



SILVIA  
VIOLET

SWORD OF  
LONGING

Loose Id

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### *Faery Treasures 1: Cup of Revelation*

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*Faery Treasures 1: Cup of Revelation* is now available from Loose Id.

# FAERY TREASURES 2: SWORD OF LONGING

Silvia Violet

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This book contains explicit sexual content and graphic language.

# Faery Treasures 2: Sword of Longing

Silvia Violet

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Published by  
Loose Id LLC  
1802 N Carson Street, Suite 212-2924  
Carson City NV 89701-1215  
[www.loose-id.com](http://www.loose-id.com)

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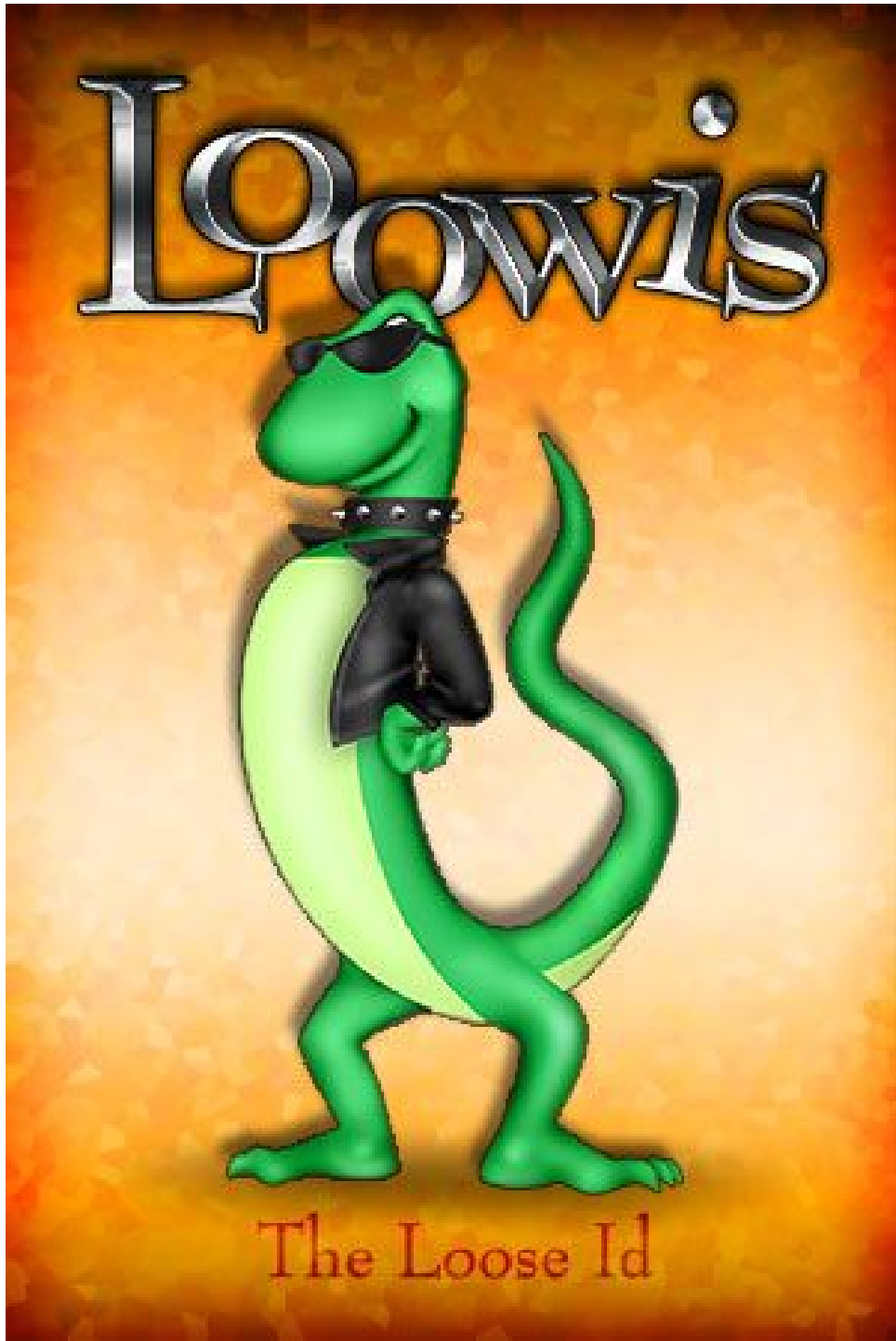
ISBN 978-1-59632-222-6

Available in Adobe PDF, HTML, MobiPocket, and MS Reader

Printed in the United States of America

Editor: Ansley Velarde

Cover Artist: Bonni Elizabeth Hall



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## Chapter One

Riordan gripped Brianna's arm, helping her to a chair. Once again, she'd drained herself until she hadn't the strength to stand. He'd done everything he could to augment her powers, but they were no closer to finding the three remaining faery treasures than they'd been that morning. He knew as well as anyone how important their search was, but Brianna deserved a break. She was half human, and she'd only been in Faery for a few months. Working magic still took a great physical and emotional toll on her.

Brianna glanced at the faery king, who was standing by the tall, narrow windows. "I'm sorry." Her voice shook with exhaustion.

King Laothin nodded his head, acknowledging her apology. "I know this is trying for you, but we cannot put off this search."

Lachlan, Brianna's Consort, crossed the room to stand behind her, laying his hands on her shoulders. The scowl on his face said his temper was held in check by the thinnest thread. Riordan knew he'd better speak up before Lachlan did. "Begging your pardon, Majesty, but we need to reconsider the idea that Brianna is not the one intended to find the other treasures. The cup called to her, but the other treasures do not. Perhaps there are others whose gift it is to find them."

The king sighed, his own exhaustion showing through for the first time that day. “If these gifted ones come forth, then so be it, but we cannot slow our efforts.”

Riordan nodded. “I understand the urgency, sire. Perhaps we should put our efforts into looking for the others, rather than trying to devise a spell Brianna can use.”

King Laothin frowned. “Have you a suggestion as to how to conduct such a search?”

Brianna looked up. “I do.”

The king nodded in her direction to indicate she should explain.

“A brownie named Hyacinth came to visit me the other day.”

The king frowned. “A brownie? How many times must it be explained to you that the lesser fey are not allowed in the castle unless employed as servants?”

“I understand the law, Your Majesty. Hyacinth tried to speak with the liaisons to the lesser fey, but none of them would listen to her.”

An exasperated sigh escaped the king’s mouth. “So, naturally, she came to you.”

“Yes, Your Majesty. She thought that since I was half human, I might listen to her.”

“Her, and all the rest of them.” The king’s words were barely audible, but they carried enough for Riordan to hear them. He bit his lip to keep from smiling. Brianna’s democratic ways had perplexed the king since her arrival.

“Your Majesty, I believe that what she had to say was truly significant.”

The king nodded. “Tell us what you heard.”

“Twenty years ago, she was assigned to watch over a half-human child whose faery mother had abandoned her. The young woman reached adulthood ten years ago, and Hyacinth has not contacted her since. But recently Hyacinth has begun to dream of the young woman again. She has seen her holding the Faery Sword. She believes that we need to contact her.”



Riordan barely stifled his gasp. He'd dreamed of this woman, too. He would swear it. He'd dismissed it as his mind working overtime on the puzzle of the treasures, but he'd seen a young woman standing by his bed, holding the Faery Sword.

The king's eyes narrowed. "Who is this child's mother?"

"The brownie didn't know, but she was assigned to guard her by Lachlan's father."

The king looked at Crandar, Lachlan's father and the king's most trusted advisor. A pained look crossed his face. "Skena."

The king frowned. "Then she is of the house that once held the sword. But dare we trust her when her mother betrayed us?"

Arden stepped forth from her place by Riordan's side. "Your Majesty, I think we must. If Brianna were meant to find the other treasures, she would have done so by now. We have to explore every path that presents itself. If this young woman --" She paused, looking at Brianna.

"Her name is Lorna."

"If Lorna has not had contact with her mother since she was a small child, then she has not been poisoned by her mother's weakness."

The king rubbed at his short beard, a sure sign he was weighing his options. After a long silence, he dropped his hand to his side and nodded. "You're right. We must at least find the girl. I will send one of my guards to seek out this brownie and her former charge."

Riordan stepped forward. "Your Majesty, I would like to be the one to retrieve her."

"I have need of you here."

"I am pleased to serve as you need, Your Majesty, but I have also dreamed of this woman. I believe I was meant to find her."

King Laothin looked exasperated, but he nodded. "I give you my blessing, but I expect your return with haste. I cannot afford to have you far from Faery at this time of crisis."

Riordan's muscles tensed. He was proud of the work he'd done as an agent of the king, but the king's constant need of him over the last several months had worn him down. He'd love nothing more than a satisfying night's sleep in a comfortable bed, but that would likely be months in coming. He bowed toward his sovereign. "Thank you, Your Majesty. I shall find Hyacinth and prepare for my journey."

\* \* \* \* \*

*Lorna stood by the side of a dark, unknown lake. The moon slipped out from behind a cloud and cast its light across the still water. She watched a woman rise and walk on the surface of the water. A tall man with sun-kissed skin and hair so white it glowed stood on the far shore. The woman approached him. He held out a long sword. The woman accepted the weapon and turned to face Lorna.*

*Lightning flashed, temporarily blinding Lorna. When she could see again, she herself stood on the waters of the lake. A man faced her. His silver hair sparkled in the moonlight. She couldn't tell if it was a trick of the water reflecting on him, but his skin appeared blue.*

*He wore no shirt, and never had she seen a man with a more perfectly formed chest. Celtic tattoos circled his arms, and a radiant sun surrounded his navel. Her heart hammered. She sucked in her breath as hot waves of lust threatened to consume her.*

*He unsheathed a sword, gripping its hilt in both hands and held it out to her, point first. She stepped back, frightened for a moment. Then lightning flashed again.*

*The same man stood before her, but now he was naked. His clothes and the sword had disappeared with the flash. His cock thrust upward as the sword had. Her knees buckled when she realized it was nearly as large as the massive weapon.*

Lorna sat up with a start, pushing the sweat-dampened sheets off her. She shook her head to clear it.

That damned dream again. She'd been having it for over a week, necessitating she start every day with a cold shower. Now this morning would be no exception.

She slid from bed and stumbled through her dark bedroom into the short, narrow hall. Only the barest indication of dawn shone through the gap in her heavy curtains. Once again, the gorgeous man with the blue skin and enormous ... *sword* had wakened her hours before she needed to be up.

Waiting until the last possible moment to confront her tired eyes with light, she entered her bathroom and fumbled for the faucet. After splashing cold water on her face, she braced herself and flipped the light switch. She wished she could shower in the dark, but she decided that was an accident waiting to happen.

Cool water splashed over her body, but it did nothing to halt the hot pulsing between her legs. Lorna knew from experience that she would spend the entire day in a state of heightened arousal. At least now that she'd hired a few more employees to help out at the shop, she'd be able to go out that night. She wanted to concentrate on developing her business, not a relationship, but she enjoyed sex as much as any girl. And it had been far too long since she'd gotten any. If she could take off early from the shop, she could catch a nap, then head out to her favorite club. Hopefully, she'd find a man who could help her get some relief. If only the aching lust was the worst part of the dreams.

She tried to block the memories from her mind, but they washed over her as easily as the water did.

*She was five years old. Her mother had disappeared. Her father drank more and more every day. He forgot to take her to school; sometimes he even forgot to feed her. He got angry in the evenings, so she tried to make herself invisible. She would crouch in the back corner of her closet, hoping he would forget she was in the house.*

*Then one night, when she'd cried so long and hard her throat was raw, a gnarled little woman appeared in her closet. The woman couldn't have stood more than a foot tall. She wore a calico dress and an apron like the characters in the Little House books Lorna's kindergarten teacher read to her. She'd twined a crown of flowers around her head. It sat on her pointed ears, holding back her long, dark hair.*

*Lorna should have been afraid, but she wasn't. She knew instinctively that the woman was there to help her.*

*The woman smiled and laid a hand on Lorna's arm. "I'm Hyacinth. I've been sent by a friend of your mother's."*

*Lorna sniffled. "Where's my mommy?"*

*"She's gone away, but I am here to help you."*

*"What are you?"*

*"I'm a brownie."*

*"No, you're not."*

*The woman drew herself up, stretching to her full height, small as it was. "I am."*

*"But brownies are made out of chocolate."*

*Hyacinth smiled. "Well, I may not be made of chocolate, but I assure you I'm a brownie"*

*"You look kinda like a gnome."*

*Hyacinth sniffed. "Certainly not."*

*Lorna giggled for the first time in months.*

*Hyacinth patted her. "At least I've succeeded in making you smile. Just call me Hyacinth, and we won't worry about the rest."*

*From that night, until Lorna turned eighteen, Hyacinth had come whenever Lorna was in need. She hadn't been able to fix all of Lorna's problems, but she'd given Lorna the strength to survive.*

The sting of shampoo running into Lorna's eyes brought her back to the present. Lorna had tried to dismiss her memories of the little woman, thinking surely Hyacinth had been no more than an imaginary friend who had helped Lorna get through the hell of being abandoned by her parents. But deep down, she knew Hyacinth had been real. Now these dreams were making that knowledge even harder to ignore.

The men in the dreams were tall and beautiful. They looked nothing like Hyacinth except for their pointed ears. But Lorna knew they were from Faery, the place to which Hyacinth returned each time she parted from Lorna. The thought scared Lorna to death.

And worse, Lorna knew her mother was one of them, too. Lorna could do things no human should be able to do, like heating objects with energy from her own hands, healing cuts far more rapidly than expected, and occasionally, when she was around someone who was very angry or scared, she could read their thoughts. Ever since the dream with the blue-skinned man had started, her abnormal powers had increased in strength.

With a long sigh, she shut off the water and grabbed her towel. When she stepped out of the shower, she caught a glimpse of her tattoo in the mirror; a wave with three curling crests decorated the base of her spine. Hyacinth had described the design the last time they'd spoken. Lorna asked why it was so important that she have a tattoo, but all Hyacinth would tell her was that it was so one of their kind could use it to identify her.

Lorna couldn't understand why any of her mother's people would need to identify her. The very thought of confronting their world frightened her. Despite her reliance on Hyacinth as a child, she'd learned to survive on her own by being logical and practical.

But now every time she closed her eyes to sleep, or even just sat down to rest, she saw the blue-skinned man. His image alone made her body sing and her heart race with both fear and anticipation. If only she could shake the feeling that something enormously unsettling was about to happen in her life.

She walked back to her bedroom, glancing at the clock as she rummaged for clothes. Six o'clock. Her chocolate shop wouldn't open for another five hours, but if she got an early start, Jenny and Susie would be able to finish making the day's truffles by noon, and she could head home early.

After blow-drying her short auburn hair, she pulled on a pair of striped wool tights, a knee-length black skirt, and a fuzzy purple sweater. She completed the outfit with her favorite corduroy jacket and her tall, black boots. Then she grabbed her purse and headed out the door of her small house.

Taking a deep breath as she opened the gate in her fence, she stepped onto the sidewalk. Lorna loved the smell of the crisp fall air. Leaves crunched under her feet as she walked, and the sky was the clearest of blues. Instantly, she felt better.

She headed out of her neighborhood and onto one of the busier streets that would take her into the downtown shopping district. But as she passed the large bank building a block from her shop, she saw a man walking toward her.

Nothing about his appearance should have alarmed her. He was tall and blond. He wore a well-tailored suit and carried a briefcase. He looked as if he might work at the bank or might be headed to the convention center. But for some reason, a chill ran down her spine. She wrapped her hand around the can of mace dangling from her keychain.

The man stared at her more openly than would be polite, but he said nothing. However, when he passed by her, he brushed against her arm. The revulsion she felt at the slight touch knotted her stomach. The man smelled ... wrong, rancid and potent, but not like any human she'd ever encountered. Instinctively, she didn't think he belonged in her world.

Lorna's heart pounded as she kept walking, fighting not to break into a run.

## Chapter Two

By the time she reached her shop, Lorna had shaken off the creepy sensations she'd picked up from the strange man. She smiled as she opened the door and saw the rows of chocolates in their refrigerated case.

Her stock was delightfully depleted. There must have been a rush before closing the night before. She opened her office door and picked up the inventory tally Jenny had left for her. They'd sold out of several types of truffles and all their dark chocolate bark. It looked like it would be a busy day in the kitchen for Lorna and Susie, her recently hired assistant chocolatier.

Lorna smiled. She'd been having record sales all month as more and more tourists flocked to her shop since the write-up in *Southern Living*. Marianne, the previous owner, had hired Lorna when Lorna was a seventeen-year-old runaway. Hyacinth had sent Lorna to the shop, and Lorna had immediately felt a kinship with the older woman. Lorna suspected Marianne was part faery, but they'd never discussed it.

Then, a year ago, Marianne had passed away, and Lorna had inherited Chocolate Haven. Lorna had been frightened that she'd never be able to keep the shop going on her



own, but she'd not only stayed afloat, she'd increased profits and hired more staff. The success of Chocolate Haven was a triumph that had made her believe in her own strength.

Now these damned dreams were threatening her contentment. She pushed that thought aside and sat down to process web orders and answer email inquiries. Sometime later, about an hour she'd guess, she heard someone moving around in the store.

Her breath caught. She picked up her cell phone, ready to call the police if it wasn't Susie coming in early to get started on the day's chocolate. Lorna crept to the office door and peeked through the crack, but the door was wrenched from her hand.

The man who had bumped her in the street stood in the doorway.

Lorna's heart hammered and her lungs contracted. She tried to find the buttons for 911 on her cell phone, but the man gripped her wrist and squeezed until she opened her hand and the phone clattered to the floor.

Lorna struggled, trying to lessen his grip on her arm, but she couldn't escape. "Who are you?"

"My lady wishes you to speak with you."

Was he out of his mind? Did he think she was someone else? "I don't understand."

His lips curled up. "You will."

She looked into his eyes and couldn't look away. He held her with a gaze as strong as chains. She felt a sharp, stabbing pain behind her forehead as if someone wanted to punch through her skull. Then words began to pour directly into her mind. The speaker wasn't the man holding her prisoner, but a woman with the lightest, loveliest voice Lorna had ever heard.

*Lorna, I am friend of your mother's. I want to meet you, darling. We have much to talk about.*

Lorna's stomach dropped to the vicinity of her knees. No one but Hyacinth had spoken of her mother since she'd disappeared twenty-five years ago. Fear squeezed Lorna's heart, yet

she wanted desperately to talk to this woman who claimed to know her mother. She sounded so lovely, so caring.

*Lorna. You only have to come with my servant. Then your mother and I can share our secrets with you.*

“But --” Lorna started to protest, forgetting that she was speaking to a voice in her own head.

*Just follow my servant.*

“I ... can't.” Deep in her subconscious, Lorna knew something was wrong, but she felt her will to protest draining away as the woman's smooth voice soothed her.

*Come to me, Lorna.*

“Let her go.” The strange voice seemed to come from very far away. Lorna wanted to tell the man to shut up, because she couldn't hear her mother's friend anymore.

Then suddenly the man trapping her was wrenched away, and she was herself again. She sucked in air as if she hadn't breathed since looking into the man's eyes.

Lorna shook her head. A black fog clouded her mind. The woman's words had been so alluring a moment before, but now Lorna realized the voice had carried a chilling, evil edge.

Another man Lorna had never seen before was grappling with her attacker. He gave off the same odd energy she'd felt from the tall, blond man. Light seemed to emanate from him in small flashes, and for just a second, he became the man from her dream, blue skin, silver hair, naked body, then before her mind could truly register her astonishment, he was once again the nondescript brown-haired man he'd been before.

Lorna stood paralyzed for a few seconds, watching as the two men rolled on the floor, each savagely struggling to get the upper hand. Then she gripped a massive book lying on the desk behind her and slammed it down on her attacker's head.

He groaned and rolled to his side. The man who'd rescued her freed himself. He reached for the attacker, but the blond man disappeared. Lorna blinked, astonished. One

moment the man had been curled in agony on her office floor, and the next minute, he was gone without a trace.

“What the hell?” But as soon as the words were out of her mouth, the second man spun around and disappeared as well.

Lorna stood staring at the spot where both men had been. Books and papers lay scattered across the floor where they’d knocked them off shelves as they fought. But otherwise, there was no evidence that anyone but Lorna had been in the shop.

For a brief second, she considered calling the police. Then she laughed at the thought. What would she tell them? A man had grabbed her arm and sent a woman’s voice into her mind, then he and another man had disappeared into thin air. She’d be lucky if they didn’t lock her up for drug use or insanity.

More than anything, she wanted to pretend she’d fallen asleep at her computer and dreamed the whole incident. Or maybe the strange dreams she was already having were causing her to hallucinate during the day now. But she knew that no matter how much she might wish they were a product of her own mind, those two men had been in her shop.

Who were they? And why, after ten years of ignoring her, would her mother’s people decide to contact her?

\* \* \* \* \*

Lorna abandoned her plans to go out for the evening. After the morning’s events, she no longer wanted to talk to anyone, much less try to turn on enough charm to lure a man back to her house.

Instead, she sat on her couch, sipping her fourth -- or was it her fifth? -- glass of wine and watching a movie filled with explosions, high-speed chases, and hot men. She’d hoped to have at least a few moments’ reprieve from worrying about who was after her, but neither the wine nor the action flick had suitably dulled her mind.

Her doorbell rang, but she ignored it. She wasn't expecting anyone. It was probably someone asking for donations. Whoever it was, she wasn't in the mood to talk. She grabbed the remote and hit mute. She'd closed her curtains to darken the room before settling in with her movie, but she was afraid the person at the door might hear the noise and persist in trying to get her to answer.

A few seconds later, the bell rang again. Lorna tensed. After glancing at the door to make sure she'd turned the deadbolt, she instinctively curled into a tight ball on the couch, even though the person at the door couldn't see her. Silence descended for a minute or two, and she was beginning to relax when she heard a firm, rapid series of knocks.

She crept slowly across the room and looked through the peephole. Her heart slammed against her chest. It was the man who'd rescued her. A desire to know who he was and why he had helped her warred with her desire to sneak out her back door and run.

Then the knob turned and the door swung open. She shrieked and jumped back.

The man stood in her doorway, giving her a once-over. She felt his odd, non-human energy swirling in the air. "Who are you?"

"Let me in, and I'll explain."

