

A romantic close-up photograph of a man and a woman. The man, on the left, has curly blonde hair and is looking down at the woman. The woman, on the right, has long brown hair and is looking up at him with a gentle smile. They are both wearing white, flowing robes. The man's hands are gently cupping the woman's face. The background is softly blurred, suggesting an outdoor setting with trees.

SAMHAIN

# A Touch of Heaven

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Portia Da Costa

*A perfect stranger with a heavenly touch.*

Miranda's first glimpse of her neighbors' house sitter nearly takes her breath away. He's everything she likes in a man—handsome and naked. She can't resist the impulse to introduce herself to this intoxicating stranger.

She quickly finds out he's more than just looks. His miraculous massage brings relief to her aches and pains, then pleasure that explodes into the sweetest, most erotic experience of her life. Yet with each encounter that follows, her confusion grows. Unlike other men she's known, he fulfills every secret desire, yet demands nothing in return.

Patrick is holding back more than a scrap of vital information. He is an angel on an earthly mission of kindness, bound by an unbreakable code. Miranda must not know that her wit, gentleness and womanly curves only sharpen his secret longing to live—and love—as humans do.

And Patrick faces an agonizing choice that could bring them everything they've ever wanted...or separate them for all eternity.

Warning: Contains a sizzling feast of hot pleasure with a naughty angel who likes to display his heavenly "attributes". This golden boy's massage technique brings a whole new meaning to the phrase "the laying on of hands".

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# A Touch of Heaven

*Portia Da Costa*

# Dedication

For the two Simons, human and feline.

# Chapter One

He's there again, my new neighbor, the guy who's house-sitting next door for the Johnsons. At least I think he's house-sitting. I can't remember them mentioning him before they went away.

I wonder if they knew he likes sunbathing naked when they asked him to mind the house for them.

Yes, naked. Starkers. In the buff. Not wearing a stitch. There he is on the lawn again on his tatty old blanket. Stretched out in the sun, exactly as the good Lord intended.

And speaking of the good Lord, thank you, God, for giving this old bird a treat.

This is the third day in a row that he's been out there, and the third day I've sneakily watched him from my balcony. Does he know I'm spying on him? He certainly doesn't give any indication. But then again, all he seems to do is sleep. He worships the sun for hours on end, and somehow he never seems to get burned. His skin always looks golden, beautiful and smooth, not the slightest bit red.

I shuffle my sun mattress over to the wrought iron railings at the edge of the balcony so I can get a better view, and boy, is he a sight for sore eyes.

He's got the body of a god and the face of an angel, and that's not exaggerating. From this vantage point, I can only see his profile and his tousled golden hair, but I know for a fact the rest of him is just as scrumptious, face *and* body. His back is a sculpted poem of muscle and his ass is nothing short of breathtaking. His strong, narrow feet look touchingly vulnerable stretched out in the sunlight.

I should go down. I should talk to him. He must know I'm here and that I'm looking. So why am I shilly-shallying? I'm a grown woman—far *too* far grown for my liking—and I shouldn't be afraid of some strip of a lad, of a youth or whatever, a guy who's probably far more years my junior than I care to count.

I pop my head up for a better view.

Well, he might be drop-dead gorgeous, but he's an unrepentant slob. His rug is littered with books, newspapers, an iPod, about half a dozen soft drink cans and the wrappers of several chocolate bars and at least four empty crisp packets. The lucky devil. Not only can he lie out in the sun for hours without burning, it also seems that he can guzzle junk food without putting on an ounce or damaging his pearly white teeth. And they are pearly white, because I just saw them. He smiled to himself a moment ago in his sleep.

I wonder what he's smiling about. Something must have amused him.

Even as I speculate, he lifts his head, looks over his shoulder and smiles again. But this time, it's directly at *me*.

Oh hell, that's torn it. What shall I do?

Several possible courses of action occur. Do I duck down again, pretend I'm not here and hope the sun was in his eyes and he didn't actually see me?

Don't be an idiot, Miranda. *Of course* he saw you. He's not blind.

Or do I brazen it out and smile right back? Give him a cheery, neighborly wave and grasp the opportunity I've desperately been waiting for—a chance to meet this dreamy guy face-to-face? I'll be playing with fire, obviously, given my history. Handsome younger men are a flame I've been well crisped by before. But hey ho, you only live once, don't you? I'm prepared to risk getting kicked in the teeth again, for just a chance to get close to a heavenly body like his.

Easing myself up into a sitting position, I smile down and flap a cautious wave at my naked neighbor. “Hi. Lovely day, isn't it?”

*Great opening, Miranda, so original.* But Golden Boy doesn't seem to mind. Yanking out his earbuds, he sits up, swivels around and gives me the full beam of the most extraordinary, spine-meltingly gorgeous smile I've ever seen on any man, woman or child.

And that's not all... I also get an extended flash of a sizeable and equally gorgeous penis.

*Lord, have mercy.*

“Marvelous,” he concurs, looking up into the cloudless sky for a moment as if he's searching for something. Then his stare flicks back to me, his smile daring me to comment on his nakedness, challenging me not to look away.

“Er...um...are you having a picnic down there?” *Great, Miranda, yet more sparkling repartee. He'll just write you off as a dotty old lady at this rate.*

Still smiling, he glances at the detritus surrounding him. “Yes, I suppose you could say that. A picnic, yes. Would you care to join me?”

*Oh hell.*

Excuses clamor to be made. I start confabulating stories about housework to do, shopping needed, or visits owed to friends. My bravado is in danger of withering on the vine and the sanctuary of indoors beckons me—a refuge from the dangerous temptation of beautiful young men.

I dither on, and he cocks his head on one side in a challenging way that's also completely irresistible. Before I know what I'm doing, I say, “Great. I'd love to. I'll be right down.”

“Wonderful.” His beautiful smile widens, and as I haul myself up from the mattress, my knees feel weak. And for once, it's nothing to do with middle-age wear and tear, arthritis and other general aches and pains, and everything to do with skittish, flurrying excitement and a mad, sweet, ridiculously girlish infatuation. The kind I told myself, never again, never again.

I grab my hat and my sun lotion and my water bottle, and slither into my wrap. I wish I dare dash inside and check myself in a mirror because I know I'm a disheveled fright. But with every sneaky glance I cast his way, I see him staring back up at me, waiting. Looking eager...

*Now don't fret, Miranda. He's just being neighborly, so it doesn't matter whether you look like a sophisticated prime-time woman or a scruffy old harridan. It's purely academic.*

Clutching my belongings in one hand, I make my way cautiously down the external wrought-iron stairs leading down to the garden, then pad across to the borderline between my realm and his. The low, insignificant hedge looms like a mighty Rubicon, but before I can hesitate again, Golden Boy springs up from his blanket and comes to meet me. He puts out a hand to take mine and helps me over the scrubby little barrier.

Great, now he *is* treating me just like a dotty old dowager, a ruin who can't manage to get across a foot-high hedge without toppling over. So much for my misplaced hopes he might fancy me.

And yet the cheeky twinkle in his eye is unmistakable. It's not sympathy. It's *interest*. I'm sure it is. I have to fight not to check out his cock for confirmation.

Calm down, you fool. He's just being nice. He's not like you. He doesn't have a fatal weakness for older women the way you do for younger men. And if he did, he probably wouldn't have it for women with quite so much mileage.

I offer him a nervous grin, and his answering smile makes me feel as if I've just drunk a glass of champagne far too fast. How could anyone feel worried or bitter or scared faced with that? It's just heavenly. And so are his face and body. No woman on earth could think straight around a guy who so casually displays a sumptuous cock like his.

I smile back at him, again fighting a titanic battle not to ogle his crotch. And failing miserably. South of the border, he's long and thick. Decidedly perky.

"Er... I'm Miranda, by the way. Miranda Clay," I burble as he leads me to his impromptu picnic ground. It's an exceptionally hot day, and I'm feeling hotter by the second just looking at him. It's not entirely a physical sensation, but more a strange wave of well-being flowing from him to me, transmitted by his firm touch and the air between us.

*Bizarre.*

"And I'm Patrick," he replies, courteously supporting me and helping me down onto the blanket. His eyes, which are blue as a crystal ocean, narrow like a blade when I flinch at a stray twinge of pain. "I'm pleased to meet you."

Like grace personified, he settles beside me, his body as fluid and supple as my younger one once was.



“Are you in pain, Miranda?” It’s a question, but I have the weirdest feeling it’s not the flinch that made him ask it. Without knowing why, I suspect he just *knows* things. And when he takes my hand in both of his and cradles it with his fingertips against my wrist, I also know I’ll do anything he says.

“Yes, I am a bit...but it’s nothing. Just a twinge of arthritis, that’s all.” I try to smile again but it comes out as a nervous grimace. He’s so awesome up close that I feel star struck. “We get it early in my family.” I twitter on, making sure he knows I’m not quite a senior citizen yet, just the victim of unfortunate genetics. “The sun will do it good if I’m careful and don’t get burnt.”

A frown pleats his otherwise flawlessly smooth brow, and an expression of sympathy forms on his handsome face.

*No! I don’t want pity. I already feel like forty kinds of fool for harboring the daft notion, even for a second, that you might fancy me.*

“Yes, I believe it will.” A fascinating mix of emotions crosses his features. There’s understanding, something a bit like admiration, and an almost crafty but benign calculation. I’d swear he knows that sympathy is the very last thing I want from him.

A bit at a loss what to say, I look around and notice his books. And get a surprise. Patrick is reading romantic novels. Some of the books I loaned to Helen Johnson months ago. I’ve been meaning to ask for them back because they were mostly keepers I wouldn’t want to part with.

“Um...enjoying the books?”

“Yes, indeed.” His expression confounds me. Men don’t usually read romances and chick-lit, but he seems completely sincere. “I like stories of love. Especially against the odds.” He touches the cover of a particular favorite of mine, a heart-wrenching historical, and again his face displays a chiaroscuro of emotions. I could swear he really does understand the agony of the book’s hero and his tangle of love and loss.

“Er...good. Glad you like them. That’s one of my favorites too.”

“They’re your books?”

“Yes, I loaned them to Helen. She broke her ankle and she couldn’t get about, so I brought a bunch of them round to keep her occupied.”

“That was thoughtful of you.” His blue eyes narrow, as if assessing my motives. Then he beams at me, granting his approval.

“She’d do the same for me.” My voice comes out a bit prickly. Who *is* this guy to pass judgment on me? Helen probably wouldn’t have thought to bring me reading material. She certainly hasn’t bothered to return what I loaned her.

“Would you like them back now?” He starts to gather my little library, stacking them in a neat pile, handling them carefully. I can see that some of the spines are cracked, but my gut instinct tells me he didn’t do it.

“No, it’s okay. Please hang on to them as long as you like. I have lots of others too, when you’ve finished those. Just let me know.”

“I will.” Setting the books aside, he glances up at the sky, his blue eyes wide open, not squinting at the sun.

“The sun is very hot. Would you like me to rub some sun lotion on your back?”

*Ooh, yes, you can rub whatever you want wherever you want, you gorgeous creature.*

I don’t say that, of course. “Thanks, but I think I’m okay for the moment. I just put some on.” I barely have to pause. “Would you like me to do you instead?”

He beams. Ah, what must it be like to be so adorable and *know* you’re so adorable?

“Thanks, but it’s okay. I’m okay for the moment too.”

Disappointment must be writ large on my face. I’m so pathetic. I told myself I’d never do the ooh-I-fancy-you, do-you-fancy-me dance ever again.

“But maybe in a little while,” he adds, with that little eye-narrow again. He’s wise. He knows what’s going on. “Can I offer you something else in the meantime?”

I can’t help but laugh. The cheeky so-and-so. He has the grace to laugh too, as he starts rummaging through his hoard of drinks and snacks, all the time watching me out of the corner of his twinkling eyes.

He offers me crisps, cheesy this and that, cupcakes, cans of full-sugar fizzy drink. He’s a generous host with his smorgasbord of junk food, and against my better judgment and my intention to eat healthy I’m soon putting away crisps by the handful. Oh, they’re so delicious and salty, and allowing the very devil to get into me, I speculate on other treats that are delicious and salty too.

Yes, I’m sneaking glances at his penis again. I try to be discreet, but every time I think I’ve managed to eyeball him without him noticing, I look up and he’s watching me.

“Okay, I admit it. Gerry Johnson always keeps his clothes on, so I’m not used to seeing buck-naked men in my next door neighbor’s garden. Can we get past that?”

He quirks his eyebrows at me. They’re as beautiful as the rest of him, sandy-gold and expressive. “I can go inside and get dressed, if like. I don’t want to embarrass you, Miranda.”

