

Mandy M. Roth



Peace Offerings:
Revelations

Peace Offerings II:

REVELATIONS

By

Mandy M. Roth

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Chapter 1

"Thanks for all your help Mackenzie." Cherri said, smiling at me as I headed for the door.

"I've told you a hundred times to stop thanking me. I enjoy what I do here. I like making a difference." It was the truth. I did love working at the women's shelter. They were desperate for funding, and I seemed to find my niche when it came to rubbing elbows with high society for fundraising purposes. Could be from all my years as a faerie princess, but

I wasn't sure. Spending a lifetime with aristocrats will make you into a social butterfly--at least that's what they tell me.

Cedric had been furious with me for agreeing to take on this added bit, but once he actually saw how many women and their children passed through our doors, he changed his tune. He made a sizeable donation and made me promise to avoid using my name or having my photo taken while in public. I agreed to that.

"Is your husband coming to pick you up? You seem run down lately. You feeling alright?" Cherri asked, as she ran her fingers through her short brown hair.

I nodded and headed for the door. It was a lie, but Cherri would worry if I told her that Cedric would be at his office until late, again, and if I told her how I'd really been feeling, she'd rush me to the nearest hospital.

"Night, Cherri." I called out as I put my jacket on and headed outside. The cool air blew past my face, sending locks of blonde hair flying into my face. Brushing them away, I growled slightly.

I walked down the sidewalk, noticing how dark it really was. Every piece of me knew that I should have left the shelter hours ago, but had been so swept up in paperwork that I'd let time get away from me. I silently cursed myself for not taking Cedric up on his offer to teach me to drive. It had taken me a month to get used to riding in the truck with him. I couldn't imagine myself being the one behind the wheel. I still wasn't doing so well with human machines. I'd already set the stove top on fire twice in the few short months we'd been living among mortals, and one of those times I was heating a pan of water. No, I don't think Cedric would be letting me live that one down anytime soon.

Things were certainly easier back at the Blessed Court for me. I had servants to attend to my every need, and an army of men to protect me. I missed the servants' part, and the army of men had its advantages, and I'm not just talking protection, but I was happier now than I'd ever been. Sex with only one man had become more fulfilling than I'd ever thought possible.

Granted, I wasn't too happy about the circumstances surrounding Cedric and me leaving the Courts, but it was better this way. We were free from my mother's sadistic behavior and the madness I like to call my life.

I zipped my ski jacket up tight and fished my gloves out of my pocket. Cherri said that it wasn't that cold out yet. She told me to wait until November got here, I'd know cold then. I didn't agree. I was used to a nice even temperature that was always just right. The Blessed Court wasn't prone to cold blustering winds or snowfalls. This was new to me. The norm where I came from was a constant, regulated temperature, and that was looking better and better every day.

I pulled my hair loose from its clip and let it spill down and over my shoulders. There was very little point to keeping it tied up, since most of it had come loose and was blowing in my face already. My hopes were that it would keep me warmer, I was wrong. It did relieve some of the tension that had been building at the base of my head. Not sleeping very well was taking its toll on me. My dreams of the Goddess Morrigan had been bothering me to the point I'd taken up an unhealthy addiction to caffeine in an attempt to stay awake. My body was not used to human inventions such as this, and it was proving to be more of a toxin than an aide, but I used it all the same.

The Goddess Morrigan, according to Celtic mythology, is the Goddess of battle and death. Many a Si has witnessed her prior to a battle, and all have perished. To see her is to see your end, and I'd been seeing her on a regular basis in my dreams for close to two months now. It was amazing that I still took air in, let alone walked. She was coming for me, with death and an end to my immortality. This much I could accept, but Cedric never would. It was best to keep it from him for as long as possible.

In my dreams, Morrigan would be bent over a river, washing bloody clothes. She looked exactly like me, yet somehow I knew that it was Morrigan and not me at all. The illusion of myself there may have been her way of easing me into the reality of my fate. There was no way for me to know for sure, and asking her was out of the question. I couldn't explain why she appeared to me that way, but the very fact that she visited my sleep said that my time as an immortal was drawing to an end-and soon.

I had tried to dismiss the dreams as nothing more than my overactive imagination and fear of my enemies finding me, but when the black raven started making appearances during my waking hours, I knew that I was screwed. The raven is another form that the Goddess Morrigan can take. Her persistence should have scared me, but it didn't. I knew I was dying. I could tell by the weight and hair that I was losing and by the blood I'd been coughing up regularly. Cedric knew nothing of this, of course, and I

had no intentions of telling him. There was nothing he could do for me now. There was nothing anyone could do.

Chapter 2

Walking towards the bus station, I thought about how mad Cedric would be if he found out that I'd come into the shelter after I'd told him that I wouldn't leave the house. He had another large security project he was working on and it had been taking up a lot of his time, so he wasn't able to run me back and forth anymore. I hated missing out at the shelter because of that, so I'd been heading in anyways for almost a week now. I'd been lucky and beat Cedric home every night, and that was good. He'd be hurt that I lied to him, and worried about my safety. Who was I kidding? He'd be furious. He'd forbidden me to endanger myself and I knew that was how he'd perceive what I was doing.

I sat down on the bench and waited for the next bus to arrive. The smell of the human city at night was almost too much for me. It always seemed to smell of garbage. How they could be so careless, and so destructive to the world, was beyond me. I'd been raised to not only respect nature but to cherish it.

I was still at least an hour from being home. The next bus wouldn't be here yet for another ten minutes and then it would only take me so far, from there I'd have to walk. Yes, Cedric would lose his mind if he knew I was out and doing this.

A man walked around the corner. I didn't look up at him, but I stayed aware of where he was in proximity to me. His footsteps echoed behind me, allowing me to carefully track his movements.

Cedric had spent a lifetime teaching me to defend myself. I'd never thought I'd actually need to know any of it, but four months ago I found myself facing two giants, or at least part giants. Their mothers were faeries and had been raped during an attack on their village. They were the end product and they weren't too friendly either. I'd managed to escape them with my life, but I wasn't about to sign up for any sparring competitions because of it.

The man kept moving down the street, never once saying a word to me, and I began to relax. I was constantly on edge--worried that one of my mother's royal guards would come looking for me. As Queen, she had endless resources at her fingertips to find me, and I'd no doubt that she was looking. I had backed out of one of her most brilliant political plans, a marriage contract between myself and Prince Elwyn Rowan Lockland. I'd fallen in love with Rowan without realizing who he was, only to find out that he was not only the Prince of the Unblessed Court, but the man responsible for torturing Cedric for over a year.

Thinking of Cedric's throat being slit and mind raped by Rowan still turned my stomach. I was angry with myself for falling in love with a monster, but even more upset with the fact that now that I knew what Rowan was capable of, I still had feelings for him. Granted, my feelings for him always included hate, but in some strange way, I still loved him, and I could never tell Cedric that. Prior to Rowan, Cedric had been the only man I'd ever loved since I was a young child. He was my best friend growing up, my closest companion, and now, at least according to human laws, he was my husband.

Human laws and ceremonies meant nothing to the faeries and our union would never stand up in the eyes of my mother or the Courts, but it made us feel closer and that was all that mattered. The time would come when we would need to answer for our choices. I only hoped that today was not it.

The bus pulled up and I waited for the driver to open the doors before standing. Something distracted me and I glanced over to see a lone black raven sitting on the bench where I'd been seated. A chill ran over me as the doors to the bus opened. The black bird omen of death had come so close that I could touch it should I so choose.

I looked up at the driver. He smiled at me and nodded his head. He'd seen me every night for the past week. I think he was starting to consider me a regular. The sad thing is that I started to look forward to seeing his friendly face. Too many nights away from Cedric and the knowledge that my death was near had caused a constant need for companionship in me and I hated it.

Chapter 3

I made my way up the tiny lane that ran to our home. My cheeks burned from the cold and my toes were completely numb. When I saw the large black truck parked outside I stopped dead in my tracks.

All the lights, in the cabin, were on. My stomach twisted into a knot. Cedric was home, and he was well aware that I was not. I took another step and felt Cedric's magic find me. He had cast a scanning spell and was searching the area for me.

His power wrapped around me, pulled me up and lifted me off my feet. It felt a little like a sitting in a swing, but there was nothing but air around me. Air and Cedric's anger.

The door to the cabin opened and Cedric's tall frame appeared in it. His blue eyes locked on me and relief washed over his face momentarily, followed closely by anger. He took the front steps two at a time and ran towards me. His magic lifted me higher and my hair blew in my face. I pulled the long blonde strands back and didn't bother fighting Cedric's power. There was no point. In theory, I should have been the stronger of the two of us, but that wasn't the case. Cedric was one of the most powerful faeries I'd ever known.