"No." She tried to push the door closed, but he braced it with his foot.

"I need your help, and you need my protection."

"I want you to leave."

"I'm not leaving. I'm concerned about protecting you, even if you're too stubborn to admit that you're scared." Despite his obvious annoyance, his voice remained calm and even, and it carried an undertone of raw sensuality that spread chill bumps across Lorna's neck and tightened her nipples to painful points.

His effect on her made Lorna all the more wary of him. She so didn't need this. "I don't want to be involved in whatever it is you want me for."

"At least take the time to hear me out."

“No.” She shoved at the door once more, but he pushed back, opening it all the way and forcing his way into her house.

She reached for her phone. “I’m calling the police.”

“I think we both know that would be foolish.”

She sighed. He was right. “Tell me who you are and what you want.”

“My name is Riordan, and I am a representative of the king of Faery.”

Lorna laughed. She wasn’t sure if she disbelieved him, or she’d simply gone hysterical.

Light flashed like it had in her shop.

Lorna stood with her mouth open, trying to form words, but unable to make any sound come out. The gorgeous man from her dreams stood in her living room. Blue skin, silver hair, sexy tattoos, and, thank God, a pair of jeans. She didn’t think she’d have survived the shock if he’d been naked. Though the bulge in his pants indicated that his “sword” might truly be as large as it had been in her dream.

He didn’t say a word, but he smiled, obviously satisfied with the shock he’d given her. She had no idea how this man had gotten into her dreams or why the -- pause for hysterical laughter -- king of Faery would send a representative to her. For once, she regretted not developing her magical talents or learning more about her heritage. She knew she must have a million questions about what was going on, but her mind couldn’t form even one.

### Chapter Three

“Perhaps you should sit.” The man -- Riordan -- gestured toward the futon that served as her sofa.

Eventually, Lorna’s brain convinced her legs to walk the few steps across the room. Riordan took her arm to steady her as she sat. The strange energy that told her he wasn’t human buzzed across her skin, making it come alive. She felt a warm flush spread across her belly and down between her legs.

He smiled as if he realized shock wasn’t the only thing he was making her feel.

Lorna took a deep breath. “So you’re really a faery?”

He nodded.

“Why are you here?”

“That is a long, complicated story, one I don’t want to tell until you accept that I’m sworn to protect you. I don’t want you trying to call the police again, after all.”

“What would I tell them -- that a blue man with pointy ears used his powers to unlock my door and is insisting that I talk to him?”

Riordan smiled. “I have been told my appearance would be quite shocking to humans.”

Lorna smiled. She couldn't help herself. "Your appearance would be shocking anywhere, even if you weren't blue."

"Like what you see, do you?"

"Ah, non-human and arrogant, just my luck."

Riordan frowned. "I see no reason to pretend I'm unattractive, though I've been told such behavior is common among humans."

Lorna sighed. "I won't call the police. Just tell me what you came here to say, so I can get back to my life."

"I'm afraid that's not going to be possible for awhile."

Lorna's chest tightened. She'd been afraid of that. She watched him take a long, deep breath. She wanted to look away to break the spell his beauty was casting on her, but she couldn't. She considered suggesting he put a shirt on, but she refused to acknowledge the profound effect he was having on her.

He used one hand to gather his waist-length hair and pull it behind his shoulders. He was stalling. Not good. Was the situation even worse than she had thought? "Just say it."

Riordan bowed his head. "As you wish. King Laothin requests that you accompany me to Faery."

"And?"

Riordan breathed deeply again. "We need your assistance in locating the Faery Sword."

Lorna's stomach clenched. She felt the color drain from her face. "S-sword?"

"Yes. You're probably most familiar with it from the King Arthur legends."

Dear God. "Excalibur?"

"As you say."

She studied Riordan carefully. He gave no sign of knowing about her dream. But she needed to hear more before she mentioned it.

“Why me?”

“I’ve dreamed of you holding the sword.”

Oh, no. Had he had the same dream as she did? The one where he’d been naked and so clearly offering himself to her, the one where she woke up so horny she feared she’d combust?

She took a deep breath. “I’ve dreamed of it, too.”

His eyes widened. “What have you seen?”

Lorna felt heat rush to her cheeks. “A tall, lean man with white blond hair hands the sword to a woman who is standing on the water of a lake.” Lorna paused, putting her dream together with what Riordan had just said. “The Lady of the Lake?”

Riordan nodded. “Quite possibly.”

She sighed. This was only getting stranger and more complicated by the moment. “The Lady accepts the sword as I watch, but then I become the Lady, and the man standing before me is you. You offer me the sword and then ...”

“And then what?”

Lorna shook her head. There was no need to tell him more. “Then I wake up. That’s it.”

Riordan looked as if he were mulling over what she’d told him. He gave no indication of whether he’d had the same dream.

“Why me?”

He looked at her, studying her. Heat raced along her spine, through her belly, and deep into her core. Her hands tightened to fists as she fought the lust spinning in her body. “You are a descendant of the sword’s creator.”

The furrows in his brow and concern in his eyes told her he was holding something back. “What else?”



Something flashed in his eyes. Anger? Pain? Whatever it was, it made him look dangerous. “The dreams are a form of prophecy. That’s why I was chosen to come for you. We are destined to find the sword together.”

Lorna’s heart beat so hard she expected to look down and see her chest jump. She wanted to run, to head out the door and not stop until everything she knew was far, far away. But if she did that, she would have to start all over again. She’d done that once when she’d left her childhood behind. She didn’t want to do it again. She was happy where she was. “What about the other man from the dream? Who is he?”

“His name is Cairthinn. Hundreds of years ago, during another time of turmoil, he devised the spell to hide the treasures.”

“Why can’t he tell you where the sword is?”

Sadness shown in Riordan’s eyes. “He sent them to hiding places magically. I’m not sure he would know where to look, but he was poisoned several years ago, so he only communicates to us in dreams.”

“So faeries aren’t immortal?”

“Our spirits are, and our bodies won’t die of old age or disease, but we can be fatally wounded and some poisons or spells can also kill us.”

Lorna took a deep breath and tried to prioritize the hundreds of questions warring for attention in her mind. “You said I’m descended from the sword’s creator. That means I’m truly part-faery?”

He nodded. “Your mother was a full fey from one of our most ancient lines.”

“But I thought ... I mean, I wanted to think ...”

Riordan shook his head. “Hyacinth is quite real. She is looking forward to seeing you again.”

“You talked to her?”

“She is the one who alerted us to your heritage and to the danger you are in. She’s dreamed of you, too.”

Butterflies leaped and circled in Lorna’s stomach. Everything she’d avoided was crashing down on her. “But I can’t really be ... I’m human. I know I am.”

“You’re part human. But you’re also fey. Your magic is untrained, but it’s there. Don’t tell me you haven’t felt it?”

Lorna wanted to protest, but doing so was pointless. She had to keep her panic at bay and find out more. “Why does the sword need to be found?”

“An enemy of the king wants to unearth the faery treasures and use their strength to help her conquer the human world.”

“A woman with a clear, perfect voice.”

Riordan nodded. “I’ve heard she has the power to make her voice sound exactly as you wish it did. She uses it to bend humans and other fey to her will.”

“She was in my head.”

His eyes widened. “What?”

“Earlier, when you rescued me. A woman was speaking directly to my mind. She made me want to follow her. She said she was a friend of my mother.”

Riordan winced and looked away.

“What?”

“Skena, your mother, is one of her followers.”

Lorna’s stomach clenched; bile rose in her throat. She’d hated her mother for abandoning her, but she’d always hoped her mother had had a good reason and that one day she would return and explain why she’d had to leave.

Riordan took her hand. Energy leapt from his fingers to hers, instantly warming her and easing her pain. “I’m sorry, Lorna. I don’t know what Esa did to corrupt Skena’s mind.

Your mother was a loyal servant of the king years ago, but something happened that made her run away to the human world. Once she returned, Esa had her firmly enslaved.”

Lorna bit her lip to hold back her tears. “It doesn’t matter. I hardly knew her anyway. I shouldn’t have expected her to be anything other than evil. No decent woman would have left me with a drunken father who couldn’t even remember to feed me.”

Riordan pulled her into his arms then. She stiffened at first, but then she gave in to the need to be held. She allowed herself a few moments of weakness, soaking up the concern she felt radiating from him, before she pulled away.

He let her sit up, but he kept his arms around her. His clear, blue eyes held hers. “Another woman who is half human like you found the Faery Cup, and it is safe now. If we can find the sword and the other two treasures, then we can protect both human and fey from Esa and your mother. Come to Faery with me. I’ll see that you are shown how good our kind can be. You won’t long for anything while you are there.”

She wanted to believe that was true, but how could she abandon the life she’d built, and how could she trust him? Other than Marianne, everyone who’d professed to care for her had ultimately abandoned her. She forced herself to look away from Riordan’s handsome face. “I have no idea how to find this sword, and I can’t just leave with you. I have a business and friends and a life here, one I’m very --”

Riordan caressed her back, and her words died. Coils of heat lit up her belly, and her nipples hardened so fast it hurt. She looked up without thinking. His blue eyes shone; heat seemed to radiate from them. Her mind flashed to the image of Riordan naked, staring at her with stark sexual desire in his eyes. She gasped and scrambled back until she bumped against the arm of the couch. “Don’t touch me again.”

He smiled, obviously aware of the lust racing through her. “You have nothing to fear from me.”

“I’m not afraid, but I’m also not stupid. I know an attempt at seduction when I see it.”

His smile deepened. "Faeries have stronger sex drives than humans. The need you feel is completely natural."

She gripped the arm of the couch to steady herself. How could desire this strong be natural? "Even so, I don't have to act on it."

"No, you don't, but you would enjoy it if you did. Sex with humans cannot compare to what you could feel with one of our kind."

Lorna's heart thumped against her chest. She knew without a doubt that he was right. Several years ago, she'd finally accepted that she loved sex, and she wasn't afraid to let a man know it. But even with the best of her lovers, she'd felt like something was missing. She'd been on a continual quest to find the perfect formula that would leave her truly satisfied. But no matter how attentive or skilled her lovers were, she was always left wishing for something more, something she couldn't put into words.

The thought that Riordan could finally satisfy that need made her body clench in anticipation. But she liked her sex casual, and something in her recoiled at the way Riordan called to her deepest self. If she slept with Riordan, she'd have a hard time keeping her emotions out of it. And the last thing she needed was a relationship with a man who wasn't even human.

She took a deep breath, fighting to calm the storm in her body. "I said I would listen to what you had to say. I never said I'd sleep with you."

Riordan nodded, but he gave her a smile that said he expected to have her sooner or later. "You have until tomorrow morning to set your affairs in order. Then we will leave for Faery."

Lorna sat up straight and gave him a hard look. "I never said I would go with you."

"Esa will continue to seek you out until she weakens you and brings you over to her side. I can help you fight her, and so can the other members of the king's council. We aren't going to leave you at Esa's mercy."

“Then why bother asking if you don’t intend to give me a choice?”

Riordan sighed. “I will not take you to Faery against your will, and I cannot make you help us find the sword, but I have sworn to protect you, and I will not leave unless you come with me.”

Lorna took a long, slow breath. She had no way of knowing what the woman who’d spoken to her was capable of, and no way of defending herself against her magic. But who would mind her store while she was gone, and what would she tell them? *Oh, sorry, I have to go to faery land and help the faeries save us all from imminent destruction.* Susie and Jenny were rather open-minded, but she still didn’t think that would go over well.

She wanted to forget the dreams and the whole last twenty-four hours, so she could move on with the life she’d built for herself, the life where she needed no one. If she went to Faery, she’d be dependent on Riordan to teach her what she needed to know. Of course, she was already in too much danger to be safe on her own, and apparently, she was stuck with Riordan until she could figure out how to get rid of him.

She glanced up, giving him the once-over. She had to admit, there were worse men ... creatures ... whatever, to be stuck with. The heat in her body kicked back up. She bit her tongue to keep it from snaking out to wet her lips as she let her eyes scan the gorgeous lines of his face. She clenched her hands into fists to keep them from touching Riordan’s sparkling silver hair. She desperately wanted to find out if it felt as silky as she imagined it would. She had to snap out of this. She was so not going to sleep with him. “I have to think about this.”

He nodded. “That is fair.”

The enormous weight of what was happening suddenly settled on Lorna’s body. She felt exhausted. She glanced at the clock. It was only ten, but she urgently needed to get some sleep. In the morning, she would make her decision.

“I need to get to bed.” She stood and stretched. “You can come back in the morning.”

Riordan shook his head. “I’m staying here.”

“No, you’re not.” Lorna fought the urge to throw something at him.

“Yes, I am. In order to protect you, I have to stay close.”

“Fine!” She was too exhausted to argue. “I assume faeries have need of a bathroom.”

He smiled. “We do.”

“It’s the first door on the right.” She gestured toward the hall as she crossed the living room, opened a closet, and started rummaging for sheets and a blanket. “The bedroom on the left is mine, but the room at the end of the hall has a couch that’s fairly comfy. I can help you set it up.”

“No.”

She turned to face him. “What?”

“When I said I would not leave you alone, I meant it. I don’t intend to let you out of my sight. And I have no intention of sleeping on a sofa.”

The indignant look on his face would have made her laugh, if she hadn’t been so angry. “Where do you propose to sleep, then?”

“With you.”

“I just told you --”

He held up his hand. “I give you my word as a servant of King Laothin that I will not touch you unless you ask me to.”

Lorna snorted.

“If you find the idea of asking for my touch so ridiculous, then what are you afraid of?”

“I’m not afraid of anything.” *If only that were true.*

“Then show me to your bed.”

Lorna gritted her teeth and bit back a growl of frustration. “I have no intention of sharing my bed with you, promise or no promise.”

“If Esa tries to slip into your mind again, I can only help you if I am close by.”

“You’ll be in the next room. That’s close enough.”

“You won’t be able to call if you’re under her spell.”

“Fine. You can sleep on the floor in my room.” She turned away from him and started walking down the hall. As she expected, he followed right on her heels.

He grabbed her arm and turned her toward him. “That plan is unacceptable.”

“If you want to protect me, that’s fine. But I don’t give a fuck if you’re too much of a baby to sleep on the floor.”

His eyes narrowed. “I see no reason why I should suffer when you have a perfectly good bed. Unless, despite your protests to the contrary, you’re afraid you can’t resist me.”

How would she keep from reaching out to touch his delightful body when he was right beside her. “I can resist you just fine.”

“Then there is no reason we cannot share your bed. I have sworn not to touch you against your will, and you have said you have the power to resist the desire that sings in your body.”

Lorna’s heart raced. He knew. He knew how much she wanted him. Damn it. Could she really sleep beside him and not touch him? She didn’t think so, but she had to admit, the idea of Esa’s getting into her head scared her even worse than the consequences of fucking a sinfully gorgeous faery. “Fine, but you’re not taking those jeans off.”

Riordan sighed. “I’d been warned humans were too prudish for their own good.”

“Prudish? I’m hardly prudish. I simply don’t trust you to keep your hands to yourself if you’re naked.”

He gave her an evil grin. “I assure you, I’ll be just as anxious to feel your delicious body clutching mine whether I’m wearing pants or not. My cock will just be a hell of a lot more uncomfortable if I’m wearing pants.”

Lorna bit her lip to keep from moaning at the thought of Riordan’s hard cock sliding into her. God, it would feel good. She wasn’t even sure why she was so reluctant to sleep

with him. She'd fully intended to bring a man to her bed that night, before the evil faery bitch ruined her day.

But something about Riordan frightened her, something far less obvious than his non-human status. She couldn't find the words to describe it, but he made her feel restless, needy in more than a sexual way. "The pants stay on, or you sleep on the floor."

"As you wish." He smiled, waved his hand in the air, and his jeans became black satin pajama bottoms. "Do you find these acceptable?"

Lorna had to swallow before she could answer. The pants clung to his hard thighs, and the thin material left no doubt that his package was more than impressive. She knew he wasn't wearing anything underneath them. She turned and entered her room, immediately busying herself looking through her drawers for a pair of pajamas. But she kept seeing his hard, naked body standing by the side of the lake. She needed more distraction. "How did you do that?"

"Make my pants change, you mean?"

"Yes."

"The fey can dissolve or create anything that is made of a natural material."

"So you could create clothes for me out of thin air?"

"Yes, as long as they're made from natural material -- cotton, silk, leather." He said the last word with a purr in his voice that made her shiver. "Of course, I could make your clothes disappear just as easily."

She scowled. "Don't you dare."

He gave her a wicked smile as he pulled back the covers and climbed into bed. "Are you going to join me?"

"Not yet." Lorna scooped up her pajamas and practically ran into the bathroom. She leaned against the counter, looking into the mirror. Her cheeks were red, and her eyes



looked wild. She looked like a woman desperate to be fucked, which, of course, she was. How was she ever going to make it through this night?

She stripped off her clothes and put on her pajamas. She'd chosen her most discreet pair, but the strappy tank top left little to the imagination. She considered putting her bra back on, but her pride wouldn't let her. She wasn't going to let Riordan think he had more self-control than she did.

She washed her face and brushed her teeth as slowly as possible, praying she'd take so long Riordan would be asleep before she got into bed.

When she pulled back the covers and climbed onto the bed, Riordan didn't move. Had she gotten lucky after all? He shifted, rolling onto his stomach. She tensed. He groaned softly, but he appeared to be asleep. She sat paralyzed, unable to take her eyes off him.

The covers had fallen to his waist. She studied the tattoos circling his firm biceps and wondered if the Celtic knot design had a special meaning to him. Then her gaze traveled the length of his spine, noting the power in the muscles of his shoulders and the gorgeous planes of his back. At the base of his spine, exactly where the wave tattoo decorated her own body, he had a tattoo of a crescent moon.

A shiver ran over Lorna. The moon controlled the ocean's tides. A clear sign she should stay away from this man. She imagined he would relish holding sway over her.

## Chapter Four

*Come to me, Lorna.*

Lorna shook her head. She knew she had to fight the voice, but she couldn't remember why.

*Your mother wants you to find me, Lorna.*

*No.* Lorna fisted her hands in the covers, trying to anchor herself to the real world.

*Yes. Don't fight it, darling.*

*But ... I ...* Lorna couldn't remember what she wanted to say. Her legs slid over the side of the bed.

*That's right. Come outside, and my servants will bring you to me.*

Lorna whimpered. The woman sounded so lovely. Why couldn't she go with her? She slipped from the bed, and her feet hit the floor with a thump. A hand closed around her arm. "Fight her, Lorna."

Riordan's voice startled her out of her trance. "Help me."

"I will. Just listen to me."

*No. He only wishes to use you. I will take care of you.* Esa's silky voice caressed Lorna, and she fell back under the woman's spell.

Lorna tried to pull away from Riordan, but he held her fast. "Let me go!"

"No, Lorna. Listen to me. Imagine a wall behind your eyes. Build it up with stone."

"No, I need to go with her."

"Lorna, do it. Build a shield to keep her out of your mind."

Lorna felt like she was being ripped in half. Esa was calling her over and over in her seductive voice, and Riordan was tugging her back toward him.

She wanted to listen to Riordan's words, but she couldn't focus. Then he kissed her. Esa's voice faded under the onslaught of Riordan's lips, tongue, and teeth. Lorna let him pull her back onto the bed, and she wrapped her arms around him. Her tongue tangled with his and stroked against the roof of his mouth.

He groaned, and she rubbed her breasts against his chest, needing more contact with his warm skin. His hand rose to cup her breast while his thumb flicked across her nipple, hardening it instantly. She whimpered against his lips, and he pressed her back into the mattress, covering her with his weight.

*No, Lorna. Listen to me.* Esa's voice intruded into her pleasure.

*Fight her. Build the wall like I told you. See it behind your eyes.* Riordan's voice spoke directly into her mind while his tongue traced the line of her throat.

Lorna tried, but between Esa's voice and Riordan's attention, she was too distracted. "Help me."

Riordan stopped kissing her and sat up. She whimpered at the loss of pleasure. He took her face in his hands. "Look at me."

She opened her eyes and met his startlingly blue gaze.

"Do it. Build your shield."

Lorna focused on his eyes. “Stay in your body. Feel the bed beneath you and my body against yours. Use your senses, not your mind. You have the power to ignore her.”

Lorna did as he said. She saw the stones rising one by one behind her eyes until Esa’s voice faded to a whisper and Lorna’s mind grew silent.

Riordan released her and pulled back.

She desperately needed to feel Riordan’s warmth after the chill of Esa’s voice. She refused to let herself think about the consequences as she grabbed his long hair and pulled him back to her, crushing his mouth with hers.

He groaned and ground his hips against hers as her hands slid over his shoulders and her nails raked his back.

She knew she was going where she’d sworn not to go, but she couldn’t help herself. Riordan tasted like heat and security and raw pleasure. She couldn’t get enough of him.

His hands slipped under the hem of her tank top. The warmth felt wickedly sensual against the naked skin of her belly.

He grasped both of her nipples, squeezing and tugging simultaneously. Her back bowed, and she shrieked. Bolts of pleasure shot straight down to her pussy.

Riordan pushed her shirt up and replaced one of his hands with his mouth. The rasp of his tongue against her hardened flesh made her whimper. When he scraped her nipple with his teeth, starbursts of pleasure exploded in her head.

She slid her hands down his back until she encountered the elastic at the waistband of his pajama bottoms. She slipped her hands underneath, reveling in the feel of his warm, hard buttocks. She shoved at his pants, trying to push them down. Suddenly they disappeared, and he was gloriously naked.

She couldn’t resist, reaching between them to touch his cock. The deliciously hard column of flesh was so thick she could barely get her hand around it. Her dream had

definitely been no exaggeration of his true form. God, she would feel stuffed with him inside her. She couldn't wait.

"Fuck me, Riordan." She gasped as she stroked him from cockhead to balls. "Fuck me now."

He gave a smile the devil would envy. "You're not hot enough yet."

"Damn it! If I get any hotter, I'll combust."

He pulled back, forcing her to let his thick shaft go if she didn't want to hurt him. Then he gripped her wrists and stretched them over her head. Hot cream slipped from her body to dampen the sheets. She always loved it when her lovers held her down, but she felt like asking for it ruined her tough girl image.

Suddenly, he let go, gripping her behind the knees and shoving her legs wide. His gaze riveted on her pussy. She intended to reach for him, to guide his hot mouth right where she wanted it, but her arms wouldn't move. What the fuck?