“No, it’s all right. Well, I don’t mind if you don’t mind.” I’m turning brilliant pink now, a rather fetching shade of cherry that’s much like the pop he’s been drinking and nothing to do with the sun. “It’s just that I can’t seem to stop myself looking at you.”

“No problem,” he says. “I can’t seem to stop looking at you either.”

*Whoa! Surely you jest, young man?*

I look down at myself. If I’m honest, I’m not really a total ruin, but he’s still getting the worst of the deal. I’m a bit fatter than I’d like, and a bit older than I’d like, but all things considered, I’m just about managing not to slide into total decrepitude. Even so, compared to him, I’m far from the pinnacle of desirability.

“Yeah, right...”

His stern look shocks me. “Why do you say that, Miranda? You’re a beautiful woman, and of course I want to look at you.” He abandons his beverage and wipes his lush mouth with the back of his hand in a gesture that does terrible, wonderful things to me, right down in the pit of my belly. “In fact, I’d love to see *you* naked too.”

I drop the crisp bag and a few spill out, but we both ignore them. I haven’t got the slightest idea what to say, but my mind goes mad, deluging me with a lush erotic picture show.

First, I see Patrick and me in bed, him looming over me, golden and beautiful as he prepares to fuck me. I can almost feel the tip of his gorgeous young cock pressing against my entrance. A second later, I’m lying wide-legged at the edge of the bed, and he’s kneeling between my thighs, his tongue delicately extended and ready to lick my pussy.

My face is pinker than ever now and even though I try to look away from him, I can’t. I’m hypnotized and I feel as if I’m falling into those heavenly blue eyes of his. The way he slowly smiles tells me he’s seen what I’ve seen...or some kind of approximation. I know he knows I’m thinking about sex with him.

“Now I have embarrassed you, haven’t I?” He doesn’t look sorry, just a bit like a naughty boy, who means well and isn’t afraid of mistakes. “I shouldn’t be so forward.” Suddenly he reaches out and takes my hand again. He holds it loosely in his, so easy and natural. “It’s just that I’m not used to being around women. And I tend to mess things up.”

How can a man who looks like Patrick not be used to women? It seems bizarre. And yet he looks so sad for a moment, and wistful, that my heart twists. I still desire him, but his mysterious sorrow touches me too.

“Ditto,” I answer wryly. “I’ve got out of the habit of being around men. I’ve been sort of off them...and it’s difficult to get back in the game.”

Patrick’s hand is warm, the skin smooth and very soft. I wonder what he does for a living; if he does anything at all. He’s been out here three afternoons running when most men of his age would normally be at work.

Good grief, is he a gigolo? I dismiss that one immediately though, even though he’s got the looks and the body. A male escort would be around women all the time.

Another frown pleats his flawless brow, and I shudder. I could swear he’s mind-reading me again.

“Are you cold? I could get another blanket, if you like?”

“No, I’m fine...just a funny feeling, you know?”

He nods and his blond curls bob in the sunlight. It seems he *does* know, even if I’m not quite sure what the hell I’m talking about.

“Did someone hurt you, Miranda? Was it a man?”

Yes, a man hurt me. I turn away. Those clear blue eyes are too searching. And yet suddenly, against my natural inclination, I start to talk.

“Yes, you could say that.” Both of his hands fold around mine again, encouraging and soothing. It feels wonderful, like a gentle glow of solace, and yet vaguely deliciously, sensual. “I’ve been married. Twice, actually. My first husband was wonderful, quite a bit older than me...but he died.”

I choke up, and we sit in silence for a few moments. But I regain composure from the slow, rhythmic circling of Patrick’s thumb against the pulse point in my wrist.

“I loved him, and he was a lovely man, but he’d have been the first to say I should remarry and be happy again. So I did, and I thought I was. Well, I *was* happy, for a while.”

Isn’t life weird? Here I am, telling all my woes to a beautiful, naked and very young man. He’s probably younger than the man who caused the woes and infinitely better looking.

“Steve, my second husband was quite a bit *younger* than me. We met through a dating web site. Sort of by mistake, when the search parameters were off. But we decided to give it a whirl anyway.” I squelch the what-if game. No use forever dwelling on bad choices. “We were great at first, and I was besotted with him because he was young and handsome and good in—”

Oh God, I’m red in the face again. What is it about Patrick that makes me want to tell him every detail? Sex and all...

“He was a good lover?”

“Yes. He was. And I loved him.” There were good days, and I miss them. I miss the sex. But mostly, I miss having someone to love.

He reaches up, brushes my hair behind my ears, obliquely urging me to go on, but in a way that allows me not to, if I don’t want.

“But it didn’t last long. I went into a bad patch with my arthritis. I didn’t want to go out as much, or spend money, or have a good time.” I straighten my spine, angry suddenly, my ire mostly aimed at myself for being so gullible. “And he met someone else. A younger woman, who also had a bit of money...” my jaw locks, but I force it out “...they’d been fucking for months when I finally found out and asked him to leave.”

As the words leave my lips, I experience the most peculiar phenomenon. It’s like a rushing wind on a still day, a whirl of something around us, furious and wild, my anger expressed as an external force.

And yet the empty crisp bags remain motionless and the trees and the stems of the flowers are totally still.

I look into Patrick’s eyes and they’re an inferno of blue, incandescent.

“The man was an idiot. He was a fool to give up a woman like you.”

Does he mean it? How *can* he mean it? He’s no idea what kind of a woman I am.

“You mean a gullible middle-aged widow with a bit of money?” I blurt out, not really thinking, just letting rip with my fears and pain.

The bizarre impression of a wind whirls up again, and Patrick’s eyes are searing. For a second his gentle fingers grip hard, tense and almost painful.

“No, I mean a beautiful and gracious woman with a pure heart.”

I laugh out loud again. He’s preposterous and crazy. A total stranger, potentially dangerous, but still irresistible.

“Thank you, Patrick. You’re an angel. But I’m not pure. No way. I’m selfish and I’m always having horrible thoughts about people.”

The whirlwind has died, and his blue eyes are calm again, but Patrick’s laughing too. We both chortle like loons, because this is all so absurd. I’m debating my moral fiber with a naked man I met about twenty minutes ago, and whose last name I don’t even know. Hell, I’m also beginning to wonder if he’s a squatter. Surely the Johnsons would have mentioned if they were employing somebody to house-sit?

When we settle down, he’s still holding my hand, still looking into my eyes. His are filled with an expression of wonder. “Your young husband wronged you, and yet inside you feel no true ill will. You still wish the best for him, despite everything.”

“How the hell do you know these things?” I try to tug my hand away, but he holds on, gentle yet firm. I’m shaking like a leaf, because he *is* right in a way. I don’t want horrible things to happen to Steve, even now. He did make me happy for a while, and I can’t deny that he tried his best. He just fell into temptation. God, nobody’s perfect.

Except perhaps...

“Call it intuition,” murmurs the perfect one softly. There’s a psychic wind blowing again suddenly, but it’s not anger or fear. Instead, it’s something far more primal and pleasurable.

“So, then, what’s your intuition telling you now?” My heart thuds and my ridiculous hormones cry *game on*.

“That you’re nervous and tense and you need to relax.”

I am those things, but the twinkle in Patrick’s eyes suggests a means to an end.

My body feels twinkly too. I’m nervous, but in a good way now. I’m a fine one, calling this beautiful man crazy. I’m the crazy one, because something tells me Patrick might be a far greater risk than falling for Steve ever was. “So what do you prescribe for that?”

“A massage.” He nods sagely then glances around the garden. “But in the shade to protect your lovely fair skin.”

“Um, yes.” Doubts gather. I don’t know him. He could be an axe murderer, a thief or a sex offender. Should I play safe? “Look...I...I think I’ll go inside, you know... It’s been nice chatting and all that.” I

scramble to my feet, but as I do, another twinge of pain makes me falter. In the blink of an eye, perhaps faster, Patrick's up and supporting me, his hand beneath my elbow.

"Don't go. Please." His blue eyes implore me. It's not Steve-style wheedling and pleading. There's nobility in Patrick's expression, and a sense of genuine sorrow. It knocks me sideways because it's intense and unfeigned, like nothing I've ever seen before. "You're safe with me, Miranda. I'll never harm you. I couldn't."

I believe him, and my heart suddenly flies. "Okay then...maybe a massage would be nice. Have you any experience?"

His smile is sweet and slow. "Yes, indeed. The laying on of hands is one of my specialties."

Did he mean that in a naughty way...or was it something else? It's hard to tell. His eyes are sparkling again. I can't put my finger on it, but I've a feeling there's more to it. Something a bit beyond my comprehension. I ought to worry, but I decide I don't want to at the moment.

We decamp to a spot beneath the old oak tree, and as Patrick lays out the rug, I look around, pondering. My neighbors aren't great gardeners, and mowing the lawn a bit is about the extent of their green thumbs. They usually only have a few scrappy flowers and shrubs that don't do very well, and yet now everything's suddenly bright and blooming, full of color and fecundity. I glance at Patrick, with his magnificent, smooth young body that has a special bloom all of its own, and I wonder.

*Stop it. You're going mental, woman. Stop having weird thoughts and just enjoy the moment.*

"You should undress," he announces calmly, as if it's the most normal thing in the world.

I smile nervously, but to my astonishment, my fingers take on a life of their own and follow his suggestion. First goes my wrap, and then, bloody hell, my very modest and quite covered up bikini. I'm scared and trembling and embarrassed, but I just keep on peeling off clothing. I can't even do the old Venus on a half-shell thing and attempt to cover my breasts and my sex. My hands just won't seem to go there.

So I stand, on display, before Patrick's youth and splendor.

My body isn't bad. I try to keep as fit as I can, all things considered, but I've got qualms aplenty.

And yet his eyes are warm and appreciative. There's nothing salacious or prurient in the way he assesses me, just an admiration that's sweet and encouraging.

My spirits soar, and I'm almost disappointed when he helps me down onto the blanket and much of me is covered again. I adjust my position once or twice in what must be a subconscious attempt to get him to notice my plump, but not too shabbily shaped bottom.

He likes me—I think. In fact, unless I'm mistaken, he actually fancies me.

The idea of it whirls in my brain and my bloodstream as I hear him sink to his knees beside me, and feel the faint displacement of air across my skin. It's as if my senses are tuning up like an orchestra. I can hear his breathing, a soft, even counterpoint to the hum of insects in the air and the rustling of the branches above us. I can smell the summer flowers in the garden, and yet through that there's also the clear,

delicious odor of Patrick's body. He smells clean, and also of some faint exotic perfume, vaguely Eastern, all rounded out with a hint of fresh sun-drenched sweat as an earthy finish. Just a nose-full of him is like swigging down a bottle of vintage champagne.

And touch. Oh, oh God, touch. His fingertips settle on my shoulder blades like ten little kisses from a cherub.

"Relax," he whispers, and those warm, sensitive fingers begin to move.

At first it's all bona fide massage. No funny business. He works quite lightly, the contact circumspect, gliding lightly over the muscles of my upper back and shoulders. I've had plenty of massages in my time, some from beauty therapists, some from physiotherapists, but never anything in circumstances quite like this. Patrick's touch is like heat sliding over me, but more, so much more. It radiates from the point of skin-on-skin and flows throughout my body.

And as he strokes and nurtures and cuddles me, he sings. And that's not like anything else I've encountered anywhere either. His voice is soft and mellifluous, but there's no recognizable tune or even proper words. It's more akin to the joyous calls of the garden birds, and it seems to melt into his touch like an extra glow.

I do relax. I melt. I float. And before long I start to purr like a contented cat being fussed over. I've never felt so loose and at ease, and yet at the same time I'm a dynamo of excitement. Waves of well-being surge around my body, bouncing from the crown of my head to my toes, and always doubling back again, and again, to my breasts and my sex.

It's soon impossible to keep still. I squirm slowly against the blanket, rumpling it up, rubbing my breasts and my pussy against the solid earth beneath me.

Patrick hasn't even touched me in an intimate way yet, but I know in every fiber that he wants to. In silent invitation, I part my legs, waiting and hoping.

He inclines over me, his lips against the side of my face, still softly singing, his breath wafting against my skin as he tucks my hair behind my ear. He settles his lips against my eyebrow, then the arc of my cheekbone, then the corner of my mouth. Then he lets them stray down over my jaw and the slope of my throat. His hands move too. He slips one like silk along the indentation of my waist and over my hip and then the curve of my buttock, while sliding the other beneath me to cup my breast.

*Oh boy.*

His knees brush against my thigh where he's angled against me. If I just flexed my fingers a little I could reach out and stroke his penis. The message flies from my brain down to my hand, but before I can act, he's fondling my breast, his fingers riffing to and fro over my nipple. It's a delicate caress, not gross or greedy, a pleasure that's about me, all about me.