"CJ, did you find her?" I heard, Matthew, Cedric's friend call out. It was still strange to hear people call him CJ. He had decided that it would be best to go by his initials instead of his name. His accent was bad enough. Mine was too. We both spoke with noticeable accents that were tinged with Gaelic. We drew enough attention to ourselves as it was. Part of me wanted to drop the act and scream out to the world that we not only existed, but also had cared for their precious earth from the beginning of time. I would never do that, but the thought of it did make me smile.

Cedric dropped his magic and I landed on both feet. He grabbed me around my waist to steady me and looked back at the cabin. Matthew ran out, looking around for Cedric. He spotted us and ran his hand through his short blonde hair. He looked like he wanted to say something, but stopped and turned around. He'd known Cedric for four months now and knew that he was about to explode with anger, and Matthew didn't want to be in the line of fire. Smart man.

I should have followed his lead.

I looked up at Cedric and felt my stomach tighten. Tiny pinpricks of pleasure danced along my back. They caressed me, making my nipples hard, and my inner thighs damp. Every time he touched me, I felt the same sensation, it never went away, and it never got old. He let out a sigh, and pulled me close to him.

"Where the hell have you been, Mackenzie?"

I reached up and touched his hair. I was still getting used to the fact that he'd chopped his long auburn hair off. It was now short, and stylish, with a messy, yet sexy look to it. When it was wet, it hung just past his ears that now had earrings in them.

Something had changed in Cedric during his time in captivity at the Unblessed Court. He had hardened. It wasn't a bad thing, just different. As much as I wanted to dislike his new look, I couldn't. I found him even sexier now. He had to cut his hair every few days because of how fast it grew. It could be back to his waist in a month's time.

I ran my hands down his shoulders and then over his muscular arms. I moved his black tee shirt up a little and kissed one of the tribal tattoos that ran around his upper arms. They looked real and didn't wash off, but were only an illusion. I used my glamour, my magic, to hide the scars he'd gotten during his torture, and also helped him add a few touches that would throw anyone looking for us off. Faeries didn't have earrings, tattoos, or short hair. Cedric looked like a human now. I even managed to hide his curved ears with my magic. I hid mine too, but that was about as far as I'd gone on the changing my appearance. I told Cedric it was because I wasn't comfortable pretending to be something I'm not. Truth was, I was too drained to keep up any more glamour. Cedric's was already costing me a great deal of energy. I had nothing left for myself.

"Mackenzie?"

I looked up at Cedric and blinked myself back. "Sorry, I was daydreaming about you again."

Cedric didn't smile. "I thought that something happened to you. I thought that he found you."

"Rowan doesn't know where I am."

Cedric turned my body around. "Don't even say his name aloud. You know how bizarre the Unblessed Courts magic is. I can't risk him finding you. I can't lose you, Mackenzie."

I nodded and put my head on his hard chest. "I'm sorry. I went to the shelter and...."

"The shelter?" he asked, sounding like he was on the verge of making a scene. "Did you walk home?"

I pulled my bottom lip into my mouth and bit on it softly, trying to give him an innocent look, but he wasn't buying it. I made a move to pull his lips to mine, but he kept me at bay long enough to ask me again if I walked home. Shaking my head, I stood very still. I wouldn't lie to him.

"Not all the way. The closest bus stop is only a twenty minute walk from here."

He tipped his head back and screamed out, nothing that made any sense, so much as a tension reliever, but he got his point across all the same. He stormed away from me and then spun around to face me. "Why would you put yourself at risk like that?"

"I, umm...." I searched for an answer that wasn't there.

Cedric flung his hand to the side and a gust of wind shot out and away from his fingertips. It was his way of bringing himself down before he came back by me--a discharging so to speak. A year in a dungeon had left him on a magical overload when he was finally released. He was now more powerful than ever and that wasn't always a good thing. His little display wasn't to show off for me, it was to prevent an accident from happening. He'd never risk hurting me.

I stood silent for a moment longer, allowing him the time he needed to cool off. Matthew peeked out the front window and I cleared my throat to let Cedric know that we had an audience. The last thing we needed was for a mortal to see us use magic. We'd be on the front of every tabloid magazine in two seconds or less, and if we were lucky enough not to get dissected, my mother would torture us herself or worse.

Cedric put his hand over his eyes and tapped his foot lightly on the ground. I decided that it was safe to go to him now, so I did. I wrapped my arms around him and put my head against his chest.

"It's cold out here and you're in a thin t-shirt," I said softly.

He looked down at me and his eyes glistened with the start of tears.

"Please don't ever pull a stunt like this again. I don't think I could take it. I thought that I'd lost you, and I knew that I couldn't go on. You are my everything, Mack, and I need your word that you'll not endanger yourself again."

"You've got yourself a deal."

Chapter 4

It seemed like an eternity before Matthew finally left. He promised to stop by and check on me while Cedric was out of town, and I thanked him, but found it to be completely unnecessary. I didn't want to think about Cedric leaving. He'd only be gone two days at the most, but the minutes without him always seemed so long.

I dipped the last plate into the sink full of soapy water and began to scrub it. Cedric walked back in and came to me. "Mack, let me get that."

I laughed as he wrapped his arms around me and plunged his hands into the water. His mouth found my ear and he nibbled on it as his hips ground against my backside. I tipped my head back and let his kisses fall to my neck. He nibbled softly at my skin, sending need crashing through my body. His sultry laugh filled my ears with promises of the fun to come.

"Why does seeing you wash dishes do this to me?" he asked, laughing slightly.

"Oh, that's easy, you've known me all my life and you never thought you'd see the day that I, Princess Mackenzie of the Blessed Court, would have my elbows in a sink full of greasy dinner dishes. What was it you used to say to me? Oh, yes, that my arm would fall off if I even attempted to brush my own hair." He bit down lightly on my neck while he continued to grind his hard erection into my back. I hated the fact that our clothing kept us from one another, but did enjoy the slight tease involved with it all.

He pulled his hands out of the water and ran them up my arms. Suds dripped onto the edge of counter and then to the floor. I let out a soft breath of need when his hands reached my shoulders. He bit at my ear and laughed. "You know, I think you may be onto to something here, Mackenzie. Think I could watch you dust too?"

I laughed softly and he stopped moving for a moment. "You're so thin, Mack. You just keep losing weight. I don't think we broke his hold over you yet, I think...."

"Shhh," I said shoving my butt against Cedric's firm cock. I didn't want to discuss Rowan again. It never ended well for us.

"You sure know how to change the subject."

"Cedric," I said, as he wiped what was left of the soapy mix down my neck, towards my breasts. A thin line of water ran down and between my breasts. I sucked in as the liquid cooled on its way to my navel. He reached up and under my thin sweater. His fingers retraced the path the water had taken and when his hand reached my lower abdomen, our magic sparked. It felt like someone had just dipped my lower body in a vat of hot oil and then ripped it away, leaving my body longing for more-cold and in need of stimulation. Cedric felt it too and he let his hand hover over my skin.

"It's getting more intense," he said, tapping his fingers and letting the power dance back and forth. My magic was drawn to him, for obvious reasons, and seemed to enjoy being toyed with. It also seemed to require his touch often throughout the day, but I hadn't told him that. He would worry and refuse to go to work.

"It means that my womb is gearing up to accept your seed." I let the words fall from my mouth, even though Cedric knew full well what was happening and why. He knew that Rowan had ignited the flame in my womb that all faerie women have but few get to use. Cedric was aware that since Rowan had basically activated my reproductive organs and that my body was in the first stages of its reproductive cycle. For a faerie this cycle generally lasted an entire year, at which point a child could be conceived.

Cedric ran his fingers down the top of my already low jeans and rocked our bodies back and forth. "I can't wait to have a family with you, Mack. I hope it happens tonight. I want to know that a part of me is growing

within you. I pray that we have a daughter and that she looks just like you, but has my good sense," he said with a laugh.

"We've only been married four months ... control yourself there, Mr. Breeder."

He laughed as he slid his fingers down further, searching for the source of our discussion. He parted my velvety folds and thrust a finger into my pussy. "Oh, but you forget that I have been in love with you since I was seven years old, Mackenzie. I've been waiting a very long time to have a family with you. And I want to bury myself deep within you and fill you with my seed ... mark you ... make sure that all know that you're mine, and bring a piece of us into this world."

I pressed my body against him as he drove his finger into me. I turned my face to find his mouth. Our lips met as his fingers moved over the root of my pleasure. I cried out as his finger tweaked my swollen nub and my legs went out from underneath me. Water sloshed everywhere as I dropped and Cedric was left no choice but to wrap me in his arms to keep me from falling. He lifted my body high in the air and slipped just a little on the wet floor as he headed towards our bed. It was good to know that he wasn't perfect. Men without flaws were boring, and Cedric was anything but boring.

