

# Storm Warrior (The Grim Series) (11 page)

“A knack he says.” Leo shook his head. “They say that animals are good judges of character. If that’s true, you just got a helluva reference from Spike.”

Rhyswr was nowhere to be found. Morgan spent hours searching the woods and the fields around her home, but there was no sign of the great black mastiff. She called her neighbors, put an ad in the paper, phoned the pound, but no one had seen the animal. Although she hadn’t known the dog for long, losing him hurt more than she’d expected.

Even less expected was her concern for the man who had claimed to *be*

the dog. She didn’t believe for a minute that his name was really Rhys. That was just too much of a coincidence. But she found herself thinking about him a great deal, wondering if he was all right. Bill—Officer Richards—had assured her that Rhys’s fingerprints weren’t on file. She had breathed an enormous sigh of relief over that point. The man might be crazy but at least he wasn’t a criminal. Probably.

And he hadn’t been charged with indecent exposure, thank God, since he’d been on private property, and she didn’t wish to complain.

*Ha.*

Rhys was hot enough to bake cookies on. Tough to complain about eye candy like that! Yet according to Bill, no one had filed a missing persons report on anyone with his description. No one had showed up to identify or claim him. Not only did he have no idea where he belonged, he remembered no other name but his first one. And that was questionable.

In the end, since he couldn’t provide ID or even an address, Rhys had simply been written up for vagrancy and placed in a cell overnight. That surprised her. She thought the authorities would have sent Rhys to a psychiatrist or even a social worker, but the man hadn’t committed any real crime. His mental condition would therefore be his own business. And as Bill had pointed out, plenty of people were wandering the streets these days with far worse problems than Rhys.

Where he was now, though, was anyone’s guess. All she knew was that the man had simply left upon release. According to Bill, there had been no incidents of Rhys turning up naked in the streets.

If only Morgan could say the same about her dreams.

“Hold it this way. That’s it, you got it now,” said Leo. “We’ll make a handyman out of you yet.”

Rhys drilled a hole through the plywood and admired the perfection of the circle when he finished. He’d seen electrical tools before, of course, but had never touched them to see how they worked. His people had been adept with ironwork, and he himself was skilled with many hand tools—but even the most basic of tools looked and worked differently in this time and place.

*So many new things to learn*

...It was exhilarating to have so much to think about, and by all the gods, it felt good to use his hands again.

Best of all, Leo was unfailingly patient as a teacher. Rhys was truly thankful that the old man had been placed in his path, because he definitely needed a guide in this strange new world.

“I think I’ll take a break now,” said Leo. “Never used to need one, but now I find I gotta shut my eyes for a little while in the afternoon. Recharges the batteries.” He sniffed and chuckled. “Although they don’t seem to hold a charge for long these days.”

As the old man headed for the house, Rhys made his way to the garden. He’d built a wide and sturdy bench for Leo and placed it in a sunny spot near some enormous purple and white flowers called *dahlias*

. It was a good spot for Rhys’s latest project too. He pulled out a large block of dark wood from under the bench and a handful of slender cutting tools from his pocket. Studying the piece, he began shaving away thin curls of wood and enjoyed the sun-warmed smell of them. Initially he’d begun carving the piece with a simple knife, but Leo had borrowed some very fine implements from a neighbor who made lifelike wooden ducks.

What Rhys held in his hands was not a bird. It would be a gift for Morgan one day, perhaps even a peace offering, if she would accept it. Just as he’d swapped one tool for the next, however, a flicker of movement in his peripheral vision caught his attention. Rhys stilled, casting his gaze about for the source. There was movement in the middle of the garden, and yet he could see nothing but the rich brown earth he had spaded over earlier in the week. Some bits of straw, the dried yellowed stems of a few leftover garden plants poked up here and there—

Suddenly a strange brown bird stood up from the midst of the dirt and shook out its feathers. Rhys thought it was a grouse—until it turned bright-blue eyes on him. In a heartbeat, the bird became a tiny man with a wizened, coppery face. Brown leaves stuck out in all directions from braided brown hair and covered his strange little body. He frowned at Rhys, planting long twiglike hands on scrawny hips.

Then disappeared in a puff of dust.

*An*

ellyll, thought Rhys.

*A stranger to this side of the waters and probably spying for the Tylwyth Teg.*

But then, had he truly expected the Fair Ones to leave him alone? Reason said they'd be watching, one way or another.

Waiting.

## **EIGHT**

I  
t was her turn to be on call, and Morgan felt she'd missed enough shifts. Jay and Grady had argued with her for most of the week in favor of continuing to cover for her. They'd both been overprotective after the attack, and doubly so after what was now referred to as the Naked Man Incident. Their concern was sweet and supportive, but it was time to get on with her regular responsibilities. Normal—she wanted lots and lots of just plain *normal*

. Morgan left her car in the parking lot and took one of the clinic pickups home for the night. The cargo box was equipped with everything she was likely to need for most emergencies.