"Oh please," I moan, not entirely sure what I'm begging for. Is it more of his touch? Or maybe his kindness? His warmth? I'm not even sure that I really want him to fuck me... Well, at least not yet.

He plays with my breast, still gently murmuring in my ear, his voice low now, but still musical, almost a coo of encouragement as he moves on, seeking the centre of my pleasure. Drifting, still moving my hips around, I try to imagine the sight of us—me, prone on the blanket, him over me, curved and protecting, his head close to mine as he touches me.

The air around us is latent, magical, and as I shift uneasily, lifting my hips to let him at me, I feel the waft of a sudden breeze blowing around us. It feels close, not part of the garden, but instead a strange micro-system that affects only Patrick and I. Weird notions flit through my brain then fly off out again as he finds my clitoris and begins to rub.

Shivers of intense pleasure ripple instantaneously from the point of contact. I never realized I was quite so stirred, so aroused. My legs kick against the blanket, my toes catch at it, and my knuckles brush momentarily against Patrick's penis, so thick and warm. I try to clasp him, but he adjusts his position, improving the angle of his wrist to better pleasure me. A tiny plume of disappointment spikes, but he kisses my neck, murmuring something in a language I don't recognize, the words against my skin. Suddenly it doesn't seem so important to touch him as long as he's still touching me.

I don't know what he's saying, but I know, still, that it's all about me.

He circles his fingertip and sends it flicking, swooping and dipping deep into my cleft for more fluid, before returning it to my clit. He's relentless, sweetly giving and unbearably accurate. Denied the gift of an orgasm at another's hand so long, I sob and cry and buck up from the earth beneath me when it arrives, given by Patrick.

Deep, hard, wrenching waves of pleasure break through my sex and my belly, and then wash up against my heart and mind and soul. My brain goes white with ecstasy and the strange wind around us rises and billows.

The last thing I remember before it all becomes too much is a dual volley of peculiar sharp sounds, like a pair of sheets on a line, flapping in a gale, and then the sensation of Patrick's arms around me and the two of us floating upwards.



## Chapter Two

It's hard to wake up. I'm in the middle of a dream about flying, but whether I'm a bird, in a hang-glider or whether I'm just Superwoman, it's hard to tell. I'm simply wafting, up, up, upwards, above my own garden.

My eyes snap open, and I'm awake. But something's strange. Judging by the angle of a shaft of sunlight on the bedroom wall, it's some time during the morning. And the last thing I remember was afternoon...and Patrick.

*Ouch.*

When I shoot up into a sitting position, the first thing I notice after a sharp twinge of pain in my hips is that I'm naked. The second is that I've been lying on top of the duvet, snuggled up in a pair of comforters that I usually keep folded over the bottom of the bed for cooler nights.

What the hell's happened to me in the last twelve to eighteen hours?

Where's Patrick?

That last question seems to be the most important. In my mind, I suddenly see him and start to blush.

How could I have let him touch me like that? What the hell was I thinking? I talk to the guy for the first time ever one minute, and the next I'm letting him touch me and make me come. Sometimes I really am too stupid to be alive.

Fishing around for my robe, I monitor my body. There are the usual twinges and aches here and there, but nothing too serious. In fact, I feel better than I have done for a long time. It must be the *massage*. Despite everything, I have to laugh. Illicit orgasms sure beat ibuprofen and heat wraps any time.

Down in the garden, there's no sign of my mysterious therapist, and I'm disappointed, despite the potential for embarrassment at our next meeting. There's no blanket, no picnic detritus and no Patrick. The garden looks strangely empty and cold despite the sunshine, and even the plants and flowers look more bedraggled than they did yesterday. When we were talking, and touching, everything down there seemed lush and juicy, almost technicolor, and now it all looks ordinary again.

Because Patrick's not there, the garden doesn't attract me this morning, and turning to the bed, I frown, still wondering how I got here. My stomach grumbles and it dawns on me I'm starving.

What the hell happened to me? Did I pass out from pleasure or something? Did Patrick carry me up the stairs and tuck my fleeces around me and leave me to sleep it off? It's all a mystery, a blank spot, completely weird.

A glance at the clock sets a fire under me. Shit, I'm supposed to be working at the charity shop this morning, and I've only got around an hour to shower and dress and get halfway across town. Looks like I'll be in the car today. I usually walk, but at my pace I'll never get there in time to open up.

But first breakfast, and lots of it. My appetite is enormous, and my body feels well and full of zest, despite its problems. I guess that's what happens when you're well and truly pleased.

By the time I return from my stint at the charity shop, and from running errands for one or two old neighbors in the avenue, it's well after lunchtime and I'm starving again. It's been a hectic morning and also still confusing.

I still can't remember quite what happened yesterday, and I'm more puzzled than ever about the beautiful man who touched me so exquisitely. None of my neighbors ever seem to have seen him, nor were they aware the house next door to me was occupied.

I make a meal and eat in the kitchen, staring out across the back lawn, looking for my beautiful enigma. The house and garden across the dwarf hedge look desolate, uninhabited, and as I consume my omelet and salad without a great deal of enthusiasm, I begin to wonder if what happened yesterday was just a dream. A fantasy conjured by a middle-aged woman who's finally ready for sex again after a period of sensual drought.

Frustration, that's it. I look out over the garden and scowl at the rain that's just started to fall. I'm horny, and somehow, I got sucked in deep by a really vivid daydream. I imagined an idealized man and then masturbated myself into a stupor, dreaming about him.

Possibly.

The trouble is I sincerely *wish* he was real, even if he is mysterious and dangerous. And as is my wont, a bit too young for me into the bargain.

The rain is heavier now and the drone of it weighs me down. I don't know what to do with my afternoon, and none of my usual pastimes appeal to me. Television seems boring. Reading—can't summon interest in my book. Going online and seeing who's chatting on various social media sites—well, that all seems trivial, more unreal than my crazy fantasies and not nearly as much fun. I decide on a shower first, and then lie on my bed in hopes of a nap, listening to the raindrops pattering on my balcony through the open patio doors.

Pretty soon I'm drifting along the hinterland of sleep and hello, hello, Patrick comes a calling in my daydream, just as I'd hoped he might.

We're on the blanket together again, beneath the tree down there, and he's kissing me, his beautiful naked body pressed close to mine. His hands rove over me, and mine over him, and at last I get a chance to stroke his penis.

He's hard and hot and fine, and he moans as I strum along his length and then play naughtily with his glans. His breath is warm, like a wind from heaven as he pushes and pushes and pushes into my grip.

I love touching him. I want to pleasure him, just as I wanted to yesterday. It was all about me down there on the blanket, but this time, next time, I want it to be about him too.

Assuming there is a next time.

Sliding my fingers between my thighs, I imagine it's him. First, he's touching me with fingers, then moving over me, pressing in with his cock. Of course masturbating doesn't really feel like penetration, but I can dream, hell yes, I can dream.

He pushes into me, and it feels like he's entering my soul as much as my body. Dream Patrick is all warmth, light, energy, positivity, hope. With him to pleasure me, I'd barely think about my aches and pains and middle age at all. With him I could be as young and free as springtime.

Rubbing myself, I writhe on my big lonely bed, lost in my fantasy, imagining my beautiful lover powering in and out, in and out, his mouth peppering my face with kisses as he fucks me wildly. It's glorious, fabulous, and just what I want. It's all I've been thinking about since...since...since I soared to orgasm yesterday, and then passed out, senseless.

Pretty soon I'm there today too. I climax sharply, shouting, "Patrick. Patrick." I'm way beyond caring that the windows are wide open, and if he were out in the garden enjoying the rain, he'd surely hear me. Behind my tightly closed eyes, I see his face and his marvelous smile, and as I throb and throb, I seem to hear my own blood pulsing and beating like the sound of giant waves.

Replete, I collapse back on the bed, smiling, loving the way pleasure always seems to make me feel so much better. Even if it's pleasure I've taken alone. I relax against the duvet, hand still between my thighs, and start to drift. Not dreaming of sex this time, but just companionship. His presence, his voice, his kindness.

I wonder who he is and where he is. Whether I'll ever see him again.

Several moments pass before I realize I can hear breathing now. It's soft and close, within feet of me...and it's not mine.

Dear God, Patrick is sitting cross-legged on the bed, barely inches away from my feet.

"What the hell are you doing here?"

I drag my wrap together and clutch it closed as I scoot right up the mattress to the pillows and jam myself against the headboard.

What's going on? How did he get here? How could I not feel the mattress sink under his weight?

I blink like a fool. I'm gasping as if I've been running. What *is* going on?

"I'm sorry I've startled you. Forgive me. I didn't mean to shock you."

His voice is so contrite and sweet, and the expression on his face so perplexed that he almost seems as flabbergasted as I am. But still, what the dickens... Even he, as lovely as he is, shouldn't come creeping

and sneaking into my bedroom and spying on me while I'm...I'm...Well, while I'm doing what I was doing.

"Jesus, Patrick, you really are the living end, you know. Couldn't you have knocked or whatever?" I glance at the door, but I'm sure he didn't come in that way. He must have come up the outside steps and through the open doors, but I can't for the life of me work out how he got up here without the staircase creaking and groaning the way it usually does. And somehow he's managed to cross the room without me even being aware of him too.

"I've brought your books back." He nods to my collection of romance novels, stacked in perfect symmetry on the sideboard. "I didn't want to disturb you. I thought I'd come up...quietly."

*How did you do that? How on earth did you do that?* The questions bubble in my throat, but somehow I can't ask them. It's as if I don't *want* to know. As if I'm scared to know. Still panting, I try to settle myself and drink him in.

He's dressed today. And not in the sort of jeans and T-shirt I might have expected. No, he's clad in the trousers and waistcoat of what might once have been a very fine, tailored suit, but which now looks a little worse for wear. It's mid grey, and he's wearing a proper shirt with it, only open collared and with his sleeves rolled up to his elbows. Not surprisingly, given I never heard his tread, his feet are bare. They're narrow and golden and just as yesterday, they look strangely vulnerable. I want to touch them. Maybe kiss them.

"How did you know I was up here? Have you been spying on me?" I get terrible qualms of fear all of a sudden. *Is he a stalker?* A stalker who has naked, beautiful feet?

"Not spying, just watching over," he says quietly, smiling but also a little perplexed. Although why he should be perplexed when he's the one who's just snuck up on me without making a sound and then watched me masturbate, I really don't know.

And now the first shock of his appearance has passed, the full force of my embarrassing predicament hits me. My ears, and the rest of me, turn puce.

"Well then, obviously, you've just *watched over* me masturbating, haven't you?" There's no way I can deny or dissemble, so I might as well charge at this thing head on. Even so, I smooth my robe down over my thighs in a belated attempt at modesty.

"Yes, indeed." He smiles, and it's like the sun coming out. Even the rain outside seems to falter as his face lights up. "You look very beautiful too. I love seeing your pleasure, and hearing your voice. You're magnificent, Miranda. You take my breath away."

And you take mine. Even in his clothes, and when I'm still vaguely cross with him for sneaking up on me, he's the most beautiful sight I've ever seen in my life. The eyes. The mouth. The hair. The knowledge of that sublime body beneath his dandyish but second-hand-looking clothes.

“Who are you, Patrick?” The words come out as if someone else’s asked them. I didn’t intend to. I’m not sure I *want* to know.

Again, he looks troubled. A little bit sad. It’s as if the question and its answer are both fraught with anguish. I wish I’d never spoken, but I can’t call it back.

“A friend, that’s all I want to be. A friend.”

Oh God, how I want one of those. I have acquaintances and friends, people I know and like. But no-one close, the way Gerald once was, and even Steve after him. I know I’m being stupid, because I sense Patrick is keeping untold numbers of secrets from me, and could be anybody—or anything. Lord knows what. But still, to be friends with him seems like a gift from heaven.

“Okay then, friend. What do we do now? What’s next?”

He laces his fingers together, elbows on knees, and studies me for a moment, beaming now that the first barrier of awkwardness is breached and we’re back in our secret world of unreality.

“I’d love to kiss you.” As if anticipating the taste of me, he flicks his pink tongue across his lips.

I shudder. Down below, my sex clenches as if he’d flicked at *me*.

“Er, okay then.” I’m so excited, so hungry for him that I can’t think of anything better or more sophisticated or sexy to say. I can’t believe how he befuddles me like this when I barely know him.

He surges forward across the bed and half-kneels in front of me, then with a warm hand cradling my cheek, he draws me to him. His mouth is sweet and mobile, alive with promise and potential. I sink back against the pillows and he follows me in, swooping over me, gentle and warm and generous.

It’s all so easy with him somehow. I don’t worry the way I did with Steve, about my age or my attractiveness or my health issues. In my gut and my heart, I know that Patrick doesn’t judge me the way others do. As he explores my mouth with his twisting, dabbing tongue I wind my arms around him. My robe falls open, but I don’t give a damn. I even smile.

