

Storm Warrior (The Grim Series) (13 page)

Morgan was thoughtful for a few moments, then nodded. Decision was written in her face. "I'm going to owe Leo big-time for stealing his handyman, but you have yourself a job."

NINE

The barn was old and empty, but it was clean. There was a corner box stall for the big mare. One of Julie Kendrick's neighbors had dropped off a few dozen straw bales and some hay and feed, promising to bring more. By the time night fell, Lucy was as comfortable as Rhys and Morgan could make her.

Human sleeping quarters were easily set up in an adjacent stall. Rhys turned down Morgan's offer of a folding cot from her guest room. Instead, he broke open some straw bales into a great heaping pile and topped it with the blankets and quilts she'd brought him. She had to admit it looked a lot more comfortable than the narrow cot would have been for his large frame. He welcomed a few other amenities, though, which she set up alongside the grain bin on the opposite wall. A lamp, a small table, a pair of chairs. Rhys didn't want to leave the injured mare alone in her new surroundings, not yet, so the last thing Morgan brought was a tray of sandwiches and a thermos of coffee.

They ate side by side, watching the big dapple-gray horse. The mare looked worn and tired, her big head drooping and her white mane falling forward over her half-closed eyes. The only thing that gave Morgan hope was that Lucy was surprisingly steady on her feet. The mare favored the worst leg, but the others weren't weak.

"What is the mare used for?" asked Rhys. "I could find no trace of harness marks on her."

"She's more of a big pet than anything. Julie's father used to have a team of heavy horses that he used for special occasions. He drove a wagon in local parades and gave hayrides and sleigh rides and such. Lucy has a good temperament for it, but it's Julie that doesn't handle the crowds well. I think she finally realized it just wasn't for her and she sold the wagon, but couldn't bring herself to sell Lucy. Julie used to ride her sometimes, but a saddle big enough for a draft horse weighs a ton and she can't lift it alone. So now, Lucy simply spends a lot of time in the pasture."

"It's a shame. She's a fine ceffyl, strong and steady. My father would have given his eye teeth to breed her to our stallion, Draig."

“Draig?” She knew she’d heard that word in Nainie’s stories. “Doesn’t that mean dragon?”

“Aye. He had a fiery red coat, and he was dragon tempered for sure. The only horse that ever bit me, and he did it for sheer spite.”

“I had a poodle do that to me in my first year of practice. I swear he smiled after he did it too.”

“I think Spike enjoys it at times too. I think he must have been a terror when he was young.”

“So far he’s bitten everyone at the clinic except me and Anne-Marie, our receptionist. He hasn’t gotten you yet?”

“So far, no.” Rhys rapped his knuckles on the wooden grain bin and grinned.

Mentally, Morgan grabbed the reins of her hormones as they threatened to stampede before that winning smile.

Just don’t look at his face.

She changed the subject for good measure, trying to focus on something,

anything

, else. “So I just came back from Wales and I saw so many wonderful little places. Gwen seemed to like the bigger cities, like Swansea and Cardiff, best, but I think I fell in love with the villages. Which one are you from?”

“Who is Gwen?”

“She’s an older woman I met on my tour. We roomed together and had a lot of fun, and I was hoping we were friends.”

“I’m certain that she’d want to be friends with such as yourself.”

Morgan laughed a little.

Such as yourself.

Nainie would have phrased the words the same way. “I’ve tried and tried to contact Gwen since, but I’ve had no luck. The phone rings, but no one ever answers it. Jay says she’s probably off traveling somewhere. I’m probably just extra disappointed because she reminded me of my grandmother so much.”

They talked about her trip to Wales for well over an hour, but it felt like only a few minutes. Rhys was familiar with the places she’d visited on her trip and was able to add a great deal to what she’d already learned about them. Of course, if he’d been reading her the phonebook, she probably would have been just as fascinated. She loved the cadence and lilt of his words, his manner of phrasing. Morgan enjoyed a deep, rich voice in a man, but mixed with a Welsh accent, the effect was devastatingly sexy. As if he needed the help! The physical packaging of the voice was drool-worthy enough. The fact that he was intelligent and insightful as well made him practically irresistible. If she didn’t leave soon, she wasn’t sure she’d want to.

And it was that, more than anything, that decided her.

“I’ll say good night now, Rhys. I have to get up in the morning.” It wasn’t quite true. She didn’t work until noon on Saturdays, but she had to get up sometime, right? “Thanks for all your help

today and especially for watching over Lucy.” She tried to stand up, but he stopped her with a big hand on her arm.

“You have a very kind heart in you. ’Tis a rare thing and beautiful to see. My thanks to you.”

Her heart pounded in her ears as she studied his powerful hand, the strong fingers resting gently on her arm. Warmth radiated from his skin to hers, and she wondered what that hand might feel like on other parts of her body...

She murmured, “You’re welcome,” and left as fast as she could, hoping it didn’t look as if she were running away. Even though she most definitely was.