I cupped his rough face in my hands and continued showering him with my kisses. My heart raced with the knowledge that soon he would be in me again. My need for him grew greater each time we merged our magics. It wasn't just desire that drove me--it was now a necessity.

I pulled at his t-shirt as he laid my body out on the bed before him. The material moved over his head and I used caution around his earrings, afraid that I'd rip one out if I wasn't careful. I wasn't used to them, but loved them on him all the same.

Cedric pulled my sweater up and over my head. His face dropped down and his mouth went to the pink silk material of my bra. He rubbed his cheek across it lightly and my nipple popped up like the good little soldier it was. His hot mouth moved over it and my body reacted to him. I knew that when he returned to my lower regions he'd find them hot and damp--accepting.

"Please," I begged softly as Cedric continued to tease my nipple through my bra.

Cedric laughed as he moved down my body. His tongue licked the edges of my navel on his way to the top of my jeans. His hands were large and he often had trouble undoing small buttons or snaps, but this time he got it. He pulled my pants down, taking my panties with him, and planted his face deep between my legs. He forced my legs apart and growled. I screamed out in pleasure, as he wasted no time, plunging his tongue into my core.

My hands went to Cedric's head and I ran my fingers through his tousled hair. Each swipe of his tongue over my clit drove my body closer to the edge of madness and I tightened my grip on him. I begged him to end my need, and give himself to me--ram his thick cock into me, but he kept licking, tugging, manipulating my soaked lower region with a skill that only he possessed. Once, twice, three times I came under the power of his tongue and each time brought me closer to the edge of abandonment.

When I was left shaking and flailing on the bed like a fish out of water, then and only then, did Cedric cease his assault on me. My body was fulfilled and unable to do anything other than be still for a moment. I smiled, with a heavy feeling of satisfaction upon my face, up at Cedric as he pulled his jeans off, slowly--revealing that he still had so much more to offer me. His ruddy cock twitched as he neared me. He wrapped his hand around it and stroked it, watching my face closely. The entire scene was so incredibly erotic that I had to fight down the need to yell, "Fuck me." Cedric would love it, but I'd be embarrassed to look at him after we finished.

He moved onto the bed and pulled my legs up. He positioned his body between them artfully, and slid the mushroom shaped head of his cock into my tight channel slowly. My pussy was already pulsating, and now I was left contracting around him at random. Clenching and releasing his shaft with each pass. His face went slack. He pulled out slowly, neared the point of exiting, and then thrust his cock back into me hard. I cried out and put my hands above the bed, grabbing the rails for support. I needed something, anything to ground me.

I glanced down and watched in awe as Cedric stayed on his knees, pumping his shaft into me--rubbing my engorged nub with his fingertips, while staring at me with the look of a hunter in his eyes. I gripped the bars tight as yet another orgasm ran through me.

I gave into the carnal need to have him and yelled out. "Fuck me harder, Cedric ... fuck me harder!"

Cedric cried out and slammed his body into mine, filling me with his seed, and his magic simultaneously. My magic sprang forth and enveloped his. Time stood still and for a moment I wasn't sure where my body stopped and his began. We were one, both physically and metaphysically.

The two forms of power fluttered about in my womb as Cedric moved to my side and wrapped his arms around me. I let my eyes close and felt Cedric's hands move over my abdomen. He leaned over me and kissed my cheek. "Wake up. I'm not done with you yet. I want to increase my chances of filling you with life. I'll plant my seed within you, my wife. Come on, open your eyes."

I peeked out at him, and gave him a fake dirty look. "I'm sleepy, you wore me out. You're insatiable! Do your batteries ever wear out?"

He laughed as he spread my butt cheeks apart and pressed the length of his wet member to my heated core--filling me up so much that he now struck the back of cervix. It wasn't painful so much as it was different. His intent was to love me and create life, allowing him deeper access to my womb was the least I could do. Besides, I rather enjoyed it.

His fingers danced along my backside as his cock pummeled into me. He gathered the juice from our merge and coated his fingers. I bucked backwards as he slid one into my ass. White hot pain lanced through me, followed quickly by a need to have him go deeper.

"Do you like that?" he asked, his voice strained.

My answer came in the form of ramming my body back into his. The feel of his thick cock driving into my pussy, and his finger in my ass pushed me into a state of bliss. I cried out his name as I felt his shaft jerk, and his seed release into me.

Chapter 5

I stood at the window and watched Cedric pull away. It was bittersweet. Part of me was happy to have a moment to myself without him obsessing

over my safety and another part was going to miss him. I hated the idea of him being gone for a whole night, and still wasn't sure why Matthew couldn't handle the new client. He seemed more than capable to me, but Cedric wouldn't hear of it. He insisted on going, and he insisted that I stay home.

Our cabin had wards up all around it that were intended to keep evil at bay. I'd used a great deal of magic when we'd first arrived to ensure that we'd be safe and virtually undetectable. It had seemed like a good idea at the time, but now that I found myself left behind due to safety concerns, I was rethinking it.

I gave in and plopped down with a book. We had no desire for a television, and little interest in a computer, so that left my choices for entertaining myself limited. I found myself oddly drawn to the mortal's world of romance books. While it was wonderful to read about a larger than life hero sweeping the heroine off her feet, it paled in comparison to my life. Tonight I wanted Cedric, not a book.

At least if Cedric was here we could find something to keep ourselves occupied. I curled up in my favorite oversized chair and pulled a blanket over my legs. I surrendered and opened the book, drawing in a deep breath in the process. I'd always loved the smell of books, both mortal and faerie. Something about them made me feel at home, regardless of where I was.

It didn't take me long to become completely engrossed in the story. I was so lost in the book that at first I didn't notice the light tingle on my feet. I continued on, stopping only when the tingle ceased being light and started feeling like someone was standing directly behind me pressing their magic against my body. I spun around in the chair, fully expecting to find someone there, but there was no one.

"Cedric?"

Silence greeted me and I fought back a shiver. My imagination was getting the better of me again and I pushed thoughts of danger out of my head.

I pulled the blanket up around me and brought my knees to my chest. I couldn't shake the feeling that someone was close to me, watching me, waiting for the right moment to strike. No longer did it feel as though I'd invented the threat. It was real and I was in trouble.

I didn't want to call on my magic and scan the area for other faeries, it would only leave them knowing that something magical was near them. From the feeling I was getting, they were very close indeed.

I tried to swallow the lump in my throat, but it wouldn't budge. I gave in and pushed enough magic out to assure that the doors and windows were locked. They were, and I felt the tiniest bit of relief wash over me. I could do nothing but hope the presence didn't sense me as I had them. I picked my book back up and did my best to read it. My nerves were getting the best of me and after six times of reading the same page, I gave up. I couldn't really beat off an attacker with a paperback anyways.

I headed towards the kitchen and pulled a wine glass from the cupboard. It took me a minute to get a bottle of Merlot open, but I managed. Normally, Cedric handled that for me. I'd been trying my hardest to learn to be more independent and if opening a wine bottle was considered a step, then I was headed in the right direction. No one ever said how big of steps I needed to take.

The deep burgundy liquid filled the glass. It wasn't as good as wine from the Blessed Court, but it would do. I brought it to my mouth and felt the hairs on the back of my neck stand on end. I froze, not wanting to believe that my worst fear had come true. My body tightened and instantly my inner thighs were damp from the pooling liquid. I knew without question who was near me. It was the only other man, aside from Cedric, that could bring me to orgasm with his very presence.

"How did you find me?" I asked, unsure if I wanted to hear the answer.

"I was not aware that you were hiding." The deep voice said from behind me.

My hand shook and I had to set the glass of wine down. I got as far as that and my body decided to freeze up again. I was unable to turn and face Rowan. Part of it fear, part of it concern that if I looked into his dark brown eyes I'd forgive him for all the horrible things he did to my Cedric. Absolution was not an option. What he'd done was unforgivable.

"Are you going to look at me?" he asked, a hint of irritation in his voice.

I closed my eyes and shook my head no. I couldn't face him. Four months apart hadn't made me an ounce stronger when it came to resisting him.

Strong hands grabbed my shoulders and I yelped. Rowan tried to turn me, but I kept my feet planted firmly. I waited for him to spin me around and demand that I explain myself, he didn't. He rubbed my neck gently, caressing it with a tenderness that others didn't know he possessed. His body pressed up against mine and the fluttering feeling that he'd caused in my abdomen once before, returned. It felt as though a thousand tiny butterflies had been let loose within me. It was a sign that we were mated and my body hadn't forgotten.

My legs threatened to give out and I had to put my hands on the counter to keep from falling. Rowan's hands moved around my neck and for a split second, I worried that he would snap it. I had no reason to doubt Cedric and after hearing about his ordeal, I was scared of Rowan--terrified to be precise. I tensed and his hands dropped away from me.