"I've restrained you with my magic."

"What?"

"I'm using magical energy to hold you down."

Instinct took over, and Lorna struggled against her invisible bonds. Her body bucked, and she tried to jerked her arms down. She would have sworn padded cuffs enclosed her wrists, locking them to the bed.

Riordan grasped her hips and forced them back to the bed. "Relax. I won't harm you." He traced a path through the wetness that soaked her whole pussy and then pushed two fingers inside her, parting her easily. She moaned and ceased her struggles.

His hot breath fanned against her wet lips. "You like being at my mercy, don't you?"

"N--" Lorna couldn't even get out the single word, because Riordan swiped his tongue along the path his fingers had taken. When he sucked her clit into his mouth, she screamed. The intensity of the pleasure made it feel like delicious pain.

“Mmmm. Now you’re hot enough to combust.” Riordan licked her again and then set to devouring her, using lips, tongue, and teeth in a way that made Lorna more certain than ever that he wasn’t a human man. Not even the magical restraints were as surprising as a man who could worship her body like she was the most luxurious treat in her chocolate shop.

She desperately wanted to fist her hands in his hair and hold him in place. And yet, being totally under his control inflamed her. It gave her license to simply enjoy every lick and bite.

She felt her orgasm gathering. She reached for it, arching her hips up, thrusting her pussy at Riordan’s warm, inviting lips. But just as she tensed to go over the edge, he released her and sat back on his heels.

“Bastard!”

He laughed. “It will only be better for the wait.”

“Damn it, Riordan, I don’t want to wait.”

He came over her, bracing himself on his arms. His cock brushed her swollen clit. “Neither do I.”

She moaned and lifted her hips, trying to force him into her. “Please.” She was beyond caring how much she begged. She had to have him, or she would die.

He entered in one long thrust. She gasped and fought her bonds once more. He gave her his evil smile, and his eyes flashed with silver sparks. Then he pulled out, inch by agonizing inch, slower than she would have thought possible.

“Faster.” The words came out as a growl.

“You’re under my control. Remember?”

Her traitorous body clenched as his words made her want him all the more. She closed her eyes and tried to distance herself from the pounding need between her legs, but as he

held himself poised at the entrance to her body all she could think about was the need to be filled.

“Tell me what you need, Lorna.”

“No.”

“Then you’ll wait for it.”

Why did he insist on humiliating her? She needed warmth and comfort after her ordeal with Esa, not torture.

He smiled again and flexed his cock, making her bite her lip to hold her moan in.

“Torture is exactly what you need.”

She realized then that her shield had crumbled. The bastard was reading her thoughts.

“Stay the hell out of my head!”

He nodded. “As the lady wishes.”

As she put rock on top of rock, solidifying her shield, she felt something hot and satiny slide over her wall and out through her skull. The feeling made her shiver. She glared at Riordan. “You’re out?”

“Not anymore.” He surged into her, filling her with a quick brutal thrust. She groaned and her head fell back, his invasion of her mind forgotten in the whirlwind of pleasure he stirred in her.

When he started to pull out with agonizing slowness again, she thrust her hips up, forcing him to sink into her again. “More, damn it. Give me more.”

He wrapped his hands around her hips and pinned them to the bed. “I’m not done torturing you yet.”

Over and over he thrust deep and then withdrew, inch by inch, as if caressing her insides. She felt wild, crazed. She’d completely lost control of her body’s response. She tried to thrust against him, but he held her tight to the mattress. She struggled at the magic

binding her arms, thinking if she got him hot enough, he might be unable to hold her. But he remained calm and cool, never faltering in his rhythm.

Damn it! Why wasn't he as frantic as she was? She was coming apart, another piece coming unglued with every thrust. She felt the wildness in him. He'd locked it away, but she knew it was there. If only she could figure out how to release it. He'd be consumed by the storm, and she'd get the hard, fast fucking she needed.

"Riordan, I want it rough. I want to feel your hard, thick cock slamming against me."

He groaned, and she smiled. "You want it, too. I feel it in you."

He tensed, but he didn't increase his pace.

"Damn it! Fuck me, Riordan. Really fuck me."

He snarled. "No, you'll take it like I want you to."

She wanted to cry. Her body was screaming for release. "I need to come, please. I need it hard, so I can come."

"No, you don't. You're on the edge right now."

"I --" She realized he was right. She hung on the edge, ready to fall, but she didn't want it to end like this, she wanted him as frantic as she was.

"Riordan. You need to come, too. I feel it. Give in to your need."

His pace increased slightly, enough to end her torture, but not enough to be the rough animal fuck she needed. She couldn't hold back anymore. Her clit tightened, and her body convulsed. Shock waves of pleasure radiated all the way to her toes.

Riordan released her hips and pulled out of her. She whimpered, wanting more even as she lay exhausted from her climax.

He took his cock in his hand and pumped. She gasped. Dear God, he was going to come all over her. The thought sent heat spiraling through her body, making her need him all over again.



She watched, transfixed. His eyes fell shut and his face shuddered. Then his entire body stiffened, and hot, creamy come splashed against her breasts and belly.

\* \* \* \* \*

Steaming hot water poured over Lorna. She'd turned the shower on full force and let the sharp, stinging streams of water pound her back. It felt like heaven. If only she never had to leave the shower.

What the hell had she done? After swearing she wouldn't let herself have sex with Riordan, she'd begged him to fuck her. And sleeping with him had affected her just as deeply as she'd feared it would. She wanted him again, desperately, and next time ...

No, damn it. There wasn't going to be a next time. She would go to Faery. Esa was pure evil. She needed to be stopped, and Lorna needed to learn better defenses against such intrusions. She could no longer run from her faery heritage, so she had to learn all she could to keep herself safe. If the price she had to pay for this knowledge was helping the faery king find a magic sword, then so be it.

But going to Faery did not mean she had to be Riordan's lover. Hopefully, once she was in Faery, they could part ways. He stirred feelings deep inside of her that had nothing to do with her recent lack of sex. He had the power to make her fall in love with him, and her life had taught her that she was better off on her own. Men were good for sex, and sometimes even conversation, but her heart was her own, and she intended to keep it that way.

Lorna shut off the water. As she stepped out of the tub, a hand gripped her arm. She screamed and would have fallen if Riordan hadn't kept a strong grip on her.

"What the fuck are you doing in here?"

"Taking my turn in the shower."

"I thought you were asleep."

He let his eyes make a long sweep down her naked body. "Not anymore."

She couldn't help but look at his cock, which stretched hard and thick against his belly. She fought the urge to squeeze her legs together as lust stabbed through her. She turned away, wrapping the towel around herself. "I made a mistake. It won't happen again."

"I assume you're referring to the delightful sex we just had. I think it would be wrong to label something you so obviously took pleasure in a mistake."

"Just because something is pleasurable doesn't mean it's good for you."

"I've heard that humans think this way. You will see that our kind believe otherwise, once we are in Faery."

"I still haven't told you I would go."

"Can you actually ignore Esa's threat after feeling her in your head for the second time?"

Lorna sighed and shook her head. "No. I just don't like you making assumptions about what I will or won't do."

"Lorna, if we're going to work together --"

"I did not agree to work with you. I agreed to allow you to escort me to Faery. When we get there, I will listen to what your king has to say. Then I will decide what else to do."

"I have been assigned to protect you until the sword is safe. I will not forswear my duty." Sparks flashed in Riordan's eyes. He stared at her as if daring her to contradict him again.

She refused to back down, but her heart hammered against her chest. She had to fight her body's instincts to keep from fleeing the room. She had no doubt that Riordan could be very deadly if he wanted to be.

His face softened suddenly. "Lorna, I would never harm you."

"Stay out of my fucking head!" She turned and left, slamming the bathroom door with a growl.

## Chapter Five

“The guard says the king is meeting with his council. He will want to see us immediately.”

Riordan’s voice startled Lorna. She’d forgotten he was standing right behind her. She nodded, but she couldn’t make a single word come out of her mouth.

They’d spun around three times in her living room and then stepped through what had appeared to be a shimmery white curtain. Now they stood in what she could only be described as a salon. It was the sort of room a Renaissance monarch would have envied -- high ceilings, walls paneled in ornately carved white wood with gold leaf detailing, a thick, royal-purple rug over a white tiled floor, richly upholstered chairs and chaises scattered throughout in little groupings.

At least ten men and women stood or sat in the hexagonal room. Their hair and skin came in a dizzying variety of shades, and every one of them had the same unreal beauty Riordan possessed. The men wore clothing similar to what Riordan had created for himself before they left her house -- black knee-high boots, skin-tight white pants, and white tunics trimmed in gold. Some wore red and some yellow. Lorna could only guess the colors designated rank or position.

The faery women wore high-waisted dresses like the one Riordan had made appear on her body. Most of the dresses were white and trimmed with pastel flowers and ribbons. They looked like they'd come from the costume room of a Jane Austen film.

Most of the faeries appeared to be engaged in quiet conversations, but a frantic energy infused the air. As it touched Lorna's exposed skin, her body heated. Her concentration faltered as the warmth rushed to her pussy. She realized the pace of her breathing had increased dramatically, and she felt dampness on the top of her thighs. Riordan hadn't seen fit to provide her with any panties when he'd used his magic to dress them in faery attire.

"Lorna?"

Oh, shit. Had he called her name already? She'd been completely lost in the sensations wreaking havoc with her body. She turned to face Riordan, knowing her eyes were wide and her cheeks flushed.

She watched his broad chest rise as he drew in a long breath. The heat in her body rose another notch, and she fought the urge to press her legs together. What the fuck was wrong with her?

He smiled as if he'd heard her question. She quickly checked to see if she felt him in her mind, but she was all alone.

"What's going on?"

"Your faery sex drive is fully awakening for the first time, now that you are in our world."

Lorna drew in a sharp breath. "You mean you're this horny all the time?"

He smiled. "No. You'll learn better control as you get used to your body's response to Faery. But being surrounded by so many fey at once is stimulating to any of us."

Lorna rolled her eyes. "Calling the atmosphere stimulating hardly does it justice."

Riordan smiled. "I'd be happy to relieve your discomfort."

Lorna was tempted to grab his arm and demand he take her to a private room before they met the king. She wanted another hot session in bed with him so badly she could taste it. But he'd touched her too deeply, and the risk to her heart was too great. She would find some self control from somewhere. "No thanks. I'm fine."

The sparks in Riordan's eyes dissipated. The stern look he'd worn since she'd told him she had no intention of being his lover returned. "Come with me."

He started toward the gold double doors on the far side of the room. She had no choice but to follow.

\* \* \* \* \*

Riordan opened his mind so the wards on the doors to the king's private hallway could recognize his mental signature. When the doors swung open, he saw Sidwell, one of the king's guards, standing on the other side. He turned to introduce Lorna, but he felt tension radiating from her.

"Get out of my head."

Riordan forced the rush of anger back down. "I gave you my word that I would not --"

"Not you." She glared at Sidwell. "Him."

"It is my duty to see that the king is protected."

"How dare you --"

Riordan gripped her arm tightly, trying to let her know he would handle the situation. The last thing she needed to do was make enemies among the guards. "Reading the thoughts of a guest is inexcusable. I vouch for Lorna's loyalty to our king, and I intend to speak with him about your breach of etiquette."

Sidwell bristled. "That is not necessary. I meant no harm."

Riordan nodded and guided Lorna past him without saying another word.

Lorna looked up at him, obviously ready to question what had happened. “The king’s guards are often overzealous. But your ability to sense his probe bodes well for the development of your magical talent.”

She raised her brow, obviously wanting a more detailed explanation. “We’ll discuss it later.”

They reached the end of the hallway, and Riordan opened the door to the council room. Brianna, Lachlan, Arden, and Riordan’s brother, Brann, were seated around an oblong table. King Laothin sat on one end, perusing a map of Faery. They all looked up as Riordan and Lorna entered, and Riordan watched as they all took Lorna’s measure. Her short, wedge-cut hair would make her appear exotic to those who rarely entered the human world, but her dark brown eyes were open and expressive. They softened the hard edges of her personality.

Riordan needed no mind-reading ability to know they all desperately wanted to know if she were up to the challenge of finding the sword. He saw sympathy for Lorna’s plight in Brianna’s eyes. The others were clearly reserving judgment.

He couldn’t blame them. While the little time he’d spent with Lorna had convinced him she had more than enough personal strength to withstand Esa’s will, she knew almost nothing about how to use her powers and even less about the ways of the fey. They had precious little time to teach her.

Riordan bowed toward King Laothin. “Your Majesty, I wish to present Lorna, daughter to Skena, House of Cresting Water.”

Lorna bowed as well, and he couldn’t help but watch the graceful movement of her body.

“Your Majesty, I believe that Lorna is the one called to find the Faery Sword.”

The king nodded and turned to look at Lorna. “Welcome to Faery.”

Riordan knew from the concentration in the king's eyes that he was scanning Lorna. He prayed she wouldn't fight him. He reached out and squeezed her hand. She gripped him hard, and he felt her tense, but she said nothing.

A few seconds later, the king smiled. "Very good. I believe you may indeed have the strength your mother lacked."

Lorna winced, and Riordan gave her another reassuring squeeze.

King Laothin rose from his seat, and the others followed suit. The king kept his gaze focused on Lorna. "I regret that our first meeting must be so short, but my daughter has just returned from a scouting mission among humans. She has requested a private audience." He looked over at Lachlan then. "I'll send a guard with a report of any news. See that Riordan is briefed on new developments. Lorna's training should begin immediately."

Lachlan nodded. "Yes, Your Majesty."

After the king made his exit, Arden stepped forward and extended her hand to Lorna. "Hello, Lorna. I am Arden, Chief Healer in Faery. Welcome. I wish you had come under different circumstances, but I hope you enjoy your time here."

"Thank you." Riordan heard the catch in Lorna's voice. He knew she must be terrified being forced so quickly into such unfamiliar territory.

Brann stepped forward next. His long, black hair hung in two braids. He looked severe as always, but Riordan was pleased to see him smile at Lorna. The last thing she needed from one of the council was intimidation. He inclined his head toward Lorna, giving her the type of bow a faery lord reserved for equals. Riordan was pleased to see his brother accept her so readily. Brann didn't trust easily. He must sense something about Lorna or else he had more faith in Riordan's judgment than he let on.

Lorna glanced back at Riordan, then at Brann, then back to Riordan. It wasn't surprising she'd noticed the resemblance. Brann was even taller and far more muscular than Riordan, but they had the same blue skin and eyes.

Brann laughed at her look of amazement. “I hope my brother has been treating you well.”

Still looking at Riordan, Lorna lifted her brow. “He’s a very dedicated protector.”

Brann smirked. “Dedicated. That describes him perfectly.”

Riordan bit back a retort. Brann had been on Riordan’s case to take some time away from his duties to the king, saying Riordan was far too uptight. Of course, this advice came from a man who’d decided to thumb his nose at some of the oldest customs in Faery.

But Riordan let that train of thought go as Brianna stepped forward. He smiled as he saw Lorna’s shoulders relax. If anyone here could help Lorna adjust, it would be Brianna. The small, blond-haired woman extended her hand to Lorna. “I’m Brianna. I’m half human, like you, and I’ve only been in Faery for a few months. Much is still new to me, but I’ll do everything I can to help you adjust.”

Lorna gave the first genuine smile he’d seen since they’d entered Faery. Then Lachlan stepped forward, placing an arm around Brianna’s shoulders. Their ease with one another tugged at something deep inside Riordan. No one could fail to see the deep love they had for each other.

The fey were a polyamorous people, and they mated only when pulled by a Consort Bond. Such bonds were rare. Lachlan and Brianna were the first mated pair in over twenty years. Unless he counted Brann and Aidan, but their bond wasn’t officially recognized since Aidan was one of the lesser fey. The law of Faery stated that such a bonding was impossible. Riordan knew differently, but many still treated Brann as an outcast.

After seeing his brother suffer, Riordan had sworn he’d never get close enough to any of his partners to allow a bond deeper than friendship to form. He found great pleasure with his partners, but he had no intention of risking the pain he’d seen his brother go through.

At least he hadn’t until he met Lorna. Whenever he was near her, he felt a restless need, something different from everyday lust. He wanted more from her than just sex. He



wanted her to open her soul to him, to accept who he was deep inside. He was more frightened by these feelings than he'd ever been when risking his life on a mission for the king.

He should take his fear as a warning and keep his distance. Both Lachlan and Brann had described feeling similarly around their mates prior to experiencing the mind merge that began the bonding process.

If he were truly to be safe, he would beg the king to assign Lorna another protector, but he knew he wasn't going to do that. No matter how much he feared their connection, he didn't have the strength to walk away from her.

Riordan suddenly realized that Lachlan was staring at him. Had he been asked a question? "Did I miss something?"

Lachlan smiled. "I'm afraid so. A damned fine protector you are. I could have attacked Lorna just now, and you wouldn't have noticed, you were so far away."

Riordan felt shameful heat creeping into his face. He knew his cheeks were turning a deep royal blue. "Forgive me. What were you saying?"

Lachlan narrowed his eyes for a moment, and Riordan felt him pressing against his shields. Riordan clamped down tightly. He wasn't ready to reveal his feelings for Lorna, even to his closest friend.

Lachlan frowned, but he let it go. "I was explaining that there's been another attack. Matargh was poisoned." Lachlan turned to Lorna. "Matargh is the leader of the king's guards."

"How is he?" Riordan asked.

"He lives, but only because he was found quickly. The poison was strong and fast acting. Esa is growing more desperate. Hence the urgency."

Riordan nodded. "I intend to stick closely to Lorna. I assume measures have been taken to ensure Brianna's safety?" Brianna had made amazing strides in gaining control over her magic, but she was still no match for Esa.

Lachlan nodded. "Aidan is guarding her when I cannot be around. The king still isn't comfortable with his presence, but at least he accepts Aidan's loyalty."

"Excellent." Riordan was glad to hear that his brother's lover was at least being allowed to enter the castle without harassment now.

Lachlan gathered his cloak from the chair he'd occupied. "Brann and I are going out again to search the area where Matargh was found. The king has asked that Arden and Brianna work with Lorna. They are to acquaint her with scrying and attempt to pinpoint the sword's location. Stay here with them, and don't let Brianna leave unless she's with Arden or Aidan."

Riordan nodded. "I won't."

## Chapter Six

Lorna watched Arden intently as the green-haired woman opened a cabinet and pulled out candles, an incense stick, and a crystal hanging from a leather cord. When she'd touched Arden's hand, she'd felt cool, soothing energy rush across her skin. But the woman still intimidated her. She had the air of someone utterly confident in her abilities, not because she was arrogant, but because she was truly that good.

And she was shockingly beautiful. Her pale skin was nearly translucent, and it made her hair look that much brighter. Her eyes were a few shades darker green than her hair and when Lorna looked into them, she had to fight not to drop all her defenses and let Arden fall into her mind.

Arden began arranging all the items she'd selected on a round table. She gestured to indicate that everyone should sit. Riordan held out a chair for Lorna, and she took a seat between him and Arden.

Arden lit the candles and turned to face Lorna. "Tell me what you know of your powers."

Lorna took a deep breath. She described the things she'd been able to do which she knew were outside the human realm, then she explained how Riordan had taught her to shield.

"Her shields are quite strong," Riordan added. "She held Esa off last night. And if she hadn't recognized my desire to help her, I don't think I could have broken through to help her."

Arden nodded, looking intrigued. Lorna felt a warm rush of pride at Riordan's compliment. But she dismissed it, forcing herself to focus on Arden. It wasn't as if his approval should matter.

Arden took Lorna's hand. "The easiest way for me to learn what I can about the nature of your power is to scan your mind. Would you be willing to open for me?"

"Will it feel like what the king did when Riordan introduced me?"

Arden's eyes widened. "You felt that?"

Lorna nodded, not understanding her surprise.

Riordan grasped her other hand. "As I told you when you felt Sidwell's attempt to scan you, your ability to perceive a probe, even a subtle one, indicates you will develop very strong powers."

Lorna took a deep breath. Part of her was thrilled. She needed all the strength she could get if she was going to fight Esa, but the idea of becoming even less human disturbed her.

Arden squeezed her hand. "May I?"

Lorna nodded and relaxed her shields. She closed her eyes and saw a warm green mist flow across her vision. She felt the same cool, soothing energy in her mind that she'd felt when Arden first touched her. Only a few seconds passed before she felt Arden leave her.

She opened her eyes and frowned. Arden looked worried.

"What's wrong?"

“Nothing is wrong, but I wasn’t able to learn what I’d hoped. I wanted to discover where your greatest magical abilities would lie, but your powers were masked from me. I don’t think they are ready to reveal themselves.”

“So you don’t know how I’m going to find the sword?”

Arden shook her head. “No, but that was really too much to hope for anyway.”

Lorna frowned. “Why?”

“All faery magic is based on the build up and movement of energy, but it differs from one member of the fey to the next. We all have what we call ‘magical anchors,’ things we do better than most, but no two of us do magic in exactly the same way.”

Lorna’s heartbeat accelerated. She needed help if she was ever going to find the sword and get herself back to her home, her shop, her life. “Then how is anyone going to train me?”

Arden sighed. “I can show you techniques that may help, and Riordan’s particular gift is magnifying the powers of others. But, ultimately, we are going to have to wait until your magical anchors reveal themselves to you.”

Lorna felt her chest tighten even more. “How long will that be?”

“I don’t know. When the fey reach puberty, their powers begin to develop. For some of them, their power awakens in a huge rush, and they learn to control it within a matter of days. Others experience a slow awakening which takes weeks or months.”

Lorna’s chest tightened. “We don’t have weeks or months, do we?”

Lorna glanced at Riordan, but instead of the concern she expected to see, he was smiling at her. He took a lock of her hair and twisted it around his fingers. “If you just relax, the magic will speak to you. You have to let go of your control.”

He might as well have asked her to fly. The one thing that had kept her going through the hell of her childhood was her knowledge that one day she would be in control of her life. She wasn’t about to surrender that now.

\* \* \* \* \*

“You’re trying too hard, Lorna. Let the crystal’s energy flow through you. Don’t try to force it.”

“Damn it.” Lorna set the crystal down on the table, just managing to keep from throwing it at Riordan. Arden and Brianna had been called away to attend a birth, and Riordan had been left to teach her the art of scrying.