It was only later, as she set her alarm clock, that she realized Rhys never answered her question about where he’d been born. And he’d managed to reveal exactly

nothing

about his life, his background, or anything else.

Damn it.

Rhys leaned against the doorframe and watched the house for a while. Light shone from the windows, warm and golden against the blues and blacks of the nightscape. The mare whickered in her stall.

“I’m here still, cariad.” He closed the door against the cool air, not because he minded it himself but because it wouldn’t be good for Lucy to take a chill in her condition. He checked the big horse over one more time, wanting her to be as comfortable as he could make her before he turned out the light. Then he stripped and settled into his own makeshift bed in the adjacent stall. The smells of clean straw and horse were soothing and familiar, but sleep didn’t come immediately. Instead, his thoughts were all for Morgan Edwards.

Her pulse had jumped beneath his hand and not from fear. Attraction had kindled the moment Rhys had touched his fingers to her skin. There was no mistaking the flush of color at her throat, the change in her eyes. He could see that Morgan felt the pull and the want, just as he did. He could also see that she wasn’t prepared to act on it. His mouth quirked, remembering the speed with which she’d left the barn.

And by all the gods, he’d missed her immediately—the sound of her voice, the quickness of her mind, the look of her in the lamplight, and even the scent of her. They hadn’t done a thing but talk, and he hadn’t wanted it to end.

Deliberately, he turned his thoughts to the farm. There was a lot of land here still not under plow and buildings that were badly neglected. He wondered what he might do to take the farm in hand, to restore it to usefulness—yet he didn’t know if that would please Morgan or annoy her. She was an independent woman. Perhaps she didn’t

want

a man in her life? Perhaps she didn't want anyone. Why else would she choose to live out here by herself on this broken-down farm?

One of the women in his village had been like that. Rhiannon was fair to look upon, but she'd chosen to live alone. Under Celtic law, she'd divorced a man who had dared beat her and kept all her land and belongings. She'd also kept her freedom forever after, scorning the company of any man, though many tried to win her affections.

Morgan was far different, he thought. She lived by herself but not necessarily by intent. A skilled healer, she was deeply devoted to her work, and it filled her life. Her unwavering passion for animals had given him his own life back. Yet Rhys thought he sensed a great loneliness in her.

Or perhaps it was his own he was feeling. Strange. He hadn't thought much about being *lonely*

. He missed his family, his friends, his clan, his village, all of them. But not in this way. Since meeting Morgan Edwards—especially since meeting her as a man—he was aware of a space within him that he hadn't noticed before. An emptiness, even though there was much to keep his mind and hands busy.

He chuckled, thinking of how Morgan had apologized for his current accommodations. She had no way of knowing that not even a clan chief in his time had had a home as fine as what passed as hired man's quarters here. Water flowed at the touch of a hand. The shower was Rhys's favorite—not only had his people bathed as often as the Romans, they had been the ones to introduce soap to the so-called civilized world, the same world that called them barbarians. There were soft cloths here—
towels

—and blankets. A fine bed waited for him for when Lucy could be left to herself at night. Morgan couldn't begin to know what luxuries these were to him, not until she accepted who he really was and what he had been.

That was going to take time, perhaps a very great deal of it. He sensed a war within her, the sensible and scholarly side of her arguing with the child she'd been, the part of her that had sensed the truth in her nainie's stories. Rhys had faith that Morgan would one day come to understand, but in the meantime, he had to have patience.

He snorted at that.

What I need do most is take care. I cannot lapse for a moment.

It was easy to allow that he was born in Wales, yet it had not been called that at the time of his birth. Rhys could speak many languages, including the present Welsh, fluently. It was true that Welsh was derived from the Celtic language of his clan, but it wasn't the same—and it was the older tongue that still sprung first to his lips. He knew the modern country of Wales intimately, although it was as an observer rather than a participant. He'd thanked all the gods that he'd been able to answer most of Morgan's many questions about the people, the history, and the customs.

It would be much harder to answer any questions about himself. Thankfully she hadn't yet asked, but he wasn't foolish enough to think she wasn't going to. And when she did, he would not lie to her.

But he wouldn't reveal the entire truth just yet either.

As for Lucy, the gods themselves must have sent the creature. Striving to save and heal the injured mare had built a bridge, a bond of common purpose, between him and Morgan. He had gained a great measure of the woman's acceptance and even trust. What would she say if she knew that she had gained his heart?

He felt that powerful twinge in his chest, both sharp and pleasant, each time he saw her run a hand through her thick red-brown hair, each time her smile lit her pale-blue eyes. There was a powerful ache in his groin too, each time he saw her bend to reach something. Images arose in his mind as his cock rose up against the quilt, images of seizing those fine hips and revealing that lush bottom, thrusting himself deep into it until he was lost. It had been nearly two millennia since he'd bedded a woman, but by all the gods, he wanted Morgan Edwards and only her.

Would she want him?