"What has changed you, Mackenzie? You disappear for months and when I find you, my touch makes you cringe. You act as though I am cruel man, intent on doing you harm. All I am guilty of is loving you, and last I checked that was not a crime."

I let out a small, nervous laugh and brought my hand to my mouth to stop it. Rowan moved closer to me and turned my body to him. I kept my eyes closed tight. It was juvenile, but it was my only defense. He touched my chin lightly and lifted my face. His lips touched mine and my legs did give out. Strong arms wrapped around me and the kiss intensified. I brought my hands up and pushed on his hard chest. I had more of a shot at moving a mountain than Rowan, so I stopped my feeble assault. I did manage to tear my mouth away from his, and that was an achievement considering how much I wanted to leave it there.

I opened my eyes slowly and stared into Rowan's chocolate eyes. His bronzed skin seemed as perfect as I'd remembered it being, and his long silky dark hair was now pulled back, leaving his face to look a bit harder than it normally did. He tipped his head slightly and gave me a questioning look.

"I have missed you, Mackenzie. Have you not missed me?"

My breathing was shallow and my pulse quickened. Of course I missed him. How could I not. But as much as I wanted to see him, I wanted to run from him. The monster within him had threatened Cedric and I could never forgive that.

Tiny beads of sweat formed between my breasts, making my shirt cling to me, and I knew that if he touched me again I wouldn't be able to break his hold on me. I took a step back, but found that I was wedged between Rowan and the counter. I was trapped and Rowan knew it. He smiled slightly and closed the distance between us.

His hand went to my stomach and his face came close to mine. His eyes seemed to look through me as he spoke. I felt naked, exposed, and terrified. "My power is weak in you. How can this be?"

"It has been four months since we had sex," I said. I didn't tell him about Cedric helping me lift some of his magic out of my body.

"We did more than have sex, my dear. We cemented a bond ... we made love and allowed our bodies to share magic. That is not taken lightly among our people, young one." His voice was so condescending that it took me by surprise.

I rolled my eyes and tried to walk past him. He grabbed my arm and held me still. His grip tightened to just this side of painful. "I believe you have some explaining to do."

I let out a laugh. I almost let it slip that I knew that he was the Prince, but didn't. He'd demand to know how I found out and that would lead him straight to finding out who Cedric really was. I'd used glamour to cover Cedric's scars at their last meeting, and Cedric had given his name as James. As far as Rowan was concerned, James was one of my guards, and was here to protect me, not make love to me daily and steal my heart. If he found out the truth, he'd kill Cedric, and most likely me as well.

I put my hand on Rowan's shoulder and forced a smile onto my face. "I've had a lot of time to think, and I can't see you again. I don't want to see you again." I added quickly, for good measure.

A crease appeared on his forehead and I knew that he was pondering what I'd just told him. He shook his head ever so slightly and moved to pull me to him. I stepped to the side and managed to avert his grasp, at least for the time being. Our eyes locked and for one brief moment, I forgot about the monster Rowan truly was. I thought only of our time together, near the river, making passionate love until our bodies were sweat soaked and numb.

His hand ran up my arm and I had to fight to swim back to the surface. I couldn't let myself be seduced so easily. I had to be strong, if not for me,

then for Cedric. I bit my inner cheek hard, and the pain helped to bring me back to my senses. I was on the brink of tears before I finally had control of myself enough to pull away from Rowan.

"Mackenzie?"

"Please leave." It was all I could manage to get out.

"I will not leave without you." His chest puffed out slightly, and I knew that he was serious. "Have you any idea what has been going on since you left?"

"No," my voice sounded weak, even to me. I had a pretty good idea, but I needed to hear it from him to be sure.

"The war between the Unblessed and the Blessed is on the brink of starting again. There have been attacks, headed by both sides, on several occasions now. It is as it was before the last Great War started. You can trust no one. The fragile peace that had been achieved prior to you leaving is all but gone. I do not think that either side wishes to make the war official again, but we will not be left with much of a choice soon."

"Are you telling me that if I don't come back and honor my marriage agreement that all hell will break loose?"

His brown eyes darted away from me a moment, as he searched for just the right words. "It is not as simple as that now. You see, your mother believes that you were kidnapped, and that perhaps, the King had something to do with it. I tried to tell her that you took some time off to think things over and that you had your guard James with you, but she had never heard of him." Rowan's eyebrows rose, and I knew that he was expecting me to solve this puzzle for him.

I took a deep breath in. "Well, that doesn't surprise me at all. My mother rarely knows what's going on in my life. Why should now be any different?"

His lips curved into a smile. It wasn't sexy so much as it was sinister. "That is what I thought too, in the beginning, but the more I tried to convince your mother that you were safe with one of her guards, the more insistent she became that you had been kidnapped. Shortly after you left, I found out that we had a prisoner break out of his cell. He was quite the dangerous fellow, serving a life sentence for trying to assassinate the King." Rowan looked at me and I could tell that he was searching me for

signs of betrayal. "It has been difficult, to say to least, for me to get away to the Blessed Court to speak with your mother on matters. My fa ... the King wishes for us to sever ties with the Blessed ones. My concern for your safety has kept me going back."

"I'm sorry that I put you in a difficult position, but...."

His grip on my arm tightened to the point that I knew I'd have bruises come morning. "Put me a difficult position ... hmm ... that is such a nice way of saying that you ran off and left me high and dry. We are a mated pair now and my body has craved your touch for four long months, Mackenzie. I have felt as though a piece of me was missing. At times, it's been hard to breathe without you near, and you say that you are sorry for putting me in a difficult position. That is rich, I must say! Now, get your things, we are leaving."

I nodded my head, but had no intention on going anywhere with him. I let my power build slowly, afraid that Rowan would sense it and use his own to render me powerless or kill me. I pushed my hand back and sent the wine bottle crashing to the ground. Rowan jumped to avoid being splattered and I used that moment to call upon my full power. I felt the icy cold feeling that I got using magic move throughout me. I thrust my hands up and out, sending shockwaves of power at Rowan. His feet lifted off the floor and he had little time to retaliate before my power sent him hurdling into the log cabin's wall.

I ran towards the front door and didn't stop to look back at Rowan. Once before I'd knocked him unconscious and it had only lasted an afternoon. I didn't have time to waste checking him now. I needed to get away and find Cedric.

Chapter 6

I ran as fast as I could through the front yard. The ground was cold beneath my feet, and the socks I wore provided little in the way of warmth or protection. Something heavy slammed into my back and I fell to the ground. I tried to roll over but someone was using their magic to hold me still. Blonde hair fell down and covered my face. It wasn't my

own, and Rowan's hair was dark brown, bordering on black--so I was concerned.

"Sorry, but I canna let you run away, Rowan would not be pleased with me." A male voice said near my ear.

I strained to see who it was, but couldn't. "Stop her!" I heard Rowan's voice. "Oh ... is she hurt?"

"No, I donna think so. I only used a stunnin' spell, and nothin' more."

"Thank you, Glyn, give us some privacy." Rowan said, sounding less than grateful.

Glyn was one of Rowan's personal guards. I never thought to check and see if he'd brought back up with him. Of course he did, it made sense now. Rowan wouldn't travel into the mortal realm without assistance.

Rowan knelt down next to me and I laughed a little when I saw his boots. I hadn't seen a faerie dressed in full uniform since I'd left the faerie realm. I'd gotten used to Cedric in jeans and a t-shirt. The overdone, centuries old fashion of the faeries now seemed silly to me, I laughed again lightly, and Rowan pulled my hair back.

"You think it is funny to use power like that against the man you claim to love?" His hand moved into my hair. He pulled up and lifted my head off the ground. My jaw dropped and I let out a small moan, indicating that I was in pain. "You're bleeding."

I licked my lip and tasted blood. Glyn's power had sent me to the ground so hard and fast that I was lucky that I still had all my teeth. A bloody lip was nothing. Rowan pulled harder on my hair. "You're hurting me."

"I know," he said, his voice sounded different, deeper than normal. He blinked down at me and released my hair quickly, leaving my head to hit the ground again. This time it was my nose that scored a direct hit. My eyes watered and I felt blood come dripping out of at least one of my nostrils. Rowan's hands slid under my arms and turned me towards him. He saw the blood coming from my nose and his eyes widened.

"Mackenzie, I am sorry. I did not mean to ... are you ... ?" He reached out to touch my face and I jerked away--scared that he would do to me what he'd done to Cedric--mind rape me. It was a horrible invasion on your private thoughts that left you in excruciating pain, and near death.

"Mackenzie, let me get you back inside. I will see to your needs and then we can be on our way."