He’d explained that their objective was to send their power into a crystal, then move it in circles over a map of faery until they felt the crystal vibrate or otherwise signal them. But after hours of work, she still felt absolutely nothing. “It’s not working.”

“You have to focus. Scrying is based on a fey’s attunement to the crystal. If you don’t open to what the crystal has to tell you, then you cannot hear its message.”

“I’m as focused as I can get.”

Riordan stared at her until she couldn’t take the scrutiny and looked down at the table. God, she hated letting him see her back down. “Fine. I’m not focused. But you try focusing when you’re being asked to perform tasks you’d thought a scientific impossibility.”

Riordan leaned over and used his fingers to tilt her chin back up so she had to look at him again. “You’ve always known magic existed, Lorna, even when you didn’t want to admit it.”

She started to deny it, but she couldn’t, not when she looked into the clear blue of his eyes as they dared her to lie to him. A shudder ran through her body as she returned his stare. All afternoon as they’d worked at scrying, Lorna had been hot, restless, unable to concentrate.

Frissons of heat and desire raced up and down her limbs, and her clit ached and throbbed. Not wearing panties always made her more aware of her pussy, but for the last several hours, the thin fabric of her dress had rubbed against her, oversensitizing her to the point of pain.

She desperately wanted to beg Riordan to throw her down and fuck her. Every time she tried to take a calming breath and focus on the instructions Riordan was giving her, pictures of them in bed flashed in front of her eyes. She had to squeeze her legs together against the rush of desire.

Riordan reached across the table and took her hand in his. She jumped as if he'd struck her.

The bastard had the nerve to smile. "Are you all right?"

"Fine. You startled me. That's all." She suspected he knew exactly what was wrong with her, but she wasn't about to admit it. She took a deep breath, letting it out slowly as she pushed her hair from her face. She picked up the leather cord holding the scrying crystal in her other hand. "Let's try again."

Riordan frowned. "Maybe we should stop for a while."

She looked into his eyes again and fought against the anger than was tightening all her muscles and threatening to turn to raging lust.

"You've got to relax. Your tension is about to choke me."

"That only makes me want to tense up more."

He gave her a patronizing glare. She closed her eyes and sighed. "Fine. I'm trying to relax, but it's not as easy as you make it sound."

"For someone as uptight as you, I guess not."

"Huh. You're one to talk. You're one of the most uptight people I've ever met. I mean, for God's sake, you couldn't even --" She stopped, horrified by what she'd almost said. The last thing she intended to talk about was what had happened between them the night before. The fact that he couldn't let his wild side out around her was just another sign that she should stay away from him.

"I couldn't what?"

“Never mind. Let’s just get on with this. I’m getting a hell of a headache. This has already been one of the longest days of my life.”

“If you’re that tired, then this is no time to learn magic. I’ll show you to our suite. We’ve got a long night ahead of us. King Laothin is holding a Mabon ball tonight.”

“Mabon?”

“It is our celebration of the autumnal equinox. A time when we give thanks for the year’s harvest.”

“Is it like Thanksgiving?”

“Perhaps. You would have to ask Lachlan or Brianna. In any case, our attendance at the ball is required. It would be insulting for any of the high-house fey to decline the king’s invitation.” He stood and held his hand out to her. “I’ll show you to our suite.”

Lorna’s body tightened with anger. “I’m not sleeping with you.”

Riordan sighed. “We’ll be sharing a suite, but we each have our own room. I haven’t forgotten your opposition to sharing my bed.”

“Don’t you have more important duties than babysitting me?”

“Protecting you is the most important thing I could possibly do right now. You’re the one who will lead us to the sword, and the faster we can find all the treasures and hide them away from Esa, the better.”

Lorna considered protesting further, but she could tell from Riordan’s tone that she would only succeed in making them both angrier. “Fine. Just take me to a hot shower and a comfy bed.”

\* \* \* \* \*

A scream of terror had Riordan leaping up from the desk where he pored over maps and historical records of the treasures. In only two strides, he’d reached the door connecting his room to Lorna’s.



She lay curled in a ball on the floor, her hands tearing at her short hair.

“Lorna!”

He touched her shoulder, rolling her to her back, hoping she would look at him. Her eyes were blank and glassy and had darkened nearly to black. She struck out at him blindly, trying to shove him away from her.

“Lorna, it’s me, Riordan.”

“Nooooo!”

He didn’t know if she was yelling at him or at Esa. His heart raced. He had to get through to her. “Block out her voice. Focus on me.”

“N-no voice. Just ... pain.” She squeezed her eyes shut.

“She’s trying to break through your shields. If we can make a connection, I can help you block her.”

“No. It hurts. I can’t keep her out.”

“Yes, you can. Open your eyes.”

She sucked in a shallow breath. “Can’t.”

“Yes, you can. Look at me. I can help you.”

She opened her eyes to slits, but it was enough. He held her gaze. With that and the grip he had on her upper arms, he had enough connection to press his way into her mind. “That’s it. Do you feel me against your mind?”

She nodded, whimpering. He wasn’t sure if the sound was caused by the pain of Esa’s attack or the deliberate sensuality of his touch. He knew he could only trick her mind into letting him slide through her shields by giving her pleasure.

“Good. I’m going to slip through.” He slid through easily, like diving into water. Immediately, he felt the pounding pressure on the front of her head. But when he added his strength to hers, the pressure eased. She took a deep breath and shifted to sit up beside him.

He continued to reinforce her shields until Esa gave up and the pressure vanished completely. Lorna collapsed against him as the tension drained from her body.

He wrapped his arms around her, intending only to hold her, but she shifted, angling her head and pulling his lips down to hers.

His lips opened automatically to her questing tongue, and his cock swelled until it pressed painfully against his tight leggings. He dispersed them without even thinking about it.

Lorna's hand slid along his belly and grasped his cock. She wrapped her fingers around it, stroking him up and down. He groaned. He was so damn horny from watching her and smelling her rich, woody scent near him all day. He feared he'd come in seconds if she kept up the tantalizing rhythm.

He tugged her wrist away, but she slid back along the floor as she snaked her tongue along his abdomen, stopping to circle the tattoo that circled his navel. Then she took the head of his cock into her mouth. He gasped, and his hips arched toward her, forcing himself deeper in. She sucked hard, and one hand returned to work the base of his shaft while the other cupped his balls.

Riordan knew he should stop her. Her sexual frenzy was a result of their use of magic, not because she'd changed her mind about them being lovers.

Use of magic fueled sexual desire, and sexual release strengthen magical abilities. It was a useful combination for the fey and a very difficult imperative to fight. He'd been learning to control the intense need for close to a century while Lorna had never experienced such painful lust. It was his responsibility to stop them before Lorna did something she would regret later. But her mouth felt so damn good on his cock. She turned her body, angling herself so she could take him deeper. Then she sucked nearly his whole length into her mouth. Any thought of stopping her vanished.

Riordan collapsed back onto one elbow as he fisted the other hand in her hair. He stared, transfixed as she worked him with lips, tongue, and the slightest graze of teeth that had him bucking up under her. He watched as her slender hand left his balls and began lifting her dress.

With merely a thought, he made her dress disappear. She groaned as her fingers snaked between her legs and slid into her channel. Goddess, she must be soaking wet. He could smell her arousal permeating the room as she pumped her hips against her hand. The fact that she was getting off on sucking him made him even harder.

The hot, velvety feel of her mouth entranced him, and he didn't want it to ever stop, but he knew he couldn't last long, not when she instinctively knew just what he wanted. "Lorna, you've got to stop. I can't hold on."

She kept right on going, working him and herself faster and faster, her tongue lashing the underside of his cock.

"Goddess, Lorna, please."

He jerked on her hair, trying to tug her away, but she caught him in her teeth, biting gently in warning. He released her. "Damn it, Lorna. I'm going to come."

"Mmm-hmm," she murmured against him. The vibrations of her voice made his cock jump in her mouth. He saw her smile.

Dear Goddess, she really wanted him to come in her mouth. He was hanging by a thread. He didn't want to lose control, but she was giving him no choice.

He saw her fingers capture her clit and squeeze. He sucked in his breath at the sight and then looked up at her face. Their gazes locked. Her dark eyes burned with passion.

He watched her body tense. She gasped around his cock as she came, thrusting against her hand. Her mouth gave a hard pull on him, and his body spasmed. He collapsed flat onto his back and pumped his seed into her mouth.

When Riordan opened his eyes again, Lorna was licking her lips. She looked like a well-satisfied cat. His cock stirred again, despite his phenomenal release. She looked down at it and smiled.

He couldn't help but smile back. "I'm glad to see you are happy with yourself. I tried to stop this but --"

"Neither of us would have lasted two minutes at the ball if we hadn't taken care of our needs. Did having you in my mind make me hornier?"

Riordan smiled, relieved that she wasn't blaming him, but not yet ready to explain the connection between magic and sex. "Yes, and the reaction can be quite powerful."

"I noticed. At least now I know you can lose control on occasion."

He scowled. "Fine. You got what you wanted. Unfortunately there isn't time for any more power games now. We both need to get ready for the ball."

She stretched, showing off her slender body. "Yeah. I could definitely use a hot shower now."

Riordan stood to leave, fighting his reaction to her taunting display.

"Thank you for saving me."

Surprised, he turned to face her. The sex kitten look was gone from her eyes, replaced by a vulnerability that made him want to scoop her up in his arms and cuddle her close.

"You're welcome. No matter what you may think of me, I would never let her take you."

Lorna nodded. "I know."

## Chapter Seven

“My, my. You’re even more beautiful than the last time I saw you.”

Lorna jumped and let out a squeal. She whirled around, frantically trying to wrap a towel around herself. Hyacinth stood behind her, looking exactly as she had ten years ago.

Lorna rushed to hug her, oblivious to the fact that she was still dripping wet from her shower. “It’s so good to see you.”

“It’s good to see you, too, dear. I’ve missed you so.”

Lorna bit her lip to hold back tears. “I’ve missed you, too.”

Eventually, Hyacinth pulled back from her embrace. “Dry yourself off and put this on.” A silk robe appeared in Hyacinth’s hand. “We don’t have much time.”

Lorna dried off quickly, slipped on the robe, which felt sinfully good against her skin, and joined Hyacinth on the sofa.

“Why didn’t you tell me I would be asked to come to Faery?” Lorna struggled to keep the edge of anger out of her voice. She loved Hyacinth dearly, but she couldn’t help resenting how unprepared she’d been for Esa’s attack and Riordan’s appearance.

Hyacinth took a deep breath. "When I left you, I had no idea you would be called to find the sword. None of us did. No one thought we would ever need the treasures again, and if we had, we all believed they would come to us at the correct time."

"But they didn't?"

"No. Apparently, Cairthinn set the magic on each treasure so that it only recognizes one fey bloodline and only a member of that bloodline whose motives are pure."

"Then how can Esa hope to get the treasures?"

"No magic is perfect, and her primary tactic seems to be finding those who have a connection to each treasure and seducing them."

Lorna remembered the alluring voice in her head and shivered. "But you could have told me about Faery, about my heritage, and about my mother being a traitor."

Hyacinth squeezed Lorna's hand and shook her head. "The king forbids protectors from telling our charges about Faery. I probably told you too much as it was."

"But if I'd known, I could have been prepared for this. I could have known how to fight Esa."

Hyacinth frowned. "Perhaps so, or perhaps such foreknowledge would have tainted your magic's ability to develop as it willed, not as you will it to."

Lorna sighed. Hyacinth had always been able to read her with frightening ease. "Tell me more about the king. What is he like? How do I know he is worthy of these treasures?"

Hyacinth smiled. "King Laothin is a good man. He does not intend to hold the treasures for himself. He wants them returned to the earth as soon as they are found. But they need to be sealed with a different magic, one Esa isn't attuned to."

"He seemed cold when I met him."

Hyacinth nodded. "That's his defense. He is afraid. He knows his people must find the treasures before Esa does, and he's concerned that his inability to find them himself will make him appear weak in front of his enemies. He fears a personal attack against his family."

He has already sent his wives away from Faery. And he tried to convince his daughter to leave with them, but she refuses.” Hyacinth smiled. “She’s a stubborn one, like you.”

Lorna rolled her eyes, but chose to ignore Hyacinth’s jibe. “How many wives does the king have?”

“Just two. The fey don’t have the same concept of monogamy that humans do. They believe that love comes in many forms and often with many different people.”

Lorna absorbed Hyacinth’s words. She had a friend at home who was in an open relationship. She’d always been fascinated by how he and his girlfriend took other lovers without inspiring jealousy, and she admired their open attitudes about sex. “But Lachlan implied that the king didn’t like Brann’s lover. Wasn’t that because he’s male?”

Hyacinth shook her head. “No one minds that Brann’s lover is male. Most of the fey are bisexual, and as long as those in the high houses are willing to take lovers who can give them children, no one worries about the gender of their partners. The problem with Brann and Aidan is that Aidan is one of the lesser fey, like me.

“The one taboo among the fey is that those of the high houses are not to consort with us. Not everyone follows the rules, of course, and few would look askance at a brief liaison, but Brann claims that Aidan is his lifemate, like Brianna is to Lachlan or the king’s first wife is to him. To suggest such a thing is viewed as heresy by most of the high-house fey.”

Lorna frowned. “Why does anyone care?”

“For the same reason humans shun one another based on race or class.”

Lorna nodded. She supposed human prejudice was just as ridiculous. It was just easier to see the ridiculousness of it when the culture wasn’t your own. “So my mother was from a high house?”

“Yes, the House of Cresting Water. All fey are marked on their spines by the symbol of their houses. That is why I insisted you get your tattoo.”

“So Riordan’s house is symbolized by a moon?”

Hyacinth nodded. "Yes, his house is the Waxing Moon." Hyacinth leaned forward, took both Lorna's hands, and captured her gaze. "Riordan is a good man. You can trust him with your life, and from what I have seen in my dreams, you will have to."

Lorna drew in a sharp breath. "What have you seen?"

Hyacinth shook her head. "I cannot say, as I would risk altering the process you must go through to find the sword. Just know that you have the power to do what must be done, and Riordan is the one you must rely on for help."

"But he unnerves me. I'm ... attracted to him and it scares me."

Hyacinth smiled. "Don't be frightened of what you feel. He feels it, too, and knowing you both, you will fight it, but you should not. It could be your salvation."

Lorna felt a sharp rush of energy run the length of her spine, as if her body was echoing Hyacinth's words. "What do you mean?"

Hyacinth shook her head. "You will have to discover that on your own. Time has come to get you ready for the ball."

\* \* \* \* \*

Lorna felt the shimmer of arousal she'd now come to recognize as the sexual energy of Faery. With so many fey in the crowded ballroom, the effect was staggering. Coils of lust swirled through her body, intoxicating her. She feared she wouldn't be able to walk straight if it got any worse.

Much to her annoyance, Riordan's presence had a stronger effect on her than any other single fey. She stood beside him and stared shamelessly as he spoke with Arden. He'd pulled back the sides of his sparkling silver hair and braided them, tying the braids off with blue ribbons the exact shade of his skin. He wore no shirt, only two gold and white bands that crisscrossed his chest like some odd weapons harness. He'd done something to his tattoos to



make them sparkle; it was as if the ink that made them contained glitter. His white leggings looked impossibly tight and seemed to glow against the bright blue of his abdomen.

She knew he wore gold boots that came just above his knee, but she forced herself to look up before she could become mesmerized by the sight of his cock, which was barely concealed by the clinging fabric. She wanted to drag him down to the floor and fuck him right in the middle of the dance floor. Of course, she also longed to caress everyone who passed her. She wanted to twine herself through the press of bodies like a cat circling someone's legs.

She knew she'd best find a way to separate herself from Riordan. She couldn't possibly get through the evening without relieving the need throbbing between her legs, but she'd be far safer finding another partner. She'd promised herself a night of satisfying, no-strings sex the day before, but Esa and Riordan had entered her life and scattered all her plans to hell. Tonight, she would have what her body craved.

After laughing at something Riordan said, Arden bid them both good night. Lorna decided to make her escape before anyone else cornered Riordan. "Would you mind if I stepped onto the balcony? I need some fresh air."

"I'll go with you."

She shook her head. "Riordan, I'll go crazy if I have to spend the night by your side."

He smiled far too knowingly. "Why does your desire for me scare you so badly?"

"My frustration has nothing to do with fear. Your company is simply too trying for me to endure all evening."

"No, you want to fuck me again, but your instincts are telling you to run away. Why?"

Damn him for being so perceptive. She wasn't about to tell him that he aroused her more than any other fey she'd met thus far. She had to get away from him and the thrumming lust he stirred in her. She decided to ignore his question. "I see no reason why I cannot circulate on my own."

“How many times do I need to explain that I’m sworn to protect you, even if you’re too stubborn to admit you need protection.”

Prickly sensations of panic tightened the back of her neck. He was right. If she didn’t get away from him, she would end up sleeping with him again, and their connection would only strengthen. She had to prevent that. “We’re in a crowded ballroom. Esa has always tried to attack when I was alone or asleep.”

“Yes, but that doesn’t mean she won’t try something new.”

Lorna called his name without saying a word, projecting her plea directly into his mind.

His eyes widened. “How the hell did you learn that?”

“I may not be good at scrying, but I am making progress in other skills.”

He scowled, his blue eyes taking on an icy chill. “Fine. Circulate, but do not leave the ballroom without informing me.”

She bowed low. “Yes, master.”

“In my dreams.”

Her breath caught as she saw herself tied down while Riordan stood over her, a whip in his hand. Dizzying lust nearly blinded her. She turned quickly, before he could sense her increased arousal. He would have to keep on dreaming and so would she. That was one scene she had no intention of playing out.

She circled the perimeter of the room, hoping to clear her head now that Riordan wasn’t beside her. She needed to quench the fire burning throughout her body, but she intended to choose a partner without the excess influence of faery hormones.

She distracted herself from her vibrating need by studying her surroundings. The ballroom was hexagonal in shape, like the royal salon. The walls rose up several stories, and a few narrow balconies encircled the room. She saw some of the guests using them as a vantage

point from which to watch the proceedings below. Others had far more lascivious purposes for moving out of the crowd.

One particular couple caught her eye, and she found herself unable to look away. The woman's skin was nearly translucent, like Arden's, but her hair was a rich rusty orange that was only found on fall leaves. She straddled a man with rich brown skin and hair the color of a tropical ocean.

The man lay flat on his back on an upholstered bench. His legs dangled from either side. The orange-haired woman was stretched wide across him, her hips sliding back and forth in a rough rhythm. Even from the floor below, Lorna could see tension in the man's legs muscles as he bucked under his partner, straining to get deeper inside.

The woman's hands gripped her partner's shoulders, and her rhythm intensified even more. Lorna's breathing shifted to pants. Cream slipped from her body, wetting the top of her thighs. The energy of the couple's pleasure swirled within her.

They were going to come any second now. Lorna desperately wanted to lift her dress and relieve the ache in her pussy, but she had just enough awareness left to stop herself.

The woman rocked forward and ground herself against her partner. Her head fell back, and though Lorna couldn't hear them, she knew the woman had screamed. Lorna shuddered and caught herself against a nearby pillar. She felt as if the waves of the woman's orgasm had somehow run through her body.

"Are you alright, my lady?"

Lorna spun to find herself face to face with a man who stood so tall she had to tilt her head back to look up at his face. He had bright yellow skin and thick red hair that fell to his waist. His dark brown eyes were filled with desire.

Heat rushed to Lorna's cheeks. She knew her face was flushed and her eyes glassy. She probably looked as if she'd just come herself. "I'm fine. Thank you."

"Perhaps you would feel better if you stepped outside for some air."

Lorna had enough sense left to be cautious. She checked her shields, strengthening them as much as she could. She felt no attempt on the man's part to read her thoughts, but she let her mind scan his lightly.

He frowned. "I promise. I mean you no harm."

"You would hardly admit it if you did."

His lips curled up in a wicked grin. "I have no intention of doing anything to you that doesn't bring us both pleasure."

Lorna's body screamed for her to follow him wherever he wanted to go. "Some fresh air sounds lovely."

He took her hand and wrapped it around his arm. She let him lead her through the nearby French doors and onto the wide terrace. She disengaged herself from him and walked to the low stone wall separating the terrace from the gardens beyond. Leaning down and bracing herself on her elbows, she took in the shadows of the flowers moving in the light breeze.

The red-haired man came up behind her. He traced the line of her spine with his fingers. Lorna automatically arched into his touch. He stopped before reaching the cleft of her bottom, but she wished he hadn't. "My name is Phelim. My companion, Raina, is awaiting me in my suite. We'd be delighted if you would join us."

Lorna's heart pounded. She'd fantasized about multiple partners for years, but she'd never acted on it. But where better to let her kinky side reign than in Faery, where no one seemed to mind how much sex her body craved?

But she should be cautious. Riordan had warned her to trust no one outside the small group who were working to find the treasures. She knew she needed to walk away.

Phelim leaned down. His lips brushed her shoulder, and his tongue stroked the skin of her back. "Please," he whispered.

"Yes." Lorna couldn't help herself. Her whole body burned with need.

“Excellent. What is your name?”

“Lorna.” The word rushed out on a gasp as he sank his teeth into her shoulder.

“You taste delicious, Lorna.” He took her hand and began to lead her back inside. “How did you end up in Faery?”

“I ...” Lorna didn’t know what to say. “Riordan brought me.”

“Ah, perhaps he will join us later. Raina would certainly enjoy him.”

Lorna smiled at the thought of her uptight faery protector engaged in a wild, delicious orgy.

\* \* \* \* \*

Riordan searched the crowd for Lorna’s unique mental signature. When he sensed her on the far side of the room, he made his way through the crowd. Hot anger had him clenching his jaw and his fists. She’d been gone far too long. Apparently, she needed another lecture on the danger she was in.

Then he saw her, arms locked around Phelim’s waist as he led her out of the ballroom. Damn. Riordan had known Lorna intended to find another partner for the evening. And considering her state of arousal, he’d doubted she’d last long without succumbing to the elevated desires, but he’d hoped she would take her pleasures in the gardens or in one of the alcoves so he could be close enough to rescue her should the need arise.

Riordan had no desire to torture himself by watching Lorna and Phelim’s escapades, but he had to put her safety over his comfort. Phelim was Esa’s nephew, and while he’d done nothing to bring his loyalty into question, they couldn’t help but be suspicious of anyone in Esa’s House.

Riordan waited until they had a few seconds’ lead and followed them out the door.