Pager on her hip, Morgan picked up a few badly needed groceries and then made a quick house call on her way out of town. She wanted to check on Berkley, a sweet-natured basset hound and unrepentant escape artist. On his most recent yard break, he'd stumbled into a hole where a construction crew was working on a sewer project. Berkley now sported a cast on his left front leg—and an enormous plastic cone around his head to keep him from chewing on the cast. All dogs looked ridiculous wearing a cone, but Berkley's ears were so long that they draped over the edges and dragged on the floor like twin mud flaps. Morgan struggled not to laugh as she made a careful inspection of the leg and assured the anxious owner that there were no swelling or circulation problems. Once back in the truck, however, she let loose the laughter she'd been holding until tears ran down her cheeks.

Despite the long day, the silly basset had done her a world of good. Morgan felt herself relax, looking forward to the peace and sanctuary of her country home and feeling more in control of her life.

*Normal is good.*

But as she pulled into the treed driveway of her property, she spotted a blue sedan parked in the yard and an old man sitting on her front step.

“Leo! Is Spike all right?” she called from the window as she parked the pickup next to the car.

The old man heaved himself to his feet as she pulled her grocery bags from the truck.

“Ol' Spike's at home holding the couch down,” he said with a broad grin, automatically taking a bag from her. “I was thinking of helping him with the job, but I volunteered to give my friend a ride out here instead. He's just taken a walk around the farm—” he glanced around for his companion but apparently didn't see him “—so I thought I'd enjoy

the shade for a while. I remember back when Earl Hornsby used to run this farm. 'Course that was long before your time."

"Well, come on in and tell me all about it. Gosh, if I'd known you were coming, I'd have hurried home. I've got some iced tea in the fridge." And that was about all there was in the fridge, except for condiments. Thank heavens she'd given in to temptation and bought a package of cookies at the store.

Before Leo could answer, a familiar figure in unfamiliar clothes came striding around the corner of the garage. His purposeful gait was fluid despite his height. And that blue plaid flannel shirt didn't hide his broad shoulders or muscled arms in the least.

"Good it is to see you again, Morgan Edwards."

The timbre of his voice combined with his accent—an accent that still spoke plainly of Wales—made her hormones do a double backflip. She wrestled them into an unquiet submission and wondered if it was going to be necessary every darn time she saw him.

And exactly  
*why*  
was she seeing him now?

"What a surprise," she managed, smiling weakly.  
*Nainie told me not to talk to strangers. What would she have said about deluded strangers?*

But every part of Morgan responded with recognition—and even a crazy kind of joy—as if the man was anything  
*but*

a stranger. Either her instincts were right and she was in no danger from this man, or her many dreams about him had created a false sense of relationship.

*I'm betting on option two.*

Thank heavens old Leo Waterson was with him, though she couldn't imagine why. And since Leo was both a client and a friend, for his sake she would be nice and give Rhys-or-whatever-his-name-really-was the benefit of the doubt.

*For now.*

Looking into the tall man's eyes, she was intrigued anew by their amber-gold color. Even better, she saw no particular sign of insanity—although she wasn't really sure what that would look like. Just the same, she put her hand in her jeans pocket and withdrew her cell phone, keeping it palmed but ready.

"I'm guessing you already know my friend, Rhys," said Leo. He didn't laugh, but she could see the humor in his eyes. Obviously he knew at least some of the story.

"We've met, yes."

As if to change the subject, Rhys swept a hand toward the fields and outbuildings. "This farm is yours?" he asked.

"All two hundred acres."

“A great deal of land. Yet you have no horses in your stable, nor cattle in your barns. Your sheds have no grain in them. Where are your hired men?”

“They have the decade off.” She heard Leo snort at that. “Besides, it’s not like the land’s going to waste. One of my neighbors leased a hundred acres from me this past summer to plant extra hay, and the local college planted twenty-five acres in test plots.”

“You have nothing for yourself?”

Rhys seemed genuinely interested, but his questions made her a little defensive just the same. He wouldn’t be the first critic of her decision to purchase the farm. She resisted her sudden need to explain how much the place meant to her. Instead, she took the offensive. “So, good to see you’re wearing clothes today.”

It didn’t seem to throw him off in the slightest. “Officer Richards said you gifted me with these. I’ve come to thank you for your kindness and I’ve brought coin—  
*money*  
—to repay you for them.”

Now she was  
*really*

surprised. The money didn’t matter to her, of course. After all, Morgan had fully expected the man to disappear into the sunset once he was free. But his desire to pay her back spoke of character, and that did matter to her—and more than she thought. “I appreciate that.”

Rhys pulled a few folded bills out of his shirt pocket and extended them to her. “Leo thought this would be the right amount.”