I lifted the back of my hand and used it to wipe my face. I glared at Rowan. "Don't ever touch me again. You're a liar, and a monster, just like I thought you to be, Prince Elywn."

His head tipped back and he smiled slightly. "Ah, now I understand. You are upset about me not being honest with you. You have to understand that I was going to tell you, but we got so wrapped up in other things that I let my best opportunity slip by. I hardly think hiding from me was called for. So what if I am the Prince of the Unblessed Court? You should be happy that I am not the monster you thought I was. There was no reason to run from me."

I turned and spit a mouthful of blood onto the ground. "Leave here now, Rowan ... Elywn, whatever it is that you go by."

"Mackenzie, you are being unreasonable. It was a game. I needed to see if you could be trusted, and when you went to confess your love for me to whom you believed to be the Prince I knew that you could be trusted." He glanced up at the cabin and then back at me. "Now I am not so sure, though."

"Oh, that's good, coming from you. I didn't lie to you," I said, letting my voice sound cold.

"Didn't you now? So, tell me, where is James, or should I say Captain Cedric James McKinney?"

My eyes widened at the mention of Cedric's name. Rowan knew the truth now, there was nothing I could do about that, but I could still try to protect Cedric. "He's not here. He's gone. He up and left me all alone."

Rowan's hand came to my cheek and he touched it lightly. "Do not forget that I have had a taste of you. I know what you are capable of when it comes to pleasing a man, and I know that no man would willingly walk away from that, so let us try this again. Where is Captain McKinney?"

"I don't know."

"Do not bother trying to protect him. I will find him, and when I do he is a dead man."

I knew that Rowan would find Cedric and that he would indeed kill him. He'd already come close to it once. It wouldn't cost him a wink of sleep to carry it out. I'd run out of options. I gave in and decided to make a deal with the devil. "I'll come back with you if you promise not to harm Cedric in any way. That goes for your men too ... they can make no attempt at finding him, or hurting him."

"What makes you think that I will agree to this?" Rowan asked, his hand cupping my cheek firmly now.

"Because you let me see a side of you that others don't know exists. I know that you're not totally the Unblessed Prince who is cruel and tortures for fun. You have another side, the side that you let me see. It can be caring and loving."

His hand slid behind my head and he jerked my face forward. "You attack me with your magic, and expect me to give in when you mention love ... ah, my dear Mackenzie, you know little about me."

"Then you not only lied about who you are, you lied about loving me?" I asked. I didn't try to fake a hurtful voice--I didn't have to. This genuinely shook me. The thought that Rowan could have been playing me since the moment we met had never entered my mind. I had honestly fallen in love with him and had to struggle with that fact everyday for the last four months.

I fought hard to keep from crying, but it didn't work. Hot tears fell down my cheeks and I tried to turn my face away from him. Shame for giving into emotions that I shouldn't have had consumed me and I wanted to shrink away into nothing--disappearing forever.

Rowan dropped his forehead down and put it against mine gently. "Do not cry, Mackenzie. I wish that I could look you in the eyes and tell you that I did lie and that I do not love you, it would make my life easier. It would make what I have to do easier."

I let out a small sob and licked my bloody lips. "Promise me that you won't hurt Cedric, please, and I'll come with you without a fight."

He gritted his teeth and exhaled. "Mackenzie, I have dreamed of the moment that I would get to put an end to the man's life who took you from me. I do not think that I can make you that promise."

"Please, Rowan."

"Have you given yourself over to him? Have you let him touch you? Have you let him fuck you?"

I nodded slightly and felt my tears rush out. Rowan's hand tightened in the back of my hair. "Did you enjoy it?" he asked.

I nodded again, and all the muscles in his face strained. His breathing changed and I knew that he was doing everything in his power to keep his temper under control. I sat still, afraid that the slightest movement on my part would set him off. The irony of my work at the abused women shelter was not lost on me. I raised money for women to not have to submit to abusive men and here I was cutting a deal with one.

"Do you love him?" he asked, looking me dead in the eye.

"Yes," I said softly.

Rowan screamed out and pushed my body to the ground. He grabbed my wrists and pinned my arms above my head. His wild eyes found mine and I could see the rage in them. "I will kill him!"

I struggled to get free of his grasp but it was useless. He was so much bigger than me that he could have held both my wrists in one of his hands. I thought about Cedric and my stomach tightened. I'd thought once that I'd lost him and it had broken my heart. I couldn't go through that again. I'd do anything to prevent that from happening.

"Promise not to hurt him and I'll not only come back to the Courts with you, I'll marry you and have your child--your heir. My womb is within weeks of accepting seed and allowing me to create life." The words left my mouth and I felt like something inside me had died. I had just agreed to be with Rowan forever to save Cedric. Worse than that, I'd lied to Rowan. Sure, my womb was ready to create life, but I wouldn't live long enough to see that happen.

Rowan narrowed his eyes. "I do not need your consent to make a child with you. You gave yourself over willingly to me after knowing that we were a match, under our laws I can take you whenever I like."

"Then it shall be rape in my eyes, because if you do not agree to my terms then I will never submit willingly to you."

Rowan let go of one of my wrists and moved his hand down. It slid between us and I felt him pulling his robe free, right before his hand

ripped at my pajama bottoms. I kicked about wildly, but might as well have been a fly as far as he was concerned, for all the good it did. His hand pushed through the torn material, finding my sex moist and accepting of him.

My mind raced with all the evil things Cedric had told me about Rowan. I thought of Cedric's scar that ran from his right ear to the center of his neck, and how it had been Rowan who'd slit his throat. I thought about how Rowan had let me believe that my life and his was in jeopardy from the Prince when he was the Prince all along. I thought of all these things and more, and hate surged through me. I let my green eyes go cold and I narrowed my gaze on him.

"You are an animal!" I screamed.

Rowan growled. "You've not seen anything yet." His voice came out as a growl. He ripped my clothing more and pressed his body to me. His rigid cock sat at the entrance to my core. My mind wanted me to kick him off me and run, my body wanted me to open my legs to him and allow him what he'd rightfully staked claim to four months earlier.

"You want me. You're wet with need."

"Get off me!"

"Tell me, Mackenzie. Did you ever think of me when his dick was buried in you? Did you ever call my name out?"

"No," I said, a little to fast. I'd thought of Rowan many a times when Cedric was in me, and each time it happened I'd beat myself up about it for days. Cedric was a good man, who loved me. He deserved better.

"I think you're lying." Rowan said, pushing the head of his cock into me slowly. "Do you have any idea what we, at the Unblessed Court, do to liars?"

I screamed out and then went very still. I wasn't sure if it was fear or sheer exhaustion that made me stop fighting him. From the look on his face, he wasn't sure either. I watched as his face softened. He looked down at me and what he was trying to do to me. "Mackenzie," he said my name softly and a single tear rolled down his cheek. He pulled out of me, quickly.

"Promise me that you'll not harm Cedric," I said, not caring if this set him off in another rage.

"I promise."

I couldn't believe my ears. I knew that guilt for what he'd almost done had been the only reason he'd agreed to my demands, but I didn't care. I had Rowan's word that Cedric would be safe and that was all that mattered. Rowan brought his lips towards mine and hesitated for just a moment. I leaned up and looked into his eyes. "Thank you," I said as my lips met his.

Chapter 7

"Are you comfortable?" Rowan asked from the doorway.

I looked around the lavish room and wondered how I could be anything but comfortable. Our room, as he called it, was huge. I reached out and ran my fingers over the deep gold-colored fabric. I'd forgotten what it was like to live as royalty and, to my surprise, I found that I didn't like it much any more. It now seemed wasteful and void of any meaning. Sort of like my feelings for Rowan. Cedric had surrounded me with love and we'd made a life together, now Rowan wanted to hand me material things and expected the same love from me. It wouldn't happen.

I closed my silk robe tighter as he entered the room. He'd insisted that I get cleaned up after we had arrived, so I did. It had less to do with the fact that he'd tackled me to the ground and left me bleeding and more with the fact that he wanted to somehow wash memories of Cedric from me. That would never happen, regardless how many soaks in his Olympic-sized bathtub I took, I would also be Cedric's.

Rowan eyed me suspiciously, as I crossed my legs and held the robe closed. "You are acting like I am a stranger."

"You are," I said coldly back to him.

He walked to me quickly and dropped to his knees before me. He jerked my hands away from the robe and pulled it open. I gasped as his hands touched my bare stomach. He pushed his magic at me and I felt it clash first with Cedric's, before finding my own. Rowan pushed his magic through me harder, causing me slight discomfort as he did it.

His chocolate eyes found me and widened. "He has managed to dilute my power in you. How?"