When they entered Phelim’s suite, he decided to wait in the nearby salon in case Lorna made a call of distress. For many long moments, he sat in the empty room, his mind

conjuring up images of what Lorna, Phelim, and Raina might be doing. The thought of Lorna entwined with Phelim's dainty demi-fey companion made Riordan's cock ache.

He grew more and more restless. Damn Lorna for making him feel that way. He'd never been jealous before, never needed a woman so badly he couldn't think straight, but he wanted to break down Phelim's door, punch the other man in the face, and drag Lorna away like a battle prize.

He found himself standing before the door to Phelim's suite before he even realized he'd moved. A deep moan echoed through the door. Lorna.

Riordan's heart hammered against his chest. Part of him recoiled at the idea of opening the door and seeing her body entwined with Phelim's, but he couldn't stop himself.

His hand shook as he gripped the knob. He turned it slowly, silently. Phelim hadn't bothered to lock it. Riordan laid his weight against the door frame and opened the door a crack.

He sucked in his breath. At first he only saw Raina, naked, kneeling on the leather sofa. Riordan cracked the door another fraction of an inch.

Lorna sat next to Raina, her head thrown back, her legs spread. Phelim knelt between her legs, his face pressed against her cunt. Raina stroked Lorna's stomach with one hand and ran the other through Lorna's short, auburn hair. She stared transfixed at Phelim's enthusiastic feasting.

The scene made Riordan's cock turn to steel. He wanted to be the one putting that wistful smile on Lorna's face. He wanted her rapt attention on him as he licked and sucked her. He bit his lip to hold back the growl that threatened to escape.

Lorna looked up as if she'd sensed his presence. Their eyes locked. Her lips curled in a taunting smile. She arched against Phelim's eager mouth and moaned long and low. Her dark brown eyes sparkled like jewels. *He's got just what I want*, they seemed to say.

Riordan's face heated. Part of him wanted to slam the door, walk away, and never see Lorna again. But he remained frozen in place.

Lorna's body moved with exquisite grace, and her dusky skin looked like rich earth next to the sunny color of Phelim. Riordan couldn't possibly tear his eyes away from the work of art their bodies made.

Lorna's eyes never left Riordan's as Phelim continued to work her. Her breath came faster, and her moans turned to sharp squeals. She speared her hands into Phelim's dark red hair, pressing his head against her.

Riordan could smell her lust across the room. He could taste it on his tongue. Her hips pumped faster. Her full breasts rose up and down. Raina used both hands to pinch Lorna's nipples, and Lorna screamed. Riordan knew she would come any minute.

He reached down and rubbed his aching cock. It thrust against his pants so fiercely, he wondered if the force of his lust could rend the material.

With one last violent thrust of her hips, Lorna went over the edge, her body spasming wildly. Still her eyes never left Riordan's. He saw her look turn from taunting to longing. In the midst of her pleasure, she couldn't hide her need for him.

Phelim slid away from her and turned his attention to Raina. Riordan entered the room, walking as if in a trance until he stood at the foot of the bed. He waited for Lorna to come back to herself and acknowledge what she needed.

Phelim turned his head when he heard Riordan enter, but he merely smiled, as if he'd expected Riordan to come for his lover.

Lorna opened her eyes slowly. They widened when she saw Riordan looming over her.

"What do you want?" He was beyond even caring if Phelim heard the desperation in his voice.

Lorna licked her lips. "I want you to fuck me, as hard and as fast as you've always wanted to."

The careful control that Riordan had prided himself on for years broke. Grasping Lorna's hips, he dragged her off the couch and onto the floor. Then he flipped her onto her stomach. Stretching over her, he pulled her arms over her head. Pinning them in one of his hands, he used the other hand to guide his cock to her entrance. In one swift, brutal thrust, he sank fully into her.

She cried out, but he didn't stop or even hesitate. He began a fast, punishing rhythm. Her heat and wetness surrounded him, and he could think of nothing but the need to show her just how rough he could be. He intended to master her fully.

"Don't move." He let go of her arms, and she dug her nails into the carpet, trying to obey but needing to hold onto something. Her hips worked wildly against his, and she whimpered as he reached the top of each hard thrust. He groaned at the feel of her cream coating his balls as they slapped against her dripping lips.

Lorna turned her head. Her teeth dug into her lower lip, and her eyes were huge and glassy. "Please don't stop."

"Never." The word escaped him before he could control it. Damn her. He'd see that she understood that once he lost control, so would she. She would be as much a slave to their desire as he was.

He let his nails scrape the soft flesh of her abdomen as he reached around her body and found her clit. She growled and pushed hard against his fingers as they closed on her most sensitive flesh.

He laughed. "Like that, do you?" But his breath caught when she circled her hips, grinding them back against his cock. He worked her clit between two of his fingers, alternately pinching and pulling.

"Come for me, Lorna. Show me how much you want my cock buried in you."

"Yes! God, yes!" Her body tensed. Then her inner muscles clenched him tight, and she went over. Her hips thrust against him in a fast, jerking rhythm as she squeezed his cock.



The intensity of her spasms took him by surprise, and he thrust deep, giving a hoarse shout as he spilled himself inside her.

When he could breathe again, Riordan opened his eyes and saw Phelim and Raina staring at them, wide-eyed and panting. The come covering Phelim's stomach and the wetness dripping from his companion's fingers told Riordan they'd brought themselves to orgasm as they'd watched him pound Lorna. He knew he should be embarrassed that they'd witnessed his loss of control, but he was too caught up in his plans for Lorna to care.

He conjured a robe for himself and one for Lorna. Then he scooped her limp, panting form off the floor. She opened her eyes long enough to smile at him and then nestled her head against his shoulder with a sigh.

He turned back to Phelim. "Thank you for your hospitality."

Disappointment crossed Phelim's face. "You'd be welcome to stay. We'd certainly enjoy spending the evening with you."

Riordan forced himself to smile. "Thank you, but I have plans for my lover that require privacy."

He saw Phelim's chest rise as he drew in a long breath. He hesitated to even imagine what the other man was envisioning. "A pity. We're available for an engagement anytime."

"I'll keep that in mind," Riordan replied as he carried Lorna to the door."

## Chapter Eight

Lorna's head reeled. She'd known Riordan was hiding a deep, dark passion, but still his intensity had surprised her. She worried that she'd unleashed a monster, and yet, that thought brought tension and heat surging back to her pussy.

They approached Riordan's suite, and she saw the wards on the door glow softly, then darken as they acknowledged Riordan.

"Don't we need to return to the ball?"

Riordan growled. "No."

Lorna stirred and tilted her head back to look at him. "Why not?"

His eyes flashed with anger and passion. "Because I'm not finished with you." His rough, sexy tone raised goose bumps across her skin. She was damned glad he wasn't finished, because she wasn't either.

He dumped her unceremoniously on his bed, and her breath rushed out in a whoosh. An evil smile spread across his face as two lengths of silk rope appeared in his hands. Her breath caught, and she could hear the rapid beat of her heart as blood whooshed behind her ears.

"Lift your arms."

She found herself doing exactly as he asked. Her hands wrapped around the cold metal of the rails in his headboard. Her robe disappeared, and Riordan's gaze slid down her body, taking in her flushed neck and chest and her tightly peaked nipples. She saw his chest rise as he drew in his breath.

He looked like the fierce warrior from her dream now. His silver hair had come loose from its braids, and wild, shimmering locks framed his face. His skin had turned a deep blue, more like a churning sea than the sky. She assumed it was his version of a flush.

The sight of him stirred something deep within her that she didn't want to examine. Instead, she gave herself over to the carnality of the moment as he leaned over her prone body and secured her arms with the rope.

He wrapped the rope in such a way that even when she was compelled to test the security of the bonds, the coils did not chafe her wrists. She moaned and arched her body, loving the feel of being restrained for him.

Hyacinth had told her to trust him, and she knew that if anyone could compel her submission, it was Riordan. The thought frightened her, but in her current mindset, the fear only heightened her arousal. When she'd finally broken Riordan's control, she'd broken hers as well.

Riordan reached for something in the drawer of the table by his bed. She strained her neck, trying to see what it was, but before she could, he climbed onto the bed and positioned himself between her legs.

He ran his fingers across her stomach, lightly scraping her with his nails. She shivered. It took every ounce of strength she had not to beg him to fuck her. She kept her hips pressed deeply into the mattress, the tension in her thighs nearly unbearable.

His fingers slid over her pubic bone and traced the length of her swollen clit. She gasped as he parted her lips and delved into the dripping wetness. He swirled his fingers through her cream, but he didn't enter her. Instead, his fingers continued their journey until

one traced the tight circle of her anus. Then he pressed one finger into her. She gasped and jerked away.

He placed a hand on her stomach, easily holding her still for his continued invasion. “So, none of your lovers has dared to take your lovely ass.”

Lorna tried to gather the breath to speak, but fear and arousal had combined to render her nearly speechless. “N-no.” Years ago, one of her boyfriends had wanted to, but she’d been too scared to agree to it, despite how often it had entered her private fantasies.

“Good. My cock will be the first to open you up.”

Lorna shivered. How many times had her fantasy lover said something similar? But no matter how hot the thought made her, she couldn’t suppress a shiver of fear. Riordan’s cock was fucking huge. “Please.” The word slipped out before she could stop it.

“Please, what? I hope you mean ‘please fuck my ass,’ because that’s exactly what I’m going to do.”

He added a second finger, and the odd pressure turned to a stretching, burning pain. Lorna bucked under him, but he continued to hold her down. “Relax. Push out against me.”

“It hurts.” She pulled at her bonds, panic overtaking her for a moment. Then she felt him in her mind, his soothing touch a wicked contrast to the rough, burning invasion of her ass. She started to calm, to let her muscles relax, and the burning became bearable.

Suddenly, she realized he’d had access to her private thoughts. The idea of him learning all her secrets scared her, far more than anything he could do with his cock. She jerked at her bonds. “Get out of my head.” She rebuilt her shields, crushing the swirling stream of his mental probe until he pulled back.

She opened her eyes, and he stared down at her, a pleased smile on his face. “Let me in. I won’t invade your thoughts.”

“But you feel free to invade my ass.”

His smile widened. “That’s an entirely different matter.”

He pulled his fingers out, and she gasped, unprepared for the wave of pleasure.

He gave a low laugh. "See. It's not so bad."

Then he thrust back in, hard and fast, wresting a cry from her. "Stop!"

"No."

"Riordan, it's not going to work. It hurts too much."

"Maybe I don't care."

A jolt of fear ran through her, but when she looked up, she saw passion, rather than anger in his eyes. "You do."

"But not enough to stop. Relax. Find the pleasure."

She whimpered as he flexed his fingers, stretching her more. "I can't."

"You wanted to know the dark desires I hide under the surface. Well, here they are. I want to dominate you in every possible way. I want to make you scream with pain and pleasure. Are you going to let me, or are you scared of what you've let loose?"

Lorna swallowed hard, but she shook her head. "I'm not scared of you."

He gave a wicked smile. "Good. We'll see if you can still say that with my cock deep in your ass." He pulled his fingers out once again, giving her an erotic buzz she hadn't expected. She couldn't stop a moan from escaping her lips.

Something cold and hard pressed against her ass. She jerked. "Relax. It's only lube."

She felt oddly aroused as the cool gel entered her, soothing her still-burning flesh. But her heart raced at the thought that Riordan's massive cock was next.

Riordan pulled the tube from her body and sat back on his heels. Lorna's eyes automatically went to his cock. It was straining up against his belly. The skin had darkened to a deep azure blue. It looked as thick as a broadsword, as it had in her dream.

She raised up, straining her bound arms, desperate to watch him. He squirted lube into his hand, then grasped his cock, pumping up and down. A drop of pre-cum dripped from its slit. Lorna panted as she longed to lick it off.

He looked up and their eyes met. The heat of lust in his gaze made her swallow hard. He really wasn't going to stop. Not that she actually wanted him to. She wanted to be his, to be completely in his control. He was the culmination of all her fantasies. For a brief moment, she let herself forget how dangerous such a thought was.

"Goddess, this is going to be good," he murmured as he stroked himself harder. "Burying my cock in your tight ass while you beg for mercy. I hope you're good and ready."

He slid his fingers along her clit and across her pussy lips, passing easily through the dripping-wet flesh. She watched, mesmerized, as he licked his fingers clean of the cream she'd coated him with. "Mmmm. For all your protests, your body knows just what it needs."

Lorna bit her lip, but he heard her moan anyway. The smirk on his face told her he knew exactly how hot he was making her. But she wasn't the only one desperate to fuck. The energy of his lust surrounded her. He pressed against her mind, but she kept her shields firm. He could have her body, but her mind was her own.

"Do you like pain? Is that what gets you off?" Her teeth sank deep into her lip, and she closed her eyes to shut out the heat of sex and anger in his gaze.

Riordan gripped her thighs, pushing until they rested against her chest. He leaned over her, lowering his mouth to her breasts. His tongue swiped each nipple in turn. Her body jerked, and her hips thrust up against him. When he sat back, she instantly missed the contact.

"Look at me."

She forced herself to do as he asked. Her lungs burned, needing air, but she couldn't make herself breathe. When she met his gaze, her tension eased. The concern he'd shown

earlier masked his darker emotions. His hand brushed her forehead. "Remember to push out as I come in."

"Please." Her cheeks heated with embarrassment. God above, she was actually begging him to put that huge cock up her ass.

His eyes widened, and he groaned as he leaned back and positioned his cock at her entrance. He held one of her ass cheeks in each hand, spreading her wide as the tip of his cock entered her.

She tried to relax and push against him, but the burning was ungodly. It felt like he was trying to put a tree trunk up her ass. "Please." This time the word was a plea for mercy.

"You can take it, just relax."

She jerked at her bonds, struggling to get away. "Please, it hurts."

"Then stop ... fighting. Let yourself ... go." With each word, he pushed himself further in. The hardness was completely gone from his eyes. Lorna knew he wanted to help her enjoy what he was determined to give her, but she couldn't control her fear. She thrashed and twisted, trying to escape, but he pinned her hips to the mattress.

Then he moved one hand to her clit, stroking the swollen flesh, pinching it gently. She moaned, and her hips moved of their own will. The pain eased.

He kept coming, stretching her until she thought he'd rend her in two. God, how much more was there? She would swear he was up to her throat already. She felt as if he'd taken absolute possession of her body. His hand on her clit brought pleasure curling through her body, and perversely, the burning in her ass seemed to magnify the ecstasy.

Lorna's ass squeezed Riordan's cock so tight it almost hurt. He slid in the last few inches, seating himself completely and let his breath rush out. He knew her ass must be on fire, but she'd stopped fighting. Her head was tipped back, her mouth open, her eyes glassy. She looked like she was ready to come any second, and so was he.

Ever so slowly, he slid out of her, her ass gripping him, wanting to drag him back in. She moaned and twisted her body under him. Her eyes closed as she lost herself in sensual abandon.

He pushed back in again, before she had a chance to adjust to emptiness. She whimpered, but he kept coming; he didn't think anything could stop him now. As he'd feared, once he had freed himself from the controlled façade he wore for the other fey, raw sexual need took over his body. But Lorna had embraced it in a way he'd never dreamed of.

He pulled out again.

"More. I need more," Lorna moaned as she bucked under him.

He surged into her as fast as her tight body would allow. Her shields crumbled a little, letting him in enough to know that she was caught in a web of ecstasy. Her body could no longer separate pain and pleasure, accepting either as fuel to her burning desire. He worked her clit hard, squeezing and pulling it in the way that brought the sharpest response from her. They were both hanging on the brink of explosion.

He thrust and thrust again, loving the dark, kinky pleasure of forcing himself into her tight channel. She jerked her wrists, moaning as she tried to free herself. Wicked pleasure spiraled through him at the knowledge that she was truly his prisoner.

His balls tightened. He was ready to spill himself. "Come for me, Lorna. Come with your ass full of my cock." He thrust hard as he thumbed her clit. She screamed. Her body stiffened, then the spasms started. Her ass squeezed him so hard she ripped his climax from his body.

Over and over, his cock spurting into her. Then he felt the line of her thoughts. He knew what it was, what it meant, but he could no more stop himself from reaching for it than he could stop the rush of pleasure that had poured from his body.

His thoughts twined with hers, and he fell into her mind. Her pleasure echoed within him. He felt the burning, stretching pain his cock had wrought in her ass. And he felt the



throbbing intensity of the pleasure still radiating through her clit. But the strongest sensation was her love for him. The warmth and pleasure it brought made him crave more. He twisted their thought lines together, tighter and tighter, until they merged completely, and he lost awareness of his body.

## Chapter Nine

Lorna tried to open her eyes, but the pounding in her head made her close them again. She felt like she had the worst hangover of her life, but all she remembered drinking was a single glass of champagne. She'd been at a party. Every time she tried to think beyond that, searing pain crossed her forehead, and her thoughts scattered.

Lorna moaned as a cool cloth pressed against her forehead. Where the hell was she?

"You're in our suite. And you're going to be fine."

Riordan. A flash of herself arching under him, screaming for him, crossed her mind, but she couldn't grasp anymore. She tried opening her eyes again. This time she saw him leaning over her and felt his soothing touch in her mind. Her shields were gone, crumbled completely.

"Don't try to rebuild them right now. It will hurt too much. I'll help you when you're ready. But you need to rest now."

She wanted to be horrified that Riordan was in her mind, but she couldn't quite summon the energy. "What happened to me?"

A long breath rushed out of Riordan, and he pushed his hand through his tangled hair. "I'm afraid you aren't going to like the answer."

She struggled to sit up. Pain squeezed her head like a vise, and her stomach churned. “What the fuck happened to me?”

He winced and stepped back. Something was definitely wrong.

“Tell me,” she moaned through the pain.

“What do you remember?”

Lorna closed her eyes and tried again to summon her memories. She saw herself at the party. Then she flashed on leaving with a tall man with yellow skin and red hair. Oh, God. Phelim. Had she really gone back to his suite? Then the rest of the evening came rushing back. Phelim. Raina. Riordan coming in on them. The heat in his eyes that she couldn't look away from. The way he'd finally fucked her hard and fast like she'd wanted. The beast she'd unleashed in him. His cock in her ass. Her orgasm going on and on and ... feeling what he felt?

Her heart pounded. She opened her eyes and looked up at Riordan. “I felt what you felt. When we came. Somehow I felt my body squeezing your cock. I felt the rush of your cum. How is that possible?”

“Our minds merged.”

Icy fear slithered along her spine. “What do you mean?”

“In the intensity of orgasm, you reached for me with your mind, and I couldn't resist.”

Not wanting to think about what he must have seen when their thoughts touched, she chose a less painful question. “Is that why my head hurts so badly?”

Riordan nodded. “But merging wouldn't normally bring you pain. I ...”

Her chest tightened. “You what?”

Riordan closed his eyes for a moment. When he opened them, she drew in her breath at the depth of pain she saw there. “I deepened the bond. I wrapped your thoughts around mine and held you with me, instead of letting you go as our orgasm receded. I kept you with me so long that you had trouble settling back into your own head.”

She winced as her head throbbed from her body's tension. She wanted to yell, to rant, to rip him apart. Instead she simply asked, "Why?"

He shook his head. "I don't know."

"You fucked with my head, hurt me, incapacitated me, and you don't know why?"

"I couldn't think straight. I wasn't in control of myself. And damn it, I wanted you to know you were mine."

She felt his pain and fear radiating around her, magnifying her own. Sheer panic made her push past him, desperate to escape. She looked around for her clothes, remembering that he'd made them disappear. "I want some clothes. I want to get out of here."

He grabbed her arm and spun her to face him. "There's more I need to explain."

Her head swam, and she had to hold onto him to stay upright. "What more could there possibly be?"

"Mind merges are not a normal aspect of faery magic. In fact, they're very rare."

She felt tears stinging her eyes. She was not going to cry in front of him. "Get to the fucking point."

"The fact that we're able to merge means we have a Consort Bond."

"A what?"

"When two fey are destined to mate for life, they are called each other's True Lady and True Consort."

Dear God. "You mean like Brianna and Lachlan, or Brann and Aidan."

Riordan nodded.

Mate for life? With Riordan? This was what her subconscious had known, the reason she'd been so wary of him. Her hands shook, and her tears began to spill. She ripped the sheet from the bed. Wrapping it around herself, she ran for the door.

His hand pushed against the door as she pulled the knob, slamming it shut and trapping her between his body and the door. "I know you're scared."

"Scared. Angry. Really fucking angry."

"I've been told it's impossible to fight a bond once you meet your True Lady. But I tried. Lord and Lady, did I try!"

She couldn't let herself feel sympathy for him, not when he'd put her in this position. "Not hard enough."

His hand fisted in her hair, pulling her head back against his shoulder. He growled, and she felt his hot breath against her ear. "Who wanted me to fuck her like an animal until I had no control left?"

"If you'd warned me we could both screw up our lives by making this merge, I would never have touched you. I was the one who said we shouldn't be lovers."

"You wanted me as much as I did you. You want me now." He breathed deeply. "I can smell how hot you are." He turned her around and pressed his body against her, letting her feel the ridge of his erection grinding into her belly.

She was just as hot. Cream was running from her body, wetting her thighs. The angry energy in the air was only fueling her need. "Yeah, I want you. But I'm never fucking you again if this is what happens."

"According to Lachlan and Brann, we won't have a choice. We'll either accept what we have together, or we'll kill ourselves resisting it."

"Fuck that. I'm going to find the sword, and then I'm getting the fuck out of here."

She reached for the doorknob again. His hand wrapped around her wrist and forced her arm back against the door. "You're not going anywhere right now. It's the middle of the night, and you're exhausted. I'm going to the other room to sleep. I expect you to be in this bed when I wake up."

Lorna had no intention of taking orders from him. As soon as he released her, she reached for the door, but when she tried to twist the knob, it didn't budge.

"The wards will no longer respond to you."

Her breath caught. "You are keeping me prisoner."

"I'm keeping you safe." He turned and left the room without looking back.

Lorna crumpled to the floor. She slammed her fists into the door over and over, relishing the pain in her hands. At least it was a distraction from the fear that was choking her. Suddenly, she realized she was sobbing so hard she could barely breathe. She wanted Riordan. She wanted his arms around her. She wanted his cock filling her body, taking the aching emptiness away. And she hated herself for it.