“Why are you smiling?” he asks, pausing to plant tiny kisses at the margins of my grin.

“Oh, just thinking what a silly old fool I am,” I answer lightly, kissing the corners of his mouth and the sweet little indentations of his smile dimples. “For succumbing so easily to the blandishments of a handsome young man.”

He stares at me, still smiling. His expression is mild yet quizzical. “But you’re not old, Miranda. And I’m not young.”

“But...” I start, and then look at him. Really look at him.

The light must be different today, because as I study his handsome features, I realize he’s absolutely right. I don’t know why I didn’t see them before, but he has a few slight lines on his forehead. I must have been dazzled by him, I guess, because they’re definitely there, along with laughter crinkles at the corner of his bright blue eyes. He has a sort of nicely seasoned look that wasn’t as apparent yesterday out in the

garden. But it doesn't make him any less fabulous. In fact, he's even more gorgeous for looking like a grownup man who's seen some life, rather than a boy.

"Well, you're right about yourself. Now I look at you, I see you're not actually a slip of a lad at all, even if you are still God's gift of hot male pulchritude." He has the grace to smirk and blush a little. He waggles his sandy brows, clearly not immune to flattery. "But... well, I have seen better days, and I'm a bit creaky and past my sell by date."

"Nonsense. That's total BS."

The way he blurts it out makes us both laugh, and as we kiss again, desire grinds low and hard and urgent in my belly.

"Relax," he murmurs again, his mantra as he starts kissing on down my throat and my chest in the general direction of due south, "I'll make you forget your twinges, woman," he growls, almost aggressive as he zeroes in on my left breast, drawing the nipple into his mouth and swirling his nimble tongue around it.

My hips lurch as if connected to my breast by a singing chord of sensation. He sucks and I start hitching about uncontrollably. I grab at his golden head, and at the same time grind my crotch against his clothed, athletic body. It's like he's turned on an engine inside me, a new power source of sex and hunger.

He kisses my breasts, playing around, dipping from one to the other, licking and sucking and teasing. My pussy is furious with desire, and suddenly friction against him just isn't enough. I want more. And whether from him, or from myself, I just don't care. Still holding onto him with one hand, I wiggle the other between us, searching for the roaring heart of the matter. He feels me rummaging around and he laughs against my skin.

Then he looks up and swipes that wicked, clever tongue around his mouth again.

I nearly lose it. My body jerks. I've always doubted that any woman, much less one like me, can come without some attention lavished on her clitoris, but right at this moment, I'm as near as I'll ever be to coming spontaneously. Especially when Patrick winks and murmurs, "Your wish is my command."

Jesus, has he read my mind? Or is it just simple but acute intuition, a man following the natural course of events. Whichever, I want him to go down on me, and he knows that. With no further ado, he starts kissing me again. First a few random pecks in the area of my rib cage, then a more determined track down the median line of my belly. When he probes my navel with the point of his tongue, I let out a squeak and tumble even closer to that orgasm.

I have both hands buried in his hair now, and it's an effort not to pull it, especially when he scoots farther down the bed and slides his hands beneath my bottom to lift me up. I feel so voluptuous and uninhibited. I'm vulnerable to him, yet glorious too. He nuzzles me, rubbing his nose and his mouth against the delta of soft hair covering my pussy. Not diving in yet, he just plays around, bussing and teasing in a way that's as affectionate as it is sexy and raw.

Still holding me up with one flat hand beneath my bottom, he shakes free a moment, then reaches forward, grabs a pillow and stuffs it beneath me for better access.

I feel ruder and more like a sex goddess than ever.

Then he goes in, thumbs teasing apart the mat of my pubic hair, and then parting my sex lips to expose my clit. As he blows lightly on it, I grab for his hair again.

*I want your mouth, you gorgeous angel of sexy naughtiness. You beautiful man from out of nowhere, give me head.*

Without a moment's pause, he extends his tongue and gives me long, insolent savoring lick.

I howl, bucking up from my supporting pillow and crushing myself against his mouth with all the strength in my body and some I never even had before.

"Yes, yes, yes," he chants against my flesh, and then with a noise like a growl he gives me a merciless, stringent tongue-lashing.

I come immediately, high and hard, but that doesn't stop him from assailing me, pressing me to greater heights. Somehow, he manages to hook his arm and hand around my thigh in devilish cleverness so he can create tension against the flat of my belly and increase the intensity of the contact.

Orgasms explode in my loins and in my head like a syncopated chain of beautiful fireworks. I shout and moan and curse and babble. I don't care if the entire avenue hears me, or even if someone calls the police. My only reality is the sublime pleasure of Patrick's mouth. His tongue is warm and flexible, plaguing me in a dozen different strokes and speeds, flattening to press, curling to a point to dab and jab and tantalize. As he slides it down to the entrance to my vagina, his clever thumb slips onto my clitoris to take its place.

And all the time his bright hair gleams in the low light, an older gold somehow this afternoon, more natural and weathered than the dazzling gilt of yesterday.

Even as I lurch joyfully into another orgasm, the mysterious changes sink into my subconscious, ready to be taken out in cooler moments and pondered upon.

I come again, and still he tantalizes and teases and compels me to yet more pleasure. I grab at him and I swear I must be hurting him the way I gouge his scalp and tug at that beautiful hair of his. But eventually, as exquisite as the sensations are, I know I'm being greedy.

"Enough. I think I'm going to pass out. It's your turn."

He stills his tongue upon me, and for five long seconds, he just stays there, mouth against my sex. Then he gives me one last gentle, cherishing kiss and withdraws. Through bleary eyes, I watch him sit up, still between my stretched out legs. His lips are gleaming from me, and his eyes are strange and stormy. They flash dark with sudden anger, and then his whole body stiffens as if a titanic battle for control is going on within it. Then he loosens again, and his face is sadder somehow than cross.

What have I said? What have I done or not done? Hauling myself up, pushing with my elbows, I too sit up and tuck my knees beside me. The golden glow of moments ago is fizzing away like a pill in a glass. Patrick looks torn, as if distraught but trying to hide it. I don't know what to do except reach out and touch him, hoping that contact and pleasure can give him solace, just as the way he pleasures me is a cure for all my ills.

He still feels rigid with tension, and for the first time, he looks away from me as if he can't face me. He's never done that before. His gaze has always been open and either gentle or challenging.

What the hell is the matter with him?

I grab a fold of the fine worsted cloth of his waistcoat, and try to pull him towards me. When he won't come, I move to him, putting my arms around him, cupping his warm cheek with my palm, attempting to turn his face to mine for a kiss.

Horrible doubts grind like rusty wheels in my innards. What is it? The dreadful engine of speculation coughs into life. What if he has some perverse quirk for wringing pleasure out of unsuspecting older women? What if it's a power trip of some kind? Get a woman under his control, and then bamboozle her with orgasms just because he can, yet with no actual desire whatsoever to fuck her? It doesn't seem anything like Patrick at all, and yet I don't know him. I don't know him at all. He could be a sadistic manipulative bastard for all I know.

"What's the matter? Don't you want to fuck me? Is there something wrong with me?"

Shit, how stupid and pettish and needy that sounds? God, how *old* it sounds. I push hard away from him, appalled more at myself than at him. There's not one shred of gloating in him at having done a sex number on me. Quite the reverse, he looks sorrowful and in pain.

He moves after me across the bed and takes my hand.

"There's nothing wrong with you, Miranda. Nothing at all. You're perfect to me." He drags my hand to his lips, the movement jerky and desperate, not a bit like his usual smooth elegance. The kisses he bestows on it are messy, jerky, badly aimed. He's totally sincere. "The fault is with me. I...I can't fuck you. I wish I could explain. I want to. I really want to. But I can't."

*Oh my poor angel. What's wrong with you? I wish I could help.*

I don't speak the words, but he looks up sharply. He's definitely heard them. His face is still a picture of perplexed confusion, but there's also a tiny hint of almost savage amusement too. Then he releases my hands, tucks my robe around me, cinching the sash, and takes me in his arms again. His hold is light, and his hands stroke my back. It's the embrace of comfort and companionship, not sex.

Grateful just for that, I lay my head against his shoulder. The scent of his body, his skin and hair, is like field of spicy summer flowers with a hint of the Orient. I wind my arms around him and we stay like that for several minutes, until natural feminine curiosity gets the better of me. I'm probably probing at some deep, deep wound, but I just can't help myself.



“What’s the matter, Patrick? Is it some health thing? I mean, well, if you can’t *do* it, there’s stuff you can get for that nowadays.” I blush crimson with embarrassment. It sounds so crude, so basic. I’ve probably made him feel worse than ever. I wish I’d never said it.

Amazingly, he laughs, and it’s a soft, wry, worldly chuckle.

“Oh, my sweet Miranda, it’s not that.” He rubs my hair, presses a kiss into it. “I do want you. I want you too much, believe me.” Before I can stop him, he grasps my hand, conducts it to his crotch and presses my palm against him. “But I just can’t have you.”

Beneath the fine grey cloth of his trousers, he’s hard as iron. Hot, even through the fabric, and so big I gasp out loud. He’s ready, able and even willing, I sense. There’s just some obstacle, some dictate that prevents him fucking me. But whatever the hell is it?

My mind whirls, racing around like a pony looking for the salt lick of an answer. Even as I wrack my brain, I can’t seem to take my hand away from Patrick’s penis. It’s like a source of life and hope and power, throbbing against my touch.

“Good grief, are you a priest? Are you on a sabbatical or a holiday or something?”

It’s the only explanation. He’s a man of the cloth, celibate, yet still human and still a man whose body and emotions work like any other man’s. His hormones and his subconscious still have the drives, even though he’s pledged to a sex-free life.

“Not a priest. No. But you might say it’s in that general sort of area.” He takes my hand from him, gives it another little kiss then scoots away across the bed. Slipping to his feet, he stands beside it, looking down on me. His expression is one of resignation, as if he has to face telling me a difficult truth.

“What do you mean in that general sort of area?” I’m shaking. I don’t know what to expect. Is he some higher echelon of priest? Surely he’s not a bishop? I don’t know what the hierarchy is. But somehow I sense it’s more, much more and stranger than that.

“Well...it’s *this*.”

My eyes widen as I watch, the world tilting and sliding...

With my mouth hanging open and a strange buzzing in my ears, I look not at Patrick’s face, but the air just behind him. The sight takes my breath away, quite literally. I gulp as I finally remember to breathe again.

There’s what can only be described as a disturbance in reality. It twists and warps and then there’s a snap like a high wind catching a sail, and two great shimmering, fluttering, feathered structures unfurl from his shoulders, perfectly visible and yet at the same time insubstantial and translucent as vapor.

Everything seems to drop away from beneath me. It doesn’t make sense. There *is* no sense to it, but Patrick leans forward, grabs my hands in his, the grip as real and tangible as the phenomenon behind him is impossible.

“Wh-what are th-they?” I stammer, even though the shape is unmistakable. I want to look away, but I know they’ll still be there when I look back again.

“They’re my wings,” says Patrick. “I’m sorry. I should have told you I was an angel.”

As I crumple into unconsciousness, I feel him hold me close again.

## Chapter Three

I open my eyes in the dark. What time is it? Where am I? What the hell has happened?

With a struggle, bits come back to me in something of a jumble. Staring at the ceiling, I attempt to sort through them, pull them to the surface of my half-asleep brain. Some of them make me smile in the darkness, feeling sensual and slightly wicked. A little debauched.

As far as I can decipher, I passed out from pleasure again, had an orgasm so stupendous that I blacked out from the intensity of it. Or at least, I think that's what happened. There's no other explanation for me being awake one moment and out cold the next.

Does this always happen with Patrick? Boy, he's good. Do his women always swoon when he makes them climax?

Still drifting and not fully with it, I stir and test my limbs in my usual exploration of possible pain. Everything seems fine though, better than fine. I wriggle my hips and wiggle my fingers and there's barely a twinge.

Excellent. But it's still a task to order my thoughts and clear my brain. In fact, the more I reach for it, the fuzzier everything becomes. Something's sharp enough though, and I smile, gasp, almost reliving the delicious pleasure of Patrick's mouth against me. My sex flutters as if he's still down there, making magic with his tongue.

But still there's something else bugging me. It's big and scary, but I just can't make it resolve. My mind keeps blanking when I grapple for it, almost as if it's automatically trying to save me from myself, and some appalling, astonishing secret or shock.

Then, still thrashing my brain cells, I freeze. It's not memory though, just physical realization. My heart starts to pound.

Beside me, I hear a soft sigh, and to accompany it the sound of a body shifting against the mattress.

Oh, how wonderful. How wonderful and strange and unexpected.

I'm not alone.