I didn't answer him even though it was simple. Cedric loved me and I loved him. We didn't need anyone or anything to tell us that. It was simple, and pure. Powerful. I turned my face away from Rowan and felt his hand moved up and under my breasts. I thought of Cedric and how he would feel when he returned home to find my note telling him that I no longer wanted him in my life and that I was going back to Rowan. The note had been Rowan's idea. It was one more way for him to stick a knife in Cedric without actually shedding any blood. It was no less painful and every bit as cruel as if he'd actually delivered the blow.

I shuddered at the thought of Cedric reading that note. Rowan had insisted that I use words like unfulfilled and farce. As much as I hated the idea of doing it, in the long run it would save Cedric's life. If he hated me for the horrible things I said to him--about him, then he just might not bother coming to look for me. Rowan had given me his word that Cedric would not be harmed, but I wasn't sure that I could trust him. Hell, I knew that I couldn't. He'd already lied about being the Prince.

Rowan's hands moved over my bare breasts and as much as I tried to dislike his touch, I couldn't. The only thing that kept me grounded was Cedric. Rowan's lips found mine, shaking and afraid. His warm mouth pressed against mine lightly and his tongue moved in. I resisted at first, but soon found myself returning his caresses. He pulled back from me slowly.

"I know that you still feel our bond. Why do you weep?" he asked, touching my cheek lightly and coming away with a tear.

"Can we please just get this over with?" My voice sounded harsh even to me. I'd sold my soul to the devil and was on the verge of selling my body, too. There could be no joy in me.

"Yes, but I am not pleased to know that my touch repulses you."

I looked up at him. "Your touch doesn't repulse me, your lies and your behavior do."

"Mackenzie, I will try my best to be the man you wish for me to be. I only ask that you open your heart to me again. Love me like you did before, like you were meant to, and through that alone I will be a better man--that is the only thing I am sure of." His voice was so deep and so sincere that I wanted to believe him. I had to. The alternative was too grim to think about. A life without Cedric and with a man that I couldn't stand, or love, was a scary thought.

I lifted my face to him and pressed my lips to his. I could feel the tightness in his mouth, no doubt due to the surprise of my forwardness. I worked hard to push Cedric from my mind and concentrate on the man that I would have no choice but to spend the rest of my life with. Rowan's body moved over mine and he took charge of our kiss. He bit at me, while still managing to taste me, making my body react to him in ways I wished it wouldn't.

His hands moved over my ribs and he pulled his mouth away from me. "By gods, you are so thin now. What has he done to you?" Rowan sputtered profanities under his breath about Cedric and I was afraid that he'd go back on his promise not to harm him if I let this continue.

"I'm thin because the bond that you and I share is not broken and because I carry your magic within me ... I started to die when it was taken away," I said this so casually, even though it was true and extremely serious. I'd never actually acknowledged this fact before and it should have bothered me more than it did, but it didn't.

Rowan looked as though I'd stabbed him in the gut. The thought of that made me smile and that wasn't a good sign. He moved my chin up and examined my face. "You have dark circles under your eyes now." The realization that I was dying slowly sunk in and I watched his expression change. "Can this be stopped?"

I shrugged my shoulders, not caring one way or the other. His body pressed down against mine and his arms wrapped around me. "Tell me how to fix this and I will. I cannot lose you, Mackenzie."

The idea of Rowan, Prince of the Unblessed Court, having feelings seemed absurd. Yet here he was acting like a man who would do anything for the woman he loved. I did know how to fix the problem I was just reluctant to admit it to him. I took a deep breath and spoke softly. "The

magic within me should stop eating away at me once we are sexually active again, but...."

Rowan propped himself up on his arms and looked down at me. "But what?"

"It's no use. Cedric's magic has just as strong of a hold on me as yours did. Now, that I will be without his sex ... his magic, it will be worse than it already is. So, I imagine that my body will give out within the next few months--maybe even before that. I don't know for sure." The words coming from my mouth should have caused me to cry, to weep for my own end, that was so near, but I felt nothing but emptiness.

"If I am able to get you to love me as you once did, will that break his hold on you?" Rowan asked, sounding disgusted with Cedric.

"I have loved Cedric since I was only five and he was just seven. You see what is happening to my body from the bond that you and I share, and how he could not stop it. Faerie women were only meant to do this with one man--to mate with only one, and now I know why." I reached up and touched his face lightly. "Promise me that when I die you will keep your word to me about Cedric."

He let out a small laugh. "Even in death you would worry more for him than me. Tell me, if you had never found him, after his escape, would you still love me?"

"I would have loved you, but if I would have found out that you'd been behind Cedric's death then I would have killed you. Nothing would have stopped me."

Rowan nodded his head slightly. "If I had let him go, right after his capture, would you ... could you have possibly loved me too, as you do him?"

I thought of Cedric's throat and the tiny scars that he had all over his body, none as severe as the one on his neck. Knowing that Rowan had caused those made my chest tight. It was suddenly very hard to breathe. I went to sit up, but Rowan's lips came crashing down on mine.

His hands were everywhere and nowhere all at once. I knew that he was using his magic to help caresses my body and seduce me. At first, I resisted him, but after a moment realized how foolish it was. My body not only craved his sex, his magic, it required it to survive. I didn't fight him

when he opened my robe all the way, or when he shed his robe and laid his naked body down on me. I hated myself for still wanting to be touched by him after I knew what a monster he was, but I didn't stop him, I couldn't. I needed him too bad. He had become as vital as air to me.

I sucked on Rowan's bottom lip as his knee spread my legs open wide. He looked down at me. His eyes were full of want, of desire. "Tell me yes, please. I cannot just take you if you do not want me."

I slid my hands up and into his braid, working my fingers into it slowly. I freed his dark hair and let it fall around us. I put my tongue into his mouth and thrust my hips up and at him. If that wasn't invitation enough, I didn't know what was.

He entered me with a fierceness I'd never seen before, and a scream tore from my throat.

"Mackenzie, did I hurt you?" he asked, his voice strained.

"Yes, but don't stop, Rowan, don't stop ... please, don't stop."

I yanked on his shoulders to encourage him to continue. My body craved his and I knew that I would literally die without his touch. He pumped the length of his cock into me slower this time, and gradually worked his way up to full speed again. Each movement, each scrape of his penis against my cervix left me panting and pleading for more.

I locked my legs around his waist and let him kiss me. Hot liquid gathered between my thighs, easing his girth as it continued to spread me. Seeming to grow larger with each pass. The head of his penis brushed deep within me, sending leg-tightening tingles down me. My chest clutched tight and I fought hard to hold back the tears of joy that were threatening to burst free from me.

I knew then that my love for him had never died, but it had been masked by hurt, and pain. His hand moved to my breast and he toyed with my nipple as he continued to slam into me. I felt my orgasm building and raked my fingers down his back, more out of revenge for what he'd done to Cedric than from a need on my part. Rowan moaned as his body shot forth its magical cum, filling me, soaking me with its power.

My legs tightened around him as my orgasm seized my body. I could feel his power running throughout my veins, rejuvenating me slowly. His cock shifted in me slightly and spit forth more hot juice.

"Ah, you still have the key to my heart, Mackenzie--Gráim thú."

I laid there stroking his back, unable to tell him that I loved him too, even though it was the truth. He grew hard within me again, as he kissed at my neck. "Tell me to go, and I shall find other sleeping arrangements for the night. I will make them permanent tomorrow. We can meet only as often as your body requires my magic and no more." He lingered for a moment, waiting for me to tell him to stay, before he started to pull out of me.

I surprised myself by refusing to let go of him. I hit him hard in the face, and then again in the arm and back while his cock was still deep within me. "I hate you for what you did to Cedric! I hate you for lying to me! I hate you for the monster you can be!" I hit him again, and he never once tried to protect himself from me or pull out of me. Hot tears streamed down my cheeks and I slapped him again. "And I hate you for making me fall in love with you, too! It wasn't supposed to happen. I wasn't ever supposed to love anyone ... I"

There I had finally acknowledged the horrible truth that I loved both him and Cedric. I went to hit Rowan again and he caught my wrist, brought it to his face, and kissed my hand gently.

"I love you too, Mackenzie," he said, as his hips started moving again. I clutched onto him for dear life and tipped my head back as my body welcomed his. I wanted to stay angry with him. I wanted to push him off me and tell him to go to hell. Instead, I held him tight and let him love me and tried to forget the events surrounding what had led us here. The feel of his body in mine and his soft whispers of love in my ear broke down the barrier around my heart.

Chapter 8

I opened my eyes slowly when I heard shouting in the hall. At first I thought it was Rowan, but I glanced down and found his bronzed, muscular arm draped over my belly. The shouting stopped and I turned to face Rowan.

He looked so innocent when he slept. It made it hard for me to believe that he was capable of being such a monster. I looked harder at his features and thought about how different the two men I loved were. One was fair and the other was dark. Their personalities seemed to match them and that made me smile through the tears that were threatening to return.