\* \* \* \* \*

Riordan heard hoof beats behind him. He glanced over his shoulder to see Brann riding toward him at full speed. He whipped his head back around and pressed his knees into his stallion's side, pushing him into a gallop. Another glance showed him Brann was still gaining ground, so he leaned out over the unicorn's neck and whispered to him. "Help me show him who's faster." Shadow snorted, and their speed increased until trees and rocks flashed past Riordan at a dizzying speed.

Brann pulled to within a length of Riordan, but Riordan managed to crest Cairthinn's Hill first. He reined Shadow in, and they slowed as they descended into the next valley. Brann pulled up next to him as he stopped.

"What the fuck was that about?" Brann was breathing hard and sweat glistened on his sky blue brow.

Riordan smiled. "It's been ages since we raced. I wanted to make sure I could still beat you."

"With a lead like you had, hell yeah, you could beat me."

Riordan snorted. "You never gave me the courtesy of waiting to start a race."

Brann smiled. "I suppose not."

Riordan sobered and turned to look out through the valley. "I enjoyed the race. I'll see you at midday meal."

But before he could escape, Brann reached out and grabbed Shadow's mane. "Not so fast. This wasn't a pleasure ride. I sought you out."

Forcing himself not to blast Brann with the full force of his anger, Riordan turned to face his brother. "Unless it's a life-or-death matter, I don't have time to deal with it right now."

Brann raised his brows. "You missed a council meeting. I was afraid Esa's men had gotten to you. Then Lachlan explained you had cause not to be your usual, punctual self this morning. I was sent to find you."

Riordan exhaled sharply. He should have known Lachlan wouldn't keep the news of his merge with Lorna to himself. How the fuck had he managed to forget the council meeting? One damn night with Lorna, and he couldn't even keep up with his basic duties. Why the hell hadn't he had better sense than to give into the temptation to take her?

"Because you can't fight the attraction to your lifemate."

Riordan winced and locked down his shields. "What the hell are you doing reading my thoughts without permission?"

Brann sighed. "I'm your brother. I want to help you."

"You can't help me. No one can help me. I'll ride back and apologize to the king for missing our meeting, and I'll request that he assign someone else to guard Lorna. I'm clearly not fit for it."

"You know you aren't going to be able to stay away from her. No matter how much you think you don't want to be bonded to anyone, the separation from her will be worse. I would imagine you're already feeling restless, wishing she were here so you could hold her."

Riordan clenched his fists in his unicorn's mane. The last thing he needed was more discouraging news. "I'm not going to discuss this with you."

"Why not? Because I gave in to it? Because you think I'm so weak I couldn't fight my inconvenient pairing?"

Riordan shook his head. "Brann, you know that's not how I feel."

Brann turned away. "I'm sorry. I just ..."

Riordan nudged his stallion forward so he could lay a hand on his brother's shoulder. "You still wish our damn father would come to his senses and recognize your bond."

Brann nodded.

Riordan swallowed past the lump in his throat. "I don't think you're weak. I think you are amazingly strong for going against the high-house dictates and treating Aidan like an equal. Your love for him is beautiful."

Brann turned back to face him. "Yours for Lorna would be, too, if you would let it show, instead of trying to hide it."

Riordan closed his eyes and took a deep breath. "I'm not in love with Lorna."

Brann snorted. "I'm not even going to bother arguing the point with you. I don't want to hear your pathetic attempts at denial."

Riordan turned away again and looked out across the valley. "Lorna has a life in the human world. She wants to go back."

"Then go with her."

Riordan snorted. "As if the king would allow that."

"You've spent every moment since you reached majority worrying about the problems of Faery. Let someone else do it for a change."

"Damn it, Brann. Serving Faery is what I want to do with my life."



“Then you’d better figure out a way to do it with Lorna by your side. Otherwise, neither of you will be fit for much of anything.”

Riordan tried to imagine sending Lorna back to the human world, and a stabbing pain shot through the core of his body. He had to fight the desire to race back to her side.

“Tell me the bond gets easier to control.”

Brann laid his hand on Riordan’s shoulder. “It gets easier when you give into it and acknowledge the bond.”

“But ...”

“Riordan. It’s our nature. You can’t fight it. If you try, your need for her will only get worse. Aidan and I can only bear extended separations because each of us is confident of the other’s love.”

Riordan shook his head. “I don’t think I can do this.”

“I’m here to help if you need it, and so are Lachlan and Brianna.”

Riordan nudged Shadow, turning him in the direction of the castle. “Unless one of you knows how to break this bond, then you can’t help me.” He didn’t give Brann a chance to reply before he squeezed his knees against his stallion’s sides. They shot off up the side of Cairthinn’s Hill.

## Chapter Ten

“Good morning, Lorna.” Brianna entered the living area of the suite, carrying a tray. “Most of the fey don’t drink coffee, but I managed to procure some for us. I thought you might need it.”

“Riordan sent you?”

“Yes. He didn’t think you’d want him to be the one to help you scry.”

“Where did he go?” The words slipped out before Lorna had a chance to filter the raw need from her voice.

Brianna covered Lorna’s hand with hers. “I don’t know, but wherever he is, he’s in just as much pain as you. Worse, probably, since he’s a full-blooded fey.”

Lorna took a deep breath and reached for the coffee pot. After she’d woken and found Riordan gone, she’d showered and eaten the breakfast he’d left for her, but she’d been longing for some serious caffeine. She breathed deeply as the rich, steaming liquid filled her cup. “Thanks for the coffee.”

“Sure. It was no problem.” Brianna poured herself a cup. Then she settled onto the sofa besides Lorna. “I know you hardly know me. But I want you to know that I understand what you’re going through. I didn’t even know faeries existed when Lachlan and I had our first

mind merge. When he told me what he was and what had happened, all I wanted to do was run as far and as fast as I could.”

Heat flooded Lorna’s cheeks. “Did Riordan tell you what happened?”

Brianna shook her head. “Not exactly. He only told me that I should work with you on scrying this morning because you wouldn’t be willing to work with him. Lachlan guessed the rest and forced a confession out of him. All I know is that your minds merged and neither of you was prepared for the consequences.”

Lorna sighed. “That’s one way to put it.” She ran her hand through her wet hair and tucked it behind her ears. “Let’s start our search. The faster I can find the sword, the faster I can get out of Faery and forget this nightmare.”

Brianna laid a hand on Lorna’s arm before Lorna could stand. “Didn’t Riordan explain ...” Brianna’s voice trailed off as she quickly looked down and wrapped her hand back around her mug.

“What? Don’t tell me there’s more I don’t know.”

Brianna sighed. “The one thing I can assure you of is that there’s more you don’t know. Faery men are not good at revealing details. I’m sure I still don’t know everything I should.”

Lorna took a deep breath, trying to calm the tension in her body. “Go ahead and give me the bad news.”

“Once a bonded pair merges, any extended separation causes anxiety that results in actual physical pain.”

Lorna’s stomach knotted. “Riordan said something about how we could kill ourselves trying to resist the bond. I just thought he was exaggerating.”

Brianna shook her head. “I’m not sure separation could be fatal, but you might wish it was. Just trying to spend a night away from Lachlan makes me anxious and run-down. And our bond isn’t even as strong as it would be if one or both of us was a full-blooded fey. I’ve

been told we'll learn to control it more and more the longer we've been bonded, but we'll never outgrow the physical need for each other."

To her mortification, Lorna felt tears streaming from her eyes. This could not be happening to her. She could not be stuck in this strange world. Riordan had trapped her in his suite, but she had assumed he would release her as soon as his anger cooled or they discovered the sword's location. It had never occurred to her that her imprisonment would be permanent.

Brianna took Lorna's hand and squeezed. "I know you're angry. I was, too. I swore I would leave, that I didn't care how much it hurt me or him. I hated Lachlan for letting the merge happen. It took me awhile to realize he had no more control over it than I did. He knew the warning signs, the obsessive desire, the restlessness around each other, but he could no more have kept himself from touching me than I could have kept my mind from reaching for his."

Hot anger overtook the pain in Lorna's chest. "You mean there are warning signs? So Riordan knew what he was risking by sleeping with me?"

Uneasiness showed in Brianna's eyes. "Lachlan sensed what was happening between us, but it's possible Riordan didn't know."

"The fucking bastard! I'm sure he knew."

Brianna winced. "Lorna, I've told you all this, because I know what it's like not to know what your faery nature really means. I'm not encouraging you to attack Riordan for what's happened. He's a good man. He's helped me more than any fey besides Lachlan."

"Maybe you haven't seen the side of him that I have." Lorna immediately hated herself for saying such a thing. After all, she'd begged him to show her his dark side, and no matter how wickedly rough he could be in bed, Brianna was right, he was a good man.

Too agitated to sit still, Lorna stood and crossed the room. No matter how much it hurt, she had to go back to her life in the human world. She'd learned years ago that depending on

others would never get her anywhere. Sooner or later, they left or ceased to care. She wasn't going to let Riordan do that to her. This time, she'd be the one to leave.

She pulled the maps of Faery from the bookshelf near the eating nook. "Let's just work on scrying. I need to get my mind off my problems with Riordan right now."

Brianna picked up both their mugs and joined Lorna at the small round table in the eating nook. "I'll be glad to give you another scrying lesson, but remember what Arden said about all faery magic being different. It's possible you'll never find the sword this way, no matter how much you scry. Your magic may speak to you in another way."

Suddenly Lorna saw a mental image of the woman from her dream. Why hadn't she made the connection before? "Show me all the lakes in Faery. I think the sword is near or in a lake."

"Then you believe it truly was returned to the Lady of the Lake."

Lorna nodded. "I started having dreams about Riordan before he came to bring me to Faery. In them, a man with white hair and gold eyes gives the sword to a beautiful woman who could walk on water."

Brianna drew in a sharp breath. "That was my father, Cairthinn. I bet you were seeing him put the sword into hiding. Can you describe anything about the lake?"

Lorna tried to call up another memory of the dream, but all she could see were the man and the woman on the lake. None of the surroundings remained in her memory. "No. All I can describe are the people."

Brianna nodded. "We might as well try scrying while focused on the lakes. When we're done here, I'll prepare some herbs that will help induce prophetic dreaming. If you could see the lake clearly ..."

Lorna nodded. "Then we could find the sword."

Brianna spread out the map of Faery and pulled a crystal from the small bag that hung across her body. “Now, I know Riordan taught you the basics of scrying, and since you obviously had sex last night, you should still have some residual power boost, so --”

“What?”

Brianna looked up, her eyes wide. “Don’t tell me he hasn’t explained the link between sex and magic.”

Lorna slammed her hand down on the table, making the crystal jump. “Fuck!”

Brianna gave her an impish smile. “Well, yes.”

“So having sex will boost my power.”

“Yes.” Brianna rolled her eyes. “Lachlan didn’t tell me that at first, either. But if you have sex just before or during magic, your power improves.”

“So if Riordan and I had slept together before I tried scrying yesterday, I would’ve had a better chance of finding the sword.”

“Possibly, but --”

“And Riordan didn’t bother to tell me this?”

“Would you have agreed to do it?”

Lorna didn’t have a chance to answer, because the door swung open then. When she turned around, she saw Riordan standing frozen in the doorway. Her eyes locked with his, and she couldn’t look away. She had to wrap her hands around the arms of her chair to keep from leaping up and running to him.

While her body fought to contain the wild swirl of lust the sight of him brought on, her anger exploded. “Why the fuck didn’t you tell me sex would make me more powerful? We might have found the sword before our bond formed and we locked ourselves into a future neither of us wants.”

“Brianna, Lorna and I need to be alone.” Riordan’s voice was eerily calm, and his eyes were the iciest blue Lorna had ever seen. He looked like the deadly warrior she knew he was.

Her heart stuttered, but she refused to let herself be cowed. “Unless you’ve come to help me find the sword, I have no desire to see you.”

“I can smell your lust all the way over here. If you want me to fuck you before you scry again, I’ll be happy to oblige you.”

Lorna heard Brianna push her chair back and stand, but she didn’t turn around. She couldn’t take her eyes off Riordan, though her gaze had dropped to the thick erection clearly outlined against his tight riding breeches. She wanted to shove him back against the wall, hold his hips in place, and torment his cock with her mouth.

Brianna laid her hand on Lorna’s shoulder. “Be careful,” she whispered as she walked past, but Lorna knew she wouldn’t heed the warning. Pushing Riordan until he snapped was too intoxicating. The wild man he became was exactly what she needed.

Riordan stepped forward to let Brianna exit. Then he slammed the door behind her and approached Lorna with slow, deliberate steps that belied the explosive tension she could see in the set of his shoulders. He kept coming toward her until she stumbled over her chair and ended up against the wall behind the table.

He stood mere inches from her. She could feel the heat of his body and smell the unique, earthy scent he gave off when aroused. Hot cream slid from her body, and her nipples tingled in anticipation.

Lorna gasped when he used magic to make her clothes disappear. Wanting him naked, too, she focused on his body, trying to find the part of her powers that could disperse the molecules of natural fibers. But his pants stayed stubbornly in place.

His lips curled in an evil smile. “I’m going to fuck you until you’re so powerful you’ll be able to make clothes disappear off men on the far side of Faery.”

Lorna’s breath caught in her lungs. Her heart pounded. She wanted his skin against hers, his cock inside her. She wanted him wild like last night. “Do it, then.”

“Beg me.”

“No.”

He leaned forward and brushed his lips against the side of her neck. No other part of him touched her. He kissed a line of fire down her throat until he reached the thick muscle above her collarbone. His teeth sank in, hard enough to sting. The pain shot straight to her core, making her clit throb.

“Do you dare to say no to me?”

A shiver of fear ran up her spine. “Riordan?”

He bit down harder. “Beg me.”

Lorna whimpered. She didn’t want to give in, yet her body was crying for him. He needed her just as desperately. She could see the fine sheen of sweat across his forehead, and his arms trembled as he braced himself against the wall on either side of her.

He released her neck and bent lower, allowing his tongue to swipe her nipple. Her whole body jerked, and she arched her back painfully, trying to get more. When he dropped to his knees in front of her and gave her clit the same treatment, she shrieked. “I can’t take this!”

His tongue flicked across her again. She cried out, bucking against his mouth. An evil laugh escaped him as he stood slowly, letting his body slide along hers. She opened her eyes and looked into his. The heat and need she saw there did her in.

“Please.” She hated the desperation in her voice. “Please, fuck me.”

He smiled. “My pleasure.”

His clothes disappeared. Then he grasped her waist so hard his nails cut into her skin. He lifted her, pushing her back against the wall. “Wrap your legs around me.”

She did, locking her ankles behind him and pulling him close until his cock nestled against her swollen flesh. She moaned.



Every nuance of her senses awakened as she reveled in the feel of his lean hips and the smooth skin of his back. Her hands came down on his shoulders to brace herself, and she couldn't resist kneading the tight, solid muscles there.

She flexed her hips, rubbing up and down on his shaft, wanting to coat him in wetness. She wanted to rub herself all over him, to feel his skin against every part of her and to coat him with her scent, marking him hers. God above, what was wrong with her?

"It's the fucking bond. I want to lick every inch of your skin. I want to torment you until you're willing to do anything I say." He growled. "You're mine, do you understand?"

Lorna nodded. Riordan lifted her higher, flexed his hips and plunged into her, spearing her with his cock.

She screamed from the pleasure-pain. He was so thick, she felt stretched to the limit. How the hell had she taken him in her ass?

"Because your body was made for mine."

She shook her head wildly. "No. I can't believe that."

He lifted her, then slammed back in. "Yes, you can."

"Riordan, don't do this to me."

"Do what? Make you face the truth?" He gave her another brutal stroke.

She groaned. "Make it harder for me to leave."

He growled. "You're not leaving me."

His words made her heart ache. She bit her lip so hard she tasted blood. But she refused to acknowledge her need to stay. "I can't, I --"

His mouth crushed hers, kissing her so hard their teeth scraped against each other. As his tongue lapped at the blood dripping from her torn lip, he increased the pace of his thrusts, taking her so hard and fast she couldn't think anymore.

He released her lips and leaned back, but he kept slamming into her. Over and over, he gave her long, deep strokes that pinned her against the wall. “Is that hard enough for you?”

She groaned, unable to answer.

“Answer me. Tell me this is what you need!”

“Riordan ... I ...

“I feel it in your mind. You’re going to come, aren’t you?”

“Jesus, yes!”

“So am I.”

“Please. Please come in me.”

“Oh, yes. I will, but first I want to hear you scream.”

He flexed his cock inside her, rubbing against that special place that sent jolts of ecstasy straight to her clit. He did it a second time, and she screamed for him. Her body clenched hard around him, and her mind reached out, questing to find his, to wrap their thoughts together.

He slammed up his shields. She pushed, but he wouldn’t let her through. She felt like a vise had wrapped around her heart. Pain tore through her, even as her climax wracked her body.

He cried out when she retreated from his mind, the sound a mix of pain and ecstasy. Once, then twice again he shoved her against the wall with short, jerky thrusts as he spilled hot come into her body. Long after he stilled, her body continued to contract in spasms of pleasure. He didn’t release her until it stopped.

When he set her on the ground, she looked down, refusing to meet his gaze. “Why didn’t you let me in?”

“I’m not merging with you again until you admit that you can’t leave.”

She bit her lip and winced from the pain. "I thought you didn't want this bond, either. I thought you wanted me to leave."

"The rational part of me does. The part of me you unearthed last night wants you right here, tied to my bed, ready to serve me."

"Damn it, Riordan. That's not going to happen."

"Then I can't merge with you anymore. Doing so will only strengthen our bond."

Lorna closed her eyes and pressed her hand to her forehead, trying to ease the pounding still echoing in her head from her mental struggle. "It hurt like hell when you slammed down your shields."

Riordan massaged his temples and kept his eyes squeezed shut. "I thought it was going to tear my mind apart to keep you out."

The pain of his rejection still echoed throughout Lorna's body. She wasn't sure her legs would hold her up, but she forced herself to stand anyway. If she stayed on the floor next to him any longer, she was going to beg him to hold her, and once she was in his arms, she just might confess that she didn't want to leave him.

## Chapter Eleven

Riordan watched Lorna lean across the map of Faery, the scrying crystal dangling from her hands. Her eyes were closed, and her hair was still ruffled from sex. She was utterly, perfectly beautiful, and the thought of her leaving made him unable to breathe.

He didn't want to be trapped like this, by fate, by his own biology, but he was. Brann was right. Riordan had ridden away from his brother filled with rage, wanting to punish Lorna and himself. He'd intended to tell Lorna that he was getting her a new protector, but as soon as he'd seen her, he'd known he wasn't going to let her go. What he wanted now was for her to admit that she couldn't live without him, not because some genetic link forced her to want him, but because she loved him.

Suddenly, Lorna jumped and dropped the crystal.

"What happened?"

"I felt something, a vibration."

"Did the crystal become heavy, like it was pulling toward the map?"

"No, I just felt a hum running up my arm, like an electric current."

Riordan reached for her arm, but stopped short. "May I touch you?"

Pain flashed in Lorna's eyes. "Yes."

His hand closed around her arm, and the upper levels of her mind opened to him. He felt what she felt. The map was telling them something, but he didn't know what. He had no great scrying talent himself, but he'd often linked with other fey while they scried in order to augment their magic. When they'd found what they needed, there'd been a clear pull from their crystal and a jolt, not the slight buzz echoing in Lorna's body.

"So what am I feeling? Did we find it?"

"I don't think so. The crystal would pull itself from your hand if you had." Riordan leaned down to look more closely at the spot on the map where the crystal lay. "There's no lake in this region."

Lorna sighed. "I don't think I can do anymore this morning." She dropped the cord that held the crystal and laid her head down onto folded arms.

Riordan caressed her neck. "You were meant to find it, so you will."

"If I were meant to find it, then why can't I? Brianna knew where the cup was from the time she was a small girl. She just had to reach the right point in her life to be able to find it."

"Maybe you have to reach the right point in your life to find the sword."

"Well, this better be the time, or Esa's going to win."

"Esa doesn't know where it is either. Her best hope of finding it is to bring you over to her side. But you've proven that you are strong enough to resist."

Lorna shook her head. "Not without your help. I know we can't risk having sex again, but I don't think I can fight her off alone."

Riordan leaned to the side and embraced Lorna from behind. "I'll always come if you call, Lorna. I've sworn to protect you no matter what happens between us."

Her only response was a nod.

"Call for some lunch and get some rest. I need to talk to the king, but I'll hear you if you call me."

She sat up and looked at him then. “You really had no power over your need for me, did you? You couldn’t stop yourself from fucking me even when you knew you could awaken a bond powerful enough to take control of our lives.”

The pain and confusion in her voice cut right to his heart. “No fey is strong enough to fight what pulses between us.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Lorna looked down at her meal with disgust. She knew she needed to eat. Between the magic and the sex, her body was drained. But her stomach churned with fear. What if she couldn’t find the sword before Esa did?

As she stirred the rich, creamy soup the king’s cooks had sent her, she felt tears prick at her eyes. She tried to bring a bite to her mouth, but her throat closed tight. She lowered her spoon once again.

The only hunger she wanted to feed was her hunger for Riordan. Scrying had stirred her sexual desire despite her heated encounter with Riordan. But this time, she craved more than sex. She needed Riordan close so she could reach out and stroke his skin and snuggle her body next to his. She couldn’t imagine anything that would feel more comforting. She shook her head at her foolishness.

A knock on the door made her jump. “King’s guard.” She recognized the voice. It was the guard who’d tried to scan her mind before she met the king. She reached out with her mind, but felt no obvious malice. Riordan had shown no distrust of him or any of the king’s guardsmen.

She crossed the room to the door, hoping Riordan had set the wards to recognize her again. She saw them flash and was pleased that he trusted her. She opened the door, and the guardsman gave a shallow bow. “Good afternoon, my lady. I’m Lord Sidwell of the king’s guard.”

She returned the bow. “Good afternoon.”

“I have a message from Lord Riordan. He says the king wishes you and Lord Riordan to investigate the area of the map that affected your crystal. He asks that you be ready to ride out within the hour.”

Lorna nodded. “Please tell him I will await him here.”

“Yes, my lady.”

Suddenly, the room swam before Lorna’s eyes, and she leaned against the doorframe.

“Lady Lorna! Are you all right?” Sidwell grasped her arm to steady her. A wave of nausea passed over her, and a sharp pain raced through her head. Then the strange feelings receded as quickly as they’d come. She opened her eyes and looked at Sidwell; concern shaded his face. “I’ll be fine, thank you. I really drained myself scrying. I just need to eat.”