Rolling to one side, I pat around and find that far from disappearing and leaving me to wake alone like before, Patrick is still here sleeping next to me. We're both reposed on the top of the duvet. I'm naked and lovingly swathed in my favorite fleece throw again, and he's just lying there, fully clothed, on his side with his hands tucked beneath his face like an angelic child.

Angelic? Oh God...

It all comes slamming back in with the force of a pneumatic hammer. The memory emerges from the lingering clouds of sleep. Something that just has to be a dream or some kind of mind trick, because it's too crazy and far too far out there to be real.

I could swear I saw wings. Yes, wings, for heaven's sake. Great big, honking wings, attached to Patrick's shoulders.

Well, I say attached. That was a bit of a grey area. They seemed to be there, and yet they weren't there. Beautiful, substantial constructions of immaculate, snowy-white feathers, yet transparent as if projected on a screen.

Crikey, it's no wonder I passed out. Who wouldn't?

They're not there now though. Gingerly, I sit up and shake off my throw, and then, shifting my weight as little as possible, I lean over him. No, no wings. The back of his waistcoat is dark silk, smooth and undamaged, covering his strong back and certainly not hiding any supernatural appendages. Just to be sure, I cautiously reach across and touch the satiny cloth. There's heat from his body, and his muscles are firm and resilient, but there's nothing at all there that shouldn't be.

I frown and my mind capers around a bit. What about hypnotism? Was he using the power of suggestion for some arcane purpose he's yet to reveal to me? It has to be that. It's a game, and I just don't know why he's playing it yet.

A little sigh interrupts my examinations, and I freeze. Rocking back again, I look down into Patrick's eyes, so blue and still lambent despite the darkness. His expression is clear and innocent, but it could be hiding terrible danger.

"Hello." He unfolds his hands from beneath his cheek and then unfolds himself up into a sitting position.

He's so handsome. So like a man, a gorgeous one, but pretty normal. So not like any man I've ever known, or imagined knowing, perhaps not even a man at all. No, please, that's ridiculous. He *is* a man. He's got to be.

"What I think I saw... I imagined it, didn't I?" Suddenly it dawns on me I'm as good as naked, and I scrabble for my throw and wrap it tightly around me. I wish I could reach my old velour dressing gown hanging on the hook behind the door. It covers me from neck to toes, and it's substantial. "Are you some kind of hypnotist? Or something like that?"

"No, I'm afraid you didn't imagine it," says the so-called angel on my bed.

He's quiet and unshakably calm, which only makes me almost judder with confusion and frustration. "Oh, come on. You're not really telling me you're an angel, are you? You've got to be kidding. You *are* joking, aren't you?"

He shakes his head in answer.

“Well, that’s just great.” I’m still taking this in, and it’s hard. In fact it’s impossible. So many implications I daren’t even think about. If he’s scamming me somehow it’s bad, bad, bad. But if he believes it himself, that’s even worse. If he’s delusional... “How on earth can you be an angel when I’m not even sure I believe in them?”

I feel cold and sick. Maybe I’m the one going mad, not him. But if he is a dangerous lunatic, then how the hell can *I* see *his* hallucination?

“You don’t have to believe in me for me to exist.” The words are nonsense. They don’t compute. He scans me with those sharp eyes of his, and I can feel him reading my fears and doubts. He makes as if to move forward and embrace me, and I shrink back. How can something as delicious as the pleasure we’ve shared go bad so quickly.

I must get him out of here. I could be in deadly peril. My brain instructs me, but my heart and body still respond to his beauty.

*Oh hell, do I still want him? Even after this latest bombshell?*

“Won’t you give me a chance to explain?” The sadness in his voice twists my heart. It sounds so genuine, and yet it could be another trick. If he’s anything like what I fear him to be, he’s as fiendishly clever as he is adorable to look at. Adorable with tragic eyes filled with pain.

Slowly, more laboriously than I’ve ever seen him move, he climbs off the bed. It’s as if I’ve aged him overnight with my disapproval. I want to surge forward and embrace him and hug away all the pain, but still...still...

*Oh, I just don’t know. I think I need a little space.*

“Very well.” His words are barely audible, but they’re louder than the ones that I only *thought*. Whatever or whoever he is, his mentalist powers are extraordinary.

Relief gusts through me like a wind as he walks away towards the open French window. But it’s a cold and wintry blast, despite the balmy summer night. Again, I battle the urge to rush to him and cuddle away his sorrow and our conflict.

At the threshold he pauses. “May I come to visit you tomorrow? During the day time perhaps, in the garden? So we can talk?”

So we can talk about what? About his ridiculous claims? How he does what he does? Talk about the infinitesimally slight and frankly terrifying possibility that he might actually be telling the truth.

“I don’t know. I need to time to think. Some space.” I babble the usual clichés, everything inside me helter-skelter. I do need to be alone so I can attempt to find a calm place.

“Very well.” Patrick already seems to be in a calm place, but I’m not too sure he likes it. “I’ll wait until you’re ready.” He yanks in a breath, and his exquisite old-young face shifts and changes in a rapid shadow-play of stark, conflicting emotions. “But...well, I might not be here too long now, and I’d like us to come to some kind of agreement and to be friends before I go.”

“Okay, okay. I’ll see you tomorrow, maybe.”

He nods and the moonlight glints on his hair. “Goodnight, Miranda.” He starts away across the balcony, and like an idiot I do scoot across to him. But I stay on my side of the divide, in my darkened room.

Still at sixes and sevens, I say the first stupid thing that comes into my head.

“Aren’t you going to fly then?”

He jumps, looks completely taken aback. A flare of hope lights his eyes for a second then dulls again.

“No, not this time.” With a final nod, he starts away down the stairs.

While I head for the kitchen, seeking a cup of tea, my body still shakes.

The next day, I have my time and my space, but I still don’t arrive at any conclusions. I fumble through a morning at the charity shop, making so many mistakes that they send me home early. And a while later, I’m sitting in the kitchen, comfort eating a chocolate éclair and turning over everything I heard and saw and felt and did during my two brief but astounding interludes with a man who may or may not be an angel—or a confidence trickster—when the phone rings.

“Hello, Miranda, love. How are you doing?”

My ex’s familiar voice used to make my heart flutter but today that organ feels indifferent to him and disappointed that it’s not another voice. The voice of someone I’m wishing and wishing and wishing would come around and see me, even if he is probably as bad for me as my ex-husband.

Even so, as Steve and I chat, I start to warm to him, and it’s as if I only remember the good times, not the bad. We skip from one inconsequential topic to another at first, but pretty soon I begin to hear the tension in him, the edge I recognize from the beginning of our end. When I ask if anything’s wrong, it all spills out, a tale of woe.

His business has failed. His new relationship is rocky. He misses me, or so he says. Part of me almost believes him. But when massive debts are mentioned, I grit my teeth, indentifying the real reason for his call.

Of course, he couches it in a touching display of regret for what he did to me, and heavy-handed intimations that we should get back together again, but we both know he’s really tapping me for money. And quite a lot of it.

As we talk, it’s like I’m in a play or following the action in a book. The real me is thinking, *what would Patrick do?* I don’t know why, but it seems important to know what he thinks and to take the course that he’d approve.

Why? Why? Why? I’ve only known him two days and he might well be even more self-serving than the man I’m speaking to. Or he might be just the one to set me on the true, right path.

When Steve gets my unspoken message that I don't want him back, he comes out and lays his cards on the table. He asks for a loan.

"I'll pay you back when I can, you know that, love, don't you?"

What I do know, or at least suspect, is that if I give him it I'll never see it, and probably him, ever again.

I'm on the spot. I must decide. Apparently, Steve borrowed the money from people that he shouldn't have, whose methods are unscrupulous.

After what he did, I should say no. And yet, I still remember a time when he made me happy, and I can't deny the love that we once had, even if mine was greater.

I say, "Okay," and then feel light and dizzy. In my mind, Patrick seems to smile and nod.

Later, I lie on my mattress beneath my parasol out on the balcony. I feel strangely calm about the money I'm going to give to Steve, even though it's a sizeable bite out of my assets and I might end up having to find a job again.

It's the *other* beautiful young man who's making me restless. The one whose very nature I turn and turn over in my mind.

Thoughts whirling, I begin to regret the two glasses of wine I had with lunch. I don't normally drink during the day, but these are special circumstances. I've never been faced before with such a conundrum.

*Who are you? Who are you? What are you? Who are you? Who are you?*

It beats like a mantra in my brain until I'm hypnotized and feeling drowsy. The afternoon is warm, the scent from the flowers below is sweet and soporific, and the wine was good stuff and packed a punch. Before long I feel myself drifting, and I welcome the haze. At least if I sleep I won't have to think. Or ponder. Or even just wait.

In my dream I'm still warm, though the heat is diffuse, not like the sun. I feel as if I'm floating, yet lying down, curled on my side, perhaps on a soft couch, or maybe even suspended in mid air, unbound by gravity or weight. I'm no longer wearing the light day dress I lay down in and my eyes are closed, yet still I seem to see a mellow glow.

I'm relaxed. I feel free. No doubts and fears and worries assail me. I smile as a presence gathers against my back, molding to the shape of my spine and buttocks.

*Patrick.*

I know it's him, even though I can't see him and he doesn't speak. Warm arms circle around me, sweetly familiar, and I feel completely safe and happy as if the real world and its questions don't exist. He grips me lightly at breast and crotch, and his mouth is soft as velvet against my ear. Loving his touch, and yes, loving *him*, I arch against him.

His lips feel heavenly pressed against my skin, and his hold on me tightens, keeping me close against him. Then we seem to roll and turn and float. There's a sound like beating and long, deep flapping, and I realize—without surprise, because it's a dream—that we're flying. He's gripping me securely against his body while his great wings bear us aloft.

The sensation is beautiful, transcendent, and it seems perfectly natural that he should start to caress me intimately. He curves his hand at my breast and cups me, thumb working slowly on my nipple in time to the lazy strokes of our celestial flight. Between my legs, his long finger divides my labia, pressing in through the soft mat of my pubic bush. He squeezes my crotch in the same languid rhythm.

Curving to fit tighter against him, I place my hands over his, feeling his warm, smooth skin and the way the fine muscles of his fingers flex and stretch as he strokes me. I tilt my hips to give him better access, and to press my bottom against the hard mass of his erection. He's naked in flight, and his cock is burning hot, like a rock against my bottom crease.

As we fly and writhe against each other, he sings to me, his voice liquid, wordless music in my ears. Even my own groans of need and desire are in harmony, matching the rhythm of his arpeggios and the stroke and squeeze of his fingers.

Helplessly aroused and with the heavy drag of desire winding in my belly, I surge against him, my clitoris tingling beneath his beautiful, accurate fingertip. My legs wave wildly, but he holds me without effort, our bodies turning together in slow rolls, unshackled by forces of nature. He plays with my nipple and rubs his cock along my anal groove, hot and teasing.

Time doesn't pass the way it normally would. Breaths take an hour to draw in. The circle of his finger around my clit seems to last a day. When I have an orgasm, the pleasure builds over what seems like a millennium, intensity spiraling and soaring as do we, swooping and rolling as if we were diving through waves of bliss.

"I love you," I sob as all goes soft and dark.

Just as we're extinguished, Patrick answers, "I love you too."

I wake a while later to gilded twilight, the dying sun creating a skyscape that echoes my dream. If that's what it was.

My body feels heavy, replete with pleasure. As if I really did swoop and fly with Patrick, turning and barrel-rolling into ecstasy. It's hard to sit up, as if I'm pinned to the mattress by complete relaxation, but I manage to haul myself up, gritting my teeth at a few little twinges as I straighten.

We're supposed to be having a talk. Did I say I'd go over and see him, or did he say he'd come here? I can't remember. I only know I want to see him. I want to *know*. I want to hear whatever he has to say. Although after that strange dream, I'm not sure what I believe.

Yesterday, I could swear I saw wings. And just now, I can almost imagine I felt them too.



But they're not there now, even though Patrick is.

What on earth is he doing? He's on his knees, beneath the tree in the garden next door, head bowed. Crikey, is he *praying*?

Suspicion and cynicism flare, even though I'm disappointed in myself for it. But still, I wonder if he knows I'm here, and the penitent posture is an act.

He looks hazy and indistinct in the golden evening light, his hair gleaming where the last rays of the sinking sun dapple upon his bowed head through the gaps between the leaves and the branches.

*You're a strange man, Patrick. A very strange man indeed. That is if you are a man at all.*

As if he's heard my thought, he looks up. He doesn't smile, but gives me a strange, complex look. Then he closes his eyes, nods and makes a little pass with his hand as if he's crossing himself. A heartbeat later, he's on his feet, brushing the dust from the knees of his trousers and then tugging his waistcoat back into place.