My gaze moved over the length of Rowan's body. The gold sheet covered his lower half and I suddenly felt the need to be close to him again. To have the length of his shaft deep within me and to feel his come soak my womb.

I moved my body over his and his eyes flickered open. He snatched my arms and for a minute, I thought that he was going to throw me off him. He blinked and stopped himself from hurting me.

"Rowan?"

He pulled my body down towards him and kissed my lips softly. "Sorry, but when you grow up here, at the Unblessed Court, you are not awakened by beautiful women, you are awakened by someone or something that wants you dead." One eyebrow rose as he spoke. "Do you still want me dead?"

I moved my body up, freeing his hard cock that had been pressed between us. I slid over it, conforming to it as I went. Fully sheathed within me, Rowan moaned as I kissed his neck.

I sat up on him and swayed my hips gently, taking the full length of him in further and further until I could take him no more. I rode his perfect body and stared into his eyes, knowing that as much as I thought I'd wanted him dead, I didn't.

"I don't want anything to happen to you, Rowan."

"I love you too, Mackenzie." He murmured into my ear as his hands found my breast, rolling my erect nipples gently, sending my body into an orgasmic spasm. I rode him hard and fast, not wanting the moment to end. He felt so good in me, so right, so meant to be there. I knew from the moment that we'd first made love that I'd been created for him.

His hands slid down my sides to my butt. He squeezed my cheeks gently, before smacking one softly, causing my pussy to begin milking him as my orgasm ripped through me. My eyes widened as he slid a finger to my

anus and rimmed it slowly. He stiffened as he drove his body upward, releasing his seed in me. I clutched on to his body as I continued to impale myself on his cock.

There were more shouts and then a large bang. The bedroom door flew open and I turned to see Cedric staring at me. Time seemed to stand still. His blue eyes wide, and his mouth open, he looked like he wanted to say something, but was at a loss for words. Guards ran in behind him, but he threw his hand up and his magic stopped them in their tracks. I froze, knowing that the image of me making love to Rowan would forever be etched in Cedric's mind.

"It's true then?" Cedric said, making it sound more like a question than a statement.

I began to say no, but stopped, fighting back the tears that wanted to flow freely since I'd been forced to leave him. I looked down at Rowan and wanted to smack the smile off his face. The smirk said just how happy he was that we'd been walked in on, and I had no doubt that he'd known Cedric was out there the entire time. Instead of hitting him, I leaned forward, kissed his lips, and began to ride his body again, taking my time, fighting to maintain control of my emotions.

I pulled my mouth away from Rowan and looked at Cedric. I had never seen hurt like that on someone's face and never wanted to again. It tore at my gut. Every ounce of me wanted to run to him, comfort him, and tell him that he would always hold my heart, but if I did that it would cost him his life. This was better. He would hate me, but live.

More guards ran in and he made no move to stop them. They grabbed hold of him and forced him to his knees. His blue eyes stayed locked on mine, leaving me no option but to look away.

"What will you have us do with him?" One of the guards asked, looking at Rowan.

I slid off Rowan slowly and he pulled the sheets up, covering my naked body from the leering eyes of his guards. I kept my eyes forward and refused to look at Cedric. I had purposely hurt him so he'd leave and never come back. I needed to know he was safe and if doing this in front of him was the only way to guarantee it, then so be it.

I felt Rowan climb out of the bed, and I prayed that he had covered himself with something, anything. Cedric had been hurt enough--he

didn't need Rowan flaunting it in his face. I had handled that all on my own.

I heard Rowan sigh, as he spoke to his men. "Ah, I have made my lovely bride-to-be a promise. Take him to the portal to the human realm and leave him." I glanced at Rowan and his eyes met mine. "Make sure not to harm one hair on his pretty little head, or you will answer to me personally."

There was a collective gasp and I knew that not one of Rowan's men wanted to be on the receiving end of one of his punishments. I looked back at Rowan and saw that he had put his robe on and was thankful for that. My gaze flickered to Cedric and I found him searching me for signs of what to do. I'd thought that my little production was enough to drive him away, now I wasn't so sure.

"Mackenzie, don't do this." Cedric pleaded.

I went to answer but Rowan beat me to it. "I strongly suggest that you leave willingly. I do not want her upset. She is in a delicate state now and she does not need you adding to it." He made it sound like I was pregnant. I looked at Cedric and his face paled considerably with the same thought.

I shook my head slightly and bit at my lower lip to keep from crying. Cedric didn't budge. "I want to hear Mackenzie tell me to leave. If I hear that she doesn't love me, from her own lips, then and only then will I leave. Mack?"

Rowan protested, but I put my hand up to speak. "I want you to leave, Cedric."

Rowan smiled and I shot him a nasty look. He stopped instantly. Cedric pushed free of the guards and ran towards me. He was to me before any of them to could reach him. He grabbed my arm and dropped down before me. "He made you sleep with him, didn't he? He threatened to kill me and made you exchange sex for my safety, didn't he? Don't lie to me, Mack. I'm part of you now and could feel your terror when I returned home. I relived what you went through. I know that you don't want this. You want to come with me, don't you?"

I shook my head slightly, trying to convince him that he was wrong, but I'd never been a good liar. He planted his lips firmly on mine and I felt my stomach lurch forward with need, and my heart tighten. Cedric's body

was ripped away from mine and he looked down at me as Rowan held him.

"Did you do this to protect me?" Cedric asked again. The moment of passion he'd just given me, now made it impossible for me to lie to him, and he knew that. Faeries are incapable of lying during moments of passion and Cedric had played off an old curse.

"Yes, but that's not the only reason," I said, telling him the complete truth.

"Then what?" he asked, yanking his arm away from Rowan's hand.

Rowan leaned over and pulled the sheet down, lifting my arm in the air quickly. "Look, look at how thin she is. Did she confess to you that she was dying? Did she tell you that she was letting my magic eat away at her body to be with you?"

I ripped my arm away from Rowan and covered myself with the sheet. I didn't care if the guards saw me naked. Nudity was beautiful and normal for a faerie. I cared more about hiding this ugly truth from Cedric.

Cedric looked at Rowan and shook his head. "You're lying. Mackenzie would have told me, we don't keep secrets. If it were that bad, she would have let me know. You're just looking for any reason to justify this, right Mack?" He looked over at me.

I wanted to lie to him to make him feel better, but there was no point in it. "He's not lying, Cedric. It's been that bad. I've been sick for close to two months now, and I knew it was bad, to the point that I've seen the Goddess Morrigan. Sometimes she appears to me in dreams, and then again the other night as a raven. I knew it was her because she followed me home."

Both men drew in deep breaths. They knew the significance of seeing Morrigan and neither of them questioned me on it. They turned to each other. I expected a battle to break out and was shocked when it didn't. Cedric looked at Rowan and they seemed to a moment of complete understanding.

"Won't the same thing happen without me?" Cedric asked calmly.

Rowan tied his robe and looked at me. "Now, we do not know for sure, but...."

As if on cue, I coughed hard and brought my hand to my mouth. I knew without looking that I had just coughed up more blood. I attempted to hide it from their view, but Cedric walked to me and pulled my hand from my face. He let out a cry and dropped down next to me when he saw all the blood I was holding. He looked up at Rowan and Rowan motioned to one of the guards. They all began handing him their top robes. He took one and brought it over to me. He crouched next to Cedric and took my hand in his. He wiped the blood from it and looked at Cedric.

"I have seen this before." Rowan said softly.

Cedric and I looked at him and waited for him to go on. It seemed like an eternity before he finally did. "I was just a boy, but I remember my mother getting thinner and thinner. I would sit next to her while she coughed to the point blood came up. I watched, but did not understand that her body was shutting down. I had always thought the Si to be immortal. When she finally let out her final breath, I could not understand why she did not wake up." His eyes closed slightly, and he took my hand in his. I didn't pull away and Cedric didn't make a big deal about it. "I asked my father why it was she passed when we were supposed to live forever, and he told me that she was being punished."

"I did not understand what he meant then, but I do now. My mother was in love with another, but my father would not allow her to see him, so you could say that she died of a broken heart."

"That is where humans get that saying from." Cedric said, putting his hand over ours. "Your mother is not the only Si to have perished this way. Our history books are full of accounts, but none are recent. It seems that the thinning of the bloodlines prevented this from happening. Your mother was pure Si, and from royal blood, Mackenzie is the same."

Rowan yanked his hand away from ours and rose to his feet. He turned his back to us and stood tall. "Take her and leave." I wasn't sure that I heard him right. I was about to ask him to repeat himself when he beat me to the punch. "Get out now, before I change my mind. I will not look for you and you are free of your obligations to me. I'll do my best to handle the marriage contract."