He looked uncertain. “I can have a tray sent to you.”

She shook her head. “I have one, thank you.”

“Is there anything else you need, my lady?”

“No. Thank you.” All she wanted was Riordan, but she was not going to ask for him.

“Then I will take my leave, but do eat and get some rest before you must leave with Lord Riordan.”

She nodded, feeling too weak to speak.

\* \* \* \* \*

Lorna gripped Moonlight’s mane as tightly as she could, and her thigh muscles ached from gripping the mare’s sides. She still couldn’t believe she was riding bareback on a unicorn. A freaking unicorn. Riordan assured her they were more intelligent than horses and would never let her fall, but she had no such confidence as Moonlight’s legs ate up the ground at an alarming speed.

She glanced over at Riordan as he rode beside her, his hand loosely wrapped in his stallion’s shiny, black mane. His silver hair whipped loose from its braid in shimmering

tendrils. He was shirtless, and her mouth watered at his beautifully cut biceps and the tattoos that encircled them. His easy seat atop the galloping unicorn made him look like the fierce warrior she knew he must be.

Suddenly, a coalescing fog wrapped its way around her mind. Her vision blurred for a second before she came back to an awareness of herself. She'd not had another intense dizzy spell like the one she'd experienced in Sidwell's presence, but she kept having these moments where her mind went fuzzy. The feeling reminded her of those moments when she was so tired she would drift to sleep for a moment sitting up and then jolt herself back to consciousness.

She knew she should tell Riordan, but he'd probably force her to rest, and all she wanted to do was find the damn sword as quickly as possible. She was desperate to complete her mission and figure out if there was any chance of having a normal life again.

The fog closed in on her mind once again. The moments of haziness were getting closer together. She decided the ride must be sapping more of her strength than she'd realized. Fortunately, as she shook her head to clear it, she heard Riordan whistle, and Moonlight began to slow.

Riordan dismounted and came around to help her. When his hands closed around her waist to lift her down, she had to close her eyes and ball her fists against the wash of lust that ran up and down her body. He released her, and she stepped back. Her breath came in pants. "Will it always be this bad?"

Riordan gave a mirthless smile. "My brother says our need will only get worse until we give in."

The storm of lust, anger, and pain in her body made her want to sink down to the lush green grass and cry. Instead, she turned her back on Riordan and reached for that part of herself that allowed her to sense things that couldn't be seen. The part Brianna had tried to teach her to focus on the scrying crystal.



“I’m going to touch you now.” Riordan’s hand came down on her shoulder. She jerked at the power he sent into her despite his warning. The warm thread of his thoughts embraced hers and helped her focus easily on the terrain around them. At first she felt nothing, but then she picked up the same type of vibration that the crystal had given off. It came from right where the terrain became rocky and began to slope steeply upward.

“Do you feel that?” Her voice shook, and she realized that, along with all the other emotions assailing her, she was very scared. What if they did find the sword? Would she actually be able to get it to the king? What if Esa knew what they were up to?

She looked at Riordan. He nodded. “I feel it. I’ll check it out.” His hand fell away from her, and a chill ran across her body. Instantly, she missed his warmth.

She took a deep breath and followed him, but he turned back around. “Stay here. We can’t be sure what’s causing the vibrations. If something happens to me, ask Moonlight to help you mount, and ride for the castle as fast as she will take you.”

Her heart sped up. “I’m not leaving you.”

“Lorna, it would be foolish for us both to be incapacitated. If something happens to me, your going for help will be my best chance.”

She took a deep breath. Intellectually, she knew he was right, but the part of her that needed him more than she needed to breathe couldn’t bear the thought of walking away when he was in danger. “You’re right.”

Riordan narrowed his eyes as if he didn’t quite believe her compliance. But he turned and headed in the direction of the most intense vibrations.

Lorna stood beside Moonlight. She rubbed the unicorn’s flank as if needing something to anchor her to the spot so she wouldn’t run after Riordan.

Then the fog closed in again, heavier, darker. She fought it as she had before, but this time, she couldn’t clear her head. She flailed against it like a drowning victim. Then, she fell below the surface and didn’t rise again.

## Chapter Twelve

Riordan crouched low, running his hand over the surface of the rock. Something didn't feel right, but he couldn't quite name the sensation. The rock felt abnormal, like it was handmade or had been tampered with in some way, but no evidence showed that it was anything other than an outcropping from the larger rock that formed the base of the mountain.

Suddenly, the air crackled. He spun around. Lorna stood behind him. Her raised hand held a huge ball of energy. For a moment, icy horror stopped his heart. Did she hate him so much she'd rather kill him than be bonded to him? Then he saw her eyes. They were utterly blank.

"Lorna, you don't want to do this." He sent his words tunneling into her mind, but he hit the thickest shield he'd ever felt in her. He couldn't find a single chink.

Her hand arced back, and then the energy ball whizzed toward him. He threw a force field up around himself just in time to prevent a direct hit. The energy sizzled around him, but only a faint buzz reached his skin.

Damn, she was strong. "Lorna! Lorna, this isn't you. Esa is controlling you."

He saw her falter for a minute before she went back to forming another energy ball. At least she could hear him on some level.

“Fight this, Lorna.”

She hesitated again. Her arm dropped. “R-Riordan.”

“It’s me. You don’t want to kill me. Fight it.”

Tears started to form in her eyes, but then she snarled. The energy ball in her hand popped and crackled. Riordan braced again.

She threw, but her aim was off. The ball sailed over his head. He dove for her then, catching her around the waist and knocking her to the ground.

He tried to roll to keep her from hitting too hard, but he needed his attack to shock her enough to break Esa’s control.

She blinked, and the dazed look faded from her eyes. He knew he was talking to his Lorna now, not the woman controlled by an evil spell.

“Fight her. You can push her out.”

Pain twisted her face. “S-she’s not here. C-can’t stop.”

“You can.” He pushed hard at her shields. She closed her eyes and tossed her head back and forth. He knew his probe was painful, but he couldn’t lose the ground he’d gained.

She struggled under him and let energy run along her skin, trying to shock him off, but he let the tingling pain roll over him and held her fast, pinning her arms above her head.

“Let me in, damn it.”

She growled. Her eyes opened, blank once more.

He braced for her attack as a searing bolt pushed between his eyes and into his mind. Sweat broke out all over his body, but he held onto her, refusing to let the pain swamp him.

“Lorna! Lorna, listen to me.”

He felt her gathering another bolt. He didn't want to hurt her, nor did he want to let her go. But he couldn't brush off another attack; he had to make a choice.

He rolled off her, and she jumped to her feet. From his position on the ground, he caught her ankle and pulled, careful to see that she tumbled toward the grass, not the rocks. She went down hard.

He pinned her from behind, bearing her into the ground with his weight as he rammed his thoughts through her shields at the moment of his impact.

She screamed. His stomach rolled at the thought of the pain he'd sent her, but he pressed on. She opened to him, and he poured his strength into her. "Fight. Damn it, Lorna. Fight!"

She panted under him. He felt her pain and panic echoing in her head, along with an alien presence. *Riordan. Help me.*

*I am. Gather your strength, and when I say to, open your shields and shove.*

He pointed his thoughts against the unfamiliar presence in her mind. He took a deep breath as he felt her energy concentrating with his. *Now.*

They both pushed. Lorna screamed and convulsed in his arms. Then she went limp. He explored her mind. They'd done it.

He sat back and rolled her over. "Lorna! Please, Goddess, let her be all right."

She looked pale, and she lay frightfully still. His hand went to her throat. Her pulse still beat, nice and strong. He let out the breath he'd been holding and stroked her cheek. "Open your eyes, my love."

She didn't respond. He leaned forward and pressed his lips to hers. When he sat back, her eyes fluttered open and instantly filled with tears. She reached for him. "Don't leave me."

"I won't." He gathered her into his arms, holding her tight against his chest. "I'm never going to leave."

Her quiet tears turned to sobs. "I'm sorry. I couldn't stop. I was inside my body, but I couldn't control it. I don't --"

He pressed a finger to her lips. "Shhh! For now, all that matters is that you're safe. We need to get you back to the castle so Arden can examine you. We'll figure out what happened."

\* \* \* \* \*

Arden laid her cool hands against Lorna's forehead. Lorna kept her eyes tightly shut, not yet ready to come back to reality. She heard Arden take a deep breath and let it out slowly. "I know that wasn't pleasant. I'm trying to ease the pain, but you have to let me back in."

Pain seared Lorna's head, and any thought of lowering her shields made her nauseous. She didn't think she ever wanted anyone touching her thoughts again. Even the thought of Riordan's cooling touch in her mind made her shields slam shut. She squeezed his hand, glad he'd never left her side during the ordeal.

Arden brushed Lorna's hair back from her face. "I'm sorry I had to go so deep. Whoever did this to you really knew what he or she was doing. They planted their suggestion in the deepest level of your mind."

Riordan had been silent through the whole ordeal, but Lorna had felt his increasing tension as his grip on her had grown tighter and tighter. "What kind of suggestion?" His voice came out as a growl.

Arden sighed. "Someone buried what amounts to a mental bomb in her mind. Her dizzy spells were the sign of her body fighting the invading thoughts. When they grew too strong, she blacked out. Fortunately, the strength of your bond allowed you to get through to her. I doubt anyone else could have."

*And then I'd be dead.* Lorna's stomach flip-flopped, and she fought the urge to vomit. Killing her would have been the only way to stop her if she and Riordan hadn't been able to

push the implant from her mind. She shivered as she remembered the solid ball of seething thoughts.

“Lorna, I’m going to give you a tincture to ease your head, since I don’t think I’ll be able to get back in without hurting you more.”

Lorna tried to nod, but stopped after the slightest movement. “Thank you for trying.” Each word reverberated in her head like a stone being thrown at her skull.

Arden lowered her hands and stepped away. Lorna tried opening her eyes for the first time. But the sunlight streaming in the window stabbed at her eyes like a knife. She shut them again.

Arden took Lorna’s free hand. “Go slowly, as if you’ve woken from a very long sleep.”

Lorna tried again. If she squinted tightly and looked away from the window, she could bear it. She took a steaming cup of tea from Arden and allowed the woman to place a few drops of tincture on her tongue.

Riordan rubbed her back as she drank. “How could someone have planted something so deep, especially without Lorna knowing it?”

“Most likely, the person would have needed physical contact. To do such a thing from a distance would take great strength indeed. I doubt even Esa could do such a thing. Cairthinn could have, and maybe the king, but no one else.”

Riordan hand froze on Lorna’s back. “Phelim.”

Lorna’s breath caught. “Could the suggestion have lain dormant that long? My first dizzy spell happened this afternoon.”

Arden tilted her head to the side as she thought. “How long ago did you have contact with Phelim?”

She glanced at Riordan, but he seemed unconcerned about her sharing such details. “I left his suite late last night, or rather, early this morning.”

Riordan nodded. “It was around two this morning.

Arden nodded. "And I assume you saw Riordan again before this afternoon."

Lorna started to nod again and winced as her head throbbed. "Yes, we left Phelim's together."

"And stayed together the rest of the night?"

Despite the pain in her head, Lorna's body heated at the memory of Riordan tying her to the bed. "Yes."

Arden frowned. "I don't think this type of mental implant could remain dormant through extended contact with the intended victim. Whom else have you seen since last night?"

Lorna tried to think despite the pounding in her head. She carefully reviewed everything that had happened since the ball. "Raina, Phelim's companion, was with us. I talked to Brianna. Then one of the king's guards delivered a message."

Arden looked at Riordan. "Did you send the message?"

He nodded. "Sidwell delivered it. He was scanned by the king before he came on duty."

Arden paced in front of them. "Raina wouldn't have the power. And I think we can rule out Brianna as a suspect."

Riordan snorted. "Obviously. I think it has to be Phelim."

Lorna truly didn't think Riordan was jealous of her having slept with Phelim. Why was he so insistent that he had to be guilty? "Why would you suspect him?"

Riordan glanced at Arden. She inclined her head toward him to indicate he should be the one to explain. He took a deep breath. "He's Esa's nephew."

Chills ran down Lorna's spine, immediately followed by a hot rush of anger. "Why the hell didn't you tell me that last night?"

"As soon as I saw you with him, I followed you. Then we got ... distracted. I took some time to investigate him this morning. Lachlan and I have been investigating him. He has never shown signs of sharing his aunt's views, but rumor has it he's been in contact with her

recently. And now, after you spent time with him, we find that your mind has been tampered with.”

Arden shook her head. “I truly don’t think the suggestion could have remained dormant so long, nor do I think Phelim would have the strength to introduce it.”

“Then who did this?” Riordan pushed his hair back from his face. For the first time, Lorna noticed the dark circles under his eyes. She needed to make him get some rest.

Arden sighed. “I wish I knew. It’s possible the culprit managed to erase Lorna’s memory of their encounter.”

Lorna bit her lip to keep tears from forming in her eyes. She’d already done more crying since she came to Faery than she’d done in the last year. But someone had messed with her thoughts, and she might not even remember seeing them. The idea shook her to the core.



## Chapter Thirteen

Riordan set Lorna down on the sofa in his sitting room. She'd tried to argue about his carrying her from Arden's suite, but he'd paid no attention. She was obviously in no condition to walk.

Her eyes fluttered open as he sat her down. "Don't open them if the light hurts you. Just relax."

She lay back against the sofa and sighed. "Here. Lie down." He encouraged her to stretch out on her stomach. Then he knelt down and started massaging her shoulders, pressing deep with his thumbs at the base of her neck. He felt some of the tension drain from her body, and he tried to concentrate on pulling it from her body and replacing it with soothing warmth.

She moaned and shifted, tilting her ass up invitingly. Heat rushed straight to his cock. But then, electric energy raced across Lorna's skin, creating tingling sensations in his hands and distracting him from his lustful thoughts.

He sat back in alarm as bright blue light rushed along the length of Lorna's body. But she turned over as it dissipated. Her eyes were wide open, and she looked unharmed. In fact, she looked as horny as he felt.

He glanced down to see her nipples pressing against the thin fabric of her shirt. Their dark red color showed through clearly. He squeezed his fists to keep from touching her.

“What happened?”

She shook her head. “I’m not sure. Your massage lessened the pain, and then I found the power to heal myself. I don’t know where it came from. All I know is that I feel better now. Much, much better.” She sat up as she spoke, leaning forward until her lips hovered near his. Riordan sucked in his breath, not trusting himself to speak.

She sat up and ran her fingers down his chest, lightly scoring it with her nails. “Help me forget that some stranger was in my head, at least for a little while.” She bent and brushed her lips across his nipple.

Riordan found his voice at last. “Lorna, you need to rest.”

She looked up through her thick lashes. The smile on her face made him swallow hard. She shook her head. “No. I need to fuck you.”

He gripped her shoulders and pushed her back, bringing his weight to rest on top of her. “If we start this, I won’t be able to stop, and I don’t know if I can block our merge. Are you sure it’s what you want?”

“Yes.” That breathless word was all he needed to hear. He lowered to take her mouth. He was gentle at first, wanting to savor her. Then crazed passion took over. His tongue thrust deep into her mouth, wrapping with hers. He tugged her bottom lip with his teeth. She moaned, sucking his tongue deeper, the pull of her lips reaching all the way down his body and making his cock jump.

Then her clothes disappeared, and his naked chest was against hers. *How’d you do that?* He projected the thought straight to her mind.

*It just seemed obvious all the sudden. I think more of my powers are waking up.*

He groaned when she arched up and rubbed herself against him. He got rid of his own clothes, desperate to feel her hot, slick pussy on his cock. She opened her legs further, and he

fought to hold back from entering her. He liked her playful mood, and he wanted to see where it would take them. But she was dripping with cream, and he needed to feel her body clench around him.

She reached for him with her mind, opening to him and projecting what she felt. He was slammed by the tight, painful need that centered around her clit. *How the fuck are you projecting like that without a full merge?*

*I don't know. I just am.*

He twisted his hips, letting his cock slide back and forth across her clit. *I think pushing that implant from your mind freed your full powers.*

She moaned. *Y-yes.* She arched her hips until the tip of his cock slipped inside her.

Riordan flexed his hips, ready to thrust deep, but Lorna pushed at his shoulders, overbalancing him and causing him to tumble off the low sofa.

His eyes opened in shock when she fell on top of him and straddled his hips. "This time, I'm in charge."

He sucked in his breath.

She grasped his cock, guiding him to her entrance, and plunged down on him.

His breath rushed back out, and he let himself sink into the pleasure Lorna sent coursing through his body.

She braced herself on his chest as she rose up and plunged down once again, taking him harder and deeper this time. He grasped her waist, but she shook her head. "Hands above your head."

Lorna felt his cock jump in response to her order. She gave him her best menacing smile.

His eyes narrowed, but he bent his elbows and clasped his wrists over his head. And the rough, jerky thrusts of his hips showed her just how hot he was. He obviously didn't mind her taking charge, and that made her love him all the more.

She did love him. She had no doubt about it now. When she'd felt him in her mind, determined to save her despite the fact that she was trying to kill him, she'd known. And his support while she suffered through a deep scan had only strengthened her conviction. She knew he loved her, too; she felt it now, every time their minds made contact, but she couldn't tell him yet. All she could do was show him with her body.

She slid up and down, her slick pussy moving easily on his cock as she increased her pace. He groaned and bucked under her, his knuckles white where he clasped his hands together.

She leaned back and brought her hands up to her breasts. She rubbed her palms over her nipples and ground her hips against him. His eyes widened. And he licked his lips.

She pinched her nipples, pulling and stretching them, relishing the intensity and slight pain. He bit down on his bottom lip, but she heard the growl rumble up from his chest. God, she loved it when he made animal sounds like that.

She leaned forward, lengthening her spine until one of her breasts swung over Riordan's mouth. He reached up to pull her toward him, but she took his wrists and pushed them back to the floor. "No. You get them when I say."

"Bitch," he cursed. But he smiled as he said it, and she knew he was getting off on her taking charge. He could easily break her grip if he wanted to, but he chose to accept her torment. She let her nipple brush his lips. Then she pulled back before he could get his lips around it. She took him deep again, groaning and rolling her hips as she did so.

Then she slid her body along his chest, letting her breast come to his mouth once again. "Suck."

He groaned, and his mouth closed on her nipple. He sank his teeth into her tender flesh. She jerked as the bite sent fire straight to her clit. He sucked her nipple deep in his mouth, pulling hard, making it hurt. Her hips pumped against him, hard and fast.

She wanted to pull away, but when she tried to, he bit down again. She'd miscalculated what his mouth could do to her. She was seconds from coming, but she wasn't ready yet. "Let go."

He did as she said, but when she looked down into his eyes, she saw wildness there. She'd pushed him too far.

"Fuck me." The words escaped her without warning.

He growled and grasped her hips, tilting her forward and spilling her onto his chest. She leaned down, licking and biting his neck and chest as he thrust up into her, jolting her body with each hard stroke.

She couldn't believe he could fuck her so hard from below, but his pace grew faster and faster until all she could do was hang onto his neck and let him take her.

Her body bounced against his chest at the top of each stroke, and her clit rubbed the smooth skin of his belly. She gasped as she felt her orgasm gather. Her clit tightened to the point of pain, and fear overtook her. She tried to hold back, fearing her orgasm might truly consume her.

Riordan's mind reached for hers. She opened, and their thoughts tangled. Both were beyond forming words, but she felt his love warming her, reassuring her, and she let go.

Riordan surged deep once more, and then he stiffened. *I love you.* He screamed the thought in her mind as his cock pumped his seed into her.

The aftershocks of her orgasm wracked Lorna's body for several long minutes. All she could do was hold Riordan as her body spasmed around him with jolt after jolt of pleasure.

\* \* \* \* \*

Lorna sat straight up. Her chest rose and fell rapidly as she tried to catch her breath. She looked around frantically. Where the hell was she?

She looked down at the bed and started. A man lay beside her.

She closed her eyes, and opened them again, hoping to see the walls of her bedroom. She saw the same tall windows and silvery walls. Her heart raced.

“Lorna.”

She jumped.

“Lorna, what’s wrong?”

When the man laid his hand on her arm, the memories rushed back. She was in Faery, in Riordan’s suite. He’d carried her to bed. She shivered as she remembered their intense lovemaking.

“Lorna, what happened?”

She looked down at him again, really seeing him this time. The last pieces of her memory clicked into place. “I know where the sword is.”

“Did you have another dream?”

“Yes, but this time I recognized where I was.” She looked down and realized her hands were shaking. She’d never been so scared in her life.

Riordan pulled her to him and held her against his chest. “What did you see?”

“My mother. She was there this time. She’s really, truly evil.”

Riordan stroked her back and rested his head on top of hers. She desperately wanted to relax into his embrace and let him comfort her. If anything could take away the chill the dream had given her, it was him, but they didn’t have time for her to give in to her fear.

She pushed him away. “We don’t have much time. Esa will discover the sword’s location soon, and she won’t hesitate to kill the Lady of the Lake.”

“So you saw the Lady? She’s real?”

“Yes. She has the sword. The lake lies right where we stood yesterday.”

Riordan raised his brows. “There’s no lake in that valley.”

“Not usually. It only appears when someone has need of the Lady.”

“Did she tell you this in the dream?”

Lorna thought of the cryptic things the Lady had said. She hadn’t understood half of them. How she knew what she did was impossible to explain. “More or less.”

Riordan’s eyes narrowed. “You’re certain.”

“Yes. The Lady needs our help. I saw thick, black smoke surrounding her; it had engulfed her feet and legs completely. If we don’t hurry, Esa will kill her.”

Riordan slid from the bed. “I’m going to alert the king. Dress yourself in men’s clothes, something good for riding and easy to move in. Select something from my weapons closet that you think you can use if need be. I’ll be back for you as soon as I can.”

“Riordan, wait.” Lorna grabbed hold of his arm, pulling him back to the bed.

“What is it?”

She desperately wanted to tell him that she accepted their bond, that if he would have her, she would stay in Faery. She wanted the words said before they went searching for the sword, but she knew they didn’t have time. She rose up on her knees and placed a gentle kiss on his lips. “That’s all.”

She watched him close the door behind himself. All she could do was pray she’d have a chance to tell him how she felt once they found the sword. The image of the black mist swirling around the Lady came to her mind once more, and she shivered.