As he walks in my direction, skipping over the little hedge, I imagine how his naked body looks, and how it felt in my dream.

He can't be an angel. I don't think they even exist. And even if they do, why would one be prancing around my next door neighbor's house and garden, apparently with nothing to do but chat up middle-aged women and romance them and make free with them?

That's not what angels do, is it?

He swoops up the wrought iron stairs as if wing-assisted, and when I make as if to stand up, he sinks gracefully down onto the mattress with me. But down at the bottom, keeping a safe distance of propriety between us.

"I still don't quite believe you are what you say you are." No use beating about the bush, eh? "I'm not a religious person. Although I sort of believe in some greater power for good. Angels have always been a metaphorical concept for me, not an actual...um...thing."

He's sitting cross-legged, and he props his elbows on his knees and steeples his fingertips. "Well, yes, I get that. It's a perfectly reasonable belief system." He shrugs and quirks his plush, gorgeous mouth in a way that's far from innocently pure. Well, at least that's the way it looks to me. "But by the same token, I can't deny the truth of what I am."

"But how on earth can you be here? I mean, shouldn't you be up there...um...glorifying or something?" I'm talking about the incomprehensible, the unbelievable, matters of faith. And I don't think I'm really qualified to do so. "What are you doing just hanging about here, sunbathing and eating junk food and reading romantic novels?" Not to mention giving pleasure to needy, sex-starved divorcees?

"Well, we get sent on missions, to perform tasks, to deliver messages, and because some of us quite like it here, we get a chance to stay a little while and hang out."

Angels just hang out? How very bizarre.

“Right. Yes. Okay. I sort of buy that, even though it still seems totally out there.” I stare at him, entranced by his winsome little smile, this angel on holiday. “Er, are there usually many of you around down here? Hanging out?”

He waggles his brows at me. “Oh, about a pinhead’s worth, at any one time, give or take.”

We both laugh, despite the fact that I feel sort of woozy, as if I’ve wandered into *The Twilight Zone*.

“And is it very different here? I mean, to the other place?” I can’t bring myself to say the word Heaven.

He looks more sober all of a sudden. “More different than you can possibly understand. In fact, while I’m in human form, I find it quite difficult to comprehend it myself.”

“I don’t understand, you *are* still an angel, aren’t you? I saw wings.”

“Yes and no.” He frowns very hard. As if he is trying to understand and describe the unknowable. “To be here I have to take a temporary human form. When I’m there—” he looks up, but somehow I don’t quite think that’s where he means “—I’m a different kind of being entirely, existing in a different state.”

My head’s starting to ache. “But what are the wings? They looked like wings would look...down here. There must be some similarity.”

“They’re a metaphorical representation of something beyond your imagination.” He shrugs again. “Like I said, something the human mind has no conception of.”

I struggle and struggle, despite this, trying to comprehend the incomprehensible. I always have been a stubborn cuss. And I when I fail, I start to shake, feeling scared and filled with wonder in equal parts.

This is so big.

In a move so fast that it too may be incomprehensible, Patrick is close to me, holding me against his warm and very human-feeling chest. It dawns on me that my shaking must have been visible. Just like the pallor in my face. I’m in shock.

“Don’t be afraid,” he croons. “I won’t hurt you. I’ll never let anything hurt you.”

And in that moment, I believe him and wind my arms around him.

“I could do with a drink. I had a couple of glasses at lunchtime, and I don’t normally do that. But if ever there was a special circumstance, this is it.”

“Do you want me to fetch you something?” He strokes my hair lightly, the soothing action making me feel better by the moment.

“No, it’s all right.” I edge away, looking into his blue eyes. “I’ll get it. Better still, let’s go inside and have a drink across the kitchen table. I always feel more sensible and in control when I’m in my kitchen”

“Good idea.”

Together we make our way through my bedroom and along the landing and down the steps. Patrick leads, unerringly locating the kitchen.

“I suppose you know everything, that is, including the exact layout of my house?”

Patrick smiles as he draws out my chair then grabs two glasses from the drainer and the already opened bottle of red wine. “No, I don’t know everything. Only my Boss knows everything. We angels just have very sure instincts. Coupled with which, the layout of the Johnsons’s house is exactly like yours.”

We laugh again. How prosaic is that? I’m attributing him divine powers that he doesn’t actually have. Although I’m trying not to think about that other unknowable concept, the one he calls the Boss.

The wine is rich and warming, an easy-drinking California blend, full of fruit. It hits the spot and I start to feel calmer, as if everything that’s happened, and that I’ve learned in the last few days, isn’t quite so preposterous.

“So how did you end up here?”

Sitting across from me, Patrick sips his wine with obvious enjoyment, and I wonder what he drinks wherever it is he usually hangs out. No, silly, he probably doesn’t drink at all.

“I had a little job in the neighborhood, talking to someone who needed a bit of reassurance.” His long fingers play over the stem of the glass. “He won’t remember my visit, but he won’t be so scared now.”

Ah, Mr. Grey at Number 24. He’s very, very old, and he’s just had a heart scare. I don’t know him very well. His family mostly takes care of him very nicely. But I once helped him tune his television when he called out to me when I was passing.

How wonderful that an angel helped him out in a time of need too.

“How long can you stay?”

Suddenly, I feel very, very afraid. I’m scared of his answer. It dawns on me that no matter how foolish it is, after just a few days, I’ve fallen hard for him. I don’t want him to go. I want more time. I want more of him. I want it all.

This new revelation makes me shake again, and I swig down more wine, only just avoiding a major coughing fit. My eyes water a bit, but when they clear, Patrick’s by my side, stroking my back.

“Better?”

“Yes. I’m fine. Do sit down. I’m all right.” Tension makes me tetchy. I don’t want to know, but I have to have an answer. “When do you have to go?”

Patrick pulls up a chair at my side of the table and sits in it, facing me. Our knees touch and just the slight contact of it makes me weak with lust. It seems my libido isn’t subject to the slings and arrows of stress and angst and bizarre revelations. It just goes on and on wanting and wanting.

“I should be gone now. I’ve already overstayed my allotted time for this visit.” He reaches for his glass but doesn’t drink. Instead, he pushes it around, sloshing the wine in precarious circles. “But I don’t want to go.”

Because of me, he’s stayed because of me? I don’t dare ask. I start to fidget with my wine glass too.

“We’re allowed a bit of latitude, but not as much as I’ve been wont to take. And this time I’ve stayed even longer than usual.”

"I see." My heart's thudding and my brain's starting to tick, tick, tick, balancing and measuring ramifications. I'm trying to stay in control, even though there's a banshee inside me ready to scream her loss.

I've only known Patrick a couple of days, but I cannot bear to say goodbye. I love him already, and even for someone with a risky habit of falling in love quickly, this is a record.

Does he love me?

He said so in my dream, but that might just have been my wishful thinking speaking. That sensual flight we shared was purest fantasy. Or was it? All this talk of states beyond comprehension makes me wonder.

Fear of the pain of loss forces me to practicalities.

"When will you come back?" I take a quick sip of wine, more carefully this time. "I mean, can you come back? Here, I mean, to this, um, vicinity?"

He closes his eyes, and his face is suddenly a taut mask. I see an intimation of the banshee, the formless shrieking anguish hidden beneath the handsome human features, and I know that the answer isn't going to be a good one.

"Yes, I can come back." He's hesitant, as if the words are hard.

"Ah, but there's a but, isn't there?" From the expression on his face, I suspect it's a big one.

"Where I come from time doesn't pass the way it does here. I might come back in a week, but it could just as easily be a decade. Or a century. Or a millennium. There's no way to know in advance."

The shrieking anguish starts to stir and roil and get a real grip on me.

"But surely, you can be sent to specific times, like to comfort Mr. Grey?"

Patrick heaves a great sigh. "But I can't be sent back for my own purposes." He reaches across the table and takes my hand. "And I can't be sent for yours either" He moves his thumb again, the action sweet and seductive and soothing as it skims the pulse point at my wrist. "The mind of my Boss is unknowable. It's not for the likes of us to understand or question his choices."

Anger surges inside of me, but Patrick's grip on my hand tightens. "Don't. It won't help. It can't."

Concepts way beyond me whirl in my head, dancing and circling with more human emotions like loss, anguish...and love.

"So that's it then." I clench my teeth, fighting the urge to rage and, yes, to blaspheme. "It's been nice, but now it's over."

Taking a deep breath, I try to stay calm and fix on Patrick's face. He's here now, perhaps for a few hours yet. There's time, time to be with him in the deepest, closest way. I imagine that perfect body poised over mine, that beautiful cock pushing into me.

He gives me a wry, poignant, painful, beautiful smile.

"In a way, that might be the answer."

I know he's read my mind, but I can't read his. "What do you mean?"

"As an angel, I am, by definition, celibate, beyond sex." He lifts my hand to his lips and kisses it softly. "But if I fuck you while I'm in human form, well, that might mean I'll be cast out." He turns his face, rubs it against the skin of my palm. "The trouble is though, I'm not quite sure to where."

No, surely not? Does *that* place exist too? I think of evil and the Devil and Lucifer, another angel who was cast out of Heaven.

"Oh God, you can't take that risk for me."

I think about what I've just said, the actual words, and suddenly hysterical and inappropriate mirth bubbles up in me. It's Patrick who'd be taking the risk, not his Boss.

As Patrick's head pops up, I seem the same emotions in him, and first his lips twitch, then he starts smirking too, and within moments we're both laughing uncontrollably. He wraps his arms around me as we rock and gasp and chortle, and in a way it's almost as intimate an experience as if we really were fucking each other.

Eventually the gales of hilarity subside, and the knife-point anguish of our dilemma reasserts itself. Patrick pours us both more wine and we sip it, swathed for the moment in thoughtful silence.

"But won't he damn you forever just for *wanting* to fuck me? Even thinking about it, aren't you putting yourself, and me, before *his* wishes?"

Patrick's always seemed as if he knows so much more than me, but right now, his confusion and his doubt echoes mine, clear in his eyes.

"It doesn't work like that. Unknowable, remember? He's beyond comprehension, even by members of His heavenly host." He laughs again, but more ironically now. "I don't know why I'm calling Him a He... He's beyond that too."

I shrug. "Well, for want of a non-gender pronoun, I guess."

What a mess we're in. And we're wasting what little time he might have left.

"When you're up there..." I glance skywards, knowing that doesn't really make sense either "...do you actually remember what happens when you're here? I mean, don't worry about me. I'll get over all this. I'll miss you, but I'll move on. I've done it before."

"Oh, I'll remember you. I'll be aware of everything. All my past, everyone I've met and known." He stares at me, his eyes so serious and so blue. "This is why I know that I've never felt like this before. I've been fond of all the humanity I've interacted with, but I've never loved in the way I love you now."

I start to tremble. Fear, a great weight of it, overwhelms me. Am I responsible for this? Patrick is a heavenly being, and yet he's prepared to abandon divinity, just for me.

"You're not responsible for me, Miranda. You're not obligated. If I choose what I choose, it's because I want to live my life in a world where you are, that's all. If another man comes along who makes you happier I'll be content knowing you're happy with him instead."

Staring at him, a thought occurs, and I voice it even though I'm now 100 percent positive he can read my thoughts.

"But when—if—you're human, like the rest of us, you'll have foibles and you might not be quite so high-minded. What then?"

"I'll never hurt you, Miranda. Never cause harm to you in any way, or even think about it." I believe him as he takes my hand again. "And I'm prepared to gamble that you *will* still care for me and give me a chance if I choose humanity."

I still feel fear, but not for myself, just for him. Can I risk the fact that he might end up damned? How can I face that outcome? The burden of cause and possible effect still weighs me down, and I feel infinitely weary.

"I'd rather take my chances, a thousand times over," he murmurs, his fingers working their magic against my skin. "A hundred thousand times."

My thoughts swirl. Exhaustion turns my limbs to lead. I've never felt more tired in my life. And of course, Patrick knows this. No matter how much I want to stay awake to savor what are probably our last hours together, he and I realize I've got to sleep.

"Come along, my love," he says quietly, urging me to my feet. "You need to sleep, and I'll sleep beside you. I'll hold you close."

Suddenly, just the thought of resting next to him seems infinitely sweet. I shut out all the tortuous fears and ramifications of mortality and hold on to that simple human pleasure. My hand in his, I follow him upstairs.

Fifteen minutes later, we're lying in bed together. I'm in my usual nightdress and Patrick has stripped to his white T-shirt and his mid-gray jersey boxer shorts. My wayward libido stirs, of course, at the sight and feel of his sublime body so lightly covered, and it keeps simmering away quietly in the background. But somehow, it seems far more important just to be here, close and warm in each others' space, rather than to fret for the intimacy of fucking when we just can't have it.

