than we had originally planned."

"Who are all of these people?"

"They are *Unseelie* elves who were being traded to the humans for weapons. After we rescued Torin" Zack chuckled. "Okay, after we ran into Torin after he *escaped*, we were making our way back here when we ran into another one of those military units like we went up against the night Brandon came home."

"Is anyone hurt?" Kavin asked as he quickly glanced past Zack to see if there were any injured.

"No, we were lucky, real lucky. They weren't expecting us, so we took them by surprise. Rocky and Doc are escorting them to cells right now." Zack gestured with his thumb to the men behind him. "But I need to know what you want me to do with them."

"Well, they're not prisoners, so I guess we find places for them to get some rest, get cleaned up, and fed. After that, we can see about sending them home if they want or finding places for them to stay here."

"Yeah, I don't get the feeling they want to go back. And I can't say that I blame them. They were taken from their homes by guards and were going to be turned over to Dr. Carson for his sick little experiments."

"Kavin," Brandon said, speaking up for the first time in several minutes, "do you think they might have *leannáns* here, like I did?"

"I suppose anything is possible, *mo shíorghrá*."

"We have to help them, Kavin."

"We will, Brandon." Gavin motioned to a passing guard and pointed to the small group of men. "I want you to see to it that our guests are given quarters, some clean clothes, and plenty of food."

"Yes, *Fayerye*."

"They are to be treated like honored guests, is that understood?" Gavin would be pissed if anyone treated the men badly because they were *Unseelie* elves. "I'd also like the healers to take a look at them and make sure no one is injured or in need of medical care."

"Yes, *Fayerye*."

Kavin held Brandon close to him as a couple of guards escorted the Unseelie elves up the stairs. He didn't hold Brandon to him because he was worried about what the Unseelie elves would do but more for his own comfort. Having Brandon close to him when faced with what could have happened to him was heaven. He could have easily lost Brandon and never found him again. He was lucky.

"Where's Conall?" Brandon asked.

Kavin frowned and searched the entryway for his brother. "Yes, where is Conall?"

Zack chuckled and shook his head. "He went after Sareed."

"But Sareed left here before we arrived back last time," Kavin said. "It's been almost a month. How does Conall even know where to look for him?"

"Apparently, Sareed helped Torin escape. Torin told us that Sareed had given birth, and after helping him escape, Sareed traveled through the veil into the human world. So, I guess that's where Conall has gone."

"Geez, Sareed could be anywhere," Brandon said, edging closer to Kavin as if he needed the close contact of their bodies. "He's all alone out there, Kavin."

"Conall will find him." Kavin was sure of it.

"How?"

"I don't know how he'll do it, but I know Conall will find Sareed. That's his family out there. He won't give up until he finds his *leannán*."

Brandon drew in a shaky breath.

"Brandon, are you okay?" Kavin looked down at him, concerned for his emotional state.

"Yes, I just . . . I just wish all of this was over. The mad scientist is trying to steal people and create super soldiers. Humans are bringing weapons into this world. People are being traded for said weapons. And our family is getting spread out all over the place. It needs to stop."

"Oh, it will stop, Brandon." Kavin drew Brandon into his arms. "It will stop, I promise."

"You can't promise that."

"I *can* promise that. We're already ahead of where we were even an hour ago." He held up the fabric-wrapped stone. "We have this, for starters. That means one less relic that can be used to travel through the veil."

"And three to go."

"True, but it's a start. Plus, we freed a group of people being abducted, and we confiscated all the weapons being traded. Both are safe from the *Unseelie* Court."

"Until they find more people to trade and bring in more weapons."

"And, hopefully, we'll be there to save them too."

"But —"

Brandon was working himself into a stress overload. Kavin rolled his eyes and swung Brandon up into his arms. His *leannán* yelped, then grabbed onto him. Kavin held the small, cloth-wrapped stone out to Zack.

"I'd appreciate it if you could take this to Mayer and Fayer; see that it gets put under guard. I need to take my *leannán* upstairs and remind him what is so wonderful about our world."

Kavin could hear Zack's laughter follow him up the stairs. The man knew exactly what Kavin had in mind. He'd probably be doing the same damn thing as soon as he found Eljin.

"Kavin —"

"Not a word, Brandon."

Brandon's eyes widened at Kevin's stern tone, but he snapped his mouth shut. Kevin carried him down the hallway to their quarters, pushed the door open, then kicked it closed after carrying Brandon inside.

He laid Brandon down on the bed and started peeling the man's clothes off. A soft chuckle caught him by surprise just as he reached the tie on Brandon's pants. He glanced up to see Brandon's grayish blue eyes staring down at him, filled with amusement.

"What's so funny?"

"You." Brandon grinned. "Do you actually think I don't know how wonderful it is here?"

"You did seem pretty upset, *mo shíorghrá*."

"I am upset. Look at the world we're bringing this child into. It's scary. But that doesn't mean I want to be anywhere else except where I am. This is a wonderful place to live, Kevin, a wonderful place to raise our child. I know that."

"You know I love you, right?"

Kevin leaned into the hand Brandon cupped around his cheek. "Yeah, I know. I love you too, Kevin. And I'm fine, promise."

Kevin glanced from Brandon's face to the hard length in his pants then back. "Does that mean you don't want a blow job?"

Brandon's eyebrows shot up. "Are you out of your mind?"

Kevin chuckled as he untied Brandon's pants and bared his cock. "No, *mo shíorghrá*, just very lucky."

~ The End ~

About the Author

Stormy Glenn believes the only thing sexier than a man in cowboy boots is two (or three) men in cowboy boots. She also believes in love at first sight, soul mates, true love, and happy endings.

When she's not being a mother to her six teenagers or cleaning up after her two 70-pound lap puppies, you can usually find her cuddled in bed with a book in her hand or her laptop, creating the next sexy character for her stories. Stormy welcomes comments from readers.

Learn more about Stormy online at www.stormyglenn.com

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