I tried to stand and was attacked by another coughing fit. Cedric wrapped his arms around me tight and pulled me to him. "Its okay, Mack, I'm here, relax, its okay."

"GET OUT!" Rowan yelled, startling both Cedric and me.

"Let's go, Cedric."

He put his arms under me and picked me up. He turned me slowly to face Rowan. "Look at her," he demanded. Rowan turned his head slightly and glanced at me. Cedric pushed me out towards him. "Take a good look at her and remember her, because she will be dead soon if you turn your back on her."

My head snapped around so fast that I was sure I'd pulled something. I looked at Cedric and thought this was his way of punishing me for trying to push him away. He looked down at me, but spoke to Rowan. "She will die without us both, and as much as I hate you, I am not willing to sacrifice Mackenzie. If you cast her out of your life, because you can't watch another woman you love die like this, then you should drive a sword through her heart now and save her the pain of dying slowly. Do you want to be like your father? Do you want Mackenzie to rot away like your mother did?"

Rowan spun around and I felt his power rising. Cedric pulled his own up quickly and wrapped it around us protectively. Rowan dropped his magic when our eyes met. His shoulders slumped and he no longer looked foreboding. He looked vulnerable, and that wasn't a word I'd ever thought I use to describe him.

"If I can stop this from happening, I will," he said.

There was a shuffle outside the door and one of the guards yelled out to Rowan. "King Torean approaches!"

Rowan's face went pale and Cedric's grip on me tightened. Rowan ran to Cedric and took me from his arms. He looked over towards a door behind us and nodded his head. "Go quickly and hide in there. If he finds you here, he will not care what happens to Mackenzie, he will have you executed, and without you she will surely die."

Cedric did as Rowan suggested and I wasn't sure what to say, everything was happening so fast. Rowan put me on the bed, disrobed, and put his body over mine. He looked back at the guards and they all nodded at him. Each guard lined up and turned his back from us. Rowan looked down at me and put his lips on mine, his hips ground against my body and for a minute I thought that he was going to start making love to me again.

I heard a loud clapping noise and looked up into Rowan's dark eyes. He winked at me and pulled his mouth away. He reached over and pulled the

sheet over the lower half of our bodies, making it look like we'd been caught in the act of making love.

I'd never seen King Torean before and was curious as to what he might look like. I peeked over the edge of Rowan's shoulder and gasped when I saw how similar the two men looked. Torean looked to be about five years older than Rowan, if that, but that was the only difference. Faeries don't age like humans, but even this knowledge did little to comfort me. It was unsettling how similar they were. Both men's skin were bronzed, their eyes chocolaty, and their hair so brown that it bordered on black.

I wanted to try to stand, so I could bow before him, but Rowan held me still beneath him. "Hello father, what do you want?"

"I heard that the Princess had arrived and I came to great my future daughter-in-law." Torean said. His voice was almost identical to Rowan's and I shuddered. Rowan caught this and pulled the sheets up higher trying to warm me.

"Father, Mackenzie ... Mackenzie, my father, now if you do not mind," Rowan said, his voice sounding very condescending--borderline agitated.

King Torean pushed past the guards and looked at me. I was still unnerved by how much he looked like Rowan that I was speechless. He smiled, and it screamed sex. Not the type of sex women wanted, but the kind that came at great cost to personal safety. No part of his look was as it should be. He made my skin crawl.

He licked his lips slightly and winked at me. "It is a pleasure to meet you Mackenzie. I sent word to your mother that you are here and that you are safe. If everything goes according to schedule," he winked at me again, and this time Rowan caught it. Rowan's entire body tightened and I put my hand on his cheek to try to calm him down. "Yes, it is good to have you with us. This place could use a woman's touch. It is amazing how much a woman's touch can ease any pain."

Torean abruptly turned and walked out of the room. The guards followed close behind him and shut the door on their way out. Rowan didn't move. Cedric started to open the door, but Rowan threw power out and slammed the door closed. I began to protest and Rowan's mouth dropped to mine. The door to the room opened again and I heard Torean's voice.

"I forgot to give you my blessing, son. Do not do anything I wouldn't do," he said, and left.

This time Rowan did roll off me. Cedric opened the door and poked his head out. "Is the coast clear?"

Rowan looked stumped by this. It hit me that he wasn't familiar with human phrases. I touched his arm. "He wants to know if it's safe to come out."

"Oh, yes, he is gone now."

I looked over at Rowan and let my body shake off the uneasy feeling that his father gave me. "Your father makes my skin crawl." I didn't feel bad saying it.

Rowan smiled. "As he should, he is a dangerous man, Mackenzie, and I fear that he has taken an unhealthy interest in you."

"What does that mean?" Cedric asked.

"It means that he will stop at nothing to have her, if he decides that he wants to claim her."

Cedric turned and lashed power out into thin air. He let out a muffled cry and turned back to us as if nothing had happened. "You people are all crazy here ... the entire lot of the Unblessed ones are insane. I thought that only you were, I mean, you came to see me enough in your dungeons that for a while I thought you were obsessed with me, but your fascination with Mackenzie was sick."

I tried to stand, wanting to head off another fight, but Rowan touched me and I stopped. He rose slowly. "What do you mean? I only came to you once, the night you were captured. I was in charge of finding out how much you knew. I thought you a waste of my time so I did not bother visiting you again."

"Bullshit," Cedric said, using his mortal slang perfectly. Rowan looked lost, but Cedric went on anyways. "Mack, drop your glamour for me."

I did. His tattoos faded away, and were replaced by scars on his arms, and one large one on his throat. Cedric touched it and tipped his head back. "You did this to me. You slit my throat and waited until I was on the verge of death before you mind raped me."

I couldn't take the pain in his eyes anymore and I threw my glamour back up, hiding the scars and bringing back the tattoos I'd come to love.

Cedric's scars weren't a problem for me. I'd love him if his entire body was covered in warts, but he didn't like having them, and I wanted him comfortable. Rowan looked over at me and I looked to Cedric.

"Wait, you said that I mind raped you?" Rowan asked sounding a bit confused.

Cedric let out a loud laugh. "Yeah, you leeches out my memories of Mackenzie and you seemed to get off on them. In fact, I remember one occasion when you literally did get off." He shuddered and let his eyelids fall closed.

Rowan threw his hand in the air and I thought he was going to use magic on Cedric. He didn't and I exhaled. "I do not have the ability to pull thoughts from anyone's mind but Mackenzie, and that is only because she and I have exchanged magic--she is my mate." Something passed over his face and he looked horrified. "Oh, gods, my father...."

I pushed off the bed and got to my feet. The sheet fell to the floor, but I didn't care. I grabbed Cedric and pulled him to me. "Did you see King Torean just now?" My voice sounded as frantic as I felt.

"No, I was in the bathroom, hiding while you played kissy face with him." He took a minute and rolled his shoulders, obviously trying to keep his cool. "I didn't see him, why?"

I looked at Rowan and his eyes closed. "Cedric, the King looks exactly like Rowan. It wasn't Rowan who tortured you, it was King Torean."

"Why would he pretend to be Rowan?"

"Because he is a sick man, Cedric." Rowan answered. "I am sorry that I did not stop him. I had no idea what he was doing. I would have just killed you. I would have never tortured you so."

I shot him a nasty look. "Is that supposed to make him feel better?"

Cedric pulled me close to him. "It actually does make me feel better. It means that your other mate is honorable and if we are to live as a unit then I would want him to be no other way."

"Live as a unit?" I asked, unsure what he was talking about.

Rowan moved over to me and touched my other shoulder. "Cedric is right, Mackenzie. We will have to find a way to get past our differences and live together. Your survival depends on it."

Tears welled up and I had to choke them back. "Don't do this to me. Don't make me believe that it can work out when I've spent four months thinking that I'd die never feeling complete again."

They embraced me tight, neither fought to be the one to hold me more. For the moment, they seemed to find common ground and my heart leapt to my throat.

Epilogue

We've not confronted the King yet, nor are we planning to. He would kill Cedric, and in turn me. In truth, if Cedric were harmed I'd want to die, but the vicious cycle of our affair meant that I would take Rowan to the grave as well. Rowan isn't willing to sacrifice all of us just to call his father out on his lies.

I wanted to leave, and return home immediately, but Cedric was the one to say no. "It's not safe yet, Mackenzie. I will find somewhere that the King cannot find us and then I will come and collect the two of you. Rowan will keep safe, and I shall not be gone long. Soon we will be safe, and we will make our new arrangement work--I promise you that."

I hope he's right, but the sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach tells me that this is far from over. Rowan and Cedric are forces to be reckoned with and both fear the King. His obsession with me is growing and I know that if I don't get away from him soon, we'll all pay the price.

Look for Peace Offerings III: Tranquility, the final chapter!