A sense of peace settles over us. It hardly seems possible with Patrick's choice ahead, but for now I feel calm. I'm in the best possible place and with the best possible man. He might be an angel, but I can't imagine anyone more human and easy to love.

As I slide into sleep, I send up a prayer to his Boss to allow his servant a little latitude.

## Chapter Four

In the middle of the night, I snap awake. The bed is empty beside me. Dreading the worst, I feel hollow, instantly bereft, as emotionally widowed as years ago when Gerald died.

But Patrick's still here. As I roll onto my side, I see him by the window. He's naked and kneeling in the moonlight.

It seems a funny way to have a meeting with his Boss.

As I watch, Patrick nods and smiles, his face suddenly radiant. Then he turns to me and bestows the same glowing expression on me.

"Are you all right?" I sit up in bed, peering at him. He looks strange, resigned yet happy, more peaceful and more truly angelic than I've ever seen him. Rising gracefully, he walks to the bed, lifts away the covers and slips onto the mattress beside me.

"Can you be content with a man?" He touches my face, his fingers warmer than human fingers should be. I know he has powers and whatever it is they do is sinking into me. His touch is exquisite. "Can you be content with just a man?" he repeats.

What a strange question. Has he made his choice? Is he safe? Can he live? I open my mouth to ask questions of my own, but what comes out is something altogether different.

"Yes. Of course I can. I've been happy with men up until now."

It's true. I have been, for all my ups and downs. And even with Patrick, it's his humanity I love, not his otherness.

"Good," he says simply, then leans in to kiss me.

The taste of his mouth and the stroke of his tongue against the margins of my lips is gorgeous. But even so, the questions roil and surge. I try to pull away, but Patrick gently holds onto me, and I feel as much as hear him say, "Relax" against my mouth.

I try to. And suddenly I can. As we kiss, a new illumination comes to me. Why fight? What will happen, will happen. Patrick's made his choice, and whatever it is, I know he's made it with my welfare in his mind and his heart. All I have to do is believe that and trust him. It's so simple.

I finally understand what a leap of faith is all about. And I'm ready to take mine alongside Patrick by making love.

Still kissing me, he rolls across me, and I feel his erection hard and hot against my thigh through my nightgown. I press myself against him, moving to caress him by hitching my body against his cock. His low growl against my lips tells me he likes it.

We kiss on, and on, our hands roving over each other as our mouths press and flex and savor and taste. Whatever fears and forebodings I might have had are firmly secured in the casket marked believe and trust. I can only enjoy and revel in Patrick's body.

The fact that I can touch him now, and pleasure him, adds dimensions of joy to the experience. I stroke his buttocks and he purrs and moves against me. I touch his cock and he gasps and growls my name. It occurs to me, as he leans back for a moment so he can peel off my nightdress, that technically he's a virgin. But that small yet awesome fact doesn't seem to impede his ability to make love. He seems imbued with all knowledge, all skill, all instinct.

The glide of his hands subdues me, yet at the same time sends me soaring. His touch seems to be everywhere, exploring, delighting. Intense sensations make me grab involuntarily at his shoulders, his ass. I might have broken the skin there, but he doesn't seem to notice. In fact, my abandoned fervor only seems to drive him on to greater heights and more vocal expressions of response.

Eventually, he moves between my thighs, and a sly whisper of reality intrudes itself.

Should we use a condom? Do we need one? Why would we need one?

He's a perfect, pure virgin angel and I know for a fact that in that respect, at least, I'm completely healthy, even if unlikely to conceive. And if I were to? Well, if that happens, that's good too.

He pauses, no doubt reading those thoughts, so I smile up at him and clasp his buttocks, urging him on. The resulting light in his eyes, and the way he smiles at me, are nothing short of heavenly. "Oh, my love, my love," he sighs, then thrusts.

Tears fill my eyes as my body yields to him, my silky channel stretching around his heat and hardness. His cock feels magnificent inside me. Bigger, harder, hotter than any of the very few I've previously welcomed, but even if he'd been average, he'd still have delighted me—because he's Patrick.

Thrust in to the hilt, he groans, and I experience a moment of fear.

*Believe. Believe. Trust.*

With happiness, I do, and I start to soar, rejoicing anew. Patrick's body is still real, alive and full of magical substance as he presses against me, in deep, and then starts to thrust again. He moves smoothly, rhythmically, perfect in this as in all things. Is he still an angel? Is he human? Is he both, yet neither, maybe the sum of many parts?

But as we rock and writhe against each other, our bodies moving in a sweet, synchronized dance, such philosophical questions become irrelevant. We're just a man and woman in love, joining our bodies in pleasure.



I try to hold out, to save my climax to match his, but he has the better of me. When he kisses my neck and then angles his body anew, going in deep, he works my clitoris with his swiving plunge, and I'm lost, lost, lost.

Pleasure is incandescent, and I rise through layer after layer of it, floating up as if I were the angel, as if I had wings. "Patrick. Oh, Patrick," I cry, holding onto him, and even in the midst of sublime sensation, I experience more wonder.

I'm holding onto him, one hand clasping at his bottom, the other hooked around his shoulder. My pussy is clenching again and again on his cock, but even so, I feel a strange glowing, effervescing sensation in my hand and I'm compelled to slide it down from his upper back towards his waist.

I hear a familiar sound, like billowing sails, and my eyes snap open.

Spread out from my angel's back, and curving round us both, are his great white wings. And as his body arches and he beats them once, twice, and three times, he cries aloud and comes in glory, along with me.

When I wake again it is morning. The sun's rising in the sky and my bedroom is warm. My body feels well rested and well pleased, with no arthritic twinges other than a slight one in my left hip, but much less than usual.

Patrick.

I fly straight up in bed, and then moan inarticulately.

He's gone.

But he can't be. He said to trust and to believe. The unthinkable can't have happened. There must be an explanation.

I refuse to accept that I might have lost him.

Clambering out of bed whilst fishing around for my nightgown, I refuse to give up hope, even though Patrick's clothes are nowhere to be seen. My faith starts to waver, but just as I grit my teeth and start to get angry with myself, I hear a familiar sound coming closer, approaching up the stairs.

Someone's singing. They're singing in a sweet way that's both tuneless and tuneful at the same time. My heart leaps as Patrick appears in the doorway with a smile on his face and a cup and saucer in his hand.

"Good morning, Miranda," he says. He sounds both happy and somehow a bit uncertain, as if he's not quite sure of the sound of his own voice. With his shirt and waistcoat hanging open, he looks both innocent and effortlessly macho.

"Good morning to you too. You're still here then?"

He pads forward barefoot and sets the cup down. A bit of its contents slop over the side into the saucer, and he makes a little sound of mild exasperation. The way he frowns and stares at the spilt tea is perfectly adorable.

But Patrick himself isn't perfect any more. My face cracks into a Cheshire Cat-like grin, and I want to leap up into the air and whoop for joy.

My beloved isn't precisely perfect because he's human, like me, and he's alive.

"Yes, I'm here." The little mishap forgotten, he sits on the bed beside me, his face wreathed in smiles as he reaches for my hand. "Did you ever doubt that I would be?"

Did I? I'm not sure. Maybe for a moment here and there, but not when it mattered.

"Perhaps a little bit." I squeeze his hand. It still feels warm and reassuring and deliciously powerful and sexy. "I'm only human, you know."

We both laugh. "So am I now, I'm afraid." He gives a little shrug, looking that little bit uncertain of himself again. "I hope that's going to be enough for you, my love." With his free hand, he reaches behind himself and rubs the back of his neck and his shoulder. "No wings, no special healing powers, no mindreading. We might find that I've magically acquired a fully formed life history from somewhere, as I understand it, but other than that, I'm just an average guy from now on. That's all."

I stare at him, drinking him in. He looks far more than average to me. Okay, so he does have a few lines on his forehead and those laughter crinkles at the corner of his eyes. He's far closer to my age than he was when I very first set eyes on him, but he's still the most handsome creature I've ever seen. And his blue eyes are bright and intelligent and full of love.

I *can* believe in him. I *can* trust him never to leave me. I love him, and I love what he did for me.

"You'll be just fine for me, my love." I squeeze his hand. "I'm not perfect either, so we'll make a pretty good partnership, I think. Don't you?"

He drags me into his arms and kisses me soundly as an answer, and his clever mouth and his demanding tongue are just as angelically sexy and provocative as ever. His touch, when he starts to explore me, is still heavenly too.

Pretty soon, my nightdress is off again, and so are Patrick's clothes. Arching back against the pillows, I claw at his shoulders, his strong, muscular non-winged shoulders as he strokes me in rapid flicks and dabs and circles to my first orgasm.

"Still as good as ever," I gasp, fighting to get my breath back as I descend. "Even without special powers."

"Are you sure?" he murmurs, kissing my brow.

"Perfectly."

"I'm not so sure of my tea-making skills though. That's a very special art indeed and doesn't come as naturally as making love." He laughs against my skin and then nods lightly to the forgotten cup on the bedside table.

"Let me be the judge." I sit up. Having a delicious climax before my morning cuppa has left me parched. Even if it's cold and stewed, a sip of the tea will fortify me for the pleasures yet to come.

He hands me the cup. I sample the brew. It's a bit on the weak side, but it's still warm and it tastes like the most divine of nectars as far as I'm concerned.

"Needs work," I tease. "But don't worry, I'll soon train you up."

"I look forward to it," he replies, taking the cup from my hand and setting it aside so I can concentrate on him again. "Let's make love. I have a lot of catching up to do."

As he starts to move against me, I suddenly have a question to ask. "How come you know how to do this so well, when you were a virgin until last night? Are there escapades in your angel past that you're not telling me about?"

Curving his hand around my breast, he stares at me solemnly. "I'll never lie to you, Miranda. There have been no others. But I was given a certain amount of human genetic memory to help me interact, and luckily it contained knowledge of sex and lovemaking." He gives a little shrug. "Something I've been allowed to keep, although a lot of my other memories I've had to jettison."

Part of the deal, I suppose. I scan his face for regret, but see none. "What did you have to give up, Patrick?"

He kisses my cheek, then my throat, before replying. "The millennia I've spent as what I was, precise details of where I came from." Cupping my cheek, he looks into my eyes, his gleaming clear and blue. "But don't worry, that's for my benefit and yours. It would be difficult to live as a normal human man, the same age as you, when I had the thoughts and recollections and acquired knowledge of an uncountable number of years inside my brain." He gives me a soft, reassuring kiss at the corner of my mouth. "As it is, we've been placed on what you might call an even playing field, my love, and from now on we can live together as equals."

I surge against him, feeling happier and happier and luckier and luckier with every beat of his human heart. This is what I always wanted. A lover who *is* an equal match, in every respect. Not a much older man who's going to die before I do. Not a younger man who'll always cause me doubt.

I've finally found my perfect man. Or perhaps he found me when he fell from heaven into my life.

And as we start to make love again, I relish the years ahead.

## About the Author

Portia Da Costa is a multi-published British author of romance, erotic romance and erotic fiction. Her novels have been published by a variety of different houses, both in the US and the UK, and translated into many languages including German, Spanish, Italian, Dutch, Norwegian and Japanese. Portia has been writing for publication since 1990, and has had over twenty novels and 100 short stories published. She has contributed to many different short story anthologies and women's magazines. She lives in the heart of West Yorkshire, UK, with her husband and her cats. When she's not writing she can be found reading, watching TV and movies, hanging out on Twitter, and enjoying online life in general. She was formerly a librarian and has also worked in local government. To find out more about Portia visit [www.portiadacosta.com](http://www.portiadacosta.com), find her at her blog [wendyportia.blogspot.com](http://wendyportia.blogspot.com) or follow her at <http://twitter.com/PortiaDaCosta>

Look for these titles by Portia Da Costa

*Available Now:*

Far From Perfect

*Enduring passion, turbulent emotions, and an engagement of convenience...*

## Far From Perfect

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At age twenty, Anna Felgate rid herself of her unwanted virginity with the one man she adored—Nick Lisitano, long-time family friend and legendary lover. But that one taste of passion branded her soul for all time—and still casts a long shadow, four celibate years later.

Their single night of matchless lovemaking left Nick racked with remorse for taking advantage of Anna's innocence. Thanks to his parents' stormy marriage, he's sworn off commitment, but believes Anna deserves deep, enduring love, not a temporary liaison.

In the intervening years, they've managed to keep a cordial distance, but when a crisis in Nick's family brings them together again, Anna is shocked by Nick's daring plan to cheer up his dangerously ill father—a temporary façade of an engagement. Against her better judgment, she agrees to it, fully aware of the emotional minefield yawning before her.

As if destiny has been waiting for them to touch once again, their volcanic mutual attraction reignites, threatening to burn the terms of their pragmatic bargain to ashes. Each begins to wonder privately if their passion can become permanent—or whether it will crumble under the weight of past sins and present secrets...