## Chapter Fourteen

For the second time that day, Lorna tore across Faery on Moonlight's back. She'd desperately wanted to ignore the side of herself that made her feel like an outsider in the human world. But now, in less than forty-eight hours, she'd bound herself to a Faery man, discovered the location of the Faery Sword, and was putting her life at risk to find it. This was all a bit much to comprehend.

They crested a small hill, and Lorna looked out on the plains below. She could see the edge of a lake near the base of the Dark Mountains, just as the Lady had said.

Riordan turned to look at her and Sidwell. The king had insisted they take some reinforcements, but the single guard was all Riordan would agree to. He didn't want to slow them down or draw too much attention to their movements. The sharp wind whipping around them stole the words from Riordan's mouth, but Lorna knew he wanted confirmation that this was the lake she'd seen. When she nodded yes, Riordan signaled to his stallion, and they all took off at a frightening pace.

Riordan pulled up a few feet from the lake's edge, and Lorna nearly fell off Moonlight when the mare stopped abruptly in response to Riordan's whistled command. Sidwell managed a far more elegant stop, and all three dismounted.



Lorna's heart hammered against her chest as she looked at the water. It was a deep, deep blue, almost black, just as it had been in her dream. Clouds had covered the sun, drowning most of the late afternoon light. All Lorna's dreams had taken place at night, under a full moon. She glanced up at the sky, but there was no sign of the moon yet. Still, the scene looked eerily like what she'd seen in her dreams. She couldn't stop herself from shivering.

The lake called to her; she felt the same vibrations she had with Riordan the day before. She walked to the edge and bent down, dipping her hand into the water until it lapped up over her wrist.

*Come and see me. I have a gift for you.*

She jerked back, fear tightening her chest.

Riordan bent down behind her, placing his hands on her shoulders. "What happened?"

"The Lady spoke to me. She wants me to come to her."

"Where is she?"

"At the bottom of the lake." Lorna could barely hear her own words over the pulse beating in her ears.

"I'm coming with you."

*No, you must come alone. I will protect you.*

Lorna shook her head. "The Lady says I have to do this alone."

"You're not going in there without someone to protect you. What if Esa breaks through your shields, and I can't find you?"

Lorna reached up and placed her hands over Riordan's, wanting to reassure him. "The Lady has sworn to protect me. I believe her."

Riordan closed his eyes. Lorna could see the thick cords of muscle in his neck standing out as he wrestled with his need to protect her and their need to find the sword. Finally, he stood and stepped back, offering his hand and pulling Lorna to her feet. "How will you find her? You'll have to come up for air before long."

Trying to sound far calmer than she felt, Lorna said, “I don’t know. But I’ve got to try.”

Riordan turned to Sidwell, who’d remained silent throughout their exchange. “What would the king advise?”

“We must have the sword. If the Lady has called to Lorna, then she must go.”

Riordan turned to Lorna. She raised up on her tiptoes and placed a kiss on his mouth, praying this wasn’t the last time she would see him. “I’ll be safe.”

Before she could talk herself out of it, she waded into the water. When she could no longer touch the bottom, she plunged in, kicking her legs to take herself deeper. She went further and further, waiting for the burning in her lungs and the beginning of panic that would signal she was running out of air, but it didn’t come. Then she realized she was breathing. Fearing that she was losing her mind and would end up with lungs full of water, she deliberately took a small sniff. No sputtering, no water in her nose. She could breathe as if she were surrounded by air.

*Riordan?*

*Are you alright?*

*Yes. I can breathe down here.*

*How?*

*I don’t know. I only know it works.*

*Be careful.*

*I will, but I can’t hold this connection. I have to focus on finding the Lady.*

*Call to me when you are ready to surface again. I want to be prepared to protect you.*

\* \* \* \* \*

Riordan felt the increase in energy just in time to brace himself, but he couldn’t get up a full shield before Sidwell’s shot hit him in the shoulder. Fiery pain sliced through the muscle, but nothing vital was hit.

Riordan whirled around, casting his own ball of energy as he brought up a strong force field. “You’re the bastard who fucked with Lorna’s head, aren’t you?”

Sidwell’s cold smile was answer enough. They circled each other, neither wanting to lower his defenses enough to attack.

*Lorna!*

*You’re in pain. What’s wrong?*

Damn. He’d tried to block his pain from her, but he hadn’t enough energy to spare. The last thing he needed was Lorna deciding to surface. *I’ll be fine. Keep searching for the sword. I just need to borrow all the energy I can.*

*Tell me what’s wrong. Is it Esa?*

*Find the sword first. I’ll explain when you’re back. Just send me energy now.*

The warm flow of her power rushed over him. He bound it tightly with his own, then broke the connection with Lorna. When he was confident he could concentrate the power into a thin, deadly beam, he lowered the force field around himself and threw it straight at Sidwell’s heart.

The man was unprepared for the force of Riordan and Lorna’s combined strength. His force field shattered, and Riordan sent the energy straight into his chest. Within seconds, smoke began to rise from Sidwell’s tunic. He screamed, “No! Please!”

“No one hurts my lady and lives.” The acrid smell of burning flesh filled the air. Sidwell collapsed as his heart exploded. But Riordan didn’t cut the energy flow until a hole had formed straight through the man’s chest.

“Well done. Thank you for saving me the trouble.”

Riordan turned to see Skena standing a few meters behind him. He tried to summon more energy for a strike, but he was drained.

“Rendering yourself an easy conquest was nice as well. Remind me to thank you with a kiss before I kill you.”

Riordan reached behind himself for the knife strapped to his back. He drew with lightning speed, but Skena traced a pattern in the air with her long, thin sword. Invisible walls closed around him. He couldn't move more than a few inches in any direction.

*Lorna!*

No response.

Skena smiled. "The cage traps everything, even thoughts."

"Bitch."

She flicked her sword up, slicing his chest from navel to neck. A thin line of blood welled up and began to drip. She smiled. "Now that you know the cage doesn't keep me out, perhaps you will resist expressing such opinions."

This woman was nothing like the Skena he'd known years ago. What had Esa done to her? Whatever it was, she was clearly insane. He had to get through to Lorna. She couldn't surface until her mother was gone. Of course, he had no idea in hell how he was going to get rid of Skena when he couldn't call for help, and he had no energy.

"When my daughter comes back with the sword, we'll see just how much you mean to her."

"She won't come up while you're here. The Lady will protect her."

"The Lady is weak. She'll never detect my presence."

"Lorna won't go with you. She hates you for leaving her."

She cut his chest again. "My daughter loves me."

Maybe he could get her mad enough that she'd lose control over her holding spell. "Esa told her you were with her, but she chose to stay with me."

Skena's beautiful face contorted in a snarl. "She didn't know where I was."

"Esa would have led her there. She doesn't want to see you."

Skena stepped through the wall of the cage, but before Riordan could use his knife, she laid her hands on his chest. Paralyzing pain rushed through his entire body. It felt like she was pulling his insides out.

He grew lightheaded as she sucked the life from him in burning waves. His knees gave, and he fell to the ground. She sank down with him, never breaking contact.

“If you ... kill me. She’ll never ... follow you.”

“It won’t matter. With all the lifeforce I’m taking from you, I’ll be able to make her do anything I want.”

His lungs burned. Darkness closed in from the edges of his vision. He fought to stay conscious, but the pain was too intense. His body needed to escape it, and blacking out was the only way.

\* \* \* \* \*

Lorna swam down and down, further than she thought the lake would go, until finally she saw a glow ahead. A silvery purple light shone out. She kicked her feet as hard as she could and swam toward it.

Her limbs were aching with exhaustion by the time she reached what appeared to be a cottage constructed of stone and thatch sitting on the bottom of the lake. Soft light glowed from inside, but the black mist she’d seen in her dream surrounded it.

The mist gave off a chill she could feel from several yards away. Every fiber in her body screamed for her to turn around, but she swam on. When she entered the mist, tendrils snaked out. They felt cold and slick against her skin. She shivered, but she gathered what small energy she had left and forced its warmth out through her pores. The mist receded, and a path opened to the door of the cottage.

She kicked with all her might. When she grasped the doorknob, the mist faded and disappeared.

The Lady opened the door as Lorna grasped the top of its frame to anchor herself. “Thank you,” Lorna replied in response to the action.

The Lady’s silky voice brushed Lorna’s skin, making her instantly forget the crippling fear she’d felt as she swam through the mist. “I’m not sure what I did.”

“The water gives you power as it does me. Your willingness to come to me despite your fear was enough to crush the power Esa had gained over me.” She extended her hand to Lorna. “Come in. We haven’t much time.”

Lorna let herself be pulled into the house. She watched as the water held itself back from the door as if being pushed by an invisible hand. There was not a drop of water in the house. Once they were inside, the Lady pulled Lorna close, embracing her. Lorna felt a shiver of cool, soothing energy race up and down her spine.

The electric sensations dissipated when the Lady released her. “What was that?”

The Lady smiled. “I was adding to your power.”

“Why?”

“Until you answered my call, I was weakened, because your mother betrayed all that our house stands for. You’re going to need all the strength I can give you to finish your fight against her and Esa.”

“My mother is one of your descendants?”

The Lady smiled and the purple glow around her shimmered. “Yes, as are you. All my descendants bear the symbol of my lake.”

Lorna’s hand reached up to rub her lower back. “You mean my tattoo?”

“Yes, the triple wave is the symbol of our house, but your mother no longer deserves to count herself among us. It is now your place to act as the champion of our house.”

Lorna’s heart raced, and the hairs on the back of her neck stood up. “I don’t even know how to control my magic.”

“Yes, you do. The knowledge is inside you. You’re strong enough to find a way to complete any task you are given, just as you found your way to the sword.” The Lady lifted the sword from a rack placed high on the back wall of her small cottage. “You must use this to preserve all that is good in Faery.”

Lorna fought the urge to take a step back. “I thought the king would find a new hiding place for it.”

“The sword will hide itself when the time is right, but like all the faery treasures, it came from the mists in a time of great need. Another time of need is upon us now. The sword’s power to discern when Faery is endangered may be needed until the other treasures are found. The sword is yours to use until the time when it is ready to leave us again.” The Lady held the sword out to Lorna, hilt first.

Lorna’s hand shook as she grasped it. It looked frightfully heavy, but it felt perfect in her hand. She lifted it, pointing the tip toward the ceiling. A pure, clear note emanated from it. Lorna almost dropped it in surprise.

The Lady smiled and laid her hand on Lorna’s arm. “The sword accepts you as I knew it would.”

Lorna looked up and felt tears forming in her eyes. Some deep part of her recognized it as an artifact so sacred she could not believe she dared to touch it. “Why? Why would it want me?”

The Lady laid her hand on Lorna’s hair, stroking it softly. Then she cupped Lorna’s chin, lifting her head until they were eye to eye. “You’re a strong, lovely woman who wants to protect the human world as a faery should.” Then she leaned forward and kissed Lorna’s lips.

Nothing had ever made Lorna feel so cherished as the soft brush of the Lady’s lips and the warm energy she sent pouring through Lorna’s body.

“Thank you,” she whispered when the Lady released her.

“You’re welcome. Now go back to the surface and protect those you love.”

Lorna nodded, suddenly remembering Riordan’s call for energy. She opened her mind, trying to contact him, but she felt nothing.

The Lady squeezed Lorna’s hand. “He’ll be fine.”

Lorna started to ask more questions, but the Lady shook her head. “You must go.”

“Will I see you again?”

“If you have need of me, I will be there for you.”

Lorna wanted to embrace the Lady again, but she forced herself to step through the door and kick off, aiming her body toward the surface.



## Chapter Fifteen

When Lorna broke the water's surface, her heart stopped. Sidwell's body lay on the ground. A beautiful, dark-haired woman who looked too much like her not to be her mother had her hands on Riordan. He writhed as if he were dying.

"Stop!" Lorna struggled to lift herself from the water.

The woman turned to face her, never breaking contact with Riordan.

"Let him go."

Her mother obeyed, and Riordan slumped to the ground, unconscious.

Skena smiled at his prone form, then faced Lorna again. "Join me, and I'll let him live."

Violent rage rushed through Lorna's body. "I will never betray Faery."

Her mother laughed. "The ideals of Faery are old. They must change if we are to survive. Esa knows what we must do to preserve our place in the world. Come and follow us."

"Our place is in our own world. The humans deserve their freedom." Lorna wasn't sure where these words had come from. Was she channeling the thoughts of the Lady through her connection with the sword?

"Humans deserve nothing. They haven't half our strength."

Lorna gathered her energy to strike. “That is why we must serve as their protectors.”

Her mother placed a hand on Riordan once again. His body convulsed, and he screamed.

Lorna threw a bolt of energy, but her mother blocked it. She turned to face Lorna, her eyes glowing with dark fire. “I’ve taken most of his lifeforce. His delicious strength is racing through my body. Your pitiful magic can’t touch me.”

Lorna’s mind raced. She had to do something. The Lady had told her to use the sword if she needed it, but she’d never swung a sword in her life.

The sword suddenly warmed in her palm as if signaling her. Could she kill her own mother? She took a deep breath. She would do whatever was necessary to protect Riordan. She wasn’t going to let him die without a fight.

Lorna held the sword up in front of her. “Let him go, and I’ll give it to you.”

Skena turned to face her, releasing Riordan again. She took a step toward Lorna, then another.

Just as her mother reached out for the sword, it twitched in Lorna’s hand. Putting her faith in the magic, she raised it over her shoulder and swung. The sword severed her mother’s head in one blow. It took a few seconds for Skena’s body to recognize that she was dead and slump to the ground.

Lorna doubled over and vomited into the sand beside her mother’s lifeless body. As soon as her stomach was empty, she ran to Riordan’s side.

She laid the sword down next to him and searched frantically for a pulse. She slumped across his body when she found it, tears pouring from her eyes. His pulse was slow and weak, but it was there. Her mother said she’d drained his lifeforce. Could Lorna give him some of hers? And if so, how?

She closed her eyes and took a deep breath, searching the far corners of her mind for the answer. An idea flickered. She had to try it.

Placing her hands on Riordan's chest as her mother had done, she envisioned herself pushing her strength out through her hands. Within seconds, Riordan's heart rate had increased, and he was taking deeper, steadier breaths.

A few moments later, his eyes opened. "Stop." His voice was raspy and weak, but he had enough strength to try to push her off and sit up.

"Lorna. Stop now. You'll weaken yourself too much."

She pushed him back to the ground. "The Lady lent me extra strength. I don't want to stop until you're strong enough to leave with me."

He laid his hand over hers. "I'm fine. Please don't hurt yourself."

She narrowed her eyes, studying him.

"I have enough strength to ride. I'll be fine."

She believed him this time. His voice sounded stronger, more confident.

He sat up when she let him go, and his eyes widened as he looked over her shoulder.

"Goddess, I thought I dreamed you doing that."

Lorna started to turn around, but he cupped her cheeks and kept her facing him.

"Don't. You shouldn't have to see her again."

Lorna shuddered, and he squeezed her hand. "It's okay. She'll be gone soon," he said.

"Gone where?"

"When a faery dies, the body is absorbed by the earth within minutes."

"Oh."

He stroked Lorna's cheek with the back of his hand. "I can't imagine what strength it took for you to kill her."

"I'd kill her again if it meant saving you." Her quiet tears turned to sobs, and he pulled her into his arms, stroking her back.

Many long minutes later, Lorna's forced herself to gather her wits. She pulled away from Riordan, wiping her eyes with the back of her hand. "What happened to Sidwell? Did my mother kill him?"

"No, I did."

Her breath caught. "Dear God, what happened?"

"He's the one who planted the suggestion in your mind. He attacked me as soon as you told me you were safe in the water. That's why I asked for extra energy."

"How did he hide his intentions?"

Riordan shook his head. "I don't know. I can only assume Esa gave him a cloaking spell stronger than any we've seen."

"If Esa can hide her intentions from a scan, then how will we know who's loyal and who's not?"

Riordan exhaled slowly. "We won't. We'll have to watch everyone until we find a way to counter her new power."

Lorna took a deep breath, trying to banish the paralyzing fear that tightened her chest. She remembered the hole in Sidwell's chest and shuddered. At least he'd paid for his crimes.

Riordan squeezed her hand. "I'm not sorry for what I did to Sidwell, but I wish you hadn't had to see it. As for your mother, I --"

Lorna held up her hand. "I did what I had to do. I might have eventually forgiven her for leaving me, but I could never forgive her for siding with Esa. I could feel the evil rolling off her. She deserved what she got."

For the first time, Riordan looked down at the Faery Sword. He reached out and took it by the hilt, lifting it from the ground. His wrist nearly gave as he did so. "Goddess, this is heavy. How did you even lift it?"

Lorna frowned. "It's not heavy to me." She reached out and took it from him, lifting it easily. It warmed in her hand, and she felt the energy she'd given Riordan returning as the sword gave off a silvery glow.

Riordan stared at the sword, transfixed.

She smiled at his confusion. "The Lady said the sword recognized me."

Riordan's eyes widened, and he sucked in his breath.

"What's wrong?"

"That would make you the Keeper of the Sword."

Lorna stared at him, confused.

"The Keeper of the Sword is a legendary title in Faery. No one has held it for over a thousand years."

"But what does it mean?"

"The Keeper receives knowledge in dreams that lets her know when the sanctity of Faery is in danger. She delivers the sword to whoever needs it and bestows her blessing before sending him or her into battle."

Lorna's heart pounded against her chest. "Surely the Lady only meant that I was to hold the sword until we sent it to its hiding place."

Riordan shook his head. "No. Unless the legends are wrong, the Lady never speaks without underlying meaning to her words."

"But why would I be chosen? I'm not even fully fey."

"No, but your magic is very powerful, and you are of the house the Lady is said to have founded."

Lorna nodded. "She told me I was her descendant."

Riordan laid his hand over Lorna's where it gripped the sword's hilt. "Then this is your legacy."

Lorna took a deep breath. She would never have asked for this, being bound to Riordan and now bound to Faery, but she was ready to accept it. Her whole life had been about learning to adapt. She would meet this challenge as she had others. If she could kill her mother to save Riordan, she could do anything.

Suddenly, the sword warmed in her hand as it had earlier to signal her. She looked around, scared she would see another opponent. She saw nothing, but she knew that every moment she and Riordan spent sitting out in the open, they were risking the sword's safety. "We've got to get back."

Riordan looked around as well. "Did you feel something?"

"The sword grew warm. I don't know what it means, but we shouldn't stay out here unprotected."

"We're not unprotected. The sword will keep us safe."

"But if Esa knows where we are, she will come for us."

Riordan shook his head. "Now that the Lady has freely given you the sword, it will not leave you."

Lorna wished she could feel so confident, but the thought of someone evil getting their hands on the sword made her shiver. "Where do we take it now?"

"Back to the castle. The council members will help us perform the ritual to hide it again, and then ..."

Pain crossed his face. She knew he was remembering his promise to return her to the human world once the sword was safe. She reached up and caressed the side of his face. "I'm not leaving."

His eyes widened. "You're not?"

She came up on her knees so she could run her hands through his silver hair. He closed his eyes and sighed.

She leaned forward and brushed his lips with hers. "I love you, and I want to stay with you."

"I love you, too." His arms came around her, pulling her close.

She rested her head on his shoulder, her hands still entwined in his silky hair. "I tried to fight my feelings. I didn't want to be trapped into a relationship, especially one chosen for me by a genetic response."

"But --"

"Shh!" She pressed a finger to his lips. "I didn't want to risk you getting tired of me and walking away. But now that I've been inside your mind and seen your deepest thoughts, I know you are the most loyal friend anyone could have. And I know you love me for who I am, not because fate has bound us together."

She felt him tense under her. "What about your shop, your life in the human world?"

"I'm needed here."

"Right now you are, but once all the treasures are found, you will be able to return."

Lorna pressed her lips against his neck. "As much as I might miss home, I'm not leaving you."

"Then I'll come with you."

"But what about your work here?"

"My brother says I'm in desperate need of a vacation."

She laughed. "I think I have to agree."

"So I guess I'll have to try living as a human for a little while. The king will just have to make do without me."

She squeezed him as hard as she could. "I love you."

"I love you, too." He pulled back, and she watched as his mouth descended toward hers. His kiss started out gentle, but quickly became a rough duel of tongues and teeth.

Lorna felt the now familiar fire race through her body. Her muscles clenched and cream dampened her thighs. Riordan's hands slid along her ribcage and cupped the undersides of her breasts. His thumbs rasped her nipples, and she gasped into his mouth.

Fighting her body's screaming need, she pushed back from him, knowing that if she didn't stop right then, he'd be inside her in no time. "We have to get back."

"Make love to me first."

"Here?"

"Yes, here with the water lapping beside us and the moon shining above. I can't think of a more perfect place to make love to you."

Lorna started to turn around, but Riordan held her tight. He looked over her shoulder. She heard his breath rush out, and he released her. "Skena's gone and so is Sidwell."

Tension and fear oozed from Lorna's body. She tilted her head back. The moon had indeed risen since she'd gone into the water. Riordan was right -- this was a perfect place for them to celebrate their acceptance of their bond. She lay back and let her legs fall open as the clothing each of them was wearing disappeared.

His cock brushed her entrance, and she sighed as he slid into her. Yes, this was perfection.

 THE END 



## Silvia Violet

I have adored the written word since birth. By the time I was one and a half, I was "reading" nursery rhymes to my parents. At age thirteen, I began my love affair with romances when a friend found a stash of historicals hidden under her living room couch. Since then, I've devoured countless romances - historicals, contemporaries and paranormals. I'm a sucker for a good alpha hero no matter what the genre.

I earned a BA and then an MA in history, all the while thinking I would rather be writing romances than research papers on obscure topics. Then four years ago, I decided I was going to stop wishing I could write a romance and actually do it. Nearly a year later, after many shots of espresso and many hours of writing when I should have been doing my "real job", I finished my first novel. I've been writing ever since.

I live in the mountains of North Carolina with my high school sweetheart (whom I married nine years ago) and our toddler-aged daughter. I am a stay-at-home mom and even when I've had no sleep and have just mopped the floor for the eighth time that day, I know I would never trade my life for anything else.

Along with writing, I enjoy baking, reading, and surfing the web for more books to buy. When I'm not chasing my toddler, I enjoy getting exercise by hiking and walking around my quaint neighborhood.

Visit Silvia on the Web at <http://violet.chaosnet.org>.