Warning: This book contains a red-hot 'n' sexy blond Italian businessman with the face of an angel, the body of a god...and a caring but carefully shielded heart. He enjoys fast cars, fast living and slow, sumptuous lovemaking, and his "cure" for the heroine's headache makes it well worth faking another!

*Enjoy the following excerpt for Far From Perfect:*

"We have to talk about that night, Anna. We've danced around it since it happened and it'll only fester if we leave it any longer."

"What's to discuss?" Anna held his gaze, and the lack of fear in her eyes was awesome, almost warrior. He wasn't the only one who'd pulled himself together. "I made a mistake...and you informed me of it in no uncertain terms. There's nothing more to be said." Her voice was steady, but huskier than before. And the blush in her cheeks was pinker, hotter.

Oh hell, he wanted her more than ever.

"It was a lot more than that. And we need to talk about it." He moved to push his hands in his pockets, then thought better of it and crossed his arms in front of him.

Suddenly, Anna was on her feet, fists clenched at her sides. "Yes, there was a bit in the middle that you seemed to enjoy—quite a lot as I recall! But after that, all I remember is you suddenly turning into the

Reverend Father of Good Sense and Moral Rectitude and preaching me a sermon along the lines of ‘You young idiot!’ and ‘How could you be so stupid?’ and ‘*Per Dio*, what on earth were you thinking?’”

*Per Dio* indeed! That night he’d lost his cool completely, just as he was in serious danger of losing it now.

There had been a delicious, drowsy awakening, then shocked realization, then an almost fatalistic slide into the most soul-drenching pleasure. And afterwards, another rollercoaster plunge, but this time into another realization. The fact that he’d just had sex with exactly the type of woman, exactly *the* woman whom he shouldn’t have allowed himself anywhere near.

Remorse had shocked him in its agonizing intensity. Anna hadn’t been one of his no-strings sophisticates who knew the score. Not then, and maybe not now. His plan was stupid...stupid, but he couldn’t forget the way his father’s weary eyes burned with hope at the mention of her name.

And yet, there was the other thing too. The need to get past that night, exorcise their demons and move on properly. Surely she wanted the same? Or was he just fooling himself so he had an excuse to bed her again? His thoughts whirled, round and round, and his temples ached from the urge to shake his head again.

“I was harsh. I shouldn’t have been. I admit that.” It seemed a hollow concession at best, and he hated the memory of her lovely face crumpling in distress.

“And presumptuous,” she flung back at him, “and arrogant.”

“Okay, yes, it was arrogant of me to presume that because you wanted to fuck me you’d expect me to get into a serious relationship with you afterwards.” Odd voices, yearnings, muttered in his head. “And it was a shock realizing you were a virgin...it was...was a responsibility.”

“Which you don’t like. I know that. I only wanted to get rid of my virginity with a man I knew was likely to be pretty damn good in bed.” Anna’s delicate chin came up as she spoke. Her expression was determined and brittle and he didn’t like it at all. “I picked you because I knew you were a player and you could get the job done.”

Sudden outrage barreled through him, but at her or himself, he wasn’t quite sure. Nevertheless it swept aside all better judgment and pragmatism. It was one thing to have a reputation as a seasoned stud—deserved, admittedly—but to be told he’d been chosen purely as a stallion hurt like a punch in the gut. Especially as he still wasn’t sure she was telling the truth.

He wanted a drink. He wanted to clear his head, which was suddenly aching. He wanted release, and whether it was emotional or just pure sex, he didn’t care.

“Well, in view of the fact that I never asked you for specifics at the time...was I satisfactory?” he demanded, “Did I ‘get the job done’, as you so delicately put it?”

To his surprise, Anna laughed. A light, sexy laugh that should have broken the tension, but didn’t. “Nick! You are kidding, aren’t you? If you couldn’t tell from all the—” her eyes skittered away just a

second, and she swallowed furiously, “—all the fuss I made, then you obviously aren’t the all-conquering sexual love-rat everyone believes you to be.”

“Reports of my sexual prowess have been greatly exaggerated,” he murmured dryly, but inside he found a smile, stupidly pleased at the idea of “getting the job done” and well.

Because she’d pleased him. *Per Dio*, how she’d pleased him. He’d never had quite the same sublime experience since, and he’d had lovers who were world-class beauties, sexually voracious and practiced seductresses to boot.

Looking down at Anna’s face, he saw courage and fire in every perfect contour. Her mouth was luscious yet determined and her eyes held his, not quailing, not hiding anything.

She *did* want him, but she was wary. Her slender body had an almost feline quality of readiness, as if she were gathering herself to dart away from him if he made the slightest wrong move. Either that or she was poised to attack him. Even ravish him.

But everything about her made him want to launch his own counterattack. To haul her against him and kiss her until the last sub-atomic particle of hostility in her had melted and she was eager and aroused in his arms. As eager and aroused as he was.

Instead, he dropped onto the sofa again, taking care to observe her personal space while every fiber of his being howled at him to invade it. “Is that what you think of me? That I’m a love-rat?” He patted the seat beside him, and felt a ridiculous, almost boyish happiness when she sat too.

He recognized his peril when close proximity surrounded him with the delicate drift of her perfume. It was very light, yet as rich as a basket of summer flowers, and it was exactly the same fragrance she’d worn in bed at Villa Rosa. It had been the only thing she’d been wearing that night and it had filled his head with madness.

As it did now.

“It’s a pretty crude way of putting it, but essentially...yes.” She glanced down at his thigh, and hers, almost touching, and he could tell she wanted to move, but he wasn’t quite sure whether away or closer. “According to those—” she nodded to a pile of shiny magazines lying on the nearby coffee table, “—and what everybody says, you do seem to work your way through a lot of women.”

“So you believe the made-up tales of trashy magazines and evil-minded gossips?” he murmured, irrationally wounded, but knowing he shouldn’t blame her. He as good as promoted that image of himself, so his lovers wouldn’t be cruelly disappointed when forever wasn’t on offer. “I’ve always credited you with more intelligence than that, Anna.”

Nick felt an intense desire to defend himself. Take her by the shoulders, look deep into her intelligent green eyes and convince her by sheer force of personality that he wasn’t the unprincipled womanizer the sensationalist press and his self-created persona portrayed him to be. But what would be the point of that? She was safer thinking he *was* a womanizer.



*If you go casting love spells, be careful what you wish for.*

## A Touch of Magick

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### *Spells, Secrets and Seductions, Book 1*

Rhiannon Sparks admits she's not a very good witch—she can't even light a candle without a match—but she keeps trying. At least her talent for business has made her magick shop a huge success. Now if only there was even the faintest flicker in her nonexistent love life.

During a night of eating and drinking, she and her girlfriends cast a candle-magick spell for hot sex. All in good fun, of course. Except Rhiannon accidentally mixes up the words. Instead of a lover, she asks for true love.

Deputy Ryland Stone's past keeps him firmly rooted in reality. Then he meets Rhiannon and sparks literally fly. One date leads to another, and then they're practically setting the bedroom on fire...until she reveals the deal breaker.

Though love and magick have found Rhiannon at last, getting a handle on her newly unleashed power is the least of her problems. Unless Ryland accepts that magick exists, he will never accept her for who and what she is.

Warning: This book contains a simple candle-magick spell, which you use at your own risk, a disastrous date, phone sex, and enough sizzle to practically set the sheets on fire.

*Enjoy the following excerpt for A Touch of Magick:*

She stepped back and looked at the two women she loved liked sisters. "I still think we all need to get laid."

They both laughed, as she'd hoped, and the atmosphere was lightened once again. "What do you propose?" Esther appeared intrigued by the idea.

"Something simple. Like I said, I'm not a very good witch. I've got issues."

Maggie giggled. "You need a self-help group or something."

Rhiannon laughed in spite of herself. It wasn't a topic she usually found funny, but she supposed it did sound a bit ridiculous.

Esther shrugged. "I'm in. What can it hurt?"

Both of them looked at Maggie, who held up her hands in mock defeat. "Okay. I don't think it will work, but I'm game."

Pleased that her friends were willing to try her experiment, Rhiannon went over to the large oak cabinet dominating almost one entire wall of the dining area, and pulled open one of the drawers. This was where she kept all her magickal supplies. It only took her a moment to collect what they'd need.

“Let’s go outside. The moon is almost full and will add power to our spell.”

She headed out the back door with her friends tight at her heels. Abigail slipped out with them and raced ahead, down the steps and into the secluded yard.

The long cotton skirt she wore fluttered in the light breeze. The air was crisp, but it wasn’t too cold. The moon hung like an orb in the sky, illuminating the garden. Rhiannon loved this time of year. There was so much magick in the air you could almost touch it. An owl hooted in the distance.

The large yard was one reason she’d bought this house. With mature trees and no close neighbors, it gave her the privacy to practice any rituals or spells she chose. Plus, she enjoyed the feeling of being alone in her garden.

“So what do we do?” Esther was on her right side trying to see what she was carrying. Rhiannon could hear the slightest bit of nervousness in Esther’s voice. Maggie walked silently on her other side.

They reached the center of the garden and she stopped and handed both women a red votive candle. “First, we’ll anoint the red candles with rose oil. Both are representative of passion. Start in the middle of the candle and stroke down to the bottom. When you’re finished, go back to the middle and then stroke the oil up to the top of the candle.”

She handed off the oil and they all began to rub the fragrant scent into the candles. The night was cool but not overly cold. Maybe it was the remnants of the wine keeping her warm. Or perhaps it was the thought of having sex sometime in the near future that heated her blood. “As you do this, think about the kind of man you’d want to have sex with. Be specific without naming a person.”

“Why?” Maggie stopped what she was doing.

“Because you should never try to manipulate anyone with magick. That’s bad and will rebound on you in ways you won’t like. What you want to do is draw someone with the characteristics you want. They’ll only come if they’re willing.”

“Okay.” Maggie went back to her task. Rhiannon noticed Esther was concentrating fiercely on her candle.

Rhiannon focused her attention on the candle in her hand. It warmed as she ran her fingers up and down its length. Her bangles tinkled with each stroke she made, like wind chimes blowing in the breeze. She pushed them high on her arm, wanting to be able to concentrate solely on what she was doing.

Closing her eyes, she thought about the kind of man she wanted. She wanted a man who was honest and loyal, one who had morals without being self-righteous. He’d be strong, with wide shoulders and piercing blue eyes. His fingers would be calloused, but they’d be gentle as they stroked over her body. A shiver skated down her spine. Her breasts felt heavy and a low pulse of desire began to throb deep in her belly.

Her eyes popped open and she sucked in a breath of the cool evening air. The breeze caressed her skin like a phantom lover, teasing and touching her everywhere. In spite of the chill, a bead of sweat rolled

down the length of her spine. She shuddered and wrapped her hand around the small votive candle, envisioning all her sexual frustration flowing from her and into the wax.

Thankfully, both of her friends were focusing so hard on their candles, they hadn't noticed anything amiss. When they were all done, Rhiannon placed her votive candle on the patio stone that sat in the middle of her garden for this very purpose. She motioned to her friends and they did the same. The three red candles now sat in the middle of the stone, the scent of rose perfume surrounding them. "If I was doing a big ritual, I'd cast a circle and do more elaborate preparations, but this is simple candle magick."

She stepped forward and lit her candle, then handed off the matches to Esther so she could light hers. Esther then passed the matches to Maggie. The flames leapt into the air, diffusing the scent of the rose oil into the air.

Rhiannon stepped up close to the candles and raised her hands in the air. The other two women did the same, and they all touched their fingers together, forming a circle around the burning flames.

Tipping her head back, Rhiannon stared at the moon, drawing its energy down to her. "Lady Moon in the sky so bright. Lend your power. Lend your might. Bring to us a love that's true. And one that one day we won't rue. In this time and in this hour, we three ladies ask this of thee. We ask this done and harm to none, what we have wrought here now is begun."

A breeze came up suddenly, whipping around them, but not extinguishing the flames. Rhiannon could sense the power building in the center of their circle, spiraling upward and outward. Her fingers tingled and her entire body vibrated. Tension stretched her nerves to the breaking point. The energy shot upward and outward, flinging itself toward the heavens. The breeze subsided and the candles flickered and died. The women slowly lowered their hands back to their sides.

"Did it work?" Maggie glanced nervously around the yard.

"Only time will tell." Rhiannon didn't want to tell the women of the huge amount of power she'd felt welling up between them. She nibbled her bottom lip. Maybe it wouldn't work at all. Maybe it would work too well. She had no idea what had possessed her to ask for a true love instead of a lover. She shook her head. What was done was done. Her magick tended to not work that well anyway, so there was really no need to worry.



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